The Complex Relationship between the Brazilian Jewish Community and Israel

The Jewish Institutions and Their Leadership in São Paulo

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Introduction

There are slightly more than fourteen million Jews in the world, of whom 6.4 million live in Israel.[1] The United States has the largest Jewish population outside Israel with a total of approximately five million seven hundred thousand.[2] Other Jewish communities are spread throughout Asia, Africa, Europe and Central and South America. Most Jews in the world continue to live in the Diaspora, with no plans to emigrate to the Israeli homeland despite Zionist encouragement to do so.

The majority of Jews in South America live in Argentina, Brazil and Chile, while smaller Jewish communities can be found in Uruguay, Colombia and Venezuela.[3] A variety of Jewish institutions have been founded in these countries, with the mission to represent the Jews, defend their interests, provide social and religious environments and channel their fears and expectations. Brazil hosts the second largest Jewish community in Latin America, with more than a hundred thousand Jews; almost half of them live in São Paulo, also the state with the most significant concentration of Jewish institutions.[4]

In order to contribute to the academic debate about the relationship between the Jewish Diaspora and Israel, the present thesis will explore issues of "long-distance nationalism" by focussing specifically on the Jewish institutions of São Paulo and their leadership. On one side, the thesis will delve into the acts and attitudes of the Jewish organisations concerning Israel. On the other, it will assess the opinions of the leaders of the most prominent institutions regarding current Israeli policies and, especially, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, analysing the extent to which these leaders absorb and reproduce traditional political stances of its real or imaginary homeland, Israel. This is a

[1] Sergio Della Pergolla, "World Jewish Population: Current Jewish Populations Reports," *Berman Jewish Databank* no.17 (2016): 6, accessed May 29th, 2017.
http://www.jewishdatabank.org/Studies/downloadFile.cfm?FileID=3584
[2] Ibid., 7.
[3] Ibid., 29.
[4] "A Conib," *Conib*, accessed February 18th, 2017.
http://www.conib.org.br/aconib

fundamental discussion, as it raises multiple questions about collective identity, secular and/or religious affiliation to Israel, and loyalty and has considerable repercussions in the field of politics. The aim of the thesis is not, however, to explore the various elements that form the individual Jewish identity of Brazilian Jews but to focus on one particular element, their collective identity vis-à-vis Israel.

The Jewish organisations present in São Paulo include political representations such as the Jewish Confederation of Brazil (CONIB) and the Jewish Federation of São Paulo (FISESP), athletic associations, such as the Club Hebraica, human rights organisations, among them the B'nai B'rith as well as prominent congregations, such as the São Paulo Israeli Congregation (CIP). Synagogues of various denominations, schools and cultural centres complete the scenario of the São Paulo Jewish community.

Despite their different spheres of action, those Jewish institutions are united in their ambition to uphold the Jewish traditions and culture as a means to ensure the collectiveness of Jewish identity. The components of Brazilian Jewish identity are numerous, ranging from religious affiliation to cultural and political interest in Israel. The relevance of each element varies considerably from one person to another. While some Brazilian Jews consider the local synagogue as the most important symbol of their Jewish identity, others seek to find in contemporary Israel ingredients to strengthen their unique forms of Jewish identity.

Chapter One

Methodology and Concepts

1.1 Methodology

The thesis is divided in four main chapters. The first chapter addresses the most pertinent concepts for the research, namely Diaspora, identity and community. The second provides a historical context whereby the history of the Jewish migration to Brazil, the history of Brazilian and Israeli relations, and the history of Zionism in Brazil are analysed. The third chapter encompasses the central part of the research: the Jewish institutions in São Paulo and their leadership. It includes the analysis of the case study and reflections and insights built upon the twelve interviews conducted personally with Jewish leaders in São Paulo. The final section of the thesis offers concluding remarks.

As part of the most populous country in Latin America, the Brazilian Jewish community represents an interesting subject of research, not sufficiently explored by contemporary academics. The state of São Paulo was selected, as it is the home to half of the total of Jews in Brazil as well as the seat of the majority of prominent local, national and international Jewish organisations. São Paulo is also the place in Brazil where the most significant events and activities related to Judaism and Israel take place.

In order to investigate the Jewish institutions in São Paulo and their leadership, I have applied, as my main method, qualitative research based on a single case study. The analysis of primary sources, chiefly in-person interviews, facilitates the creation of original research and interpretation, since it offers the opportunity to access the subject from a new angle. Instead of resorting to surveys or speaking to a larger number of people, I have chosen to interview the most important leaders, including opinion-makers, of the Jewish community in São Paulo with the aim of revealing their perceptions and assumptions.

I have conducted semi-structured interviews in Portuguese with a total of twelve

people. The Jewish leaders who participated in the interviews hold different political views and work in various activities and environments. Not only the heads of the most important organisations were interviewed but also leaders of smaller associations as well as younger leaders. This is relevant since it conveys a broader scenario of the leadership of the Jewish community in São Paulo. The interviewees were selected based on their political engagement concerning Judaism and/or Israel. All interviewed are well known and have their own voice and space in (and sometimes beyond) the community. They, or the institutions that they represent, express their positions openly either in speeches or in written declarations.

My main objective conducting interviews was to investigate how these institutions work, what is their agenda and how their leadership position themselves concerning important issues that affect Israel. Due to their public engagement and broad social interactions with a remarkable number of members of the Brazilian Jewish community, the Jewish leaders could provide significant insights into this community and its collective identity vis-à-vis Israel.

The interviews were based on nineteen questions, which were prepared in advance. Each question contained one to three sub-questions. Numerous issues were addressed in the questions, including Jewish institutions, the Brazilian Jewish community, the role of the Diaspora in attenuating or aggravating conflicts, and personal considerations related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I have sought to formulate questions that avoided yes or no answers, instead, offering a wide space to discussion and reflection. I must say that the practice of active listening, asking for clarifications and maintaining eye contact, was fundamental to establish trust and openness between the interviewee and me.

As it is common with the method of interviews, I have experienced the “snowball effect”: leaders suggested other leaders, whose perspectives could vary significantly. The interviews were mainly conducted in the premises of the institutions, although a few occurred in public spaces. In view of the fact that offices of organisations are not neutral environments, the location of the interviews certainly affected the power

dynamics between the interviewee and the interviewer.

When first contacted, some leaders reacted with caution, fearing that the purpose of the research would be to confront them with difficult questions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Fortunately, all of them accepted taking part in the interviews, answered all questions and, in my opinion, showed sincerity when speaking. Most leaders participated enthusiastically in the conversation and expanded on their answers. The duration of the interviews, an average of two to three hours, testifies to their level of engagement.

Intrinsic to any method of research is the presence of biases. Before and during the interviews, I have faced some. First, all leaders interviewed belong to the middle-high and high social classes of Brazil and, thus, form part of the economic elite of São Paulo. Second, most leaders interviewed clearly identify with the political moderate right in Brazil. Thereby, their opinions on Israel could not be dissociated from their positions on domestic politics. The fact that the vast majority of leaders, having attended Jewish schools, are part of a wide social network of Jewish friends and family also cannot be overlooked.

In order to overcome or at least control those biases, I sought to formulate questions that took into consideration the limitations that I had expected to find in the interviews. In preparing the questions, I made an effort to include critical perspectives as well as provocative assertions and assumptions. By relying on points-of-view and analysis widely adopted by the Brazilian and international media, I have tried to challenge traditional stances. During the writing process, I sought to rein in the biases of the leaders by giving a broader contextualisation to the reader; I inserted additional information available in the websites of the institutions and articles of the Brazilian Jewish press.

Through these interviews, I was able to assess the advantages and disadvantages inherent to the method of qualitative research. Although it was more difficult to replicate and extrapolate the answers than quantitative research, the information

provided was more complete, detailed and from a personal perspective. What is more, the interviews enabled me to search and interpret meaning not only in words but also in facial expressions and body language. Conversely, due to the nature of face-to-face interviews, it was challenging to establish a pragmatic distance from the subject, especially when one compares to other methods, such as discourse or content analysis. Interviews also provided access to updated information, more than some written sources would, since the leaders interviewed are constantly engaged with the issues that are explored in the research.

As a complementary method, I relied on the study of source material, mainly public primary sources, material produced by the Jewish institutions and press -- secondary sources were used to provide a theoretical and historical framework to the research. Most organisations have their own websites and publications. Leaders also frequently publish op-eds pieces in the Jewish press. In these publications, institutions provide information about how they define themselves, their role in society, their activities and their political positions on issues related to Israel and/or the Middle East. In addition to these materials, I relied on United Nations documents as well as surveys and data offered by the Brazilian embassy in Israel and the demographer Sergio Della Pergolla.

The study of source material also entailed significant challenges. There is not a large body of publications related to the Brazilian Jewish community. Similarly, data and surveys that provide specific information about this community are not frequently updated. The information available in the websites of the institutions is also not substantial. Yet, the fact that most articles of the Jewish press are not available on a digital format was the main obstacle faced concerning access to materials. A large number of articles can only be found as physical copies, and archives are accessible only in the premises of the respective publisher.

1.2 Theory

Diaspora, as any enduring concept, has been constantly evolving. The term, originally from the Greek language, was initially understood as the scattering of religious groups with a common original territory.[5] Having being forced to leave Israel by the destruction of the first and second temple of Jerusalem, the Jewish people has remained as the template of the classical concept of Diaspora. In the past, a significant number of Jews had defined themselves as living in exile, or in Hebrew vocabulary, Galut, a term that entails a situation of physical and moral humiliation, uncertainty and discrimination.[6]

Since modern times, practically all Jewish communities worldwide do not define themselves as living in exile. Consciously, most Jews did not migrate to Israel in spite of the solid incentive offered by the Law of Return. Galut was not longer considered adequate to translate the positive experience of Jews living outside Israel. After all, Diasporic Jews have flourished politically, economically and culturally in the countries where they have settled. Thereby, the term Galut, and its negative connotation, was replaced by the concept of Diaspora.

Political scientist Gabriel Sheffer offers a contemporary definition of Diaspora that contains three main characteristics: a distinctive ethnic or ethnic-religious identity; solidarity among its members as to create a certain internal structure; and a real or imaginary connection to the homeland.[7] According to Sheffer, the process of globalisation has significantly increased the cultural, economic and political ties between Diasporas and their homelands.

For Eliezer Ben-Rafael, one of the most fundamental elements of the Diaspora is its distinctiveness as an ethnic, religious or linguistic group.[8] William Safran explains that

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[5] Stéphanie Dufoix, *Diasporas* (London: University of California Press, 2008), 1.

[6] William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of the Homeland and Return," *Diaspora: a Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no.1 (1991): 91.

[7] Gabriel Sheffer, "A New Field Of Study: Modern Diasporas In International Politics," in *Modern Diasporas In International Politics*, ed. Gabriel Sheffer (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 9-10.

[8] Eliezer Ben-Rafael, "Israel-Diaspora Relations: 'Transmission Driving- Belts' of Transnationalism," in *Reconsidering Israel-Diaspora Relations*, ed. Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Judit Bokser Liwerant and Yosef Gorny (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 447.

it is "the consciousness of the Diaspora" or the awareness of being a Diasporic community that enables a Diaspora to emerge and to survive.[9] He underscores that this shared consciousness culminates in the creation of a collective identity, fundamental for any Diasporic group.[10] Robin Cohen expands on this contention arguing that the collective identity of the Diaspora is stimulated not only by the host land and homeland but also in cooperation with co-ethnic or religious communities worldwide.[11]

Safran shows how the creation of institutions, symbols and practices by Diasporas represents a means to nourish their own collective identity.[12] In this sense, a Diaspora is an example of what Benedict Anderson coined as an "imagined community". "Imagined" because members, without knowing each other, share a collective imaginary of fraternity. "Community" since it is based on ample horizontal relations of camaraderie.[13] In case of the Jewish Diaspora, an imaginary or real homeland and a common history constitute the main elements of their collective identity.

Building upon his studies of Diasporic communities, Anderson coined the term "long-distance nationalism". As other forms of nationalism, it entails political activism. But, in this case, nationalism is exercised not in the country where someone has been born, lives or votes. Instead, members of Diasporas adopt nationalistic practices towards a country with which they do not maintain a legal connection.[14] Long-distance nationalism can be understood as concrete political support to the land Diasporas feel attached to. It might also serve to strengthen the collective ethno and/or religious identity of members of a particular Diaspora.

Identity is an essential concept for the study of Diasporas. Contemporary academics define identity not as an immutable and permanent element that groups

[9] Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies," 85.
[10] William Safran, "The Jewish Diaspora in a Comparative and Theoretical Perspective," *Israel Studies* 10, no.1 (2005): 41.
[11] Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2008), 7.
[12] Safran, "The Jewish Diaspora," 37.
[13] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 6-7.
[14] Benedict Anderson, *Long-Distance Nationalism: World Capitalism And The Rise of Identity Politics* (The Wertheim Lecture 1992. Centre for Asian Studies in Amsterdam (CASA), 11.

inherently share, but as product of a continuous interaction involving behaviour, cultural contexts and practices.[15] People are endlessly redefining their identities, incorporating a large variety of components such as gender, class, profession, environment, culture and religion. So too Jewish identities of Diasporic communities and individuals are divergent. Bila Sorj, a Brazilian author and professor, clarifies that Diasporic Jews, in order to foster their connection to Judaism, select from a variety of cultural elements: celebrating religious holidays, eating Jewish food, visiting Israel, seeing movies and exhibitions about the Holocaust, among other activities.[16]

In general, identity is considered to be an affirmative element due to the fact that it prompts cohesion within a group and a sense of belonging for its members through the creation of solidarity channels and social exchanges.[17] In this vein, identity seems close to the definition of community itself. According to Gerard Delanty, community allegedly entails a sense of belonging, a deeper significance and a situation of camaraderie among its members.[18]

Communities do not require institutions to exist. However, the existence of well-developed institutions influences the degree of internal organisation of the community in question. This is especially true regarding Jewish communities. In most Jewish communities worldwide, there is a high level of internal structure, made by several secular and religious Jewish institutions. The relevance of the Jewish institutions lies in the fact that they bear the responsibility of nurturing the Jewish community that they claim to represent. Resorting to Anthony Cohen's words, "the consciousness of community has to be kept alive through manipulation of its symbols".[19] To put it another way, it is up to the leaders of these institutions to ensure that Jews maintain their engagement and continue their interest in the membership.

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[15] David Campbell, "Poststructuralism," in *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, ed. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 234.
[16] Bila Sorj, "Conversões e Casamentos 'Mistos': a Produção de 'Novos Judeus no Brasil," in *Identidades Judaica no Brasil Contemporâneo*, ed. Bila Sorj (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Imago, 1997), 69.
[17] Margaret MacMillan, "History and Identity," in *The Uses and Abuses of History* (London: Profile Books, 2009), 58.
[18] Gerard Delanty, *Community* (London: Routledge, 2003), 3.
[19] Anthony Cohen, *Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Routledge, 1993), 15.

It is not only on the institutional realm that symbols are created and disseminated. For Michel Bruneau, congregations, community centres, monuments, restaurants, supermarkets and the media also constitute examples of iconographic elements.[20] These components are essential for the maintenance of any community. After all, the survival of the community depends on how much its members attach personal meaning to its values and imaginary.

[20]Michel Bruneau, "Diasporas, transnational spaces and communities," in *Diasporas and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*, ed. Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 38.

Chapter Two

Historical Context

2.1 A concise history of the Jewish migration to Brazil

In Brazil, the largest and most populated country in Latin America, there is a prosperous and long-established Jewish community of approximately 120.000 people according to the Jewish Confederation of Brazil (CONIB).[21] Brazil is home to the second biggest Jewish community in the region after Argentina, and the tenth largest Jewish community in the world.[22] Jews in Brazil live in peace and securely, fully integrated and recognised as part of the Brazilian society.

The presence of Jews in Brazil dates back to 1500, the year Portugal discovered and colonised Brazil.[23] Jews discriminated and persecuted by the Inquisition sought refuge in the recently discovered American continent. A larger wave of Jewish migration arrived in the mid 17th century, when the Netherlands invaded and occupied the northeast of Brazil. In 1636, due to the freedom of religion granted by the Dutch, Jews living in Brazil – most of them of Portuguese descent – founded the first synagogue of Americas, the *Kahal Kadosh* Israel.[24] From 1654, when the Dutch were expelled from Brazil, until 1889, when the Monarchy was toppled and a Republican regime established, Jewish migration to the country was minimal, with some Jews settling in the Amazon region and in the states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.[25] [26]

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[21] "A Conib," *Conib*, accessed February 18th, 2017.
http://www.conib.org.br/aconib

[22] Sergio Della Pergolla, "World Jewish Population: Current Jewish Populations Reports," Berman Jewish Databank no.17 (2016): 24, accessed January 9th, 2017.
http://www.jewishdatabank.org/Studies/downloadFile.cfm?FileID=3584

[23] Arnold Wiznitzer, *Os Judeus no Brasil Colonial*, trans. Olivia Krähenbühl (São Paulo: Editora Pioneira, 1960), 2.

[24] Anita Novinsky, *Os Judeus que Construíram o Brasil: fotos inéditas para uma nova visão da história* (São Paulo: Editora Planeta, 2016), 135.

[25] A Jewish community was formed in Belem, due to the lucrative extraction of rubber, by Jews of Moroccan origin. As for the states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, most Jews arrived between 1840 and 1850.

[26] Eva Alterman Blay, "Judeus na Amazônia," in *Identidades Judaica no Brasil Contemporâneo*, ed. Bila Sorj (Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1997), 50.

With the Republic, a constitution that enshrined the separation between the State and the Church was promulgated. As a result of a more tolerant environment, the migration of Jews grew significantly, mainly from Europe and the Middle East. In the First World War and the time of the Russian Revolution, there were roughly 5.000 to 7.000 Jews in the country. In the 1920s and 1930s, this number increased to 30,000, due to a significant migration from Poland and the Soviet Union, where pogroms were taking place.[27] After the Holocaust, it is estimated that there were 80.000 Jews in Brazil, concentrated mainly in the states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.[28] The post-war period witnessed a significant migration of Mizrahi Jews to Brazil, especially from Morocco.[29]

Contemporary estimates of the number of Jews living in Brazil vary. According to the national census of 2010, 107.329 persons self-declared affiliation to the Jewish religion.[30] Nevertheless, given the understandable distortions that census processes may produce, the Jewish Confederation of Brazil (CONIB) estimates that there are approximately 120.000 Jews in the country.[31] Since 2009, March 18th has been established as "Jewish migration day" to celebrate the choice of thousands of Jews for Brazil as a safe and free haven.[32] According to Israeli demographer Sergio Della Pergolla, the greater Jewish population of Brazil, constituted by Jewish as well as non-Jewish members of Jewish households, was approximately 150.000 people in 2016.[33]

Currently, approximately three quarters of the Brazilian Jewish community is formed by Ashkenazi Jews, mostly descendants of German and Polish Jews. The next

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[27] "Historia," *Conib*, accessed January 7th, 2017, http://www.conib.org.br/historia.

[28] Jeffrey Howard Lesser, *Paws of the Powerful: Jewish Migration to Brazil* (New York University: PhD Dissertation, 1989), 7.

[29] Blay, "Judeus na Amazônia," 46.

[30] Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE), "Censo Demográfico 2010 : Características Gerais da População, Religião e Pessoas com Deficiência," accessed February 3rd, 2017, http://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/visualizacao/periodicos/94/cd_2010_religiao_deficiencia.pdf

[31] " A Conib," *Conib*, accessed February 18th, 2017, http://www.conib.org.br/aconib

[32] The date 18 March was chosen because it was on this day, on 2002, that the Kahal Kadosh Israel synagogue in Recife was re-inaugurated, as well as the museum of Jewish history in Brazil, contiguous to the synagogue.

[33] Sergio Della Pergolla, "World Jewish Population: Current Jewish Populations Reports," *Berman Jewish Databank* no.17 (2016): 47, accessed November 12th, 2016, http://www.jewishdatabank.org/Studies/downloadFile.cfm?FileID=3584

largest group is composed of Sephardim, originally from Portugal and Spain, followed by a significant number of Mizrahi Jews from North Africa, especially from Egypt. The members of these groups live almost exclusively in urban areas, with only a small fraction inhabiting rural areas. Full assimilation and intermarriage are the main concerns as to the future of the Brazilian Jewish community. Indeed, according to Sergio Della Pergola, with the exception of Israel, all Jewish communities worldwide will face a decrease in the following decades.[34]

2.2 **The ups and downs of the diplomatic relations between Brazil and Israel**

For Israel, Brazil will always be celebrated as a pivotal actor in the creation of the Israeli State in November 1947. After all, it was the then Brazilian Foreign Minister, Oswaldo Aranha, who presided over and, to some extent favourably manoeuvred, the meeting of the United Nations General Assembly responsible for adopting resolution 181, which approved the division of Palestine and the subsequent creation of a Jewish and an Arab state in the territory. After that decisive step, strong relations between the two countries developed in the political, economic and cultural fields. Brazil recognised Israel as a state and established diplomatic relations in February 1949. Two years later, the vice-President of Brazil, Café Filho, visited Israel and initiated official Brazilian representation in the country, which was elevated to the category of embassy in 1958. Israel, in turn, demonstrated interest in forging a partnership with a key Latin American country. In the 1950s, Brazil's relevance was acknowledged with the opening of an Israeli embassy and visits paid by Golda Meir, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Zalman Shazar, the first Israeli President to visit Brazil.

The year of 1967 left an enduring mark on Israel and on the relationship of the Jewish State with other nations. For Brazil, it was not different since the country began to adopt a more critical posture towards Israel concerning what would become known as the Palestinian question. Brazil was an elected member of the Security Council of the

[34] Della Pergolla, "World Jewish Population," 17.

United Nations in 1967-68 and its diplomats were active in the drafting of resolution 242 concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict. The unanimously approved resolution demanded the end of military activities and the mutual recognition of the parties, and is still regarded as a blueprint for peace in the region. The resolution also stipulated, as a prerequisite for peace, the Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in the Six Day War: East Jerusalem, West Bank, Golan Heights, Gaza and Sinai.[35] The Brazilian government has continued to advocate the two-state solution and over the course of time several official and unofficial documents have condemned Israel and what was deemed to be the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories.

Brazilian criticism of Israel reached a new level in the 1970s, when events of national and international dimensions triggered a substantial estrangement between the two countries. In the 70s, Brazilian foreign policy was marked by an abrupt discontinuation of its ideological affiliation with the United States, which was replaced by a multilateral approach that favoured the establishment of partnerships with third world countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.[36] The adoption of this more pragmatic foreign policy was definitely influenced by the oil crisis of 1973 during which the Brazilian economy, with its major dependence on the import of oil, was severely affected. With the aim of promoting its economic interests, Brazil sought to engage with Arab nations, establishing bilateral relations and siding with their perspectives in international conferences to Israel's detriment. This tougher approach reached its peak in November 1975, when Brazil voted in favour of the General Assembly Resolution 3379, which "determines Zionism as a form of racism and social discrimination".[37] The controversial resolution, denounced by Israel, the United States and the Brazilian Jewish community as anti-Semitic, was revoked in 1991.[38]

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[35] S/ RES/ 242 (1967), accessed January 27th, 2017,
http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/242(1967)

[36] Amado Luiz Cervo and Clodoaldo Bueno, *História da Política Exterior do Brasil* (Brasília: Editora UNB, 2008), 423.

[37] A/ RES / 3379 (XXX), accessed January 27th, 2017,
http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/3379(XXX)

[38] A/ RES/ 46/ 86, accessed January 29th, 2017,

An additional political element aggravated the relations between Brazil and Israel in the decade. The Brazilian government declared that, according to its view, terrorism needed to be understood as an expression of social and economic dissatisfaction. In other words, terrorism was a problem of underdeveloped societies and thus, could only be overcome through the promotion of economic and social development. For Israel and other Western nations, terrorist attacks were illegitimate and should be condemned and suppressed. However, with the end of military rule in Brazil in 1985 and the prospects of the Oslo Peace Process in the 1990s, the Israeli-Brazilian relations improved significantly.

With the election of left wing Labour Party member Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva as President in 2002, the Palestinian question was once again the subject of heated debates. Brazil thereby joined the tradition of championing the Palestinian cause maintained by the political and intellectual left in Latin America.[39] Nonetheless in 2010, during his second term of office, Lula was the first Brazilian President to make an official visit to Israel, following President Shimon Peres' official visit to Brazil a year earlier. The year 2010 was also when the free trade agreement signed in 2007 between Mercosur and Israel – the first such agreement with a non-regional partner – came into force.

With the conflict in Gaza sparked by Israel's "Operation Protective Edge" in 2014, relations between the two countries deteriorated. Then President Dilma Rousseff condemned Israeli actions, classifying its behaviour as disproportional and recalled the Brazilian ambassador in Tel Aviv for consultations. A more recent diplomatic incident was the refusal of the Brazilian government to accept Dani Dayan as the Israeli ambassador to Brazil due to his close association with the settlers' movement in the country.

In spite of those disagreements, Brazil and Israel constantly demonstrate respect and consideration for each other. The frequent exchange of visits of high-level

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http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/46/86

[39] For a deeper analysis of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism in Latin America see Leonardo Senkman, "Anti-Zionist Discourse of the Left in Latin America: an Assessment," in *Reconsidering Israel-Diaspora Relations*, ed. Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Judit Bokser Liwerant and Yosef Gorny (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 309-333.

representatives testifies to the fluidity of the bilateral dialogue and strength of the relations. As a result, in the last decades, several agreements of cooperation were signed, covering different areas, such as agriculture, health, education, tourism, science and technology. More recently, Israeli Minister of Education Naftali Bennet and the Minister of Culture and Sports Miri Regev visited Brazil and Brazil's former Minister of Foreign Affairs José Serra attended Shimon Peres' funeral.

The human dimension is an important element in the relationship. The role of the Brazilian Jewish community in improving bilateral relations should not be underestimated. We could contend that there is a permanent concern, championed by the Jewish institutions in Brazil, to ensure that the Brazilian government and society acknowledge and protect the right of Israel to exist as a nation in an environment of peace and security. This concern extends not only to the idea of a Jewish State, but also to the well-being of fellow Brazilians who live and do business in Israel. The current Brazilian community in Israel is estimated at 10.000 members. In 2003, the Council of Brazilian Citizens in Israel was created, followed by the Honorary Consulate in Haifa in 2005.[40] In addition to those who have migrated to Israel, there is a constant flux of Brazilians visiting Israel as tourists or participating in Jewish-related programmes, such as Taglit-Birthright Israel and March of the Living, as well as Jewish and non-Jewish exchange students. As a testimony to the relevance of the interpersonal exchanges between the two countries, a direct connection between São Paulo and Tel Aviv, run by the Israeli airlines El Al, will be shortly resumed, after a three-year hiatus.

2.3 Zionism in Brazil

The connection between Brazilian Jews and Zionism is longstanding. Zionism, contemporarily defined by the World Zionist Organisation as the right of the Jewish people to exist as a nation, initially entailed the moral obligation of Jews to migrate to Israel. Prior to the creation of the State of Israel, the ideals of Zionism were already

[40]"Brasil-Israel," Embaixada do Brasil em Israel, *Telaviv.itamaraty*, accessed January 19th, 2017, http://telaviv.itamaraty.gov.br/pt-br/brasil-israel.xml

current among Brazilian Jews. According to the historian Nachman Falbel, professor at the University of São Paulo, founder and director of the Brazilian Jewish Archive and an authority on the history of Jews in Brazil, the 1920s saw the foundation of a local Zionist movement in the states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, where most of the Jewish community already resided.[41] Zionism was espoused by several Brazilian Jewish entities, which, although not formally organised, were responsible for overseeing the entrance of Jewish refugees and migrants to the country, and providing them with housing, food and facilities for social interaction and religious practice.[42] The Jewish Brazilian press at the time, openly advocating Zionism, disseminated the ideals of Zionism and reported on meetings and negotiations taking place in different countries concerning the creation of a Jewish State.[43] Jewish entities also resorted to newspapers and magazines to collect funds for the Zionist cause.

As the result of a substantial correspondence with the international leaders of Zionism, Brazil sent its own representative, Júlio Stolzenberg, to the 12th Zionist Congress in Carlsbad, then Czechoslovakia, in 1921, the first to be held after the Balfour Declaration.[44] One year later, four Brazilian organisations already espoused Zionism.[45] [46] As a reflection of their enthusiastic engagement with the movement, Brazilian Jews organised their first Zionist Congress, which resulted in the Zionist Federation of Brazil, championed by Jacob Schneider.[47] The federation's mission was to propagate the ideals of the Zionist movement throughout the country as well as to raise funds for the construction of educational facilities.[48] Schneider promoted the visit of prominent Zionist leader Yehuda Wilensky to Brazil in 1921, whose visit was followed by Leib Jaffe in 1923. Travelling to several cities, both leaders sought to encourage people to donate

[41] Nachman Falbel, *Judeus no Brasil: Estudos e Notas* (São Paulo: Editora EDUSP, 2008) 391-421.
[42] Sionist organisations such as the Tiferet Sion in Rio de Janeiro, the Ahavat Sion in São Paulo, and other institutions in Para and Curitiba.
[43] Examples can be found in the newspapers Kol Israel and Correio Israelita.
[44] Falbel, *Judeus no Brasil*, 396.
[45] Tiferet Sion in Rio de Janeiro, Shalom Sion in Curitiba, Ahavat Sion in São Paulo and Ahavat Sion in Pará.
[46] Falbel, *Judeus no Brasil*, 395.
[47] Ibid., 414.
[48] Ibid., 397.

funds to Keren Hayesod.[49] Wilensky met the most prominent Jewish leaders, among them Jacob Schneider and Eduardo Horowitz, to celebrate the opening of further institutions that would disseminate the ideas of Zionism.[50] Similarly, Jaffe went to various regions in Brazil, including Rio de Janeiro where he encountered the Brazilian President Arthur Bernardes.

The renowned leaders captivated the local population and their successful visits are, to this day, celebrated in the history of Zionism in Brazil. Strengthened by the physical presence of representatives of the World Zionist Organisation, Brazilian Jews became more politically engaged. They organised their first public demonstrations at the end of the 1920s, when approximately two hundred Jews assembled in Rio de Janeiro to ask the Brazilian government to officially condemn the verbal and physical attacks against Jews in Palestine.[51]

As reported by Falbel, in the 1930s the Brazilian Jewish organisations were sufficiently structured as to address the economic, social, cultural and political concerns of their members. This ongoing development was suddenly interrupted from 1937 to 1946, when Brazil lived under an authoritarian regime, which suppressed minorities' rights and drastically reduced the number of entrance permits granted to refugees, especially those of Jewish origin.[52] During this period, Zionist activities were outlawed. It was only in 1945, at the end of the Second World War, that the Zionist movement would re-emerge.

When Brazilian Jews got word of the atrocities committed against Jews in the war, Zionism gained even more strength and active supporters. Even those who were not personally connected to the Holocaust were extremely affected. As Falbel asserts, for the majority of Jews in Brazil, only the creation of a Jewish State could ensure that a

[49] Falbel, *Judeus no Brasil*, 377-379.
[50] Ibid., 386, 396.
[51] Ibid., 421, 391.
[52] Maria Luiza Tucci Carneiro, *O anti-semitismo na Era Vargas: fantasmas de uma geração* (São Paulo: Editora), 37.

tragedy of this magnitude would not recur.[53] As a result of their personal and collective interest, most Brazilian Jews not only followed the decision-making process closely, but also acted to promote the passing of the United Nations resolution 181, which would eventually lead to the birth of the State of Israel.[54] [55]

Already in the early 20th century, Zionist ideology was present on the political agenda of the Jewish organisations in Brazil. Initially, Zionism translated into political and economic support to the Jewish State and into efforts to persuade Brazilian Jews to practice aliyah.[56] During the following years, the Jewish institutions focused less on stimulating people to migrate to Israel, instead, concentrating their efforts on the increase of financial donations to the creation of the State.

Most Brazilian Jews endorsed the stance and the activities promoted by the Jewish organisations. By backing the initiatives of the institutions, Brazilian Jews revealed their perceptions about one of the most important roles of the Jewish community at that time: to create the conditions for the establishment and sustainability of the State of Israel. From political and financial support to aliyah, Brazilian Jews directly or indirectly demonstrated their devotion to Zionism.

[53] Falbel, *Judeus no Brasil*, 417.
[54] A / RES/ 181(II), accessed January 29th, 2017.
http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/181(II)
[55] Falbel, *Judeus no Brasil*, 430.
[56] Ibid., 428.

Chapter Three

Case Study: The Main Jewish institutions in São Paulo and Their Relationship with and Stance on Israel

3.1 Jewish institutions in São Paulo and their activities

The state of São Paulo is home to more than half of the total Jews in Brazil. The city of São Paulo – capital of the state – is the seat of numerous Jewish institutions, ranging from religious to secular to athletic and educational. São Paulo is also the location of the headquarters of the most prominent Jewish organisation in Brazil, *the Jewish Confederation of Brazil* (Confederação Israelita do Brasil – CONIB), founded in 1948, the year of the founding of the State of Israel. CONIB is a non-partisan, non-profit organisation that represents different segments of the Brazilian Jewish community regardless of their religious denominations or political principles. The institution acts on the social, cultural and educational levels to strengthen the sense of identity and collectiveness of the Jewish community in Brazil.[57]

Eduardo Wurzmann, Secretary-General of CONIB, when interviewed for this thesis, explained that CONIB openly professes to be an institution pro-Israel and Zionism, and its pivotal role is to mediate between the Brazilian Jewish community – 14 states have Jewish federations – and the executive, legislative and judiciary branches of power in Brazil. The organisation also works on an international level by engaging with Israel, foreign governments and international organisations. Illustrative of the cosmopolitan nature of CONIB is the fact that its current president Fernando Kasinski Lottenberg also serves as the current vice-president of the World Jewish Congress and member of the American Jewish Committee.

The Secretary-General of CONIB also highlighted that the organisation seeks to promote activities of inter-religious dialogue, the main objective of which is to ensure

[57] "A Conib," *Conib*, accessed February 18th, 2017, http://www.conib.org.br/aconib

that the Arab-Israeli conflict is not imported to Brazil, since it could impair the peaceful and respectful relationship that people from different religious and ethnic communities have in Brazil. Rabbi Michel Schlesinger, the main coordinator of the project, frequently interacts with other religious leaders, mainly Christians and Muslims, in events throughout Brazil. For the Rabbi, also interviewed, the engagement of religious leaders could provide an example of co-existence that might even impact political issues such as the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The idea that the Brazilian society might serve as a successful illustration of mutual respect among ethnic and religious communities was also expressed by others interviewed. An initiative by the former Minister of Foreign Affairs Antonio Patriota sheds light on this issue. "Side by Side", as it came to be known, was organised in Brasilia in 2012 in the form of a series of conferences and meetings among representatives of Jewish, Arab and Muslim communities in Brazil. In the gatherings, people from different religious and ethnic groups had the opportunity to listen to different points-of-view and convey their own perceptions and opinions about a variety of subjects. The project was inspired by the author Amin Maalouf's contention that Diasporas could work towards achieving peace and reconciliation among warring groups since Jews, Arabs and Muslims appear to have a better relationship with each other as Diasporic groups in several cities worldwide than their counterparts in the Middle East.[58]

However alluring Amin Maalouf's reasoning may be, when it comes to the Brazilian society, some of its particularities must be taken into account. Samuel Feldberg, professor at the University of São Paulo, specialised in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, pointed out that most Arabs in Brazil are not Muslims but Christians and, thus, might show signs of distrust or even hostility to Arab Muslims. Rafaela Barkay, a PhD student in the same university, is sceptical. For her, the fact that there is practically no interaction between the Jewish and Palestinian community in Brazil illustrates the

[58] Amin Maalouf, *Disordered world: setting a new course for the 21st century*, trans. George Miller (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), 202-203.

argument that "Diasporas could not only reproduce the conflict but also intensify it".[59] Barkay formerly worked for the youth organisation Forum 18, affiliated to B'nai B'rith, but she currently defines herself as an online activist. Her transnational activities involve setting up meetings between Israelis and Palestinians in Israel and the Palestinian territories. In Brazil, she seeks to encourage encounters among the Arab, Palestinian and Jewish communities. Barkay firmly believes that, in the case of Diasporic communities, contrary to what might be effective in Israel, the principle of inter-religious dialogue constitutes the best alternative to persuade people from different religions to interact with each other.

Michel Schlesinger, the Chief Rabbi of *the São Paulo Jewish Congregation* (Congregação Israelita Paulista –CIP) is also very involved in projects of inter-religious dialogue with Muslim and Catholic leaders. In 2015, CIP hosted a large event of inter-religious dialogue, which counted on the support of the American NGO Foundation for Ethnic Understanding.[60] The Rabbi explained to the author that the congregation is affiliated both to Conservative and Reform denominations of Judaism. CIP's history dates back to 1930s, when a small number of German Jewish refugees decided to establish a centre of religious, cultural and social life for its prospective Jewish members. In the 60s, the congregation endorsed Zionism and celebrated its first Yom Ha-atsma'ut (Israeli Independence Day). In 1969, CIP coordinated a visit to São Paulo by Ben Gurion and Yitzhak Rabin and in 1974 organised the Brazilian Zionist Congress, initiatives that substantiate its adopted Zionist orientation.[61] Currently, the congregation promotes social, cultural and educational events, although its main activities revolve around the project of interreligious dialogue.

Another very active institution is *the Jewish Federation of São Paulo* (Federação Israelita do Estado de São Paulo- FISESP), the most important federation in Brazil. FISESP

[59] Personal interview conducted on September 5th 2016.

[60] "Congregação Israelita Paulista sedia pela primeira vez no Brasil a Season of Twinning (Tempo de Irmandade)," *Conib*, accessed February 13th, 2017, http://www.conib.org.br/noticias/3099/congregacao_israelita_paulista_sedia_pela_primeira_vez_no_brasil_a_season_of_twinning_tempo_de_irmandade

[61] "Histórico," *Cip*, accessed January 7th, 2016, http://www.cip.org.br/quem-somos/historico/

was founded in 1946 as a means to coordinate the substantial number of Jewish refugees that had arrived in São Paulo since the 1920s. FISESP acts on several areas of Jewish life, such as education, religion, social assistance, sports and health.[62] Ricardo Berkeinsztat added that one of his main tasks as Vice-President of FISESP, consists of showing to the Brazilian public "what Israel is".[63] In order to fulfil this goal, the organisation works in cooperation with the Israeli embassy and consulates. When interviewed for this text, Berkeinsztat further admitted that, even though the organisation represents the Jewish community of São Paulo, there is a "natural connection with Israel".[64] His interesting assertion reveals the existence of a collective bond between the Brazilian Jewish community and the Israeli State, which will be further explored throughout this chapter.

On February 2017, under the supervision of FISESP and CONIB, eight members of the House of Representatives and Senate went to Israel to get better acquainted with its social, economic and political spheres.[65] Berkeinsztat explained that the main goal of the so-called Parliamentary Mission was to enable Brazilian politicians to engage with authorities and representatives of various religious, ethnic and political backgrounds, thereby building a better understanding of the realities of the Middle East. For him, the trip is also an opportunity to display positive aspects of Israel as a country and society, such as the scientific and technological innovations created by Israel in the last decades.

The Parliamentary Mission is an official governmental activity involving members of the Brazilian congress, yet it could also be understood as a transnational initiative of the Jewish Brazilian community. The program is, after all, the result of intense cooperation between Brazilian Jewish institutions and the American Jewish Committee. According to Berkeinsztat, other international Jewish organisations such as the World Jewish Congress and the Anti-Defamation League also have permanent interactions with

[62] "História," *Fisesp*, accessed January 26th, 2017, https://www.fisesp.org.br/historia/
[63] Personal interview conducted on August 24th 2016.
[64] Ibid.
[65] "Interchange: Missão de Brasileiros a Israel," *Pletz*, accessed February 9th, 2017, http://www.pletz.com/blog/interchange-missao-de-parlamentares-brasileiros-a-israel/

FISESP. The international nature of the exchanges shows a solid trans-state level connection, which we might consider as evidence of activities of institutions that do not limit themselves to the scope of home and host land. It is an example of what Stephen Vertovec has named "triadic relationship", i.e. activities that take place not only among host and homeland but also with other co-Diasporic communities worldwide.[66]

Berkeinsztat added that a similar example of a transnational enterprise is the project "Goal of Peace", held in 2016, a partnership among FISESP, the Brazilian Confederation of Football (CBF) and the Israeli NGO *Goal of Equality*, which is related to the organisation *Abraham's Path*. By means of this initiative, Jewish and Arab children went to Brazil to play football and participate together in numerous cultural and social activities. The program's purpose was both to educate children for peace and to demonstrate how Brazil could offer a model of co-existence.[67]

Another interesting initiative by FISESP is known as Hassefá Ba'Aretz, whereby approximately thirty Jewish representatives from several Brazilian associations, religious or secular, are invited to first visit a European nation and soon after go to Israel. In Europe, the Jewish leaders gain knowledge of the ways that the chosen country addresses the memory of the Holocaust; once in Israel, they meet Arab and Jewish leaders and engage in conversations about various subjects. Luiz Gross, President of the Executive Committee of the São Paulo Jewish Congregation (CIP), was part of this program in the early 2000s. After visiting Germany, he went to Israel in a very sensitive period, just after the construction of the wall that separates Israelis and Palestinians. Learning about the benefits and complications that the wall had created, he concluded that the relevance of the project lies in the fact that young leaders are able to see the reality as it is. "Even if the reality is not always comfortable, it is important to observe and explain to others in Brazil what you saw and heard".[68]

According to Gross, the idea behind Hassefá Ba'Aretz is that the trip enables

[66] Stephen Vertovec and Robin Cohen, Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism, (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1999), 37.
[67] "Gol da Paz," *Pletz*, accessed February 11th, 2017, http://www.pletz.com/blog/gol-da-paz/
[68] Personal interview conducted on August 25th 2016.

leaders to gain first hand information about complex issues. When they return to Brazil, they find themselves better intellectually prepared to answer controversial questions from Jews and non-Jews alike. We might remark that the program has an even more meaningful implication, which is to replicate the traditional Zionist narrative according to which Israel is the sole place where Jews can not only live in peace and security but also thrive without facing discrimination and persecution. To put it another way, the project helps multiply the message that only the incontestable existence of Israel, serving as a refuge of last resort, can guarantee the physical safety of the Jews around the world.

Another organisation that interacts frequently with Israel is *the Athletic Association Club Hebraica of São Paulo* (Associação Brasileira A Hebraica de São Paulo) - affiliated to the Maccabi World Union -, the largest Jewish athletic institution in Latin America, founded in 1953 and with almost 30.000 members.[69] Gabriel Milevsky, Director Superintendent of Hebraica, noted that the athletic association receives regular visits from prominent Israelis, including several presidents. In 2009, for example, Shimon Peres was a guest speaker at an event at Hebraica for approximately two thousand people.[70] According to Milevsky, national and international representatives seek to establish relations with the athletic association because "Hebraica is the calling card of the Jewish community in Brazil".[71] Reinforcing its international interests, Milevsky observed that Hebraica participates in activities with the Jewish Agency for Israel, the Keren Hayesod, the American Jewish Community Centre (JCC) and the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), where he also works as consultant.

A Jewish international institution that has its own representation in São Paulo is the *B'nai B'rith*. The global organisation, present in 54 countries, came to Brazil in 1932.

[69] "A Hebraica: 50 Anos de Sucessos," Morashá, accessed February 28th, 2017, http://www.morasha.com.br/brasil/a-hebraica-50-anos-de-sucessos.html
[70] "Nesta Quinta Shimon Peres na A Hebraica," *Pletz*, accessed March 15th, 2017, http://www.pletz.com/blog/nesta-quinta-shimon-peres-na-a-hebraica/
[71] Personal interview conducted on September 8th 2016.

Its main mission is to uphold the values of Tzedaká (social justice) and human rights.[72] In Brazil, B'nai B'rith advocates for the rights of Brazilian Jews and other minorities, working in cooperation with the LGBT movement. Abraham Goldstein, President of *B'nai B'rith Brazil*, underscored in an interview to the author that the institution "works for human rights, not only for Jews, but human rights for humans".[73]

It was under the umbrella of B'nai B'rith that the youth movement *Forum 18* emerged, albeit with considerable autonomy. Its founder, Daniel Douek, clarified that his intention was to create a type of study group for young people, a place where students and professors, Brazilian and foreign, with differing points-of-view could gather to exchange information and perceptions about Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Douek underlined that among the influential participants in Forum 18's events were Professor Edward Kaufman and Haaretz journalist Amira Haas. In 2015, Forum 18 invited several academics from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Arab University in Jerusalem (Al Quds) to join their Brazilian counterparts to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

More traditional youth movements can also be found in São Paulo, such as Hashomer Hatzair, Chazit Hanoar and Habonim Dror Snif. Each one of them has its own agenda and interests, although all are united in stating to be pro-Israel and Zionism. Other Brazilian Jewish institutions involved in Zionist activities in Brazil are women's organisations, particularly *Wizo* and *Pioneer Women* (Na'amat Pioneiras). Cultural institutions such as *the Israeli Brazilian Union of Social Welfare* (União Brasileiro-Israelita do Bem-Estar Social - UNIBES) and a soon to be reopened Jewish Museum also work to foster the ties between Brazilian Jews and Israel.

Cultural and educational activities related to Israel also occur with frequency in Brazil. Israeli bands, singers and musicians are regularly invited to participate in Jewish festivals. Every year, the athletic association Club Hebraica presents its Carmel Festival,

[72] "Mais de Oitenta e Cinco Anos de Beneficência, Fraternidade e Harmonia," *Bnai-brith*, accessed March 12th, 2017, http://www.bnai-brith.org.br/mais-de-80-anos-de-beneficencia-fraternidade-e-harmonia/
[73] Personal interview conducted on August 29th 2016.

one of the largest festivals of Israeli folk music in the world.[74] On March 2017, the celebrated singer Charles Aznavour held a concert in São Paulo to raise funds for the recovery of forests in Israel.[75] It was also in São Paulo, in the same year, that the famous exhibition Expo-Israel attracted numerous Jews and non-Jews interested in deepening their knowledge about Israel.[76]

The demographer Sergio Della Pergolla estimates that, until 2010, more than half of the total number of Brazilian Jews visited Israel at least once in their lifetime.[77] Even with this significant proportion, it seems that the Jewish institutions continue to mediate the relationship between Brazilian Jews and Israel. Through events offered by Jewish organisations, Brazilian Jews partake in the celebration or commemoration of special Israeli dates, such as Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Memorial Day), Yom HaAtzmout (Israeli Independence Day) and the Yom Hazikaron (Israeli Memorial Day). In these ceremonies and on other religious or secular occasions, the Israeli anthem is always played.

The Brazilian Jewish Press also serves as an intermediary between the Brazilian Jewish community and Israel. A significant number of Brazilian Jews follow the events in Israel and the Middle East through the media of the Jewish institutions. There are more than thirty sources produced by Jewish leaders and organisations, including printed and online newsletters and magazines, TV programs, blogs and websites.[78] Aside from compiling news related to Israel, the Jewish institutions in Brazil also offer their own

[74] Glorinha Cohen, "35 Festival Carmel Le Olam," *Glorinhacohen*, accessed February 23rd, 2017, http://glorinhacohen.com.br/?p=27007

[75] "Charles Aznavour," *Kkl* (Keren Kayemet LeIsrael), accessed March 29th, 2017, http://kkl.org.br/wordpress/noticias/charles-aznavour/

[76] "Vem Aí A Expo Israel," *Pletz*, accessed April 3rd, 2017, http://www.pletz.com/blog/vem-ai-a-expo-israel/

[77] Sergio Della Pergolla, Jewish Demographic Policies: Population Trends and Options in Israel and in the Diaspora, *The Jewish People Policy Institute* (2011): 66, http://jppi.org.il/uploads/Jewish_Demographic_Policies.pdf

[78] Morashá, Shalom, Tribuna Judaica, Alef, Hora Israelita, Hebraica, Visão Judaica, Mosaico na TV, Shalom Brasil, PLETZ.COM, TVTOVÁ, Jewish Brazil, Revista 18, GLORINHACOHEN.COM, Nosso Jornal,NetJudaica.com, Revista Judaica, De Olho na Mídia, BB Press, www.beitchabad.org.br, DVARIM, Le Haim!, Revista Israel, www.hakotel.com, Revista Nascente, Haaretz, Maariv, Yediot Aharonot, Arutz 7, Aurora, Boletim AHJB, Informe AHJB, Artision.

interpretations and analysis of the events unfolding in the Middle East, which testifies to their continuous engagement with Israel. In situations of military conflict, such as the Six Days War, Yom Kippur War, Intifadas and the conflicts in Gaza, the main Jewish institutions in Brazil reiterate their unequivocal support to the State of Israel. In some cases, the most prominent Jewish institutions in Brazil overtly expressed their discontent with the Brazilian government's position concerning Israel.[79]

The Jewish institutions in Brazil are also the main coordinators of Jewish international programs in the country, including the March of the Living and the Taglit - Birthright Israel. The initiative March of the Living aims at uniting people from different parts of the world who want to visit historical sites related to the Holocaust, in Poland and in Israel, to gain a deeper understanding of the history of the Holocaust and the origins of anti-Semitism as well as to pay tribute to the victims.[80] The Taglit-Birthright Israel program seeks to encourage young Jews to visit Israel for the first time with all expenses paid.[81] Although not officially proclaimed, it appears that the main idea of the latter initiative is to create a bond between Diasporic Jews and Israel strong enough to culminate in a larger number of Jews going on aliyah. High school students also have the opportunity of spending two to three years studying in Israel. Likewise, when Jewish Brazilians decide to migrate to Israel, mainly due to economic and security reasons, they first resort to Jewish institutions that clarify initial concerns and direct them to the appropriate centres of migration.

3.2 Standing by Israel

Most activities of the Jewish institutions are partially or mainly financed by the representation of Keren Hayesod in São Paulo, the Communal Fund (Fundo Comunitário), the Jewish Agency and the Keren Kayemet LeIsrael (KKL Brazil). These

[79] A recent example occurred in 2010, when President Lula received Iranian President Ahmadinejad in Brazil, most Jewish institutions issued critical press releases and encouraged demonstrations.
[80] "Uma viagem para reviver a história e viver intensamente!," *Fundocomunitario*, accessed May 5th, 2017, http://fundocomunitario.org.br/marcha-da-vida/
[81] "A Viagem," *Taglitww.birthrightisrael*, accessed May 5th, 2017, http://taglitww.birthrightisrael.com/sites/BR/visitingisrael/Pages/Tudo%20sobre%20a%20Viagem.aspx

financing associations seek to stimulate donations to Israel and to programs tailored to reinforce the Diaspora's connection to Israel and to ensure that Israel remains an essential element of the individual and collective identity of Diaspora Jews. For Eliezer Ben-Rafael, the involvement of Israel in the activities of the Diaspora is also used as a means to foster political and economic assistance to the Jewish State. [82] The centrality of Israel to Brazilian Jewish institutions results in a permanent concern with the legitimacy and safety of the Israeli nation.

Standing by Israel, in private and public, becomes an imperative to most Brazilian Jewish leaders when Israel is faced with situations of risk. Resorting to the example of the conflict in Gaza in 2014, the President of B'nai B'rith Brazil Abraham Goldstein explained that the level of support to Israel among the Jewish community significantly grows in circumstances that appear to imperil the State of Israel. In these moments, several Jewish institutions act to overcome their differences and work in a more coordinated manner.

Sensitive situations as the conflict in Gaza in 2014 constitute a challenge for the Diaspora. In the interviews, most Jewish leaders seemed to feel that they have a moral obligation to protect Israel, to ensure that its existence is not called into question and to consider most Israeli actions as legitimate. Measures of this type may be understood as exemplifications of the practice of Hasbara, translated as explanation or enlightenment. Hasbara is, essentially, public diplomacy. It encompasses acts whereby people not only vocalise their endorsement of Israel but also provide additional information about complex issues, as to motivate others to adopt a balanced view of Israel and the Middle East. Public appearances, educational initiatives, passionate op-eds and financial campaigns are some examples of Hasbara, which is a frequent practice among the most prominent Jewish institutions in Brazil and elsewhere. Hasbara's global mission is to tackle the vilification and isolation of Israel. Not resorting to the word Hasbara but aware of its meaning, Rabbi Michel Schlesinger notes "externally, the Brazilian Jewish community is recognized as a kind of Israeli ambassador to Brazil".

[82] Eliezer Ben-Rafael, "Israel-Diaspora Relations," 455.

It is not a simple task to grasp the motivations and activities behind this seemingly unconditional support for Israel. In the interviews, it became clear that some leaders feel compelled to defend Israeli actions in public due to the fact the country is already subjected to what they see as fierce and sometimes unfair criticism by most of the international community and the national press. Others, it appeared, while critical of Israeli behaviour, could not express it in public due to issues of legitimacy and representativeness. For most interviewed, it seemed that criticising Israel is an overwhelming challenge, especially in the public sphere. Real or imaginary fears held by the leaders about the future of the Jewish State cannot be overlooked when analysing this behaviour.

3.3 Adopting a more critical posture towards Israel

The unbalanced public defence of Israel by the leaders of the main Brazilian Jewish institutions, especially when it is related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is fiercely condemned by some Brazilian Jews. Sérgio Storch, founder of *Progressive Jews* (Judeus Progressistas), an online platform established in 2011 with over 1.200 members, claimed that the public stance of the "establishment" – as he calls the most prominent Jewish institutions in Brazil - is similar to the official position of the Israeli government across the board. For Storch, the Jewish institutions do not reflect the diversity that exists within the Brazilian Jewish community and, as a result, he does not feel genuinely represented by them.

Yuri Haasz offered sharper criticism: in his opinion, the Brazilian Jewish institutions and the Brazilian Jewish community itself is more conservative than other Jewish communities worldwide, be they in the United States, Israel or Europe. Haasz, an Israeli Jew who has been living in Brazil for decades, founded the organisation *Educational Network for Human Rights in Palestine/Israel* (Rede Educacional pelos Direitos Humanos em Palestina/Israel - FFIPP) in Brazil. The international organisation considers its central mission to inform about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by setting up conferences between academics and activists around the world. Since 2012, FFIPP Brazil

has sent a significant number of Jewish and non-Jewish students to Israel and the Palestinian territories to experience *in loco* the complexities of the Middle East.

The assumption that the leaders of the main Jewish institutions in Brazil consent to practically every policy implemented by the Israeli government is a simplification. The fact that these leaders do not articulate their disagreements in public cannot be construed as an unconditional and automatic support to all Israeli actions, especially when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is complex and broad. Assessing the interviews, it became clear that public and personal opinions do not always converge; on the contrary, they tend to differ substantially. Critical voices exist within the most prominent Jewish institutions, even if they are not officially expressed in public appearances or written declarations. The main Jewish organisations and their leadership in Brazil are not the monolithic and homogeneous block they might seem to be at first glance. Like the whole of the Brazilian Jewish community, members of these institutions hold different political views on many subjects.

Most of the leaders interviewed, for example, acknowledge that they invariably read the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, which is considered critical of the Israeli government. It is of utmost importance for them to draw on a variety of sources of information, including articles and newspapers written from various perspectives, because it enables them to hold a more balanced and judicious view of the general situation of the Middle East. When asked about sensitive themes such as settlements and negotiations, the majority of leaders displayed sophisticated and shrewd reasoning. While some answers were very similar to official declarations of the Israeli government, particularly issues concerning Iran and Hamas, responses related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict indicated substantial and encompassing knowledge about the subject. Some leaders even offered significant insights into overlooked elements.

Additionally, even if the majority of leaders identify with the moderate right, they hold different political views on many subjects. Whereas most are politically conservative, some are prone to adopt progressive points-of-view. Only a few of the Jewish leaders interviewed consider themselves to be part of the political left and, as is

typical in Latin America, present a more critical position towards Israel. Due to the fact that a considerable number of left-wing parties in Latin America regard Israel as an extension of the American power, left-orientated politicians and academics often embrace harsh predispositions towards both countries. In São Paulo, the Jewish leaders interviewed, depending on whether they belong to the left or moderate right, have significantly different opinions when it comes to a political assessment, but the vast majority support the existence of Israel as a Jewish State.

Interestingly, the plurality of considerations and points-of-view of the leaders of the Jewish Brazilian community is noticeable despite the fact that most Brazilian Jews – and all the leaders interviewed - belong to the high and middle-high echelons of Brazilian society and define themselves as Ashkenazic Jews. Although Brazilian Jews originated from sixty different countries,[83] the Ashkenazic elite continues to be the largest and main active force within the Jewish institutions of São Paulo. The presence of many Ashkenazic Jews in leadership positions in the community is, therefore, consistent with their proportion among the Jewish community.

3.4 Anti-Zionism and Anti-Semitism in Brazil: a subtle difference?

Reflecting on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Rafaela Barkay believes that most Brazilian Jews incorporate the perspective conveyed by the leadership of the main Jewish institutions. She asserted that many people avoid criticising Israeli policies because they are afraid of being stigmatised as anti-Israel or anti-Zionist. In this regard, Samuel Feldberg of the University of São Paulo, underscored that it is imperative to distinguish between the approach of Diaspora Jews towards the support to the State of Israel and their standpoint in relation to the current government. Feldberg regrets that other Jews label him as anti-Zionist when he expresses negative opinions about policies implemented by the current Prime Minister. According to his view, it is the same level of criticism he frequently directs to the Brazilian and to the American governments, but

[83] Misha Klein, "'Afro-Ashkenazim' e Outras Experiências com Identidade," in *Experiência Cultural Judaica no Brasil: Recepção, Inclusão e Ambivalência*, ed. Monica Grim and Nelson Vieira (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Topbooks, 2004), 252.

which in the case of Israel is considered unacceptable for some Jews.

Anti-Zionism was a recurrent theme in several interviews, normally accompanied by considerations over anti-Semitism. Fernando Greiber, Vice-President of the Federation of Industries of the state of São Paulo (FISESP) and one of the first to promote the negotiation of a free trade agreement between Mercosur and Israel (in force since 2010), asserted that anyone who positions himself or herself against particular policies of the Israeli government is automatically labelled as anti-Semitic. The President of B'nai B'rith Abraham Goldstein, in turn, highlighted the need to differentiate between attitudes of anti-Zionism, anti-Semitism and anti-policies of Israel. His argument resonates with Earl Raab's contention that judicious Jewish leaders ought to be able to discern between critique of Israel and anti-Semitism.[84]

Assuming that these postures should be differentiated, it seems that, more than ever, there are blurred lines between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism among Jews and non-Jews in Brazil and in other countries. In the majority of cases, the difference is extremely subtle and difficult to discern. It is a complicated situation and Jewish leaders are struggling to cope with it. The problem is aggravated by the fact that in Latin America, the extreme left holds not only Israel but also Diaspora Jews responsible for the Palestinian question, which generally triggers an increase in anti-Semitism.[85]

Most leaders interviewed agreed that to criticise the Israeli government is legitimate but to go beyond this, even to the point of denying the right of existence to the State of Israel is not. Indeed, for them, this act is merely anti-Semitism disguised as anti-Zionism. In Samuel Feldberg's words, "anti-Zionism became an heir to anti-Semitism".[86] Daniel Douek, building upon this reasoning, contended that anti-Zionism is a form of anti-Semitism, to the extent that the former denies the right of the Jews to be considered a national group with its own homeland. For the founder of Forum 18, non-Jews ought to accept that Jews want to be seen and treated as a nation that has the

[84] Earl Raab, "Anti-Semitism, Anti-Israelism, Anti-Americanism," *Judaism* 51, no.4 (2002): 393.
[85] Isaac Caro, "Anti-Semitism, Anti-Zionism and Israeli-Palestinian Conflict from 2000 to 2014: Some Visions from Latin America Southern Cone," *Trames* 19, no.3 (2015): 291, 304.
[86] Personal interview conducted on September 8th 2016.

legal possibility of residing in Israel.

Yuri Haasz and Sergio Storch challenge the traditional paradigm concerning anti-Semitism. In their views, Jews are partially responsible for anti-Semitism. Both claimed that when Diaspora Jews do not vocalise their dissatisfaction with Israeli policies in public, they become acquiescent and thus should be held accountable for Israeli actions. Their reasoning is that since Israel professes to be speaking in the name of all Jews, the silence or the lack of criticism of Jews in the Diaspora is merely compliance to Israeli behaviour. So Jews must respond, meaning that, for them, it is impossible for a Jew to be a Brazilian Jew without involvement with Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

According to Yuri Haasz, Brazilian Jews do not criticise Israel because this behaviour will inevitably trigger a challenging identity crisis. The problem lies, he argued, in the fact that the Jewish identity is not different from the Zionist or Israeli identity. For him, it is essential to call into question the amalgamation between the Jewish and the Zionist identity. In order to achieve this purpose, Haasz plans to provide the Jewish Brazilian community with physical spaces where they can "renegotiate" their identities. Haasz's reasoning seems to relate to Gabriel Sheffer's contention that a relevant number of Diasporic Jews do not consider Israel as the chief place for the development of cultural and Jewish principles, perpetuation of the Jewish nation, or the physical security of Diaspora Jews.[87] Haasz further explained that with mutual support, Jews could express their critical opinions without being "manipulated by Israel". In his opinion, developing projects of this kind is the main assistance that Diasporas could give to the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Another contribution that Diasporas could provide for the end of the conflict is, in the opinion of Rafaela Barkay, to offer a critical analysis, a refined perception of the complex issues at stake. Daniel Douek agreed that the Jewish Diaspora could help by being more critical of Israeli actions. For Samuel Feldberg, Diasporas need to make an

[87] Gabriel Sheffer, "Reflections on Israel and Jerusalem as the Centers of World Jewry," in *Reconsidering Israel-Diaspora Relations*, ed. Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Judit Bokser Liwerant and Yosef Gorny (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 436.

effort to dissociate from contesting narratives. He tries to put that approach in practice in his academic courses, when he first presents the historical facts and then debates with the students the Israeli and Palestinian narratives corresponding to the events that have occurred.

For Yuri Haasz, the Jewish Diaspora bears the responsibility of challenging the official narrative of the Israeli government. For him, debates within the Diaspora enable a re-evaluation of identities and a shift in the relationship with Israel. He further contended that the Diaspora could contribute to the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by trying to overcome the Arab and Jewish dichotomy, which is not limited to the conflict. Sergio Storch firmly believes that the Diaspora can make a difference by calling into question its absolute support for Israel. For the founder of Progressive Jews, the mounting criticism of Israel within the American Jewish Community heralds this change in behaviour, which is essential to achieve peace.

3.5 Some considerations related to Brazilian Jewish identity

It is not the intention of this research to draw a general profile of Brazilian Jewish identity, a task that would be, in any case, very complex. Even though this thesis has focused on the space that Israel occupies within the broader Brazilian Jewish identity, it is a fact that numerous elements of Jewish identification that do not include or that go beyond Israel certainly exist within the Brazilian Jewish community.[88] Also, identity itself is a fluid concept, which is in constant renegotiation and transformation. Taking into consideration these limitations, the investigation of the activities of the Jewish institutions and their leadership still provides an opportunity to identify particular characteristics of the Brazilian Jewish community and its collective identity.

When it comes to religion, the majority of Brazilian Jews are not remarkably pious. The largest synagogue in Latin America, the Jewish Congregation of São Paulo

[88]For further considerations on the elements that compose individual Jewishness see Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M.Eisen, *The Jew Within: Self, Family and Community in America* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000).

(CIP), has eight thousand members, which corresponds to less than 10% of the total Jewish population of Brazil.[89] Research conducted by the Jewish Federation of São Paulo (FISESP) reveals that more than a half of the Jews living in São Paulo do not attend the synagogue on the most important days of the Jewish calendar. Among the fifty-five synagogues affiliated to FISESP, the total attendance on Yom Kippur was lower than thirty thousand and on Rosh Hashana approximately twenty thousand.[90] Although a research carried out in 2010 showed that 71% of Jewish children attended Jewish schools, a remarkable high percentage,[91] enrolment at Jewish schools is declining steadily, as recent data suggests.[92] In attending Jewish schools, Jews were eventually exposed to Jewish holidays, culture and history and had primarily Jewish friends, a situation which definitely affected their identity. The fact that most Jewish leaders interviewed had attended Jewish schools illustrates the relevance of this phenomenon.

Nowadays, secular Jewish institutions such as the athletic association Club Hebraica of São Paulo seem to have more appeal among Jews. Hebraica's membership is estimated at thirty thousand not including those who, although not official members, are regular attendants of events and celebrations on its premises. Interestingly, Hebraica, formally a secular institution, has its own synagogue where Jewish ceremonies take place, including the celebration of marriages as well as Bar and Bat Mitzvahs.[93] In São Paulo, there is also great interest in enrolling in cultural and educational courses in secular Jewish institutions. The Israeli Brazilian Union of Social Welfare (UNIBES) is one of the most prominent institutions that provide daily conferences and workshops concerning various topics. Thereby, when assessing the institutions and activities sought after by the majority of Jews living in São Paulo, it seems that other aspects elements of their Jewish identity prevail over religious ones.

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[89]Jeffrey Lesser, "Jewish Brazilians or Brazilian Jews: A Reflection on Brazilian Ethnicity," *Shofar: an Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 19, no. 3 (2001): 66.

[90] Renée Avigdor, Judeus, Sinagogas e Rabinos: O Judaísmo em São Paulo Em Mudança, (Universidade de São Paulo: Tese de Doutorado, 2010), 107-108.

[91] Sergio Della Pergolla, "Jewish Demographic Policies: Population Trends and Options in Israel and in the Diaspora," *The Jewish People Policy Institute* (2011): 66, accessed March 23rd, 2017.

[92]Avigdor, "Judeus, Sinagogas e Rabinos," 109.

[93] "Sinagoga," *Hebraica*, accessed April 10th, 2017, http://www.hebraica.org.br/servicos/sinagoga/

There are certainly orthodox and ultra-orthodox Jews living in Brazil, but they represent a minority. Similarly, there is a small number of Jews who live only among other Jews. In general, Brazilian Jews are used to being part and parcel of larger communities made up of people from different religions and ethnic backgrounds. It is noteworthy that Brazil holds the largest population of African, Lebanese and Japanese descent in the world.[94] As a result of this multiethnic and multicultural society, Jews and non-Jews tend to demonstrate respect and tolerance towards each other. The relatively low-level of anti-Semitism in Brazil – estimated in 16%- might serve to illustrate the peaceful and harmonious co-existence between Jews and non-Jews in Brazil.[95]

What is more, Brazilian Jews incorporate elements of other religious and ethnic groups, such as spiritual beliefs and rituals, into their own community, creating a new hybrid identity. Brazilian Judaism benefits from the religious syncretism that exists for centuries in the country. As a result of this merging of different elements of identity, Bernardo Sorj considers that Brazilian Jews "(…) have a Jewish form of being Brazilian and a Brazilian form of being Jewish".[96] Sorj expands on his reasoning by arguing that the particularity of the Brazilian Jewish community is also present on the alleged paradox that exists between the Brazilian and Jewish culture. Whereas the former concentrates on the present, the latter nourishes the past. Brazilian culture fosters an "optimistic fatalism" while Judaism promotes a "pessimistic voluntarism".[97] In the end, even if it is challenging for Brazilian Jews to conciliate these seemingly contradictory aspects of their Brazilian Jewish identity, it seems that those elements, more than any other, make the Brazilian Jewish community unique.

[94] Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein, *Rethinking Jewish-Latin Americans* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 18.

[95] Anti-Defamation League Global 100: an index of anti-Semitism. "A survey of attitudes towards Jews in over 100 countries around the world," accessed March 15th, 2017. http://global100.adl.org/public/ADL-Global-100-Executive-Summary.pdf

[96] Bernardo Sorj, "Sociabilidade Brasileira e Identidade Judaica," in Identidades Judaica no Brasil Contemporâneo ed. Bila Sorj (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Imago, 1997), 22.

[97] Ibid.

Conclusions

The present thesis sought to shed light on the relationship between the Brazilian Jewish Diaspora and Israel. In the first part of the research, we analysed the concepts of Diaspora, identity and community. In the second section of the thesis, a historical contextualisation was offered to provide the reader with a more adequate historical background, which facilitates the understanding of the particularities of the Brazilian Jewish Diaspora. In the third chapter of the research we have delved into the study of the Brazilian Jewish community by means of an analysis of the most prominent Jewish institutions, their leadership and their relationship with and stance on Israel. As a result of the process of the research, the following conclusions may be drawn.

The examination of the interviews and official websites of the Jewish institutions of São Paulo allow us to conclude that they share a common element: the support to the State of Israel. The most important organisations discussed declare, tacitly or explicitly, their Zionism. The leaders of the Brazilian Jewish institutions convey and constantly reinforce their stance in websites, digital and printed publications and public appearances. In parallel, these institutions seek to reinforce the Zionist identity of Brazilian Jews to such an extent that, for a notable number of people, their Jewish and Zionist identities merge into a single element.

When assessing the information obtained in the interviews, the events organised by the institutions – published on their websites and in the Jewish press – and the agenda of the leaders, we might also contend that these institutions, which position themselves as pro-Israel and Zionism, actively seek to strengthen the connection of Brazilian Jews and the State of Israel. As it was seen, most leaders of the Jewish institutions in Brazil work on a daily basis, either voluntarily or professionally, to advance both the interests of the Jewish Brazilian community and of Israel. Although no precise data is available, we could infer that a large amount of time of the Jewish institutions and leaders is dedicated to reinforcing the relationship between Brazilian

Jews and Israel, since practically all their initiatives entail a symbolic and/or material connection to Israel. Thereby, the political activism of the institutions and their leadership might be understood as efforts to encourage Brazilian Jews to espouse "long-distance nationalism" in relation to Israel.

Emotional attachment to Israel was also detected throughout the process of research. Examples can be found in the celebration in Brazil of important dates for the Jewish State, in the adaptation of Israeli food and cultural festivals to the Brazilian public, in the display of the Israeli flag in the offices of several Jewish institutions and in the performance of the Israeli anthem in the most solemn ceremonies. We could argue that these manifestations of real or imaginary connection to the Israeli homeland cultivate the awareness of being part of the Jewish Diaspora and end up reinforcing the distinctiveness of the collective identity of Brazilian Jews from the rest of the Brazilian society.

The fact that a considerable number of activities are financed by Israel cannot be overlooked. We could contend that Israel has been developing projects that engage Diaspora communities in order to ensure their continuous involvement with and support to the Jewish State. After all, it offers an opportunity for the homeland to set the agenda for Diaspora communities worldwide and to encourage the centrality of Israel to Diasporic Jews. It could also be understood as an example of "long-distance nationalism"; however, in this case it is Israel and not the Jewish Diaspora that is behind the political action.

This phenomenon probably constrains the autonomy of certain Brazilian Jewish institutions. In spite of that, it seems that the leaders who organise these numerous initiatives with Israel are able to maintain, if not freedom of action, at least freedom of thought. The vast majority of leaders interviewed, although overt supporters of Zionism, have their own points-of-view and political stances, which do not necessarily coincide with positions officially adopted and disseminated by the Israeli government.

In this vein, the research offers intriguing insights into what it means to be a

Zionist in a Diaspora such as that of Brazil. Indeed, while some leaders consider a true Zionist to be a person that offers unconditional and automatic public support to Israel, others claim that a real Zionist is someone who, through his or her criticism of Israel, warns Israel that some of its policies might have insidious and negative effects, which could put the country in jeopardy. Both types of Zionist leaders are present within the Brazilian Jewish community. Their disagreements and particular agendas contribute to the diversity of a Jewish community that does not have a sole voice. The perceptible growing presence of critical Jewish organisations, youth groups and outspoken leaders, constitutes a welcomed addition to the plurality of the Brazilian Jewish Diaspora.

Another interesting discovery of the process of the research is the international activism of Brazilian leaders. Most of them do not limit their scope of action to São Paulo or Brazil. In fact, they are part of relevant international organisations including the World Jewish Congress and the American Jewish Committee. With that in mind, we could claim that although Israel remains notably relevant for the Brazilian Jewish institutions, Jewish communities worldwide also have opportunities to influence and engage with the Brazilian Jewish community.

This thesis has focused on the case study of the Jewish institutions in São Paulo and their leadership. It would be interesting if future researchers decided to concentrate their attention on the analysis of the different elements that compose the individual and collective identity of Brazilian Jews. The connection to Israel, though apparently strong, constitutes one element of their identity that needs to be contextualised by additional research. The way that these institutions will position themselves in the face of growing international criticism of Israeli domestic and foreign policies is also an engaging subject for those interested in this field.

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