The construction of Jewish identity—as a nucleus of significance and belonging—went through profound transformations in Latin America during the 20th century, beginning with the first waves of immigrants, whose identity was anchored on a substantial commitment to Judaism as the historical and cultural core of their existence, up to current generations, which stand amidst the complex and paradoxical horizon of global culture, a Latin American context of continuous identity crises, and a contemporary Judaism that also faces serious controversies.

Certainly, the various modalities in which Jewish identity has been constructed in Latin America have responded to the specificities of the host countries. However, Jews on this continent have shared a minority group status in societies that, until very recently, privileged the principles of nationalism and cultural homogeneity as substantial features of identity, wherein the acceptance of the Jewish community has not been without problems (Elkin, 1998). Moreover, while it is true that since the very beginning of the immigration flow the literary realm clearly depicted the representation of symbolic universes alluding to the construction of Jewish identity in Latin America, any attempt to find univocal features would be a challenge difficult to face. Nevertheless, it is possible to establish a few common denominators. For example: poetry, short stories or novels written by the first generation of immigrants expressed the voice of migrant women and men marked by persecutions and/or poverty, as well as by the tensions between the memory of the universe left behind and the vicissitudes of adjusting to foreign lands.

Written mostly in Yiddish, and therefore hardly known outside the Jewish community, this literary creation was, simultaneously, an exercise

---

1 Language of which Isaac Bashevis Singer said: “It is the language of the exile, devoid of land and borders.”
of remembrance as well as an expression of the inevitable need to grow roots and find new horizons in the country where they had arrived, although they couldn’t help feeling foreign to it. The construction of a Jewish literary identity for the second and in some cases third generations followed a different pattern. Favored by growing social mobility and by a stronger Jewish presence in most of the national social circles, the connection with their country of origin was entwined with the strong spiritual legacy of Judaism passed down by their parents. The literary voice of these generations, written in Spanish as the language of communication and comprehensively inserted in the literary corpus of their respective countries, exposed the multifacetic expressions of the encounters between Jewish and Latin American cultures, as well as the dilemmas posed by them. Hence, it is not surprising that this literary creation abounded in matters such as the conflict between the exposure to the local culture and the need to preserve Jewish values, the drama of generational tensions, the experience of being marginalized from social majorities, anti-Semitism, etc. (Feierstein, 1989; Goldemberg, 1998).

The dilemmas of identity construction faced by subsequent generations, living in a significantly different environment, are ever more intricate and complicated. Embedded in what sociologist Zygmunt Bauman denominates ‘liquid modernity’ (Bauman, 2000) to refer to a new way of life which corresponds to fluid and rootless, ever changing and volatile, unstable and fragile times the identity construction is redefined in a new cultural context, mostly characterized by deterritorialization (founded on an economic logic unattached to spatial or temporary coordinates, which distorts the correlation between identity and community); rootlessness (entailing the waning of institutions, references, social bonds and symbolic orders); de-historization (where, contrary to the Jewish conception of an unfolding time spiral that is forever bound to its origin, present times are compartmentalized and severed from the past); and a new sense of space relationships (wherein heirlooms, loyalties and stable affiliations that have constituted fundamental identity parameters are dissolved or, at best, used provisionally). Additionally, it is important to remark the arising of an extreme individualism as strategy for personal survival (in an uncertain and competitive labor market) which is no longer sustained on the ideal of a historical community, thriving in an environment void of public life and fraught with distrust of politics as a means to reach collective aims.

Furthermore, emphasis need be made on the specific conditions of Latin American countries, many of which have democratically elected