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Diaspora, Transnationalism, and Racialization: Jews and Jewishness Between Perú and Israel

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Latin American Studies

by

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The Thesis of Beatrice Waterhouse is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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by

Beatrice Waterhouse

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The Moroccan-descended Jewish community of Iquitos, Perú has engaged in large-scale migration to Israel since the early 2000s. Despite strong self-identification as Jews, Israel's immigration regime requires "conversion" practices that privilege Ashkenazi-normative Jewish identifications and customs and help integrate Iquiteño migrants into Israel's racial hierarchy. In two sets of in-depth interviews in 2016 and 2019, Iquiteño Jews explained their reasons for

migrating, changes to their modes of identification, and their understanding of their future place in Israel. Their explanations reveal the tension between sociological theories of diaspora and transnationalism. After applying interview data to these theories, this thesis finds that the Iquiteño case is one example of how interested actors, including states, use the rhetoric of diaspora to stimulate transnational activity, such as philanthropy and migration, among otherwise-localized communities, thereby introducing and reinforcing external racial hierarchies among the far-flung nodes of diasporic networks. Broadly, the rhetoric of diaspora serves interested actors' transnational political aims, which often homogenize diasporas even as they activate them.

INTRODUCTION

Iquitos is the largest Amazonian city in Perú, in Perú's northernmost and easternmost province of Loreto, nestled between the Amazon, Nanay, and Itaya Rivers. Alongside its past as a grand center for commerce, its present as a center for indigenous[1] and environmental activism, and the everyday lives of urban, Catholic Peruvians that make up the majority of the city, a small community of Jews lives quietly. They attend one synagogue in the back of a mattress shop, use the Amazon River as a mikveh, maintain close relationships with Masorti congregations in New York and Buenos Aires, hold grudges against Limeño Jews, invent workarounds to help yeasted challah rise in the jungle, make difficult decisions about the schooling of their children, convert, marry, care for a historical Jewish cemetery, and every year, send several families to Israel as olim, Jewish migrants. Every few years, an article is published in the Jewish or mainstream press marveling that there could be Jews so different from the ones whose ancestors lived in the Pale, so far from Tel Aviv or New York. Usually, the migration history of this community is sketched out in broad strokes, jumping in a few sentences from 19th century Morocco to the present day, when migration to Israel is fast depleting their numbers. In these articles, White Jews and White

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[1] The Jews of Iquitos, and all other people of Loreto, live on the land of the Iquito, Yine, Bora, Urarina, Matsés, Huitoto, Huachipaeri, Achua, Yagua, Capanahua, Shipibo, Ese'eja, and Jebero peoples, among 47 others (INEI 2008). The existence of the Jewish community in Iquitos, as the existence of the city itself, is based on the brutality and theft of land, culture, and life perpetuated by the Spanish colonial government and the Peruvian national government. Those wishing to learn more and support these communities should visit the Organización Regional de los Pueblos Indígenas del Oriente (ORPIO), the Instituto Chaikuni, and the Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana (AIDESEP). For a more complete list of indigenous organizations in Loreto, please visit http://www.aidesep.org.pe/node/15.

Similarly, the University of California, San Diego resides on un-ceded Kumeyaay land. The Kumeyaay people maintain their political sovereignty and cultural traditions as vital members of the San Diego community. I am honored to share this space with them and I thank them for their stewardship. I ask that readers of this thesis support Kumeyaay and other indigenous struggles in San Diego, including by supporting indigenous-run organizations, such as Native Like Water, Indigenous ReGeneration, and UCSD's own ANAMS, AIGSA, and NASA.

gentiles hold up Iquiteño Jews — Latin American Jews — Jews of color — non-Ashkenazi Jews — as a curious spectacle. These are Other Jews, the articles seem to say. How strange they are; let us feel curious about them, sad that their community is dying, pleased or outraged that they have a relationship with Israel, intrigued by their exoticism.

There is an us, these articles say, and there is a them, and in doing so, they ignore the humanity and the Jewishness and the special ordinariness of Iquiteño Jews. They flatten and whitewash Jewish history. These narratives use race as a lazy shorthand for what they deem authentic Jewishness, using tropes of migration, skin color, and otherness to flatten real ethnic differences and diverse cultural practices into simply "not Ashkenazi." In doing so, they fail to recognize that they, as reporters, and they, as readers, and they, as Jews, are missing vital questions about what it means to be Jewish, about how narratives of Jewish sameness and otherness can be politically useful, and how Jewishness reveals the cracks in common thinking about diaspora, transnationalism, religious identity and change, and convergences of practicality and spirituality.

When I came to Iquitos, the people of the community taught me to ask these questions. I began by asking a political question: Why, given the substantial costs in time and money, the invalidation of their own self-identification as Jews, the devaluation of their traditions in favor of Ashkenazi ones, a relative lack of institutional support, and, in general, a self-contortion necessary to fit a normative ideal of Israeli Jewishness, do Iquiteño Jews continue to migrate to Israel in such large numbers? As I spent time learning, I began to see to the larger questions behind that one. Why is the movement of Jewish people so centered on Israel even when it is not beneficial to migrants, and why does Israel seem to both require and drive away potential

immigrants? Why do the dynamics of Iquiteño-Jewish movement contradict models of migration which emphasize interest-based decision-making and circular motion? If this people-movement is unique to this Jewish group, then how can the impact of Jewishness, and therefore religion, explain migration dynamics writ large?

These questions are answered at the fringes. The Jews of Iquitos fall across the margins of many presumed definitions of Jewishness: racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural. Because of their marginality, their case reveals much about how Jews define themselves and others, and how different parts of the diaspora relate to one another in the contemporary age of nation-states. These relations go from the personal or community level alongside the institutions that serve them, to the state level, all the way to the grand level of interlocking transnational dynamics. Although small in number, Iquiteño Jews as a group reveal that the shifting, global relationships between symbolic diaspora and practical transnational activity drive Jews to actively adapt their own identities to fit new narratives of authentic Jewishness. At the level of states, the muddiness of Iquiteño Jewishness illustrates how Israel's relationship to the diaspora is based on a delicate balance of domestic racism and the problems that arise when citizenship is based on an identity as surprisingly fluid as that of Jewishness. And broader yet, they reveal two major flaws in the scholarship of religion and immigration. First, the terms 'diaspora' and 'transnationalism' are commonly understood to be interchangeable, when in fact they have different dynamics and can each be used to influence the other. Second, scholars often disregard or explain away religious and spiritual belief or motivations as "really" practical and self-interested in nature. Truthfully, the lives of people of faith often see these two aspects converge into a dynamic that is vital to

interrogate in order to respectfully seek to understand dilemmas that touch on the divine as well as the mundane without foolishly disregarding either.

These many arguments are all covered in depth, but most important is their convergence to the main argument of this thesis. In short, transnational communities are subtly but importantly different from diasporic peoples, and the two should not be understood as interchangeable, because the rhetoric of diaspora serves the transnational goals of interested actors, including states, in driving migration, racial formation, and other cross-border activity that affects outcomes and identities within and beyond the people diasporas encompass.

The structure of the thesis:

This thesis begins in Iquitos, by unpacking and examining that combination of spirituality and practicality which is essential to understanding why and how this community specifically migrates and converts, and why those two things are so interlinked. In interrogating the migration-conversion connection, it introduces the racial pressures that affect Iquiteño Jews and which are more fully explored in the third chapter. The first chapter also introduces the history of the community, with special attention paid to the years between 1990 and 2003, when the foundation for many of the community-level dynamics that guide contemporary Jewish life and migration in Iquitos was laid. This information serves to establish how the transnationalism/ diaspora dynamic operates on the personal/community level.

To massively oversimplify the history of Iquiteño Jews for the sake of this introduction, they can be described as Moroccan-descended Jews who, after decades of intermarriage with local indigenous Amazonian populations, have developed a unique religious practice, culture,

and self-identification that blends Jewish, indigenous, and national-Peruvian ways of being. After a lapse in Jewish practice during the latter half of the 20th century, the Iquitos community experienced a massive revival at the turn of the millennium and has since oriented itself firmly towards a Jewish identity quite unlike its earlier practices. Specifically, influxes of foreign (mainly Israeli, Argentinian, and U.S.-derived) educational materials, teachers, and money have influenced the Iquitos community towards a more Ashkenazi form of practice, one that is strongly oriented towards Israel (Segal Freilich 1999). 80 percent of the circa-2000 Iquiteño Jewish population[2] has emigrated to Israel, and the majority of those who remain plan to or wish to go (Waterhouse 2016). Almost all are settled by the state in Ramla, home to the largest Latinx community community in Israel and one of the country's last mixed Jewish-Arab cities, although some earlier migrants were settled in Beersheba. Although they self-identify as Jews, most Iquiteño Jews cannot enter the State of Israel under the Law of Return, because intermarriage has long rendered their Jewish status illegitimate in the eyes of Ashkenazi-Orthodox Israeli authorities. As such, most would-be emigrants must "convert." Although Israel's restrictions on conversions in the Diaspora are less strict than those mandated within the state (Barzilai 2010), there simply are no rabbis versed in the specific Iquiteño tradition to conduct these conversions. So, the process requires Iquiteño Jews to change their religious and cultural practices to resemble Ashkenazi-normative Israeli conceptions of valid Judaism.

Notwithstanding this acculturation, the insistence on conversion despite intensive Jewish practice and elective Jewish identification automatically invalidates Iquiteños' own conceptions of themselves as Jews. The question this chapter seeks to answer is: Considering the time-

[2] 722 people total, out of roughly 1,000

consuming, invalidating, perhaps insulting hoops Iquiteño Jews must jump through to achieve Israeli validation of their Jewishness, why do they continue to "convert" and migrate?

To answer, I argue that Jewishness is adaptable. As local and diaspora-wide terrains shift, Jews adapt their practices and identities to survive, and the notion of "authentic" Jewishness adapts with them. While the first question is answerable in the Iquiteños' specific case only through interviews—asking Iquiteño Jews why and how they have made their own choices—other common migration drivers appear, like the potential to access education, work, and quality of living, that push and pull all migrants across the globe. In the case of Jews generally, I apply transnational frameworks to help understand how historical, potentially symbolic diasporas and modern transnational behavior like migration influence one another, and why Jews value different national identities and expressions of Judaism differently across time and place. In Iquitos, transnational behaviors that use the idea of diaspora-homeland as a symbol and self-justification lead Jews to center the modern state of Israel in their Jewish self-understanding and their understanding of Jewish authenticity. Beyond these basic assumptions it is best to ask the people themselves for their stories.

Given this set of theoretical and practical circumstances, what purposes does conversion specifically serve for Iquiteño Jews? Considering individuals' differing affairs, Iquiteños may see conversion as a formality, a great insult, a common-sense realignment, a necessary step towards self-acceptance as a Jew, a motion towards "authenticity," a stepping stone towards better economic prospects beyond Peru, or any combination of the above. Although conversions for purposes of migrating to Israel must be observed to some extent by a rabbi, a purpose that may take years of practice to that rabbi's satisfaction, it is an open question whether Iquiteño Jews

continue to live and practice in accordance with these (Ashkenazi, Orthodox and/or Conservative) precepts. In my experience observing and participating in weekly services and life events like Bnei mitzvot in Iquitos, it seems that Iquiteño Jews do continue using at least Ashkenazi-style liturgy, calendars, and orders in public religious practice. Private practices may vary significantly, and I do not know what those Iquiteños who currently live in Israel do. This question of "why do you convert?" is of course one of my central questions, but its answer allows me to suggest further avenues of study regarding the structural processes that shape Israeli citizenship. Is Israel engaged in constructing a machine in which "problematic," marginal, questionable Jews are found, processed, and shaped into ideal settlers? Although this process is unwieldy, multipart, historical, inefficient, and only partially successful, in this chapter I argue that this immigration process does succeed in its primary goal of convincing diasporic Jews to identify with Israel, migrate, and solidify Israeli racial hierarchies.

Regardless of the personal meaning of conversions to Iquiteños, they are a powerful tool for the education and selection of potential Israelis. Since some Mizrahi and Sephardi communities wield significant power within Israel, and Israel's secular courts have loosened restrictions on the kinds of conversions that turn potential olim into viable proto-Israelis, why do Iquiteños nonetheless convert in Orthodox Ashkenazi modes[3]? The obvious answer is that affiliating themselves with relatively disadvantaged groups is unwise. Forward-thinking action towards assuming a more privileged position in Israel seems like a rational step to take, but how is that position of privilege communicated to Iquiteños, and what parts of the social position are

[3] There is no official Sephardi conversion institution in Israel, but there is a certain amount of wiggle room for members of these communities to practice and display their faith in their own ways within the Rabbinate's unitary system.

received as most attractive? How is the sincere potential religiosity of conversion tied to expectations of more material gains in a way that Iquiteños understand and respond to? The overlap of personal choice and state-level manipulation may reveal much about how the diaspora relates to a modern state claiming centrality and authenticity, and vice-versa.

The second chapter takes a closer look at the transnational frameworks introduced in the first, expanding its scope to Latin American Jewry writ large, and then to the global Jewish diaspora. It argues that Jewish discourse continually constructs the meaning of diaspora internal to its community, even as sociological discourse constructs a different meaning that is more closely related to the concept of transnationalism. Each definition ignores the ways in which the modern international arena of nation states can *actively use* these definitions to influence behavior: using the rhetoric of diaspora to encourage transnational activities and using transnational activities to curate and control who belongs to the diaspora. This expansion to the global, theoretical level comes before the exploration of the state level because it is vital to contextualize transnationalism and diasporic rhetoric before jumping into case-by-case examples.

Latin American Jews are immensely diverse and their communities and relationships within the region and within the global Diaspora are complex and long-standing. The literature that uses transnationalism to better understand the identities of Jews in Latin America tends to position them on a spectrum with a national identity and a Jewish identity at opposite ends. At one end are scholars like Judit Bokser-Liwerant (2009, 2013), who see Jews in Latin America as Jews foremost. From this point of view, a sense of pan-Jewish ethno-religious identity unites Jews across national borders, often to the exclusion of meaningful national identities. In this understanding, Jewishness is the most important tile in Jewish individuals' mosaics of identity,

and lends itself naturally to transnational behavior. This presumed behavior and presumed identification with other Jews across and irrespective of national borders is also assumed to have something to do with the fact of being a diasporic people.

On the other end of the spectrum are Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein (2009; 2009), who have both rejected what they deem the "essentializing" pan-Jewishness of a stance like Bokser-Liwerant's in favor of seeing Jews in Latin America as national citizens first. Jews are expected to look to the host nation first when assessing their own identities, rather than emphasizing their Jewishness to the exclusion of their national identity. This results in a range of hyphenations, such as Jewish-Argentinian, Jewish-Peruvian, etc. While transnational behavior may occur, the Jewish identity is usually considered to be one of the less prominent (though still salient) identities that an individual counts towards their identity mosaics. Lesser and Rein's concern with the differences in Jewish life, treatment, and identification between countries is important to remember, particularly when examining shifts in local conditions that may lead Jews to consider migration. Nevertheless, it can be essentializing as well in its focus on discrete and identifiable national identities and can minimize important regional similarities or historical ties between communities.

Luis Roniger's (2010) position is more flexible. In his view, Jews in Latin America (and presumably elsewhere) pick as their most salient identity whatever is safest and most beneficial at a given time. Both active pan-Jewish identification and Jewish-exclusive or -subordinate identification coexist, with one sometimes eclipsing the other due to local conditions. These choices are particularly linked to the public legitimacy of transnational ties between Jews. At times, these ties, perhaps between Jewish communities or between a given community and Israel,

are seen as legitimate and valuable, even reinforcing a positive host-national identity (Rein 2009); at others, they are seem as illegitimate, dangerous, and disloyal to the host nation. Thus, the importance of a transnational pan-Jewishness or a national-Jewish identity that looks internally for referents fluctuates over time and from place to place.

Some of the differences between these scholars' assertions can be partly explained by disentangling the terms "transnationalism" and "diaspora," which are often conflated. The term "diaspora" is nowadays frequently used to describe the people who live outside a particular country of origin but maintain emotive or practical ties to it, for example, the Salvadoran or Dominican diasporas. These kinds of diasporas are often assumed to be transnational by default, because of seasonal, cyclical, or family-reunification migration, remitting practices, and family connections maintained across borders. There also exists the earlier sense (derived originally to describe the Jews, in fact, and also applicable to the Rroma) of a *diasporic people*. Defined by Clifford (1994, in Goldstein 2015, 9202) as "expatriate minority communities whose consciousness and solidarity are 'importantly defined' by a memory, vision, or myth about, and a continuing relationship with, an original homeland and an expectation of return," diasporic peoples (and their parents and grandparents) may have no active, practical connection with a country of origin. Their relationship to borders may be very insular, and this kind of diaspora may have nothing to do with transnational activities in the modern sense: an isolated shtetl in the Pale of Settlement was no less diasporic for having little material connection with either its semi-mythical homeland or other communities of Jews beyond its own borders. It makes sense to describe communities of people with ties to another nation-state as diasporas. Nevertheless, I see a useful distinction between these two phenomena, particularly because some diasporic peoples,

including the Jews, literally predate the modern nation-state and thus any useful conception of transnationalism. The assertion that diaspora is the same as transnationalism, and Jews are always transnational by virtue of being diasporic (Bokser-Liwerant 2009, 2), is a result of the conflation of the term.

By being able to see this distinction, it also becomes possible to see how a sense of belonging to a diaspora can influence transnational behaviors. In fact, diasporic history and transnational behavior are often actively conflated to achieve political and/or economic aims, especially pan-Jewish and Zionist activism, religious philanthropy, and Jewish education. Jewish philanthropy that calls on a diasporic identity to solicit transnational donations has a long history, which includes transnational emissaries in the early modern period when nations were first developing (Lehmann 2014). Iquitos experiences its own version of this border-crossing Jewish philanthropy, and has done since the turn of the century (Segal Freilich 1999). Frequent intra-diaspora migration for professional purposes has a similarly long history: traders, clergy, and activists maintain personal, business, and religious connections across national borders, alternately using the diaspora and transnationalism to justify each other. (Lehmann 2014; Benbassa and Rodrigue 2000; Roniger 2010; Michels 2010).[4] Often, the existence of a diaspora sets the stage for many kinds of transnational activities, which may or may not symbolically call upon the diaspora to achieve their goals. At the same time, transnational activity may make a sense of diasporic pan-Jewishness stronger and a more active part of individuals' self-

[4] Perhaps the best modern example is Chabad, which combines all three reasons for movement, as Chabad-trained rabbis are sent across the world to perform religious services, outreach among existing Jewish communities, and simply make a living (Bokser-Liwerant 2009).

identification. Participating or not in transnational activity between nodes of the diaspora also comes into play when gauging Jewish authenticity. [5]

The third and final chapter returns to a single country-level case study, this time in Israel through a structural examination of the great contradiction of Israeli immigration policy. Israel's view of immigrants and potential immigrants is torn between religious and secular interests, which prioritize Jewish purity and Jewish numbers, respectively. On the one hand, secular Zionist immigration policy requires more and more Jewish bodies in Israel to make the state more secure and overwhelm Palestinians still living there through sheer numbers and new settlements (Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian's [2015] concept of "demographic warfare"). In light of this need for numerical superiority, politicians on this side of the ideological divide are willing to expand ideas of authentic Jewishness. On the other hand, ultra-Orthodox religious factions wish to keep the answer to the question of "who is a Jew?" very narrow, because a narrow definition allows them to maintain certain special privileges above and beyond those granted to all Israeli citizens. Furthermore, the current citizenship regime and their (usual) status as European-descended Ashkenazim grants these groups the structural privilege to effectively lobby for such restrictive definitions. Both sides need each other to form an effective governing

[5] As an aside, I find it important to note that the "center" of the Jewish Diaspora has shifted many times over the course of Jewish history. If I am to question the centering of Israel in modern Jewish identities, I must question the center everywhere. The modern assumption that Israel is the authentic physical center of Jewishness and Ashkenazi Judaism is the most authentic expression of Jewishness is just that—modern. Roman Judea, the Ottoman Empire, the Iberian Peninsula, and Eastern Europe have all taken turns as centers of gravity in the Jewish world, while the practices of the Jews who lived in those places were viewed as most authentic in their time (Benbassa and Rodrigue 2000). Even early Zionism did not take Israel's practical centrality for granted: "Jerusalem" may well have found itself in Kampala or Anchorage, had history progressed differently (Cohen 1997). It is only since the 19th century that the literal physical place of what is now Israel has become a vital center of Jewish life once more, while the centrality of Ashkenazi-style Jewishness has been reinforced within the last century, after a long span in which it was considered little more than the quaint religious expression of backwater bumpkins (Benbassa and Rodrigue 2000).

coalition, and as such, the immigration of "problematic" Jews is not halted completely. Rather, the two sides compromise such that the secular bureaus in charge of immigration and Diaspora relations will attempt to create a machine of policy and outreach that produces *more desirable Jews* from an Ashkenazi-normative religious perspective, that is, to make "inauthentic" Jews "authentic."

Furthermore, the fact that most Iquiteño migrants are settled in the mixed city of Ramla indicates that they serve the Israeli state in constructing a racial hierarchy. Demographic warfare is not general, but is in fact quite tactical and specific. In this case, the absorption of Iquiteño Jews into an Ashkenazi mold is not only an indicator of intra-Jewish hierarchy, it is a way of reinforcing, even creating, an Israeli racial project in which even the most "undesirable" Jews can be wielded against Palestinians. In this way, Iquiteño Jews are literally and metaphorically placed definitively apart from pale-skinned Ashkenazi, but above Palestinians. The way in which Iquiteños are asked to shape themselves also includes shaping themselves as an ethnic group against a racialized Arab Other.

Driven by many transnational forces, including powerful movements within global Jewries, the Jews of Iquitos have dramatically changed their religious practices, self-identifications, and migration plans, mostly with the goal of migrating to Israel for reasons that combine the practical and the spiritual. Although the Jewish community of Iquitos is very small, and grows smaller yearly due to emigration, its marginal position within Jewish hierarchies of ethnicity, religion, and nation helps reveal the messy, contested borders of contemporary Jewishness and how Jews actively change what it means to be authentically Jewish.

Human identities are always a mosaic of multiple facets of greater or lesser saliency, and Jewish identities that cross or complicate those boundaries are possible and common. Iquiteño Jews fall across many of those borders. As they do so, they bring into focus the intersections of symbolic diaspora and practical transnationalism, the historical mutability of Jewish authenticity, and the active use of these intersections and the Diaspora at large by the Israeli state as it seeks to solidify and stabilize its contemporary centrality to modern Judaism. By seeing and seeking to understand these often-ignored or hidden points of difference and conversion, scholars and activists can examine the ways in which they define their own religious and ethnic identities, make their discussions of religion and migration more respectful and nuanced, and take control of the narratives that predicate rights and safety on authenticity. And, finally, understanding the differences between transnational communities and diasporic peoples will reveal the usefulness of diasporic rhetoric to actors seeking to influence groups' transnational activities, and therefore the changes in migration patterns, racial and ethnic formations, and self-identifications of diasporic peoples.

CHAPTER ONE: WHY ISRAEL?: PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY AND IQUITEÑO MIGRATION AND CONVERSION

For the Jews of Iquitos, migration to Israel is seen as a step in the pathway to becoming an authentic Jew that is as necessary as a conversion process. This blending of Israeli and Jewish identity stems from institutional influence in the early days of Iquitos' community renaissance, but has since become self-sustaining thanks to global-level economics and individual-level transnational affective bonds. Iquiteño Jews do not see their conversions as solely an instrumentalist tool to gain a more economically privileged life in Israel, nor do they see their conversions as completely individual pursuits of spiritual fulfillment. Rather, they are motivated by both practical and spiritual concerns, which are made to converge at key points thanks to diasporic influence on transnational actions. This phenomenon challenges common narratives in the sociology of conversion that require total separation of the practical and the spiritual. It is often useful, even necessary, to make such a separation, but insisting on its essentialness makes it difficult to study cases where the two converge. These points of convergence are often important in understanding the justifications, motivations, and identifications of individuals as well as the influence of organizations and states with religious aims. Choosing to interpret these convergences as only blinkered fantasies hiding self-interested, rational motivations, quite aside from being condescending, also hides the very real power of religious belief to motivate action. In this case, the decisions made by Iquiteños occur at the crux of individual belief and global political dynamics, so recognizing both dynamics as important is key to understanding their joint influence. In the case of global Jewry and other diasporic peoples with strong religious identities, this convergence helps make the rhetoricization of diaspora an effective tool to encourage and guide transnational activity.

In this chapter, I will examine the individual/community-, state-, and global-level influences that affect conversion in Iquitos. The global influences I will examine are globalization, neoliberalism, and transnationalism, which create the economic environments of Iquitos and Israel and shape the transnational social field between the two places. At the state level, I will examine the role of the Jewish Agency for Israel, Israel's current iteration of the Law of Return and other immigration policies, and the Latin American-Jewish organizations that are or have been active in Iquitos. Here is where narratives of historical diaspora and spiritual belonging are disseminated along practical economical channels. At the individual/community level, I will draw from the personal stories of Iquiteño converts, which I gathered during stays in the community in 2016 and 2019. While in the early 2000s, state- and institutional-level influences were salient for directing converts' choices, their influence has waned in the last ten years as global- and individual-level dynamics, like family-linked migration and transnational communications technology, have combined to create an endogenous flow of new converts. Thanks to the blending of Jewishness and Israeliness in the Iquitos environment, these new converts are usually potential immigrants as well. Where early meso-level institutional influence helped meld Jewish and Israeli identity in the early days, it is now less important than the micro-level affective bonds and community ritual that reinforce that link, and the macro-level forces that continue to make a life lived in Israel more attractive than one lived in Iquitos. It is in these micro-level interactions that the practical and the spiritual blend most seamlessly, where conversion narratives offer insight into how spiritual needs for belonging as much as into practical self-interest.

Conversion is not the whole story of the Jews of Iquitos, which of course is also one of cultural change, regional history, and individuals' lives, but it plays a key part in modern

immigration flows. To understand how conversion works in the Iquiteño process, I use the Lofland and Stark model (1965) as critiqued and updated by Phillips and Snow (1980), Ines Jindra's combined critical realism and toolkit approaches (2016), and Yang and Abel's micro-meso-macro classifications (2014), which I adapt into the community/institutional, state, and global levels discussed previously. To tie the conversion thread to broader questions of diaspora and transnationalism, I survey many definitions of diaspora. Together, these approaches allow me to respect and examine individual conversion narratives, broader societal forces influencing conversion, and the connection between Judaism, conversion, and migration.

The Lofland-Stark (1965) conversion model has long been a fundamental way of understanding conversion sociologically. It is a value-added process model, recognizing that while conversion is often portrayed within Christian or Christian-secular contexts like the Western university as a blinding flash of inspiration that transforms its individual subject in an instant, as in the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine or Kierkegaard's *The Sickness Unto Death* (Davis 1992), in most cases, conversion is a long and social process. Their model has also been heavily critiqued. Critics find that it leaves little room for converts' own perceptions of their experience, while at the same time relying on individuals' reportage of their "turning points" and their "seeking" behaviors (Snow and Phillips 1980; Gooren 2010; Yang and Abel 2014). Furthermore, it is flawed in its insistence on the presence of each and every one of its purported prerequisites for conversion[6], in particular because each of these prerequisites are characterized purely as the answer to some inner, individual spiritual lack, leaving aside the many other tools

[6] "For conversion a person must: 1. Experience enduring, acutely felt tensions, 2. Within a religious problem-solving perspective, 3. Which leads him [sic] to define himself as a religious seeker; 4. Encountering the D.P. [the "cult" or religious community] at a turning point in his [sic] life, 5. Wherein an affective bond is formed (or pre-exists) with one or more converts; 6. Where extra-cult attachments are absent or neutralized; 7. And, where, if he is to become a deployable agent, he [sic] is exposed to intensive interaction" (Lofland and Stark 1965, 874).

converts have at their disposal, and which they may use alongside or indistinguishable from religious responses. That said, I feel this model accurately emphasizes the importance of affective bonding and community ritual to conversion. Phillips and Snow (1980) emphasize the importance of that affective bonding and intensive interaction, and add the important note that it is those two activities that help potential converts choose between many possible options when they convert. In the case of Iquitos, why do people simply not respond to Mormon or Evangelical Christian overtures[7]? The community, its actions, and the relationships converts build with each other are key not only to why individuals convert, but can explain how new converts are brought into the fold.

In the field of pastoral psychology, Ines Jindra (2016) combines two important concepts in the service of studying conversion: critical realism and the toolkit approach[8]. Critical realism allows for multiple levels of truth, which Jindra characterizes as what *really* happened and what *actually* happened (2016, 334). This allows personal conversion narratives to be important and truthful while also acknowledging other forces that may push someone towards conversion. It goes some way to healing the problem Gauri Viswanathan sees in the sociological study of conversion, where personal narrative and the power of belief are disregarded (1998). The toolkit approach, meanwhile, draws on cultural studies to recast religion as a tool with many uses, both spiritual and practical. In this way, granting religion validity as a tool means that transformation, where there is a change in a person's values, outlook, and sense of self, among other key characteristics, and conversion, a change from one religion to another, do not march in lockstep (Jindra 2014, 338).

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[8] The toolkit approach originates from Ann Swindler's 1986 article in the *American Sociological Review,* "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies."

Yang and Abel, while they intend to characterize the subfield of sociology that focuses on conversion, also lay out a three-tiered model from which they say sociologists pick and choose influences (2014). I intend to use this model more intentionally, where the tiers are like baskets from which certain influences are more salient, and which the convert responds to with their religion, as in toolkit theory. The three levels, or baskets, are the macro, the meso, and the micro-level (2014). The macro has to do with very broad-scale forces, such as globalization or transnationalism, that change a person's societal surroundings. This could connect to Lofland and Stark's predisposing conditions (1965). The meso could also be called the institutional level; it is where congregations, community and activist organizations, and even large international NGOs are found. This level is critical to the supply side Phillips and Snow identify; these are the institutions that shape what affective bonds and intensive interaction can look like for a particular community. Finally, the micro level is where individual narratives of spiritual seeking, feelings of belonging, or personal troubles can shape decisions to convert. I have chosen not to copy these levels exactly but to adapt them, combining the individual and the immediate religious community, seeing the international arena of individual states as the middle level, and taking in the grand networks of transnational activity as the largest scale.

In understanding conversion in Iquitos, then, I draw from each of these models. In particular, the focus on community, the recognition that religious communities are affected by strong political forces, and the connection between the individual and the world are key. Drawing from Yang and Abel's leveling technique, the various factors can be described as follows. At the global level, individuals a macroeconomic and political situation that makes migration from Peru to Israel more attractive in general, and a transnational social field made possible by global advances in transport and communications technology. The Iquitos case is interesting on its

merits, and it also helps us understand that the usual sociological division between practical and religious motivations for conversion is flawed, and that any focus on conversion as purely instrumentalist or purely a subject for the spirit is necessarily incomplete. It is obvious that religion and worldly concerns influence each other, but when it comes to conversion, sometimes worldly concerns *are* religious and vice-versa. Furthermore, Iquitos helps us understand how narratives and myths of diaspora can actively drive practical transnational movement in the modern age by creating new forms of religious authenticity linked to politics, place, and movement.

At the state level, major Jewish institutions like the Jewish Agency operating in Latin America are interested in potentially supporting an isolated community with a complex history (and which have the resources to do so) are primarily Ashkenazi, usually quite large, and often connected with the State of Israel. In Israel, the Law of Return's current iteration requires certain bona fides from potential immigrants. Together, these forces have helped shaped what conversion, and therefore Jewishness, looks like in Iquitos. Finally, at the individual/community level, individual Iquiteños interpret and respond to the institutions and options available to them using all the tools in their kit, including religious ones, which are in turn influenced by the two broader levels.

By the end of this chapter, I wish to demonstrate that the Latin American-Jewish institutional resources available to the Iquitos community early on shaped an orientation towards Israel. That early orientation combined with the economic situation of Iquitos led to an early wave of migration. Those first migrants established what would become a transnational social field between Israel and Iquitos. The template for Jewish education and conversion continued combined with contact between Iquiteños in Israel and Peru led to a blending of Jewishness and

Israeliness in the Iquiteño imagination and also provided more standard pull factors for further migration, resulting in state appropriation of diasporic identity to drive today's migration patterns.

Early histories and the Iquiteño-Jewish educational system:

Traces of Iquitos' historical Jewish presence jump out from between the saints'-name streets, the churches and monasteries, and Jesus-bedecked public buses with surprising ease. The large supermarket in the historic city center does business in the old Casa Cohen, its sign still hanging above the *portales* that give the current store its name. On the same street is the current synagogue, hidden behind a mattress and fabric shop. One of the ubiquitous mototaxis coughs by with a phone number and an elaborately calligraphed surname that immediately surprises me with its almost humorous Jewishness — I later hear from an interview subject who shares the same apellido that the owner-driver is a distant cousin from the branch of the family that did not hold onto or return to their Jewish ancestry. Iquitos' most famous living artist is the ironically named Christian Bendayán, descendant of second-generation patriarch León Bendayán. In the municipal cemetery, a small fenced-in meadow marks the Jewish section, where flowers give way to river pebbles and red-and-black huayruro seeds placed on the headstones. Someone was buried there just two months before I arrived.

Online, things look pretty good too. The Kehilá runs not one but two Facebook pages which post at least a few times a week, and the first Google search result for "Iquitos synagogue" is a helpful webpage on TurismoJudaico.com. At the time of writing, the English-language Wikipedia page returns nine results for the word "Jew," the Spanish page five, while on Hebrew Wikipedia, the section simply called "Yehudim" is more than twice as long as the general history

section. Several articles in online newspapers also come up in a Google search, from long features in *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* to Sefardi special-interest websites to Zionist RSS feeds to local Spanish-language dailies. Most of them have been written since 2010, when *The Fire Within,* a 2008 documentary directed by Lorry Salcedo Mitrani about the community's renaissance, made the film festival circuit. All this despite the fact that the most common response to my research wherever I go is an incredulous, "There are *Jews* in *Peru*?"

Sitting in the courtyard of the synagogue, conducting my scheduled interviews and also swooping down on unsuspecting visitors who drop by for coffee, help with Israeli immigration documents, and sometimes mattresses, I get a different picture. A little girl of six who I remember as a toddler from my last visit tells me in passing that she always comes to Monday "Judaism classes" because it is a chance to see her same-age friends, who, she sighs, will all be leaving soon except for her. Of all my interview subjects in 2019, only that girl's father and two others tell me they intend to stay in Iquitos with their families to keep the Abramowitzes company. Over coffee on day one of my 2019 visit, Jorge Abramovitz, the de facto leader of the community and owner of the synagogue building, tells me something Ryan Schuessler quoted him on in *The Guardian* in 2016[9]: "La comunidad puede morir." The community may die.

The sentiment is independently repeated to me by Señor Abramowitz's wife, several of my interview subjects, and the little girl, who appoints herself my unofficial guide after I spend at least an hour with her lying on our fronts trying to make nice with the mattress shop's resident ice queen cat. The presidents expect that no more than five to seven families of the twenty or so presently there will remain — some will have to stay whether they want to or not due to family

[9] "Dwindling Amazon Jewish community keeps faith despite religious exodus," 18 August, 2016. The headline is also a clear example of the most common framing of Iquiteño aliyah: a matter of faith.

matters or money troubles. What can explain the gap between the international perspective on Iquitos and the reality that the community once more appears to be going dormant, if not dying?

Beginning at the global level of transnational networks will help explain why migration in general might be attractive. Migration is an intrinsic part of broader processes of development, social transformation, inequality, and globalization (Castles, de Haas, and Miller 2013). The relation between migration and inequality is complex and fundamentally non-linear, but there is a strong relationship between economic development and migration. It is generally assumed that when moderately high inequality and an international arena that encourages some movement exist in conjunction, an integrated migration system exists (Castles, de Haas, and Miller 2013). As of 2018, Peru's GNI per capita was 6,530 USD, while Israel's was 40,850 USD, a clear difference, although as of 2016, both countries' GINI index score was only 4.6 measures apart (WorldBank 2019). Generally, middle-income countries like Peru (WorldBank 2019) have the highest emigration rates because of a combination of relative deprivation and tighter links to developed countries — in Iquitos, this link is the somewhat nonstandard link between Israel and the global Jewish diaspora.

It is within this connection that transnationalist theories of migration flourish globally. Israel, despite a sometimes difficult relationship with its diaspora (Gitelman 2016), has for decades engaged in aggressive outreach to Jewish populations across the world. This includes legal provisions such as the Law of Return, which guarantees access to Israeli citizenship for migrants who meet state-determined baseline criteria of Jewish practice and/or ancestry. Accessing the benefits of this law often requires that potential migrants be able to provide documents such as parents' Jewish marriage certificate (ketubah), burial records, and/or documentation proving conversion (Fisher 2013). Since the 1970s, the Israeli state has in

general encouraged both migration and conversion in order to boost the absolute numbers of Jews in the country, although this has deepened struggles between secular Zionists and ultra-Orthodox religious Jews in the state apparatus, and led to ambiguous or difficult situations when groups (notably immigrants from the former Soviet Union) cannot provide such documentation, claim Jewish identity, and do not convert (Gitelman 2016; Fisher 2013; Kravel-Tovi 2017). NGOs like the Jewish Agency for Israel and the Jewish National Fund conduct outreach between Israel and other countries, while organizations at the national level, like the Federación Sionista del Perú, engage in Israel-positive activities for a local or regional audience (Fisher 2013). Conceiving of Israel as the natural center of Jewish life, practical or religious, is a relatively recent phenomenon: indeed, for most of Rabbinic Jewish history, the land that was to become Israel was a backwater that maintained a symbolic, ritual importance rather than being a practical goal for most Jews (Benbassa and Rodrigue 2000; Lehmann 2014). As will be discussed in the next chapter, that the modern state of Israel today seems a natural point of interest for Jewish migrants across the globe is evidence of a successful parlaying of a symbolic diaspora, which was in reality only loosely connected between its individual nodes, into practical transnational activity, including migration, money flow, and idea exchange.

Altogether, it seems evident that migration was a response to circumstances that any Iquiteño person might have chosen. This simple model does not explain, however, *why Israel*? Why not Lima, the center of Jewish life within Peru? Beyond internal migration, why not the U.S., Spain, or Argentina, the first, second, and third most-common host countries for migrant Peruvians (UN 2019)? Why go through the long and involved process of conversion (particularly if one feels one is already a Jew!), followed by the long and involved process of making aliyah? It is the history of the state and institutional history one level down from the interconnected

world that helped fuse Jewish and Israeli identities in Iquitos that explains why Israel specifically became the goal.

The earliest institutions that offered support to Iquitos help explain the dynamic. The community's rebirth began with the 1990 revival of the Sociedad de Beneficencia Israelita de Iquitos (the Jewish Charitable Society of Iquitos) by community member Víctor Edery in response to his own personal desire to rekindle Jewish community life in Iquitos among the remaining practicing families (Segal 1999, 166). Without a Torah or other sacred texts, a solvent community fund, much collective knowledge of Jewish ritual outside the home, or a synagogue, the new community officers and the thirty-three members they represented felt outside help was needed to make a group of individual families of varying levels of independent practice into a cohesive community. They wrote letters to the Lima community asking for such help, and reached two important figures: the Argentinian-born Conservative/Masorti rabbi Guillermo Bronstein and Federación Sionista del Perú (Zionist Federation of Peru) member Debora Frank. While current members of the community remember little of Debora Frank, Guillermo Bronstein continues to be active in the community, despite recent illness.

It is already notable that Edery and the community sent these letters to a non-Peruvian rabbi and an Israel-focused organization as well as to Lima. The Iquitos community, which, despite its isolation, has always been diasporic by virtue of being Jewish, realized that a transnational action was needed to get the support they desired, and did so through intra-diasporic networks. Although Lima's community of 1,900-2,000 Jews is by far the largest and closest Spanish-speaking Jewish community in Peru (DellaPergola 2018), internal dynamics, such as colorism and citified prejudice against far-flung Loretanos, made Lima's Jewish community a less viable option for aid, which explains why the letter moved from the Limiño

synagogue to Bronstein and the Federación Sionista. Meanwhile, transnational forces in the Jewish diaspora ensured that international institutions like the Conservative/Masorti movement and (inherently transntional) pro-Israel organizations like the Federación were most likely to respond. A jump from Lima to Argentina is also unsurprising; Argentina boasts South America's largest Jewish community, at 180,300 individuals (DellaPergola 2018), with attendant resources. Rabbi Bronstein's connection to the Conservative/Masorti movement is significant, as it is linked to member synagogues throughout the world, including Israel, and has strong relations with the Jewish Agency for Israel (JewishAgency.org 2019), an organization relevant to the post-2011 Iquiteño experience. When the Iquitos community broke its long isolation, it reconnected itself to the webs of organizations that crisscross the Jewish world. The organizations that were most eager and financially ready to engage with the Iquiteño community, therefore, were institutions that centered Ashkenazi practices and the modern state of Israel as foundational to Jewish identity writ large, which thought of diaspora as requiring transnational integration. At this point, it was practically certain that the influence of Israel-focused groups, who make up a significant percentage of Jewish philanthropic organizations working internationally, and Ashkenazi groups, where there is the most money and influence, would have an outsized impact on the future of Iquitos.

Bronstein especially responded with alacrity, encouraging the Iquitos community to draw up congregational statutes and begin to observe various major holidays. (The elders of the community tell me that observance of holidays such as Shabbat, Pesach, and Purim was common among the more observant families well before this time). He also reached out to his contacts in Buenos Aires, Miami, and New York. Among them was Ariel Segal, then a PhD student at the University of Miami, who visited Iquitos in 1995 and involved himself intimately in projects to

convert Iquiteños and help them make aliyah. Meanwhile, Debora Frank made the Iquitos community familiar to the Federación Sionista, which boasted many connections to Israeli officials and other Zionist groups across South America. The stage was set.

The impact of this is immediately visible in the circumstances of the two first mass conversions in August 2002 and December 2004. Rabbi Bronstein, in a 1993 letter reproduced in full in the fifth appendix of Ariel Segal's book, argues that conversion should be granted only to "those who pledge to make aliyah" and who will undergo a second, Orthodox, conversion once in Israel (1999, 172).[10] From the very beginning, then, not only was emigration to Israel dependent on conversion, but *conversion was dependent on emigration to Israel*.

To be as clear as possible: in order to make a spiritual commitment, a practical action was seen as necessary. In order to make a practical move, a spiritual commitment was necessary. Regardless of whether these migrants continued to practice as they were taught in Israel, a question that is beyond the scope of this thesis but which deserves attention, it is clear that mixing together transitional actions with religious and diasporic identity was useful to actors invested in a particular transnational outcome. The conflation of Jewish identity and Israeli citizenship in Iquitos begins to show itself most clearly here, with no thought to standards of living, improved education, or other practical concerns. The practical and the religious converge here, and they do so because transnational activity was used as proof of diasporic conviction.

Segal speculates that the emigration stipulation was meant to weed out those who were not sufficiently devoted to Judaism, a concern that appeared again and again in my interviews, ironically twisted to a fear that some individuals would "fake" a conversion in order to emigrate. The state/institutional level, therefore, allows us to understand that, for the first several years of

[10] Unfortunately, I do not have access to the Spanish original of this letter, and must therefore rely on Ariel Segal's translation and representation of the document in his book.

the Iquitos community's revitalized existence, Jewish education, community support, and conversion depended on external institutions which happened to strongly support connections between Jewishness and Israel.

Before examining the individual/community-level through data from the interviews Iquiteño Jews and I conducted in 2016 and 2019, I wish to remind readers of the timeline of this community. While states and major international organizations were instrumental in setting up the initial conditions for conversion and migration, they no longer play as important a role in influencing the individual decisions Iquiteños make in response to global or personal factors. Between the second conversion, in December 2004, and the third, in August 2011, there was a great shift. The presidency transferred to the Abramowitzes and the synagogue moved into its current location in 2009, and leadership attitudes towards conversion and migration have practically reversed — a notable change and one that proves, in case there was any doubt, that despite strong interference from non-Iquiteños, a great deal of the changes happening there come from within the community.

"I do not want people to see us as a travel agency," Señora Francisca Abramovitz told me sharply over lunch one afternoon. The de facto female leader for the community, Sra. Abramovitz is also the primary bookkeeper, synagogue caretaker, programming coordinator, outreach specialist, Internet publicist, and general macher of the Iquitos community. She makes the arrangements with the rabbis, solicits donations for, selects, and distributes prayer books and Hebrew primers, sets up the synagogue for services and cleans it up afterwards, conducts the entrance interviews for people interested in joining the synagogue, organizes outings and children's classes at the synagogue in everything from liturgy to karate, collects and records dues and donations received, and reaches out to Jewish youth groups in Argentina to come visit.

Although she and Sr. Abramovitz are technically two of the five-member Directiva (Board of Directors), they do almost all the work of maintaining the community's organized behaviors themselves. Congregants often refer to them as a unit simply as "la Directiva" or "los presidentes."

Sra. and Sr. Abramovitz are also the intermediaries between individual congregants and the rabbis of the Batei Din (the panels of rabbis that oversee conversions) and the Jewish Agency for Israel, which currently handles the emigration paperwork for Iquiteño olim. The process is not easy, and Sra. Abramovitz's travel agency remark came at the end of a long demonstration of the mountains of complex paperwork involved in journeying from non-affiliated Iquiteño to new Israeli citizen. If one does not know the community's history with Israeli immigration, the option seems no better than emigrating to, say, the United States or Argentina if gain is the primary motivation. Nonetheless, the fear that people might be taking advantage of Sra. Abramovitz's hospitality —the synagogue, after all, is literally inside her home— and fierce Jewish faith to simply pursue a selfish financial end permeated many of our conversations.

The first step for any person who wants to migrate from Iquitos to Israel is to join the synagogue. They must find it, first of all, and then make it past Sra. Abramovitz's entrance interview. Then, there is an application (two, in fact: one for people who can prove that they are descended from the original Moroccan-Jewish settlers and one for those who cannot) to become a "Miembro Activo de la Asociación Judía de Beneficencia y Culto de Iquitos" (an Active Member of the Iquitos Jewish Charity and Worship Association). The new members must then take classes in Hebrew, liturgy, and "Jewish life," and regularly attend Friday night and holiday services, as well as other community events, for at least two years. This educational programming is done in conjunction with Rabbi Bronstein and Rabbi Rubén Saferstein of

Buenos Aires, who began his involvement with the Iquitos community in 2004. These two rabbis, and a rotating cast of others, eventually conduct a formal conversion in the Masorti (Conservative) tradition, complete with a brit for the men, and present the new converts with a stamped and signed certificate of conversion, a shtar geirut. Those who wish to make aliyah must provide three copies of that document, their birth certificates, passports, and National Identity Cards and those of their spouses and children, certificates of completion for all the classes they have passed complete with syllabi, their marriage records, proof of circumcision for the men, and a letter from the presidents (the Abramowitzes) affirming that they have been "good and active participants" in the community.

That enormous packet of documentation (often hard to come by in isolated, underserved Iquitos, where interviewees told me that documentation can be somewhat fast-and-loose and a simple spelling error leading to a difference between the birth certificate and the passport can take months to resolve) passes from the Abramovitzes to the Jewish Agency for Israel, and then, through some alchemy that the Abramovitzes themselves do not fully understand, to the Israeli Bureau of Immigration, where applications are tentatively approved or denied. Potential olim must then travel to Lima, a matter of either an expensive plane flight or a days-long journey by boat and bus, to be followed by an also-expensive stay of multiple days in the capital, for an entrance interview. Only then may they officially be granted Israeli citizenship and have their travel and resettlement expenses taken on by the state. Those with family already in Israel may choose to live near them; those without are settled according to the dictates of the state. Most in the latter category are sent to the mixed Jewish-Arab city of Ramla. All this, and *even then*, the

olim and their children will need to undergo a further, Orthodox conversion to access the full rights of an Israeli citizen[11] and may also be required to serve in the Israel Defense Forces.

At the time of writing, this process is for people who very likely have practiced a form of Judaism for much or all their lives, identify as Jews, have Jewish parents (or parents who feel Jewish in all ways but halakhically), and frequently have relatives already living in Israel. If this is a travel agency, it seems like one of the most redundant, possibly insulting, and certainly *difficult* tours I have ever heard of.

Why do this? In 2002 and 2004, aliyah was a prerequisite to conversion. That is no longer the case; converts in 2011 and 2018 made no such commitment. Sra. Abramowitz ensured that this would no longer be the case, hoping that it would prevent more Iquiteño Jews from leaving Perú. On the one hand, if migration is undertaken for practical personal gain, why undergo a long, difficult, expensive, and, frankly, annoying process to go to a country where one does not speak the language and may not be able to control even where one lives? On the other, if aliyah is undertaken out of a deep spiritual desire to connect with a particular facet of perceived Jewish identity, why submit to the indignity of being told your Jewish practice is insufficient, inauthentic, and invalid?

Although not in as many words, these were the questions I posed to my interviewees in 2016 and 2019. It is in the content of Iquiteños' responses and the eagerness with which they gifted them to me that I have found something approaching an answer. I argue that, despite changes in leadership conversion method over a long period of time, Iquitos' Jewish education has always conflated Jewish authenticity with Israeli citizenship because of its early influence by the Federación Sionista, Rabbi Bronstein, and Ariel Segal, creating an environment that suggests

[11] Such as marriage.

the endpoint of a successful conversion is aliyah. Furthermore, there is now a self-sustaining transnational dynamic between immigrants from the 2002 and 2004 conversions now living in Israel and friends and relatives in Iquitos. Lastly, when deciding whether to migrate or not, Iquiteños do not draw clear distinctions between practical and spiritual reasons for migration, because those pro-Israel individuals and institutions framed Israel as central to a valid diasporic Jewish identity. Any one of these factors might drive migration to Israel from Iquitos; together, they are a powerful motivating force.

Between 2016 and 2019, I interviewed 52 adult members of the Iquitos Jewish community, a number that, according to the synagogue records, represents all but seven of the adult affiliated members of the synagogue during that time period. In that time, the average age of my respondents dropped from 45 to 38, and almost all the 2016 interviewees made aliyah. Although I interviewed 19 people in 2016 and 35 in 2019, I am sure that these averages represent a notable demographic shift, because during both visits I was assured I had spoken to the majority of adults in the community, having arrived in a habitual lull between the exodus of the recent converts and the entry of prospective converts. I was able to re-interview only three adults in 2019, as all the rest had either died, moved to Lima, or moved to Israel. Notably, in 2016, almost 90% of my interview subjects claimed Moroccan Jewish ancestry, while only half of my 2019 subjects did: the other half were the spouses of community members who did claim descendance. In general, there has been almost complete turnover in Iquitos, and the main body of congregants in 2019 was made up of younger adults, most with children below the age of 13.

Individual/community-level dynamics explain this turnover. Those that I spoke to in 2016 were either old-timers who have practiced all their lives, or in large part, those still dwelling in Iquitos after the 2011 conversion. Encompassing 280 children and adults, 2011 saw the largest

conversion in Iquitos, almost three times the size of the conversion of 2018, which included 94. According to the Abramowitzes and my oldest respondent in 2016, who was 76 years old, almost all the converts from 2002 and 2004 (98 and 250 adults and children, respectively) made aliyah as outlined in Rabbi Bronstein's plan. They left behind younger siblings, parents, and in some cases children.

"Before 3G [cellphone networks] it was hard to stay in touch because calling was expensive, but by 2009 or around then I think we all had it, and I started calling every week," said Angélica[12], explaining how she used her cellphone to maintain contact with her older sister and eventually niece, who moved to Beersheba in 2003. She was not alone in taking advantage of technology to keep in touch with friends and family in Israel. 33 of my 35 2019 interviewees mentioned using the Internet and/or their cell phones to communicate with past olim. These technological connections make passing information between Iquiteños in Israel and in Peru much faster, cheaper, and easier. Most people use WhatsApp to message and video call, and three families showed me WhatsApp group chats that included members living in both countries, while others told me that it was common practice. Facebook is another thread connecting the two halves of the community: individuals use Messenger and their personal pages to communicate. Some people do visit in person, especially after a death in the family. In 2016, two young women were visiting Iquitos for that reason, and one in 2019. One man maintained business interests in Iquitos and returned in person every few years to attend to his enterprises. Children will also return to visit their parents while alive: in 2019, the Abramowitzes and two other older individuals informed me that they had received at least one visit from their adult children since those children's aliyot. Nevertheless, air travel between Israel and Peru is prohibitively expensive

[12] This interviewee's name has been changed at her request for her privacy.

for most, so overwhelmingly, modern communications technology permits familial and friendship ties to persist across distance in Iquitos.

These transnational ties inspire those who originally stayed behind in Iquitos to become active in the community themselves. Respondents told me that hearing family members' and friends' stories of their experiences with Judaism and aliyah inspired them to come to the synagogue to learn for themselves, feel closer to their distant relations, or to seek a new spiritual experience. Those who stayed universally told me that they felt that Judaism fit them or called to them in some way. The most common responses were that respondents valued Judaism's perceived emphasis on family and education, that it made them feel closer to their family history, and that they appreciated what felt like a personal relationship with God. These responses came in response to my request that they tell me the story of their relationship with Judaism. As conversion narratives, they may not reflect the actual course of events, but they are very real to their respondents (Jindra 2016). It also supports Lofland and Stark's (1965) "affective bond" and "intensive interaction" steps, which Snow and Phillips (1980) accept as perhaps the most important and universally applicable steps in the model. This part of the narrative demonstrates how commonplace, practical transnational influence blends with a sense of spiritual calling for many Iquiteños. It also indicates that Lofland and Stark's insistence that converts must sever "extra-cult bonds" (1965, 874), in keeping with general portrayals of conversion as intensely individual, is quite incorrect in this case. Considering that other large portion of my interviewees from 2019 were the spouses of those with Jewish ancestry, some 14 adults, 10 of whom were women, without such bonds, most of my 2019 interviewees would never have entered the synagogue.

Once in the synagogue, these young families are educated about Judaism following the syllabus described earlier, which hews closely to the topics of education first suggested by Rabbi Bronstein. Students begin with lessons in elementary Hebrew, using children's primers, which take place alongside classes taught in Spanish on Jewish history and culture — essentially, Ashkenazi Jewish history and culture. Moroccan Jews or Latin American Jews are not included. When classes in conversational Hebrew and the history of the modern state of Israel are required alongside classes in liturgy, the very syllabus of conversion indicates that Israeliness and Jewishness are the same, and that both those identities have little to do with Iquiteños' own pasts. Moreover, as each wave of new converts leaves, it reinforces the idea that graduating, if you will, into Jewishness also involves leaving the Diaspora for Israel. Once again, the practical and the religious converge, each necessary to endorse the other.

Secular education is also a great driver of migration for converts who are parents. In 2019, 25 of 35 respondents had children under the age of 18 still living in Peru. Universally, those 25 mentioned a desire for their children to "get a Jewish education" and "grow up Jewish." The best way to do this, they thought, was to allow them to grow up in Israel. Parental concern about children's Jewish educations, opportunities, and identities if they continue to live in Iquitos are the primary motivating factor I found in adults' narratives about their migration choices. Most of these children are quite young: only two sets of parents had children above the age of 15. It is indeed difficult to practice Judaism in Iquitos: seven parents told me of their children facing antisemitic taunts from their peers, and every parent mentioned that they had to choose between a higher-quality education at a Catholic school and an inferior one at supposedly secular public schools, which nonetheless often ask students to practice writing via copying prayers. There is only the one synagogue, no access to kosher food, and little in the way of Jewish life for

teenagers. “I worry that my daughter will just be confused,” one mother told me. “She comes home singing these Christian songs just as much as she sings the [Jewish] prayers.” In this way, education and religion are tied together. To Iquiteño-Jewish parents, getting a “good education” has as much to do with getting an education that teaches their children how to be good Jews as it does with academic practicalities. There is no division. If being a good Jew means being in Israel, then it stands to reason that learning to be a good Jew should take place in Israel. Some might consider this mindset purely rationalist, desiring a “better” life for one’s children. I, however, cannot help but see the inseparability of practical education and spiritual education for the parents of Iquitos.

The two eighteen-year-olds I interviewed in 2019 were the most candid about the material benefits they expected to receive after migrating. One wanted to attend university at a much lower cost than he would in Peru. Another felt that his chances of achieving enough stability to financially support his younger siblings would be better working in Tel Aviv than in economically depressed Iquitos.[13] Both also told me that by making aliyah and becoming successful Israeli citizens (a prospect which, for them, would include military service), they would be *proving* that they were Jews, something they had felt sure of since they were young children, but which also felt like something that could be taken away from them, whether by the strictures of Iquitos’ Catholic rhythms or by the lack of recognition of their Conservative/Masorti conversions. One, who mentioned acquiring an expedited Orthodox conversion in the military,

[13] Although the Jews of Iquitos are largely at least lower-middle class in their local context, shopkeepers and white-collar workers, Iquitos is a struggling city with few sources of revenue, and is also extremely peripheral from the hubs of financial, industrial, and agricultural activity in Lima, Arequipa, and Trujillo. Middle class-ness there is less advantaged than in almost any other city in Peru, and certainly less than middle-classness in Israel.

said that he wanted to be financially successful so that he could meet a Jewish Israeli woman and support her. Even these young adults, then, blended their economic interests and their spirits.

However, it is vitally important to note that, although these benefits might accrue to the youngest members of the community, or perhaps their children, they will probably not accrue to the majority of Iquiteño migrants. Being middle-class in Perú is not the same as being middle-class in Israel, and the hit migrants take from being unable to speak Hebrew fluently, not being certified in their professions in Israel, and other hindrances, severely hamper them. This is dealt with more thoroughly in the next chapter, but it is clear that in the absence of material benefit, some sort of religious benefit becomes a more convincing argument.

When these young adults and young parents with their children migrate, they will not leave behind the rest of their families as earlier waves of converts did. The transnational social field between Israel and Iquitos, which has been self-sustaining for almost two decades, may continue in a diminished way, but it is running out of potential converts, and therefore potential migrants. Sra. Abramowitz does not believe there will be another conversion anytime soon, and does not wish to continue classes aimed at emigration. She wants to build a community, if possible, in Iquitos, though she doubts there are enough people to make it viable long-term. Sr. Abramowitz told me, in his jocular way, "Eventually there simply aren't any more Levy's out there in the jungle to find." Rather than a give-and-take or circular model, the migration dynamic in Iquitos is one of suction, where people leave and do not return. As families reunite in Israel and stay there, and as fewer people with Moroccan-Jewish heritage exist in Iquitos to rediscover their roots, migration to Israel may peter out along with the base community. I could, of course, be incorrect. Perhaps this latest wave will begin to pull more, previously unaffiliated people without Jewish ancestry towards Israel, but there is no evidence of such a dynamic yet.

It is inaccurate to describe Iquiteño Jews as solely motivated to convert by practical *or* religious concerns. Iquiteño Jews are motivated by *both* practical and religious concerns, and often do not see a difference between the two. Individuals may fall differently on a spectrum between material and religious interests, but all exhibit at least some blending behaviors. Because of this blending, the choice to emigrate is often seen as simply a part of the choice to convert. This fusion is a result of early state/institutional-level influence on the Iquitos congregation in a global atmosphere that has all the hallmarks of standard migration. Given a situation that is ripe for migration in general, and offered a way of learning Judaism that emphasizes the role of Israel and once even required aliyah, it is unsurprising that recent converts continue to migrate to Israel at such a high rate. This transnational activity is both a sign of and a reason for the changes to Iquiteño self-identification as Jews and as members of a diaspora. High-level use of diaspora rhetoric has from the beginning attempted to shift the focus of Iquiteño Jewish practice into one that sees religion and political affiliation as inextricably linked. In the meantime, transnational contact at the personal level provides another strong draw away. Since 2002, it has been the individual bonds between the synagogue directorship, converts, and their family members that have sustained the community. Nonetheless, these bonds and individuals' practical-religious decisions are what have drained it.

CHAPTER TWO: OTHER HOMELANDS; WHY DIASPORA AND TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITIES DIFFER

The Jews of Iquitos unsettle the common and careless scholarly usage of the word "diaspora" to simply mean an international community that maintains ties across national borders. Jews, alongside members of other diasporic peoples, can easily be diasporic without engaging in transnational activity, and it is perfectly possible to engage in transnational behavior without being a member of a diasporic group, so it is well worth questioning how the two dynamics influence each other. In fact, *because* these are separate concepts and phenomena, diaspora rhetoric can be incredibly useful as a tool to encourage practical transnational activity to benefit states, organizations, and ideologies.

Diasporas and transnational communities, although often conflated or used almost interchangeably, are different, as has been established by such scholars as Robin Cohen (1999). Strangely, diasporas can be more localizing; whereas the transnational dynamic is more fluid. Not only are these phenomena different from one another, it is vital to consider them separately when considering a people, such as Jewish or Rromani people, whose status as a diasporic group far predates the existence of nation-states inherent to modern transnational study. Between their early 1900s decline and their community revitalization in the early 2000s, the Jews of Iquitos were no less diasporic for being largely cut off from transnational Jewish life displayed through cross-border communication, migration, and financial activity. Diasporic identity in such cases may well indicate nothing about an individual's transnational activities.

In particular, this conscious separation is important because rhetoric that wields an actual or presumed diasporic identity can be knowingly and intentionally utilized by actors that include

states, individuals, or institutions as a motivator to encourage people to engage in specific transnational activities. For a Jewish person, these activities might be as relatively small as donating to synagogues or Jewish communities outside one's own state as an act of tzedakah[14] or visiting Jewish sites as a tourist above other locations, or as significant as making permanent aliyah to Israel.

This rhetorical use of diaspora to encourage transnational behavior is not new, but it is understudied in the context of migration. When discussing classical diasporas[15] as more than a synonym for transnational social fields[16], the real movements of people are left out in favor of myth and rhetoric. When discussing transnational people movement, the myth and rhetoric are ignored in favor of tangible practicalities. How can these two conceptions of how flow works across borders productively inform each other? The influence of diaspora rhetoric on transnational movement, and the vice versa, appears frequently in the narratives of Iquiteño Jews. As such, Iquitos provides a case study that demonstrates why transnational migrations within diasporas and between diasporas and "homelands" should be approached with an eye to both historical narratives and practical people movement. Their case suggests the power of diaspora rhetoric to alter people movement and settlement patterns, as well as create and reinforce a genuine sense of collective identity across national borders.

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[14] Holy charity.

[15] Reis, Michele. 2004. "Theorizing Diaspora: Perspectives on "Classical" and "Contemporary" Diaspora." *International Migration* 42(2). An expanded definition of this term is found in the following brief section on diaspora studies.

[16] "…A set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed" (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004, 1009).

Transnationalism Among Jews Living in Latin America:

When transnationalism entered the literature through authors like Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton (1992), authors usually fell into one of two camps regarding the strength and interconnectedness of the sending country and the migrants. Some, like Portes et al (1999), insisted on the necessity of fairly intense and sustained contact, while others theorized away from transnationalism as a way of being, seeing instead a continuum of transnational *practices* (Levitt, 2001). Nina Glick-Schiller provides an interesting two-part definition of transnationalism in which migration is an afterthought. Transnational frameworks, in her view, are for studying "political, economic, social, and cultural processes that extend beyond the borders of a particular state, include actors that are not states, but are shaped by the policies and institutional practices of states" (1999, 96). That is, states are necessarily the central actors. Meanwhile, transnational migration is when people "move across international borders and settle and establish social relations in a new state, [and] maintain social connections within the polity from which they originated" (1999, 96). Her definition in particular is interesting because she draws a sharp distinction between transmigrants and "people with a diasporic tradition" based on the heavy involvement of the state in the former. If one accepts that distinction, it creates room to consider the differences in the relationships with nation-states that people from a historical diaspora who are also migrants have with the state they were born in, the state(s) they have moved to, and place of origin for their people, which may or may not be the same as the place they were born.

This is a definition that suits my argument to a point: indeed, these are different things, but that distinction that may not always be so clear-cut, considering the highly important role states have had to play in the formation of modern diasporas by legislating who may enter or

leave a given state to form another node in the diasporic web, or providing opportunities so that one zone in a diasporic field may have more reach or influence than another (Waldinger and FitzGerald 2003). In the case of Israel specifically, being a member of the Jewish diaspora makes such transnational activity much easier, thanks to programs such as the Law of Return and Birthright. It is also the case that a person could be both a transmigrant and a member of a diaspora; such is the case with many Iquiteños.

In this essay, when I discuss transnational activity, I follow Glick-Schiller in understanding that transnational activity is not limited to people and still less only migrants, and is commonly affected by the actions of states, corporations, and other institutions. Furthermore, people with links to a diaspora and transmigrants are not necessarily one and the same, although those categories may overlap. At the same time, following Levitt (2001) and Waldinger and FitzGerald (2003), migrants may engage in transnational practices without forming a transnational *community*, which would imply a cohesiveness, shared vision of the "homeland," and intentionality that is not necessarily present.

Keeping that distinction in mind, Judith Bosker Liwerant theorizes a far more open definition of transnationalism in which the ends, rather than the methods, are stressed, and flows "interactions and relationships continue to be developed notwithstanding the presence of international borders with all the laws, regulations and national narratives they represent" (2009, 2). Together, both definitions lend themselves to an understanding of a transnational social field, "a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed" (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004). A transnational social field fits the study of global Jewry much better, as it does not

privilege the transnational experience over the national or community experience, relying instead on the ways in which they overlap and interlock, giving attention to both those who leave and those who stay behind. Social fields also acknowledge the many sets of institutions to which an individual might belong and with which they might identify beyond those of a given nation. This adds weight to the distinction made between transnational being and transnational belonging (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004, 1011), in which an individual might out of necessity or convenience engage with other people and institutions, but not identify with them. On the other hand, individuals might feel strongly that they belong, and so seek out transnational ways of being. Transnational social fields are thus more immediately applicable to diaspora communities which engage with each other across national boundaries.

The Jewish diaspora is particularly widespread and enduring, and as such, contains several notable subethnic groups and differences in practice that make speaking of a singular transnational Jewish identity myopic. The transnationalism-centric literature that focuses specifically on the identities of Jews in Latin America positions them on a spectrum with national identification and Jewish identification at opposite ends. At one end are scholars like Judit Bokser-Liwerant (2009, 2013), who see Jews in Latin America as Jews foremost. In this point of view, a sense of pan-Jewish ethno-religious identity unites Jews across national borders. Jewishness is the most important tile in Jewish individuals' identity mosaic, and lends itself naturally to transnational behavior. This behavior and identification with Jews beyond and irrespective of national borders is also assumed to have something to do with the fact of being a diaspora, as I will discuss later.

On the other end of the spectrum are Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein (2008; 2009), who

have both rejected what they deem the "essentializing" pan-Jewishness of a stance like Bokser-Liwerant's in favor of seeing Jews in Latin America as national citizens first. Jews are expected to look to the host nation first when assessing their own identities, rather than emphasizing their Jewishness to the exclusion of their national identity. This results in a range of hyphenations, such as Jewish-Argentinian, Jewish-Peruvian, etc. While transnational behavior may occur, the Jewish identity is usually considered to be one of the less prominent (though still salient) identities that an individual counts towards their makeup. Lesser and Rein's concern with the differences in Jewish life, treatment, and identification between countries is important to remember, but itself can be somewhat essentializing and ignores regional similarities or historical ties.

A position like Luis Roniger's (2010) seems to be the most nuanced and permissive of historical influence and variation. As discussed on page ten, he holds that Latin American Jews especially, but by inference Jews everywhere, judge what degree of diasporic identification and practical transnational action is safest in a given set of circumstances. Because of this saliency judgement, both very intense and active identification with a pan-Jewish diaspora and a very nationalist positions can coexist in a shifting equilibrium that is responsive to changes in their atmosphere. Determining what position is most safe and salient has historically been tied to the level of non-Jewish acceptance of Jewish transnational activity (today, especially Israel). Sometimes these ties are perceived as beneficial, even helpful to the host nation (Rein 2009); at other times, they feed the standard antisemitic canards of Jewish disloyalty and international conspiracy. So, different Jews in different times and places naturally have taken different positions on the relative value of acting transnationally on diasporic urges.

Roniger's viewpoint is particularly useful in examining Iquitos' rapidly changing Jewish community, where relationships with non-Peruvian Jews, Jewish organizations, and other states have altered dramatically over the last three decades. What is most important to keep in mind for the purposes of considering Iquitos is that it is neither natural nor necessary that Jews from Iquitos should consider themselves Jewish before Peruvian (or at least Loretanx), feel the need for contact with Jewish communities outside of Peru as a component of their Jewish practices, or be practically connected to the modern state of Israel. However, all of these situations may arise and become important as the context around the community changes.

Jewish and non-Jewish diasporas:

Some of the most widely varying assertions between these three camps have to do with the conflation of the concept of diaspora with transnationalism. The term "diaspora," which originated to refer to the various populations of Jewish people living outside of what had been the Kingdom of Judah, is nowadays used to describe several patterns of people living in places different from those they or their ancestors were born in, often without defining which of those patterns a particular scholar is referring to.

When studying Jewish people in transnational contexts, it is important to pick out a definition that suits discussion of what Nina Glick-Schiller called people with a diasporic tradition, so that the influence of such history can be suitably studied apart from other transnational relationships which may be called diasporas but have very different effects. William Safran's (1991) definition is one of the most specific. He insists that the word "diaspora" should only be applied to those who:

> "have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign, regions; 2) [who] retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) [who] believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) [who] regard their ancestral home-land as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate; 5) [who] believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) [who] continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and [whose] ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship" (83-84).

In *Global Diasporas* (1997), Robin Cohen agrees with Safran's criteria but adds that diasporas may have left a homeland for purposes of economic expansion, and, critically, suggests that those dwelling in a diaspora feel "a sense of empathy and co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement even where home has become more vestigial" (17). Although it might be assumed that Safran did not intend for all of these criteria to be applied to all diasporas, his language is ambiguous. Taken as a whole, these are demanding criteria which do not match even communities that are generally accepted to fit the definition—for example, the Rromani people, who do not necessarily desire return (Berns-McGown 2008). Furthermore, the requirement that a diaspora must have a persistent idea of itself as different, and specifically incapable of living full lives in their present homes because of prejudice, does not reflect all locations at all times (aside from being deeply pessimistic about the possibility of change). In the vein of Raanan Rein and Jeffrey Lesser, Cohen's definition also insists on a pan-diasporic identity that in actuality waxes and wanes based on a variety of circumstances. Both also rely on being able (presumably) to accurately discover exactly how all people in a given group *feel* about

such fraught topics as “ideal” homelands, which would be essentially impossible.

Looser definitions such as Clifford’s (1994, in Goldstein 2015, 9202), which argues that diasporas are “expatriate minority communities whose consciousness and solidarity are ‘importantly defined’ by a memory, vision, or myth about, and a continuing relationship with, an original homeland and an expectation of return” are broader and more forgiving of individual and historical difference, but are also vague. Equally flexible, but much less beholden to strictly homeland-driven definitions, are those definitions like Rima Berns-McGown’s (2008). A diaspora according to Berns-McGown is a perpetual tension between a here and a there (8-10). In a more practical sense, people who are diasporic “have settled, or been resettled, outside the place they once considered home; balance a connection to the adoptive state with a connection to that original homeland, "mythic" or real; and, within the adopted country, balance a community connection with a connection to the wider society” (10). Much as the active nature of transnational *practices* changes the study of action across borders from some inviolable identity to a set of deeds, the active need to balance these tensions and tend these connections (whether through attentiveness, neglect, reconstruction, etc) makes this a more practice-based version of a diaspora. This definition, although it includes the potential for change, is inclusive of homelands within living memory and those mired in myth, and holds up the value individuals place on intra-community connection, also (and, to be fair, intentionally) brings together recent transmigrant groups in bilocal fields and diasporas that have lasted many thousands of years over many changing polity boundaries such that they are not helpfully differentiated.

Michele Reis (2004), meanwhile, divides diasporas up by time period: classical (Jewish, Armenian, and the like), modern (colonial, enslaved), and contemporary. Her contemporary

diasporas appear to be essentially the same as transnational social fields, in which divorce from the place of origin need not be total or final and is highly mediated by technology (47-48). She also insists on the importance of decentering the Jewish diaspora as the archetypal diaspora by which all others should be measured—fair enough! Nonetheless, such a division ignores the fact that classical-style diasporas *exist in the contemporary world.* In a case like that of Iquitos, Reis' divisions run into the issue of multiple immigrations, each forming its own transnational social field, while still being actively shaped by "classical" forces. Although Reis separates out Jewish-like diasporas from others as I wish to, she does so in a way that makes it difficult to study such diasporas in a contemporary context.

Distinguishing between transnational fields and diasporas:

The key difference that none of these definitions appear to reach is that it is possible to be diasporic without engaging in transnational migration, but it is not possible to engage in transnational migration without (at least in the eyes of the looser definitions of diaspora) becoming diasporic. Contemporary diasporas in the definitions of Reis or Berns-McGown rely on the existence of the nation-state in order for people to conduct their lives across modern borders. As such, they are often assumed to be transnational by default, because of the frequency or cyclical or chain migration, remitting practices, and family connections maintained across borders. This may be accurate. However, it is undeniable that *diasporic peoples* and their parents and grandparents may have no active, practical connection with a country of origin. Their relationship to borders may be very insular, and this kind of diaspora may have nothing to do with transnational activities in the modern sense: Iquitos' Jewish community was no less

diasporic for having little practical connection with either its semi-mythical homeland or other communities of Jews beyond its own borders. They are thus different from a generic contemporary transnational social field even as the lack of pan-ethnic connection disqualifies them from a definition like Cohen's that was seemingly built upon holding the Jewish diaspora up as an archetype.

The assertion, then, that diaspora is the same as transnationalism, and Jews specifically are always transnational by virtue of being diasporic (Bokser-Liwerant 2006, 2), is clearly incorrect. At the same time, strict, homeland-based, insularity-dependent definitions like Safran's and Cohen's do not include contemporary transnational social fields, or even all Jewish communities in all places and times.

People, states, and organizations (if not academica) are aware of the blurry lines between diasporic people and transnational communities, and use these differing definitions rhetorically to achieve practical political and economic ends. Individual communities and individual people may identify more closely with a strict definition that privileges an insular, self-identified community with strong feelings about a homeland, while others feel that their transnational practices make them diasporic—or not. Safran's and Cohen's definitions, which privilege strong intra-group identities shaped by prejudice and longing, make a far more convincing argument for why a member of the diaspora might wish to return to a homeland, if possible, than a looser Reis-style description of what is essentially a transnational community staying in touch via Skype. What is interesting about the case of Iquitos and Israel, and what is important to understand about diaspora-transnational rhetorical relationships generally, is that a definition that emphasizes intra-community integrity at the expense of multiple intra- and extra-community ties

is far more useful in *encouraging* transnational activity if diaspora is to be actively and knowingly used as a tool. The modern-day myth of "return" to Israel relies on such a Safran-like definition, wherein the Jewish diaspora must be in a miserable, alienated situation and "coming home" must be the final fulfillment of a true Jewish identity. In general, emphasizing the importance of the homeland, the possibility of return, the separateness of the diasporic people from the host people, and the desirable nature of return or rebuilding can make transnational activity to that end more appealing to a transnational community that might not otherwise engage in such activities.

Regardless, these definitions and the identities linked to them are changeable and *usable* because of, not despite, the way in which they each flow into one another. In the Iquitos case study, a diaspora that through its own words fits the assumption of being a people apart is *also* a transnational social field maintained over WhatsApp. In the wider field, communities anywhere on this spectrum can and do shift in their self-identification, and when they do, their activities shift with them, with major consequences.

Historical use of diaspora rhetoric within global Jewry:

Diasporic history and transnational behavior have been actively conflated to achieve political and/or economic aims, especially pan-Jewish and Zionist activism, religious philanthropy, and Jewish education, since the earliest days of the existence of nation-states. In particular, Jewish philanthropy that calls on a diasporic identity to solicit transnational donations has a long history. A particularly useful example is that of the early modern pekidim, or emissaries who traveled about the Ottoman Empire and Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries

soliciting charitable donations from the Jewish communities in cities such as London, Amsterdam, and then-Constantinople for Jews living in Eretz Yisrael (Lehmann 2013). This is a period early on in the development of nation-states that took advantage of an existing, thriving population of Jews living outside a "homeland" — that is, it is clear in this example that the Jewish diaspora existed before transnationalism was possible, but that each affected the other. As pekidim sold the idea of a country which had not existed in centuries to wealthy, influential Jews in the diaspora, they engaged in transnational movement and encouraged other Jews to operate transnationally by sending money to change the material conditions of people living elsewhere. If they did so, these individuals also bought the idea that they were somehow connected to Jews living thousands of miles away, speaking different colloquial languages and practicing Judaism in a different way.

This interlocking network of traveling pekidim, as well as other activities like the redemption of Jewish slaves from bondage, in the early modern period helped construct both the idea and, to an extent, a reality of a pan-Jewish peoplehood across new nations. The phenomenon of far-flung Jewish communities identifying strongly with each other *as Jews* did not always exist and was certainly not overdetermined to exist. It took dedicated efforts, such as those of the pekidim, and for many centuries any active transnational Jewish activity was largely a practice of the elite. This historicizes and destabilizes modern assumptions that the diaspora has always been practically connected as well as spiritually and emotionally invested in its supposed unity. This is not the case — as Raanan Rein argues, too many assumptions are made in the present day about indelible pan-Jewish unity instead of acknowledging important community, regional, and national differences. Far from cementing those assumptions, Lehmann purposely focuses on the

way in which any unified pan-Jewish identity had to be actively constructed and then maintained over and through ethnic, geographic, and linguistic divisions. In Lehmann's words, these emissaries encountered a Jewish so-called community that was "imagined as unified but experienced as fragmented" (3), even as their own travels and myth-making increased that imagined unification. In tacitly agreeing that Jews in the diaspora should help maintain the wellbeing of Jews elsewhere, wealthy Jews influenced their own communities and their peers, making the idea of Jewish unity relied upon by pekidim more realistic. That is to say, the real connections between and across Jewish communities fostered by pekidim themselves, the home communities they came from, and the Jews living in Eretz Yisrael that they collected for helped create a genuine sense of pan-Jewishness and universal Jewish identity, a process that was begun by utilizing the rhetoric of diaspora.

Similarly, the centrality of the "Holy Land"/Eretz Yisrael in the discourse of the early modern pekidim prefigures a modern assumption that the land that is now Israel has always been central to spiritual and religious imaginings of Jewish identity *and* should be a central practical concern to which diasporic Jews should bend their attention and pocketbooks. This is an assumption that should not be taken for granted. Lehmann defines these pekidim-enabled connections as a network, by which he means a delicate web made out of actively sought and maintained interactions, not institutionalized, official, or extant outside of the actions of individuals. Importantly, there was no formal center, although there were certain cities where the web was thicker or where more people tended to circulate, especially in the Ottoman world: Jerusalem, although the beneficiary, was not the center of Jewish wealth, bureaucracy, or attention.

Early modern Jewish emissaries therefore provide an example of how transnational activities can be inspired by calling upon rhetorical ideals of an interconnected diaspora and a deserving homeland. Even further, they demonstrate how that very engagement can build or reinforce the same sense of pan-Jewish, cross-diasporic belonging that is rhetoricized to encourage such behaviors in the first place.

Iquitos and diasporic Jewish philanthropy:

The development of Iquitos' Jewish community's transnational relationship with Israel is a more modern example of similar philanthropic forces. As described in the previous chapter, the Jewish community of Iquitos is at least twice removed from the "homeland" (if one takes it as given that the territory that is now Israel is their homeland). Its founders migrated from Morocco to Iquitos in the mid-19th century—an "expansion" diaspora, as Cohen would have it. Despite a brief period of wealth and high connectivity associated with the rubber boom and the importance of South American river transport, the Jews of Iquitos were effectively cut off from other Jews between 1910 and 1990, with no or very little transnational activity in any form. Nonetheless, several families maintained their Jewish identities (once again demonstrating a key difference between diasporic and transnational activities).

In the 1990s, the connection of the Iquitos community with other Jewish communities, which began with a letter to a congregation in Lima, was enacted almost entirely through the efforts of transnational philanthropic organizations (most of them Zionist). U.S.-based Venezuelan academic Ariel Segal Freilich, the Jewish Agency for Israel, Debora Frank of the Federación Sionista del Perú, and Argentinian rabbi Guillermo Bronstein all provided resources

in the form of international attention, money, educational and religious supplies, bureaucratic aid, and religious services with the explicit intent of linking together Jews pan-diasporically. All of these organizations and individuals also had the aim of connecting Iquiteño Jews with Israel specifically.

As discussed in the previous chapter, these individuals, the education they provided, and the organizations they connected with all actively placed migration to Israel at the center of the Jewish experience they presented as desirable. Through their own transnational activities, mainly philanthropic in nature, they did in a very straightforward sense make cross-diasporic connections themselves and encourage others. Interviews with Iquiteño Jews also show that many individuals feel a strong sense of solidarity with other Jews, and, in direct contravention to Rein and Lesser, often feel more Jewish than Peruvian, and the vast majority of the original Jewish population of Iquitos has, of course, migrated to Israel under the auspices of a law designed to encourage precisely this kind of transnational action. Those who have relatives in Israel engage in *almost* all of the common practices associated with transnational social fields between a sending and receiving country—on which more later. Meanwhile, those who are left in Iquitos remain transnationally linked to a very high degree. Iquitos is dependent on U.S. and Argentina rabbis for rabbinical services and freely invites and enjoys educational exchange programs with other Latin American Jewish organizations such as the Masorti Movement-run youth program NOAM.

These are all recent developments that show a dramatic shift from a diasporic community with no recent history of transnational practice to one where transnational practice has become a *necessary* component of individuals' self-reported diasporas identities, in both practical and

ideological senses. This evidence strongly supports Luis Roniger's assertions about the contingency of Jewish-national identities. It also supports my argument that rhetoric about diasporic solidarity can a component in changing individuals' and communities' behaviors with respect to other subgroups within their same classical-style diasporas.

Connecting Iquiteño migration and transnationalism:

To return to the reference to Iquiteño migration practices in the previous section, it is important to note that those who have migrated to Israel and their friends, relatives, and fellow community members who have remained behind engage in many, but not all, of the most common transnational practices usually associated with bilocal transnational social fields. Migrants and those still in Iquitos keep in touch with their families via technological means and visiting, when possible. A small number maintain properties and businesses in Iquitos, while others send money across both borders as gifts, aid with expenses, and payments. However, these interactions cannot be a Portes-style intensive and sustained transnational*ism*, for the simple fact that these relationships last only so long as people remain on both sides of the Atlantic. As already discussed, it appears these transnational contacts last until those left in Iquitos themselves make aliyah, which is all but sure to happen in most cases.

It is still early to predict with confidence that Iquitos' Jewish community will be lost entirely or almost entirely to out-migration (although it is clear that the latter has effectively already happened), but it is possible to say that, since 2003, circular, seasonal, and one-way return migration have been almost unknown. These three kinds of people movement are often considered key transnational practices when bilocal communities are involved, and are

contrasted to migration for settlement. In particular, circular and seasonal migration imply that migrants may leave, but they come back in predictable, if irregular, patterns, following the demands of labor (Waldinger and FitzGerald 2003). Indeed, these practices are considered hallmarks of the late 20th/early 21st century transmigrant, and something that distinguishes contemporary migration from pre-WWII migration (Castles, de Haas, & Miller 2014). It is notable, then, that such practices very rarely appear in the accounts of Iquiteño Jews. In 2016 and 2019, my interview subjects overwhelmingly declared their intent to leave and not come back, following after family members and friends who had done the same, some as long ago as twenty-five years before, plenty of time to change a mind, change a living situation, change an ideology, and enter into the circularity and constant flow that supposedly characterizes 21st century movement.

What is keeping the Jews of Iquitos in Israel, then? Is it simply the fact that being a citizen from entry thanks to the Law of Return eliminates or overcomes other hardships? Certainly the only reason any Iquiteño Jewish migrant goes to Israel is because of Israel's recruiting of Jews from the diaspora, rhetoric backed up with citizenship and financial assistance. On the other hand, Israel does so because it is important for it to be seen as a homeland for all Jews, and Iquiteño Jews across borders of time, gender, and age strongly identify as Jews who want a homeland. Furthermore, gaining their citizenship in Israel is, like citizenship anywhere else, a long, arduous, confusing, and sometimes humiliating process. As a reminder, an Iquiteño who wishes to move to Israel must register with the Iquitos synagogue as someone who has Jewish ancestry or someone who does not (and if not, they are treated with an extra level of suspicion within the community and by immigration officials), take multiple years of classes in

conversational Hebrew, Jewish liturgy and ritual, Israeli culture, and successfully perform their learning over a period of more years to a series of community leaders, rabbis, and semi-official migration bureaucrats before "converting," a process which may feel hurtful to those who already identified as Jewish, all before even considering taking the first practical steps towards movement. The main difference seems to be that for Iquiteño Jews, this process occurs largely before the actual movement takes place.

Furthermore, once Iquiteño Jewish migrants are in Perú, their citizenship is revealed to be partial. Because conversions in Iquitos are performed according to Conservative/Masorti standards, not Orthodox ones, Iquiteño Jewish migrants are still barred from institutions such as marriage as a result of their ambiguous halakhic status. They will also face less ambiguous racism and xenophobia (Raijman & Hochman 2011, Bartram 2011, Averbukh 2016). They are inarguably within the privileged tier in the Israeli Jewish/Palestinian binary, and their citizenship is hard-won and partial compared to other European-Jewish migrants and native Israeli Jews.

These difficulties often appear in the ways in which the familial patterns of Iquiteño Jewish migrants differ from those of non-Jewish Peruvian migrants. The gender pattern is different: while in previous major 21st century waves of Peruvian migration, women have overwhelmingly formed the vanguard and later brought their male relatives with them (Paerregaard 2014), in Iquitos the pattern is that whole families migrate at once, leaving behind only scattered adult or near-adult children and siblings. Is this a factor only of guaranteed citizenship and Israel's financial assistance, which removes barriers that separate other families? The household strategy approach to migration suggests that sending individual members of a family helps diversify that family's options and adding to their overall economic security

(Massey et al. 1998). The "absorption basket" governmental aid to new citizens from the ends after twelve months from arrival, meaning new migrants cannot rely on the Israeli state for long (Kol Zchut 2020). It is easier to justify such an economic risk to the entire family when non-practical considerations are in play.

Similarly, Iquiteño Jewish migrants to Israel buck another common demographic trend in Peruvian migration: they take their children with them rather than leaving them to finish their educations in Peru, as can be assumed to be usual by the low proportion of Peruvian migrants under age 20 (IOM, Migraciones, INEI, RREE 2018, 31-34). The children of Iquitos' Jews go to good schools and expect to go to university, whether in Iquitos or, more prestigiously, in Lima. Those good schools, however, are private Catholic schools, a situation that perturbs parents who want their children to be educated in environments that value and promote Jewishness, not simply educated. This concern for children's Jewish education was, as discussed in the previous chapter, by far the most commonly listed reason for migration. For many parents, a Jewish education that they feel will help make their children more Jewish is worth disrupting education in an absolute sense. Education is not a neutral driver in this case, or even a blunt-force promise of opportunity; questions of identity visibly trump questions of practicality and pedagogy.

From a neoclassical economics standpoint that privileges economic self-interest as the main driver of human motion, one might expect that the differences in standard of living and wages between Israel and Perú would encourage migrants to stay in Israel, rather than Iquitos. Peruvian migration in general does indeed lend some support to this thinking: return migration is relatively uncommon for Peruvians specifically (Paerregaard 2014) and non-Jewish Latin American migration to Israel conforms to this pattern (Schammah, Raijman, Kemp, & Resnik

2000). However, Iquiteño Jews do not necessarily expect a better life in Israel in economic terms, although the shift seems clear on the surface. The majority of Iquitos' Jewish community is lower-middle to middle class —shopkeepers, professionals, clerical and medical workers—and usually moves down the economic ladder when they move to Israel. In my 2019 interview group, nineteen of my adult subjects expressed anxiety about their work prospects in Israel, and were particularly nervous about the difficulties of learning Hebrew as adults to the level necessary to do their present jobs. One young woman, a math teacher, told me about her older sister, a family medicine doctor who, after seven years in Israel, had been able to recertify herself as a nurse. As for herself, she thought, perhaps there would be some posts for tutoring the children of other Spanish-speaking migrants until she could learn enough to earn an Israeli teaching credential. On the Ramla Tinos Facebook page, which circulates death notices, flyers for secondhand refrigerators, and the periodic Jewish meme in Spanish to the approximately 1,800 Latin American olim who make up its followers, a typical job ad is for domestic labor in private homes or factory jobs. This is not the kind of work the majority of Iquiteño Jews do in Iquitos, and combined with the testimony of my interview subjects, suggests that life will in many ways be economically harder in Israel than in Perú, and many Iquiteños know it.

It seems implausible, therefore, that neoclassical-style economic thinking, easy citizenship, or the promise of a wealthier life could explain why Iquiteño-Jewish migration follows a riskier and more permanent pattern than is usual among 21st century migrants generally and even Latin American migrants to Israel specifically. Life for recent olim from Latin America, who face racial, religious, linguistic, and legal barriers to full citizenship and economic success, is arguably more difficult in Israel than it was at home, something of which

prospective migrants are aware, at least in part.

I do not wish to ignore the fact that migration dynamics often become self-sustaining as time goes by. Ethnic enclaves like those that my subjects and their Israel-dwelling relatives tell me have sprung up around the central bus station in Tel Aviv, in Ramla, and in Beersheba represent social capital that softens arrivals for new migrants and provides information and formal and informal labor opportunities (Massey et al. 1998; Schammah, Raijman, Kemp, & Resnik 2000). Transnational social fields develop institutional frameworks and pulls of their own, and become self-sustaining. All this is true and demonstrably affects the ways in which Iquiteño Jews migrate: as discussed in the previous chapter, by the time of writing, almost everyone left in the Iquitos community has friends and family living in Israel with whom they desire to reconnect. Even so, transnational social fields can become self-sustainingly circular (Waldinger & FitzGerald 2013), so it still matters why this social field has become self-sustainingly unidirectional. Moreover, it is not simply coincidental that these Jews ended up in and stayed in Israel, and treating this group as if it were not engaged in behavior that conforms to a certain set of expectations about the reciprocal roles of diaspora and homeland in favor of simplistic economic arguments is shortsighted.

Other homelands:

Discussions with Iquiteño Jews laid out in the previous chapter made clear that the majority of these potential migrants feel an intense affinity for Israel that out times outweighs their expressed love for Perú. I also described how the revitalization of Jewish life in Iquitos has from the start been shaped by individuals and organizations with a desire to see the Jewish

diaspora support Israel in multiple ways up to and including permanent migration as religiously inflected olim, not simply any other migrant. The educational materials and conversion processes made available to the Jews of Iquitos suggest the similarity of the Biblical Holy Land and the modern State of Israel and reinforce the primacy of Israel for diaspora Jewish identity. They seem to have successfully created a now self-sustaining model of Jewish identity in which migration to Israel to live a "more Jewish" or "better Jewish" life is key to proving belonging and status in the community and in a perceived global community of Jews.

Although this might seem a natural equivalency, it is in no way a given that the modern state of Israel should be the locus of current Jewish transnational activity. Over the course of thousands of years of Jewish diaspora, Jewish self-rule developed in countries far from the Holy Land, belying the assumption that owning the territory of the erstwhile Kingdom of Israel was necessary (Gitelman 2016, 2). In the modern era, diaspora nationalism, which for Jews indicates not the support of the home country in the diaspora but the assertion of real, valid, solid identities *as Jews in the diaspora* had an enormous influence on Jewish arts and letters and political activity, including proposals for alternate Jewish homelands in places as diverse as eastern Russia and the Niagara River, New York (Shanes 1998, 178). As Lesser and Rein (2009; 2009) argue so forcefully, hyphenated Jewish identities can and often do focus as strongly on the host-national segment as on the Jewish one. As Roniger (2010) argues, the usefulness of acknowledging and acting upon transnational ties is perpetually in flux. It is not natural and obvious that the Jews of Iquitos, simply for being Jews, should have decided to engage in transnational activity with Israel specifically. If a purely economic analysis suggests that transnational activity was inevitable in a globalized world, precluding a durable community in

Iquitos, it was not inevitable that Iquitos' Jewish community should decide to focus its transnational activities to such an extent on Israel. It is possible to imagine stronger links with Argentina's Jewish population that did not lead back to Israel, just as it is possible to imagine connections with communities in the United States that were not tied solely to migration. It is even possible to imagine a resurgence of interest in Morocco, from whence the ancestors of most of Iquitos' Jewish population hail, far more recently than any connection to the land of Israel. It has only been made to seem as though Israel was the choice so obvious it could not be passed up through precisely the utilization of diaspora discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

When respected religious officials like Rabbi Guillermo Bronstein, long-term guests like Ariel Segal, and philanthropic organizations like the Jewish Agency for Israel and the Federación Sionista del Perú all push a specific narrative of the inadequacy of diaspora and the illegitimacy of diasporic identities in which dedication to Jewish life and possession of a valid Jewish identity is shown through attachment to the state of Israel, the rhetoric combines with the economic. Diaspora rhetoric becomes a tool through which transnational activities and agendas are carried out. Iquitos' Jewish community is a clear example of transnational practices, from commerce to migration, being guided by rhetoric that takes strict Safran-style interpretations of diaspora for its guide. Apart from simply steering migrants towards a particular destination, this blending of diaspora with transnational practice also produces different outcomes from groups in similar situations who are engaged in transnational activity without belonging to a diasporic people (Schammah, Raijman, Kemp, & Resnik 2000). Transnational social fields occur thanks to economic and practical principles; this transnational social field occurred thanks to economics and the conscious deployment by activists, states, and organizations of diaspora as more than a

myth.

If this situation is true for the Jews of Iquitos, it can be true for other diasporic peoples, whether they more closely resemble a Safranesque diaspora or a Berns-McGown-like one. If, as Roniger states, Jews in the diaspora can choose when and where to direct their transnational efforts after absorbing changing messages about their own and their ties' legitimacy, so can other diaspora groups, whether or not that identity is conventionally considered strong. Homelands (or places which want to be seen as homelands) can shape a narrative in which being part of the diaspora makes an individual less than both a person living in the homeland and a person native to the host country, where recall and return are not only necessary performances of identity but can be acted upon in practical ways, whether through voting abroad, sending back money, or moving back home. On the strength of these narratives, they can cultivate support at home for laws of return or flexible citizenship regimes, or seek support abroad from diaspora nationalist communities. It is not a given that these stories will be accepted or acted upon, but it is clear that sometimes they are, to dramatic effect.

When differentiating between transnational practices undertaken for purely practical economic interests and those undertaken for religious, ethnic, or identity-based reasons becomes difficult, it becomes yet more important to recognize how the reality of diaspora and the myth of diaspora can be used to move people, money, and ideas in ways that simple labor forces never could.

CHAPTER THREE: DEMOGRAPHIC WARFARE: ISRAEL'S NECESSARY BUT UNDESIRABLE JEWS

"I'll probably go to Ramla, but I want to move out quickly." The third interview subject I asked about her future home in Israel was the firmest in her answer. I edged around the real question I was interested in, the one about how Jews in Iquitos feel about Palestinians in Israel, and instead making leading comments about Ramla's diversity, and wouldn't it be nice to live in such a heterogeneous place? My interviewee, S, brought her five-year-old daughter to the interview with her and kindly let me tag along when they bought fruit for an after-school treat. She planned to move in with relatives of her husband who had a spare room in the house they rented in Ramla, but to only to stay for a month. Apart from the understandable desire not to live for long in a small house together with in-laws, she told me that when she had visited them in Ramla when her daughter was a baby, she had gone to a park and been frightened by groups of teenagers hanging around. When she got back and told her sister-in-law about it, her sister said, "Oh, esos son árabes, son malos." Those are Arabs; they're bad. Quite simple. S went on to tell me that after that, she never wanted to live in Ramla, even though, "before I came to the community, I didn't know anything [about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict]."

By the time I spoke with her in 2019, however, she had definite opinions: "They're people who don't understand; they're very aggressive. For that reason I told my husband… we will rent a room and then if we want to live in a calmer place, it had better be somewhere else. And [my husband's] mother told him… don't mix too much with Latino people either."[17]

[17] "Son unas personas que no entienden; son muy agresivas. Por eso yo le dije a mi esposa… vamos a alquilar un cuarto y si queríamos vivir en un lugar más tranquilo, qué sea otra lugar. Y su mamá le dice también que… no se mezcle mucho con gente latino."

Following S, person after person told me similar things about their fear and dislike of their future Arab neighbors, and a few also told me that they would prefer to live outside of the increasingly Latino neighborhoods springing up in Beersheba, Ramla, and Tel Aviv. How did my subjects learn about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, and how did they learn to place themselves so firmly against the Arab side of it? Why are they all ending up in Ramla anyway? Why in the world should their fellow Latin American Jews be lumped in with Palestinians as people to avoid once they make aliyah? And what does their curious, tenuous position tell us about the way race and immigration operate in Israel?

Perceptions of race relations in Israel are based on a binary Jewish/Palestinian divide. Obviously, people exist outside and beyond this divide; the binary is only a politically expedient assumption. Even within the Jewish "side," perceived race is predicated on a complicated and nuanced set of associations between different Jewish groups, affected by skin color, religious practice, language, and former national origin, among other aspects. Iquiteño Jews fall firmly on the Jewish side of that foundational split, but they fit uncomfortably within that side. In this strange position, they highlight a fundamental Israeli paradox. Secular nationalists in Israel need Jews to outnumber Palestinians within its territory, and so Israel constantly desires new Jewish bodies. To get them, it broadcasts a welcoming face to the diaspora, encouraging immigration under the Law of Return. This desire, however, must contend with powerful ultra-Orthodox gatekeepers that disapprove of conversion into any kind of non-Orthodox Judaism, and with the racism of other secular-nationalist Israeli Jews. The Iquiteños are desirable because they are seen in some way as incontrovertibly Jewish. However, they are not Jewish in the right or the most desirable ways. As they make their way to Israel, they must jump through administrative and

religious hoops to please both sides, and along they way, they form their own opinions about their identities, Israeli racial hierarchies, and Jewishness itself. The case of Iquiteño Jewish migration is proportionally tiny, but it handily reveals Israel's tenuous balancing act between secular-nationalist and ultra-Orthodox politics, and highlights the fragility and arbitrariness of the definition of Jewishness that Israel relies upon.

Frameworks of race:

Howard Winant and Michael Omi's definition of a *racial project* (2014) is useful in discussing the creation of Israel's racial system. A racial project is "is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organize and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines" (Omi and Winant 2014, 125). Omi and Winant often fail to see the ways in which religion becomes racialized, or the overlap between religion and ethnicity (2014, 113), unfortunately. Such an intersection is easy enough to fill in after the fact, particularly with the help of the clear example laid out before Iquitos. The state of Israel knowingly and actively pursues a racial project that privileges Ashkenazi religious and cultural behavior alongside phenotypical representations of race. In order to bridge this gap, I use Orna Sasson Levy's work (2008) to describe how sub-ethnic differences within the Jewish population rub up against racial differences, as well as Yehouda Shenhav's discussion of "Arab Jews" (2006), which complicates the assumed simplicity of the Israeli/Palestinian divide. The end result is a racial project that hides the real complications of identity in Israel from vital prospective citizens.

Israel's multi-part racial hierarchy privileges an ideal Jew who is pale-skinned, descended from European Jewish immigrants, observant and Orthodox enough for civil benefits but not *too* Orthodox[18], and Ashkenazi in practice and culture. For those of Israel's Jewish population who do not fit this mold, a complex hierarchy exists between different Jewish groups, forming a two-part intra-Jewish racial structure where both perceived race and Jewish sub-ethnicity can be vectors of privilege and oppression (Sasson-Levy 2013). These groups may combine ethnoreligious subcategories and racial identities in a number of ways; however, almost all of them strive to be read as *not Arab*. Non-Arab, non-Muslim, non-Jewish peoples with a long history in Israel, such as Armenian Christians, are marginalized civically and politically (Geller 2016), and do not figure largely in the racial imaginations of most Israelis (Shenhav 2006). Newer non-Jewish, non-Arab immigrants have also been drawn to modern Israel, including a population of Catholic Latin Americans. They too are a very small minority and are generally excluded from discussions of racial formation and hierarchy within the country (Schammah, Raijman, Kemp, & Resnik 2000). Considering these elisions, the most basic division of Israeli society is thus between Jews of any race or ethnicity and Palestinians (Shenhav 2006).

Israel's situation is quite different from American racial projects, which are perhaps its closest cousins, and I do not wish to ignore these differences or apply American racial optics carelessly. Israel's history, its theological governance, and its demographics are very different, as are its modes of thinking about race, citizenship, and belonging. That being said, some models of race developed in the United States, when adapted, can shed light on other cases. In Israel specifically, bringing in such theories is useful because countries wrestle with a popularly

[18] For example, not a member of a Haredi community that discourages service in the military.

assumed racial binary that hides much diversity. When used alongside scholarship like that of Sasson-Levy and Shenhav, the existence of the imagined but strict Israeli/Palestinian binary leads to fruitful theoretical comparisons. In particular, I find that this system in some ways resembles Claire Jean Kim's U.S.-based theory of racial triangulation (2003).

Kim theorizes the racialization of Asian-Americans within the American "field of racial positions" as a process that does not happen in a vacuum in which each ethnoracial group receives particular treatment independent of the treatment of other groups, nor in a strict hierarchy bounded by Black and White, but "relative to and through interaction with" (2000, 106) all groups. These fields of racial positions acknowledge the power of public discourse, personal interactions, and structural forces in shaping the relative privilege of racial groups in a shifting arena specific to time and place. This form of racialization allows for multiple axes of racial formation (Kim focuses on insider/foreigner and superior/inferior) and foregrounds the manner in which different groups are racialized through comparisons with others. When she argues that Asian-Americans are "racially triangulated" within these fields, she illuminates the ways in which Asian-Americans define themselves and are defined by others in contrast to White and Black Americans through processes of relative valorization and social ostracism (107).

By borrowing Kim's vocabulary to refer to Israel, I locate Iquiteño-Jewish migrants within a field of racial positions that includes Palestinians, non-Jewish and non-Arab migrants, and multiple subgroups of Jews with varying levels of ethnic and religious privilege. Their identity is triangulated in relation to, especially, light-skinned Ashkenazi Jewish Israelis and Palestinians. Iquiteño Jews, mostly, are converts in the Conservative/Masorti movement, people with dark skin, people with Sephardi rather than Ashkenazi heritage, second- or third-language

speakers of Hebrew, and recent migrants. As such, they are racially constructed through social ostracism when compared to light-skinned Jewish Israelis, European-descended Ashkenazim, first-language speakers of Hebrew, those born in Israel, and Orthodox Jews, among other axes of identity. Legally, as non-Orthodox Jews, they have fewer de jure rights in Israel, such as to marriage. Socially, they face colorism, language discrimination, anti-immigrant bias, and anti-convert bias. At the same time, they enjoy innumerably more rights, both de facto and de jure, than Israel's Palestinian citizens.

How aware of this situation are the Jews of Iquitos? It is not clear to me or to my subjects how legible Iquiteños moving through Israel are as non-Arab, or even perhaps non-Christian. However, it is clear that in Iquitos, potential olim know enough about Israeli racial hierarchies to name themselves as emphatically *not* Palestinian, and to preemptively take action to distance themselves from Palestinians. Interview subjects did so by expressing their desire to move quickly away from Ramla, which they saw as a demeaning or undesirable place to live *because* it had a high proportion of Arab residents. A younger female friend of S, the interviewee who opened this chapter, told me in hushed tones that she had heard Ramla was violent and unhealthy —because of its Arab population. My youngest respondent, a young man of 18, planned to immediately join the IDF for a variety of reasons, including the opportunity to undergo an expedited Orthodox conversion in the military, but also to "defend [Israel] from rats[19]," meaning displaced Palestinian families who might wish to return to their ancestral homes. My hosts appeared generally moderate in their Peruvian political opinions[20], and were by and large

[19] "…es que quiero defender al estado de unas ratas."

[20] My hosts saw themselves as defenders of indigenous rights through their voting records and philanthropy, and spoke affectionately of younger congregants dabbling in APRA (the major Peruvian social-democratic party).

vehemently anti-Trump[21], but when I asked them who they would vote for in the then-upcoming Israeli prime ministerial election, they responded that they liked and approved of the Likud party's policies around checkpoints and the building of new settlements. Clearly, many Iquiteño Jews felt a deep anxiety about Palestinians in Israel. Those who did not involve themselves politically were nonetheless entering a situation in which their presence would inherently help the Israeli state disenfranchise Palestinians with equanimity.

At the same time, my respondents divulged much less anxiety to me about their position within the intra-Jewish Israeli hierarchy. Although in 2019, three individuals informed me that Ramla was undesirable not only because of the large Arab population but also because they felt other Latin American Jews were broadly undesirable to be identified with[22], few others expressed such sentiments. While many told me they felt anxious about learning and using Hebrew on a daily basis, introducing their children to such a new place, or finding good work, it seemed to me that most felt excited about merging into a Jewish-Israeli whole, deeming such assimilation entirely possible. It was not clear to me in any instance in my 2019 interviews that individuals felt they "should" be more identified with either Ashkenazi or Sephardi Jews in Israel, or that there was much trouble with racism within the Jewish population in Israel. Some older respondents, particularly when I spoke to community elders whose families had maintained Judaism through the Iquitos community's lean years in the late 20th century, mentioned that they strongly identified as *Loretano* Jews, who had a practice and history all their own, but that

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[21] When I asked questions about Iquiteño Jews' hypothetical future Israeli political affiliations in 2019, almost everyone at some point turned the conversation to asking somewhat disbelieving questions about Donald Trump's administration. I was in fact in Iquitos for the 2016 election, and the general mood in the Jewish community then was that it was definitely bad luck for the Americans.

[22] As in, they behaved in ways these Iquiteños felt were embarrassing and not sufficiently Jewish, such as by reportedly dancing and having parties on Shabbat.

identification waned quickly as respondents grew younger. The incidence of reporting such ties fell dramatically overall between 2016 and 2019. Those who felt those ties to a Peruvian, non-Ashkenazi form of Jewishness were also much less likely to report a desire to migrate or a sense of already *being* Israeli, rather than or in addition to being Peruvian (Waterhouse 2016). This provides a picture of Jews who feel themselves already comfortably ensconced within a privileged majority.

That said, I do find it interesting and important that even three of my respondents would feel the need to preemptively distance themselves from other Jewish Latin Americans living in Israel. It is even more interesting that not a single person I spoke to was interested in reclaiming the traditions of their Moroccan-Jewish ancestors, or connecting with Moroccan-Jewish communities within Israel. Certainly no one spoke of migrating to or even visiting Morocco. The current community leaders had not considered reaching out to the Sephardi Chief Rabbinate for assistance or educational materials, content with the Ashkenazi-normative materials and training sent by such organizations as the Jewish Agency for Israel[23]. However roundabout the way, and however quiet the transmission, clearly some Iquiteños are receiving some information that allows them to preemptively triangulate themselves before making aliya.

Information that comes to Iquitos about racialization in Israel comes from Iquiteño Jewish family members and friends living in Israel, the Spanish-language Jewish news media, rare features in the general Peruvian press dealing with Israeli issues, Jewish organizations interacting directly with Iquiteños, and visitors. Notably, most of the Iquiteño Jews could not name a favored Israeli party or politician when I asked them to (my hosts were unusually well-

[23] These materials were described in greater detail in the second chapter.

versed in Israeli politics). The people I spoke with were not ignorant or easily molded, and were justifiably proud of all the learning and hard intellectual work they had put in to becoming eligible olim. As I discussed in the first chapter, however, the materials used in Iquitos' conversion and migration-preparation courses come from a very limited number of sources, including the Jewish Agency for Israel and a number of self-avowedly Zionist rabbis from Argentina and New York. It does not seem outside the realm of possibility that information about daily life for Jews in Israel, about Palestinians generally, and about Jewish-Palestinian relations specifically, is heavily biased against Palestinians. Much as I found that the educational materials available in Iquitos strongly encouraged adopting love for, belief in, and loyalty to the modern state of Israel as an integral part of being a Jew, these same resources, which contain implicit information about racial hierarchies in Israel, emphasize Jewish-Palestinian strife and the importance of believing in Jewish difference as a core part of Jewish identity.

Iquiteño Jews are necessarily being purposefully manipulated by the Israeli government to form Jewish-supremacist ideas before entering Israel. However, many parts of the conversion and migration process encourage a kind of racialized nationalism. In particular, the community focus on the modern state of Israel as central to a contemporary Jewish identity and the need to perform dedication to Israel and a particular form of Jewishness in order to be permitted conversion encourage this. These small nationalisms compile, and the result is that people learn to discriminate without it being a necessity planned by any individual or agency. Given my observations, the entire process of Jewish education, conversion, and migration, with all its particularities, contingencies, and administrative requirements, seems to encourage anti-Arab

racism as a side-effect. And, as that side-effect is beneficial to the state, it seems evident that it is at the least allowed to continue, even if it was not a premeditated plan.

It is important to note that a perspective that puts the burden of creating this internalized hierarchy ignores Peruvian influences. I also suggest that, as most Iquiteño Jews belong to a relatively privileged ethnic group within Peru, most are not accustomed to thinking of themselves as racially marginalized. Rather, the Peruvian field of racial positions in which Iquiteño Jews locate themselves position Afro-Peruvians and indigenous Peruvians as the other points of the triangle, against whom the mestizo (mixed-race) Iquiteños define themselves as relatively valorized. Although nobody I interviewed specifically compared Palestinians to any other groups, I noted similarities in the ways in which some Iquiteños referred to their indigenous neighbors. They used racist epithets like "indio" in the way that my young interviewee referred to Palestinians as rats. One might assume, therefore, that Iquiteño Jews find it easy to imagine themselves fitting into a similarly elevated place in Israel, and difficult to imagine changes to their current position of privilege. Historically, futhermore, due to Peru's large indigenous population, racial censuses and other state documents struggled to clearly demarcate "indigenous" and "not-indigenous" categories based on descent alone; rather, the assumption of European cultural markers became key to classification (Loveman 2014, 131-2)[24]. Thus Iquiteño Jews might also draw on Peruvian historical dynamics around cultural assimilation as a means of racial advancement as a way of reading their options in an Israeli context. In

[24] Something Mara Loveman does not make explicit in *National Colors* is that, across Latin America, indigenous peoples were to some degree allowed to assimilate in this manner despite genocide and horrific oppression, whereas Black Latin Americans were regarded as fundamentally unassimilable. I see echoes of this divide in the case of non-Black non-Ashkenazi Jews who are nonetheless more assimilable (even if the terms of those assimilation are heinous) than Arabs, and also in the fact that the limited tolerance extended to "undesirable" brown Latin American Jews does not appear to extend to, say, Ethiopian-Jewish victims of state sterilization.

combining both perspectives, then, a proposed method of transmission for knowledge of the Jewish-Israeli/Palestinian divide begins to appear.

The other half of the equation is still missing, however. It is intriguing to consider that, at least in a relatively isolated place such as Iquitos, Israeli racial hierarchies reveal their fundamental dichotomy but not the complexity of intra-Jewish triangulation. Latin American Jews who migrate to Israel might expect to enter the country in a position of privilege, only to find that the truth is more complicated. Thus, it seems apparent that processes that train diasporic Jews to become potential Israeli citizens end up educating these future olim on their likely place within an Israeli field of racial positions — to an extent.

Demographic warfare:

Regardless of whether most Iquiteño Jews who wish to migrate to Israel expect to fit into a given field of racial positions in which they gain one enormous privilege, of Jewishness, but might yet face a very difficult battle against many forms of racialized prejudice, and whether their education on these matters is intentional or not, they are involved in an explicit attempt by the Israeli state to maintain and deepen that fundamental Jewish/Palestinian divide. To describe this instrumentalization of Latin American, specifically Peruvian, Jewish migrants, I will use Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian's concept of *demographic warfare* (2015).

Shalhoub-Kevorkian names the strategies the Israeli government uses to surveil and control Palestinian lives via restrictions on settlement, movement, and living spaces "demographic warfare." She highlights the ways in which population control is central to Zionist Israeli political projects. Preventing family reunification, return to homes and land owned before

the Nakba, and zoning laws are only some of the ways in which Palestinians are demographically controlled (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2015, 56, 84). The goal of this control is to eliminate Palestinians, or at the very least make sure they are outnumbered by an order of magnitude by Jews. I argue that the aggressive advertising and subsidizing of aliyah on part of the Israeli state also represents an act of demographic warfare. Shalhoub-Kevorkian only passingly refers to the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law (56), which governs immigration, but controls on immigration directly shape the makeup of a country's population. Although Iquiteño Jews are construed as racially undesirable, unideal Jews, they are nonetheless Jews. As such, they receive support and encouragement from the Israeli state as they journey towards becoming acceptable Israeli citizens. Thanks to the global reach of Jewish educators and educational material that position Israel as central to Jewish identity, far-flung diaspora communities can both be shaped and shape themselves into better-conforming citizens. After all, an ideal Jew is not needed to be superior to a Palestinian. It is no coincidence that so many Iquiteños have ended up in Ramla: in a city with a large Muslim minority, even undesirable Jews can serve the state's demographic purpose.

The Law of Return:

How does the Israeli citizenship and immigration regime navigate this complex set of desires? The key is in its power to enforce a specific set of standards for deciding who is a Jew, and therefore who is eligible to come to Israel as a potential Jewish citizen. The split between levels of citizenship and the impossibility of creating a neat and widely acceptable definition of

Jewishness reveals how weak and divided the Israeli political consensus is on issues of immigration, race, and Jewish identity.

The basis for this incorporation regime is the Law of Return of 1950. Together with the Citizenship Law of 1942, these two pieces of legislation form the basis of Israel as a state; they are arguably more important than any other law in Israel, including the constitutional Basic Laws (Barzilai 2010, 29). Put together, they define Israeli citizenship, and thus who is granted free movement into Israel, in a seemingly very simple way: if a person is a Jew, then they are a citizen. If they are a citizen, wherever they may be in the world, wherever they were born, they may enter Israel to live legally and with full government support. It is, of course, *not* so simple.

Citizenship is always subject to citizenship discourses, or the different "schools of thought" that govern what access to rights citizenship grants to its holders, how people think about citizenship, and who gets to be a citizen (Shafir and Peled 2002). In Israel, these citizenship discourses present a tug-of-war between ethno-nationalist and ultra-religious priorities. While some scholars add the demands of a liberal democratic regime (Shafir and Peled 2002), this seems like an increasingly over-optimistic characterization as Israel entrenches itself increasingly firmly in the category of illiberal democracy (Freedom House 2020) in which the appearance of being reasonably democratic excuses highly undemocratic social and civil rights violations (Zakaria 1997, 42). Iquiteño Jews face two particular and linked difficulties in integrating into this discourse: navigating Israel's tiered citizenship regime and being recognized as appropriately and fully Jewish.

Since the time of the second incorporation regime at the state's founding[25], Israel has effectively created tiers of de jure citizenship. On the highest tier are those recognized to be Jews by the state, as well as some minority groups such as Armenian Christians, with a fairly full complement of social, civil and political rights. On the next tier down are those reliant on the increasingly frail liberal framework of Israel's non-ethnic citizenship. The largest proportion of this group is "1948" Palestinians, those who remained within Israel's armistice boundaries, who are technically citizens but enjoy many fewer rights, which have historically been suspended at the state's whim (Shafir and Peled 2002). However, Jewish Israelis also fall into this category if their Judaism is somehow in question[26]. For example, Israeli-born Jewish people who are not strictly *halakhically* Jewish are denied the civil right of marriage despite being citizens (Hammer 2011, 1), and the very large demographic of ex-Soviet Jews whose halakhic bona fides are insufficient to merit full inclusion is a perennial source of anxiety to the state (Kravel Tovi 2017). Shifting between these tiers is the non-citizen legal resident, who enjoys a scattershot basket of rights and yet has more security and standing than undocumented or non-citizen Israelis. The situation an Iquiteño Jew wishes to avoid is that of becoming an ambiguous Jew, prevented from accessing full rights despite their citizenship.

The fact of this strange bifurcation highlights a cleft between secular nationalists and

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[25] Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled (2002) identify four incorporation regimes that have governed the integration of new citizens into Israel. The first began at the beginning of modern Zionist colonization of Israel in the late 19th century, the second at the founding of the modern State of Israel in 1948, the third during the 1967 War that brought an enormous amount of Palestinian territory under Israeli military control, and the fourth towards the end of the Cold War and, according to the authors, continuing today, characterized by the incorporation of more and more diverse groups of diasporic Jews and the shift away from liberal democracy generally.

[26] Other minorities do as well, such as some non-Jewish legal immigrants, but they are small in number and not considered a driving motivation behind citizenship-related lawmaking.

ethnocentric religious communities apparent in the Law of Return itself: that of the perennially impossible problem of deciding who is a Jew. This is a loaded question regardless of who is asking it. Identity and belonging are fraught with emotional, historical, and familial weight that becomes all the heavier and more complex when an identity is, like Jewishness, a shifting blend of culture, religion, and ethnicity. It becomes truly urgent when the allocation of basic rights depends on fitting this deeply personal and subjective identification into a bureaucratic box and proving it to the satisfaction of an immigration judge. When this is the case, deciding who is Jewish "is not an autonomous problem waiting to be politically and legally resolved but rather a social language that serves the political purposes of social engineering" (Barzilai 2010, 28). Who decides who is Jewish has created a powerful tool for social and political control.

According to Jewish religious law, halakha, a Jewish person is someone with a Jewish mother or someone who has converted through an extended community process under the guidance of a rabbi. These rulings postdate the Biblical period and so derive entirely from rabbinical debate (Hammer 2011). As may be predictable by this point, this seemingly simple pair of criteria are in fact very complex. What if the Jewish mother is herself a convert? What if a child is adopted? What about those whose fathers are Jewish, or those born of Jewish parents who do not practice, or those born to a Jewish mother who have converted to a different religion? What if the conversion is not Orthodox? And whatever the case is, how do you prove it?

The Law of Return attempts to avoid these complications for immigration purposes by making the requirements for entry relatively loose. Today, those with Jewish parents or at least one Jewish grandparent and their spouses and children may enter Israel and achieve some level of citizenship (Fisher 2019, 5). This more permissive approach fits badly with other stricter state

applications of halakha, however. They are Jewish enough to enter Israel, Jewish enough to be subjected to the draft, and Jewish enough, in many cases, to consider their Jewishness an indelible part of their identity. However, they are not Jewish enough (or cannot prove they are Jewish enough) to fully access the benefits of Israeli citizenship. This divide is exemplary of the clumsy compromises Israel has had to make between secular nationalists and the ultra-religious, compromises visible in the history of the Law of Return.

Before 1970, the Law of Return granted entry to those with Jewish ancestry up to three generations back; the major amendment of the Law of Return in that year to its present, more restricted form was the culmination of two decades of court and legislative fights that progressively tightened the criteria for entry across many potential defining aspects of Jewishness[27] (Fisher 2019, 5). The inherent messiness and incompleteness of this project is highlighted by the many edge-cases that still exist: Conservative/Masorti, Reform, or Reconstructionist conversions; patrilineal Jews, deconversions, adoptees, those with no access to documents of "proof" such as ketubahs, photographs of tombstones, etc.

The Jews of Iquitos match many of these descriptions, most importantly, those of being patrilineal, of having difficulty finding proof of Jewish ancestry, and of having non-Orthodox

[27] In 1962, for example, the Supreme Court ruled that people previously legally considered to be Jews who converted to a different religion lost their eligibility for immigration and citizenship — an interesting, religion-forward contrast to the increased ethnic emphasis of the 1970 amendment, which prioritized immediate familial connections (Fisher 2019, 5).

conversions[28]. Resolving this situation via conversion to the level which allows Iquiteños the status of olim, though not of fully enfranchised Israeli citizens, is an arduous and expensive process for members of the community, but it is also arduous and expensive for Israel, and in the end only produces unideal Jews. Why bother? In order to meet the demands of demographic warfare for Jewish bodies while taking a conciliatory stance towards ultra-Orthodox opponents, Israel has essentially developed different stances towards incorporation to try to make use[29] of those who fall into these edge cases.

Drawing on the work of Netanel Fisher (2019), I argue that these stances more or less fall into the following camps. Ethnonationalist inclusion, which is ironically accepting of different modes of Jewishness in the pursuit of Jewish ethnicity, seeks to meet the racist demands of demographic warfare by welcoming the diaspora into Israel, albeit often as second-class citizens. Ultra-Orthodox incorporation regimes are in fact exclusion regimes, as very few potential immigrants can muster the evidence necessary to prove their Jewishness or pass through a stringent Orthodox conversion process. In the middle are the (relatively) centrist religious Zionists, who do their best to be a bridge between these two camps, in particular by creating special conversion schools (Kravel Tovi 2017), funding the Jewish Agency for Israel and similar

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[28] The history of the community is discussed in greater depth in the first and second chapters, but in short, most Iquiteño Jews' Jewish ancestry was patrilineal from the start due to gendered migration dynamics. After several generations in Perú, many, though not all, let their Judaism lapse. Meanwhile, the community infrastructure crumbled, and in the absence of a rabbi or official record-keeper, and in the paper-destroying environs of the jungle, many important family records were lost. As such, being unable to prove with the required documentation for a legally acceptable level of Jewishness, most Iquiteños must undergo a Jewish conversion process in order for the state to recognize them enough to grant them entry under the Law of Return. Because the community has had the easiest access to Conservative/ Masorti rabbis, these conversions are enough to ensure entry but not enough to ensure Iquiteño-Jewish olim the highest level of citizenship rights.

[29] This concept of the usefulness of conversion owes much to Gauri Viswanathan's work in *Outside the Fold* (1998).

bodies, deciding which aspects of life in Israel should be determined by the secular face or the religious face of the state. Instead of solving the basic issue (arguably an impossible task without fundamentally changing Israel's stance towards Palestinians), these religious Zionists create an "Israeli halakha" (Fisher 2019) that ultimately pushes an increasingly ethnicity-dependent definition of Jewishness under a cloak of halakhic observance.

Settling for Conversion:

Encouraging and regulating conversion, then, is one of the state's main tools to resolve these competing camps and strengthen the Israeli definition of Jewishness. And so, Iquiteño Jews represent a marginal case that touches on an unusual number of these edge cases, inadequacies, and shaky bridges — they are reliant upon the secular-nationalist programming that provides them with support without which migration to Israel would be impossible, but are beholden to ultra-Orthodox strictures that guide their practices and lives before and after immigration. This reveals not only the tension and the strange inefficiencies of Israel's immigration regime, but the larger compromises that must occur between secular-nationalist and religious forces within the state, *and* the almost separate racial categorizations that exist side-by-side. As such, Jews who are difficult to incorporate into the idealized nation of Israel unsettle the state—but the apparent effectiveness and even existence of programs to encourage homogenization through conversion demonstrate how conversion can also strengthen it.

The concept of an unsettling conversion derives from Gauri Viswanathan (1998). Because conversion involves change, critique, and examination of religious hierarchies on the part of the convert and all those who are aware of the convert, it both reveals and hides the

slippery, blurry edges of religious self-identification and the power of society and the state to control that identification. Taking as given that religion is a mode of social identification akin to race, gender, or class, Viswanathan unpicks the idea that religion can ever be successfully relegated to the private, personal realm by a secular state[30], and that it can be easily pigeonholed by scholars as simply another kind of ideology like party affiliation. Instead, belief and faith intertwine with legislation, culture, politics, and public life in ways that cannot be neatly separated. Furthermore, a religion can be a site of knowledge construction, a site of oppression, and a site of resistance — functions that bely an easy classification. Conversion, therefore, is both intensely personal and entirely public and political, as it begs questions about society, individual responsibilities, and state/societal power.

Viswanathan focuses on clear-cut conversions from one religion to another, mainly conversions from minority to majority religions or vice-versa. Furthermore, in her focus on England, Viswanathan is interested in how conversion fits narratives of tolerant, (allegedly) secular[31], multicultural states. This is not quite the situation of the Jews of Iquitos—how to define a conversion from one religion to more or less the same religion, so that one can move from a place where one is a minority religion to a place where one would be the majority religion in a state that makes no pretense at secularity? Nonetheless, the critique she makes of the state's role in defining religious identity and conversion is highly applicable. Because converts in general can make claims on the state, and because the claim olim make on Israel is so strong and

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[30] Israel is emphatically not a secular state, but there are definitely strands that insist that it should not be an Orthodox one.

[31] I do not believe as much as Viswanathan seems to in the true secularity of a state that claims to be secular — Gramsci-style hegemony applies to religion, and even (or perhaps especially) states that claim to be entirely secular fail to notice the ways in which their values and procedures are deeply influenced by whatever the hegemonic religion may be.

foundational, the state engages in constant legislation and bureaucratization of what is a valid conversion, and therefore, who is a valid convert and what that validity looks like. As discussed in this chapter, this might include protecting or assigning rights, adjudicating relevant court cases, or navigating the space between religious and secular law. This is essentially the legalization of religious authenticity, the center around which my study of Iquitos turns.

Even in Judaism, where converts are meant to be above question, fully absorbed into the fabric of Jewish life, and the history of conversion more or less personal, when Judaism becomes theocratic, spirituality is "usurped by the state" (Viswanathan 1998, 16), which must regulate converts' authenticity. This creates an interesting double-bind for the state itself: even though this turning to the state to confirm identity or authenticity strengthens the perception of the state as the place to turn to for help, it exposes the untruth of a truly secular, disinterested, multicultural state as it exposes the state's interest in religious intervention. By attempting to exert power over this process, the state highlights its own weaknesses—which may be the same as weakening itself.

However, because even marginal Jews are privileged above Palestinians, this is not all conversion does in Israel. When marginal Jews convert in Israel, they are in fact actively strengthening the state in its aims of demographic warfare. When diasporic Jews convert in order to enter Israel, they do the same. Also, Fisher (2019) points out that as much as the ultra-Orthodox protest the entry of Jews into Israel, and sometimes even the existence of Israel, they use state power—the aforementioned Israeli halakha—to enforce their preferred standards in ways that would be simply impossible if their purported Orthodox readings of sacred texts were

truly being upheld[32]. As such, even the problem of these unideal converting Jews helps bring a powerful group into the fold.

In particular, marginal Jews can present a major racial destabilization to the state. Former Soviet Union Jewish migrants, who can usually more easily pass for Ashkenazi than Iquiteños can and so cause much racial consternation when they are denied the rights they are supposedly owed according to their acculturation into Ashkenazi Israeli culture, incontrovertibly "settle" the state when they convert (Kravel-Tovi 2015, 129). When Iquiteño olim convert in an Ashkenazi method before even leaving their home country, they too help the avoid these scenes of racial tension. Even though their dark skin and accents in Hebrew are punished in Israel's racist society, their assimilation into an Ashkenazi *ethnic* identity through conversion is settling. Furthermore, even their very undesirability emphasizes the fundamental difference in the Israeli racial project between Jews and Palestinians. As at the individual level, where religious concerns and practical concerns converge, this is an instance in which two things are true at once. Transnational state influence over conversion is both settling and unsettling of definitions of Jewish and of Israel's overall racial project, papering over the most obvious cracks and serving Israel's immediate demographic need, but at the same time reinforcing an unstable racist system that cannot hold the full complexity of the diaspora.

Conclusion:

To sum up, diasporic immigration in Israel is encouraged and made possible by the foundational Law of Return and the pragmatic need to wage demographic warfare by literally outnumbering Palestinians with Jews. It is discouraged by Israeli racism and anti-Sephardic/

[32] Similarly, no one to my knowledge argues that the hydroponic fields should lie fallow for a jubilee year every five decades — another example of the picking-and-choosing approach of Israeli halakha.

Mizrahi sentiments, as well as the disproportionately powerful ultra-Orthodox lobby. Therefore, immigration policy has to strike a balance between serving their ethno-nationalist agenda and appeasing the ultra-Orthodox, resulting in a system which encourages mass migration, but only under a labyrinthine set of conditions that ensure migrants will find it easier to assimilate into the Ashkenazi mainstream than to maintain their own traditions even as they are used to further Israel's anti-Palestinian agenda.

However it is defined, the emphasis on *Jewishness* as the basis for the right to reside in Israel, even if one is not a citizen, prevents movements towards equitable, antiracist, antinationalist citizenship from gaining traction. It pushes definitions of Jewishness ever more towards an ethnic base, while Ashkenazi ethnocentrism further racializes the definition and therefore the state. This shut-out of a common citizenship regime from Israeli discourse does prevent many Jews from obtaining Israeli citizenship, but its primary purpose is to forestall Palestinian claims on Israeli citizenship. Simply broadening the definition of Jewishness and asserting secular power to do so could open the doors to massive new Jewish migration to Israel even as Palestinians remain excluded from returning—but that is not in fact the goal of the state. As unsettling as it may be for the state to navigate the many edge cases its policies create, and as difficult and expensive as it may be for Israel to fund its conversion and diaspora-welcoming apparatus, this tug-of-war produces a satisfying-enough compromise to keep things steady. "Israeli halakha" enforces a racialized definition of Jewishness that allows conversion to actually settle the state, as the imperative to win at demographic warfare supersedes the need for an internally-consistent definition of Jewishness as a religion or culture.

As I see it, this situation leaves two paths for Jews on the margins of Israeliness who wish to enter Israel as full citizens. First, they may attempt to prove their Jewishness in the manner prescribed by the state and religious authorities by converting or "converting" Orthodoxly or changing their manner of practice. Many institutions, both state-run and not, exist to help them along this path, and as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the forming of racial identities through triangulation effectively primes potential olim for these activities. The second option is that marginal Jews form unusual coalitions with other groups in similar situations, such as Palestinians, disenfranchised Mizrahim, and "not-Jewish Jews" to push back against the ethnic typing that the Israeli citizenship regime deem necessary. If this sort of solidarity became possible, the logic of demographic warfare could no longer be sustainable or sustaining, and the unsettling nature of state intrusion into the spiritual realm of Jewishness would become ever more apparent and destabilizing.

CONCLUSION

The lazy assumptions challenged by Iquiteño Jews can be seen as a cone, moving out. At the level of the individual, they challenge assumptions about the power of religion to effect changes in political action and self-identification beyond religion. On the level of states, they reveal much about how racism operates through migration in Israel specifically, and also among Jews generally. Finally, at the most global level, they make clear the power that the conflation of diaspora with transnationalism grants interested parties to sway very non-theoretical people-movement and self-identification across borders. All together, these arguments combine to demonstrate that transnational communities differ from diasporic peoples, a difference that allows interested parties, from organizations to states, to adapt the language of diaspora to influence migration patterns, cross-border activity, and convergences of religion and self-interest, which together powerfully shape racial formation and self-identification within and outside of the diasporic group in question.

Intimately, personally, they bely the sociological ideal that divorces the very real role that spirituality and religion play in the everyday lives of people of faith. Instead, decisions around education, migration, and conversion blend the spiritual and the practical until the two cannot be separated. The tendency of social scientists to listen to their subjects explain how their lives have proceeded, shaped by religion, and then decide to impose their own ideas of what *really* happened is not possible to apply here. The religious practices of Judaism specifically are integrated into daily life from the very beginning, and when, as in Iquitos, religious behavior and belief are prerequisite to practical benefits, it becomes almost impossible to discern the *true* reason for behavior — because it is misguided and disrespectful to subjects to assume that their

truths are fundamentally different from the researcher's truth. When the Jews of Iquitos convert because they want to migrate, and migrate because they want to convert, it becomes eminently clear that disregarding the statements made by migrating Jews in particular, but also those of any person who claims that faith, belief, or spirit moved them to action, is blinkered and lacking in nuance. Rather, these truths coexist and are far more complex than a fashionable and pseudo-scientific divorce of the spiritual from the practical.

On the international stage, and specifically on the road between the Jewish diaspora and Israel, Iquiteño Jews are but one of many cases that reveal the tenuous balance of Israeli politics between exclusionary intra-Jewish racism and the anti-Palestinian sentiments that make for an ironically inclusive immigration regime. They are also, however, one of only a few cases where it is absolutely clear how Israel can advertise itself, its politics, and its definition of Jewishness to potential immigrants in the absence of other powerful factors (such as immediate danger to life or mass expulsion, for example, which drove many other large-scale migrations to Israel in the recent past). Iquiteño Jews demonstrate why discourse on demographic warfare should expand to include Israel's international demographic goals that are met by the cultivation of diaspora and converted immigrants. Meanwhile, they illuminate the power dynamics that stories of migration to Israel often flatten under a single narrative of Zionist nationalism or religious fervor.

Finally, on the level of global sociological study and the movement of money, people, and goods across borders, they challenge the assumption that diaspora and transnational community are simple synonyms. Instead, the Jews of Iquitos operate in a world that experiences both diaspora and transnationalism as separate, but linked phenomena. Diaspora, as a concept that predates the modern nation-state, should be obviously different to any random transnational

social field. Although it can be usefully descriptive when discussing the spread of people across the globe from a single origin, it matters that it maintain its individuality. Members of Roma, Jewish, and Black diasporas, among other diasporic peoples whose existence spans multiple transnational social fields, actively engage with *concepts* of diaspora that carry significantly more emotional and historical weight than the prosaic realities of transnational activity. This makes diaspora incredibly useful to those who wish to influence transnational behavior, for whatever reason. The networks that allowed Jerusalemite emissaries to find safe harbor in Amsterdam have not vanished; they have merely changed, become less visible in the grand people-movements of the industrial age. As Israel appeals to diasporic sentiment to draw in immigrants from places so far apart that they share no transnational field at all, so it is possible to study the impacts of pan-African and pan-Asian political and artistic movements, and so it is possible for NGOs to rake in transnational donations by appealing to communities across the world who have never shared experiences. The rhetoric of real or imagined kinship through diaspora stimulates multiple transitional actions. Appeals to diaspora sentiment, therefore, are far too useful in the contemporary transnational day for researchers to ignore their distinctive drawing power.

As vital as the story of the Jews of Iquitos is, I am aware that this thesis covers only one chapter. I was unable to visit the fast-growing Latinx communities springing up in Ramla, Beersheba, and Tel Aviv so that the migrants I spoke to in Perú could tell me how their lives, identification, and point of view have changed. I personally intend to continue this work in the future, so that this community may continue to teach me. Additionally, Jewish migration from Iquitos is only two decades old. It is entirely possible that the dynamics of migration may

change. I am particularly interested to know if, eventually, the circular dynamics that characterize so much non-Jewish Peruvian migration will emerge in the Iquiteño-Jewish population. Any changes, which will come although I do not know what they will be, will reveal further challenges to and constructions of Judaism, faith, and migration.

Furthermore, Latinx-Jewish communities in Israel are understudied in general, in keeping with the general neglect of scholarship that centers non-White, non-Ashkenazi Jews. My research has led me to believe that this is at least partially due to the disconnect between the majority-English-speaking Jewish scholars of the U.S., the Hebrew-speaking scholars of Israel, and the majority-Spanish-speaking and -Portuguese-speaking scholars of Latin America. Much Spanish-language scholarship exists and deals with questions of Jewish national identity, how Jews fit into Latin American racial hierarchies, Ashkenazi-Sephardi tensions, the fraught relationships between diasporic Jews and Israel, and Jewish-Latin American migration.[33] That U.S. and Israeli scholarship generally disregards these voices means that their scholarship understands Jewish life and Jewishness outside the contemporary, bipolar Jewish world poorly. Latin American-Jewish experiences matter, and Israeli and U.S. scholars should further integrate such work into their own.

Meanwhile, as mentioned briefly at the end of the third chapter, understanding how and why Israel seeks out and yet struggles with migrants could up avenues for resistance and antiracist work. Applying this understanding of how countries advertise themselves to potential migrants and communicate racial hierarchies before migrants even set foot on new soil can help us destroy the racism inherent in our own countries' immigration apparatuses.

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[33] Raanan Rein, Judit Bokser-Liwerant, Sílvia Glocer, Damián Setton, Margarita Cadavid Otero, Haim Avni, and Emmanuel Nicolás Kahan are only a few.

Finally, and on a personal note that I have otherwise neglected, I wish to urge the Jewish readers of this thesis to deeply consider with me how our own conceptions of Jewish identity and the diaspora may uphold destructive, exclusionary, and racist ideas that harm Jews everywhere. The exoticizing treatment that the Jews of Iquitos receive is part of a pernicious intra-community racism that rips at the fabric of Jewish communities across the world. That Judaism and Jewishness should be able to thrive in many hundreds of unique ways across time and space is a testament to the strength and beauty of its ethical platform and cultures. Although this spread of Jews and Jewishness has frequently been unwilling and violent —and has sometimes caused violence itself, as some Jews have assimilated into settler cultures on occupied lands— the constant adaptation and reinvention of Jewishness has allowed it to be radically creative. The totality of Jewishness is so much more tenacious and fascinating than a singular, restrictive Jewishness. As the Jewish world becomes increasingly concentrated in the United States and Israel, conceptions of what it means to be a Jew grow narrower and narrower. The loss of diversity in practice and identification harms the current efforts of Jews to adapt as we seek safety, justice, and belonging in a changing world. Let us look beyond our immediate communities so that we can continue to renew ourselves in ways that honor the breadth of our history and the many possibilities of our futures.

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