In the Name of the Community: Populism, Ethnicity, and Politics among the Jews of Argentina under Perón, 1946–1955

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We are with the regime because we are first of all Argentines, and because the most excellent President of the nation has declared on many occasions that he is against racial discrimination and has shown this through his good gestures.

— Organización Israelita Argentina (OIA)

We keep a clear rule of loyalty: to the Jewish and to the Argentine. Not half Argentines and half Jews, but rather simultaneously Jews and Argentines. We feel identified with all that is Argentine, within the centenary tradition consecrated in the National Constitution; we feel solidarity with the Jewish, loyal to the millennial tradition that lives in the Torah.

— Instituto Judío Argentino de Cultura e Información (IJA)

As Argentines, as citizens, and as free men, Jews profess the total gamut of opinions and exercise all range of activities that are common with the totality of our people. Other entities group them or represent them according to each class of militancy or activity. The DAIA, no. The DAIA represents them integrally, as Argentine Jews. It is as its name states, a delegation of all other institutions: the representation of the entire community.

— Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (DAIA)

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Over the past several decades, scholars of Latin America have accomplished great feats in documenting the history of immigration in the region and linking it to the wider historiography of global mass migration during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet while they have chronicled the migratory process, the formation of immigrant communities, and the construction of New World immigrant identities during the so-called Liberal Era, the development of these newly created communities in the period after 1930 merits further analysis.

In the realm of politics, for example, scholars are only now beginning to document the way in which immigrant communities both influenced and were influenced by the rise of the populist movements that dominated the political landscape of Latin America for nearly three decades after 1930. I seek to expand our understanding of this issue by considering how the Jewish community of Argentina responded to the rise of populism under Juan D. Perón between 1946 and 1955.


The election of Juan Perón in February 1946 forever changed the balance of Argentine political and social life. Campaigning on a platform of social justice, political sovereignty, and economic independence, Perón defied the traditional liberal-based political system that had dominated Argentina since the 1860s and mobilized millions of new social actors in support of a populist national vision. Yet, while scholars have devoted a considerable amount of attention to his relationship with organized labor, the Catholic Church, the military, women, and even students, far less consideration has been given to the impact of Peronism on the country’s numerous immigrant and ethnic communities. In fact, Peronist corporatism extended to virtually all sectors of Argentine society, and there is evidence to suggest that the regime attempted to mobilize immigrant communities just as it did other prominent social groupings. As one of


5. By corporatism, I refer to a political model that organizes society according to a series of competing interest groups, rather than as individuals. These, in turn, are mediated by the power of a central state. Although corporatism is most often associated with European fascism in the 1930s, it frequently informed Latin American populist political thinking as well. For a general comparative analysis of corporatism as a political philosophy, see Howard Wiarda, Corporatism and Comparative Politics: The Other Great “Ism” (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997). See also Michael Conniff, ed., Latin American Populism in Comparative Perspective (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1982). With regard to ethnic groups, Perón made various political appeals to members of Argentina’s Italian, German, and Middle Eastern communities on the basis of ethnic affinity and national identity. For example, see the text of Perón’s speech to an extraordinary congress of
Argentina’s largest and most distinctive ethnic minorities, the country’s three hundred thousand Jews were especially noteworthy in this regard.6 In particular, Perón sought to attract Jewish support for his “New Argentina” in order to improve his tarnished international reputation as a Nazi-fascist sympathizer and as part of his larger effort to create an image of what Mariano Plotkin has termed a “passive consensus” in the country.7 As such, the rise of Perón and his populist political movement represented a great challenge to established forms of Jewish ethnic and political identity in the country, ultimately precipitating an intense struggle to speak for the community and represent it at the national level, between three rival organizations: the Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas, the Organización Israelita Argentina, and the Instituto Judío Argentino de Cultura e Información.

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6. This approximation is based on Sergio DellaPergolla’s groundbreaking 1992 study of Latin America’s Jewish population. The 1947 national census, which specified the religion of the respondents, reported a Jewish population of 249,330; Dirección Nacional del Servicio Estadistico, IV Censo general de la nación, vol. 1, Censo de población (Buenos Aires, 1947). However, it is likely that this figure was underreported, owing to Jewish fears of anti-Semitism and to the inclusion of “without religion” as a possible response on the census form. DellaPergolla, working backward from an estimate of 310,000 Jews in 1960, calculated a Jewish population of 294,000 for 1945–50 and 305,000 for 1950–55; DellaPergolla, “Demographic Trends of Latin American Jewry,” in The Jewish Presence in Latin America, ed. Judith Elkin and Gilbert Merkx (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987). It should also be noted that this figure is considerably less than estimates from that era of 350–400,000; see, e.g., American Jewish Yearbook 48 (1946–47).

Prior to Perón’s rise to power, the Jewish community had remained somewhat ambiguous with regard to Argentine national politics. Although individual Jews had become prominent members of the country’s Radical, Socialist, and Communist parties, the community as a whole had remained relatively divided and detached from the surrounding political system. In fact, it was only in 1935 that community leaders were able to come together to form any type of political representation at the national level, in the form of the Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (DAIA). Originally founded to combat the rising tide of anti-Semitism both at home and abroad during the 1930s, this federation of 33 institutions served to represent the community as well, owing to the broad composition of its membership, which included organizations from across the social, political, and cultural spectrum. In its dealings with the state, however, the DAIA generally limited its voice to matters of direct Jewish concern (such as the protection of Jewish institutions, religious practices, or public use of the Yiddish language) and avoided becoming too politicized within Argentine partisan politics. “The Jewish collective as such,” read one DAIA declaration, “and the DAIA as its representation, has not and does not participate in questions of Argentine politics, which it understands to be incumbent upon each individual in their condition as Argentine citizens.”

Perón’s rise to power profoundly challenged this ideal. For Perón not only appealed to Jews as individuals, as his more liberal predecessors had done, he also sought to mobilize them as a corporate community, much as he did with the organized labor movement, the military, or the Catholic Church. In the words of Isaias Lerner, son of a prominent community leader, “The triumph of Perón . . . meant a greater participation of the community in the political arena. For the first time in Argentina’s political history, a political party courted our community.”


Moreover, Perón also sought to draw upon the community’s highly developed institutional infrastructure as a means of gaining support from a constituency whose members themselves remained suspicious of his nationalist and authoritarian leanings. All of this posed a severe test for the DAIA, which—as the community’s fledgling national organization—found itself forced to respond to Perón’s new and more activist state. Initially opting for a middle course of mediation and compromise, the DAIA soon found itself outflanked on both the Peronist and anti-Peronist fronts.

From the Peronist side, DAIA leaders quickly discovered that the Peronist regime demanded more than its predecessors in exchange for political concessions. Instead of simple acquiescence and lukewarm pledges of national loyalty, Perón expected the community to offer concessions of its own, ranging from public acknowledgement of his stance against racial and religious discrimination to outright panegyrics on behalf of the president and the Peronist party. When DAIA leaders did not go far enough in meeting these demands, a small number of Jews allied to the Peronist movement created their own political organization, in February 1947, as a direct challenge to the DAIA and its function as the community’s representative institution. With Perón’s approval, this Organización Israelita Argentina (OIA) sought to intercede with the state on matters of Jewish concern and promote Peronism within the community more generally. On the anti-Peronist front, a small number of more liberal leaders in the community also banded together in July 1948 to create the Instituto Judío Argentino de Cultura e Información (IJA). Motivated by the integrationist politics of the American Jewish Committee in the United States, the founders of the IJA rejected both the DAIA and the OIA and instead encouraged the Jewish community to align itself more fully with the traditional political parties of the anti-Peronist opposition, refraining from any public contact with Peronist officials beyond what was absolutely necessary to ensure the maintenance of Jewish life in the country.

11. Substantial evidence suggests that Jews voted overwhelmingly against Perón in the 1946 election. For one, Perón tended to garner a lower percentage of votes in electoral districts with high concentrations of Jews, at least in the city of Buenos Aires. In addition, nearly all segments of the Jewish press in Argentina supported the opposition parties of the Unión Democrática in one form or another. This ranged from Zionists on the right to Socialists (Bundists) and Communists on the left. Although empirical evidence of Jewish electoral behavior is less clear for the 1951 elections, anecdotal evidence suggests that Perón continued to remain unpopular among the community throughout his first two terms; See Lawrence D. Bell, “The Jews and Perón: Communal Politics and National Identity in Peronist Argentina, 1946–1955” (Ph.D. diss., The Ohio State Univ., 2002).

12. On “integrationism” within the context of Jewish politics, see Ezra Mendelsohn’s excellent and concise On Modern Jewish Politics (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993). See also
It is precisely the contested relationship between these three institutions to represent the larger Jewish community that I explore here in this article. While previous studies have considered the significance of the Peronist OIA and its efforts to politicize the Jewish community, they have also tended to overlook the activities of the DAIA and the IJA. I seek to broaden this perspective by interpreting the actions of the OIA as just one of several competing Jewish responses to Peronism. This approach makes it clear that although Perón never attempted to co-opt the Jewish community directly as he did with other corporate groups, his movement nevertheless presented a substantial challenge to established forms of communal organization and identity, one that was not always benign or entirely voluntary. In fact, the increased contact between Jewish institutions and Perón’s activist, and often manipulative, state prompted a period of substantial ideological adjustment within the community, leading to a proliferation of new discourses of Argentine-Jewish political behavior. Indeed, as Leonardo Senkman has recently written, “The nationalist call for popular participation in the reconstruction of their countries” under populist regimes “demanded of immigrant and indigenous ethnic communities new modes for incorporating their cohesive collective identities into the new ideological discourse.”

Above all else, I argue that the Jewish response to Peronism was dominated by a fundamental interplay between an “external” arena of Argentine national politics and an “internal” arena of Jewish communal politics. In many ways, Harriet Freidenreich’s characterization of liberal Jewish politics in Jewish Politics in Vienna, 1918–1938 (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1991). For a history of the American Jewish Committee, see Naomi Cohen, Not Free to Desist (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972).


15. On the eve of Perón’s rise to power, Argentine-Jewish communal politics in general were organized along European lines, with three larger camps competing for power and
this distinction reflects the findings of Jewish political scientist Daniel Elazar, who has argued that Jewish political behavior has historically operated on three different levels: the state (*medina*), the community (*kehilla*), and the Jewish polity as a whole worldwide (*edah*). In the external realm of state politics, Perón’s popular, inclusive, and corporatist ideology by its very nature forced a redefinition of Jewish political behavior and identity. The older liberal notion of the *crisol de razas*, or melting pot, had previously discouraged collective Jewish participation in national politics. However, Jewish leaders now found themselves compelled to respond to the Peronist state as a corporate-style community. Since this idea of collective Jewish political participation ran seriously counter to the DAIA’s established pattern of independent and individual political activity, it in effect threatened to undermine the organization’s political effectiveness, leading to the rise of competing political discourses among the OIA and the IJA.

At the same time, conditions in the internal domain of Jewish politics, both locally (at the level of *kehilla*) and globally (at the level of the *edah*) also profoundly influenced and intersected with the external politics of the DAIA, OIA, and IJA. For just as Perón was galvanizing the Argentine political imagination with his reformist, nationalist, and populist political vision, an equally inspiring ideology was changing the face of international Jewish politics—Zionism. Quite by accident, Perón’s first term in office coincided with the end of the Second World War and the struggle for Jewish national liberation in Palestine.


In the wake of the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948, the spectrum of Old World Jewish politics worldwide shifted radically away from the traditional Yiddish-speaking parties of the Jewish Left and toward the revitalized, Hebrew-oriented parties of the Zionist movement. In Argentina, this shift manifested itself in the capture of most of the community’s social and charitable institutions by Zionist political parties or their allies in the years following World War II and by a tremendous outpouring of popular support for Zionism more generally in the community at large.  

As a result, debates over Peronism within the Jewish community were never entirely separate from events affecting the larger Jewish political arena worldwide, and the two domains were instead inextricably bound together in an uneasy coexistence. In fact, it was this series of dramatic events in the Old World, even more than the rise of Peronism in the New, that captured the hearts and the political imagination of Jews in Argentina during the decade from 1946 to 1955. This meant that only an organization that successfully appealed to the Zionist aspirations of the majority of Argentine Jews could generate the kind of popular support and enthusiasm necessary to function as their legitimate voice at the national level. This, then, was the challenge that faced the three would-be representatives of Argentine Jewry after 1946. They needed to develop a formula for political behavior in the national arena that could be reconciled with the Zionist identity that dominated the internal realm of Jewish communal politics. Ultimately, I argue that, despite serious setbacks, the DAIA was able to resist the challenges posed by the OIA and the IJA and emerge as the nation’s predominant Jewish institution by 1955 precisely because it was best able to negotiate this distinction.

17. Although there is no precise estimate for the number of Jewish institutions in the country by 1946, they most certainly counted in the hundreds and included burial societies, religious congregations, mutual-aid associations, residents’ associations (landsmanshaftn), charitable societies, a Jewish hospital, and even an immigrant protection society. On the panorama of Jewish institutional life in the country prior to 1930, see Mirelman, *Jewish Buenos Aires*; and also Elkin, *The Jews of Latin America*. Perhaps the greatest victory of Zionism within the Argentine-Jewish community during this time came in 1949, when the Zionists and their allies won full control over the nation’s largest Jewish institution, the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina, for the first time. For more on this and its relation to the politics of the DAIA, OIA, and IJA, see Lawrence D. Bell, “Bitter Conquest: Zionists against Progressive Jews and the Making of Post-War Jewish Politics in Argentina, 1946–1955,” *Jewish History* 17 (2003): 285–308. See also Sylvia Schenkolewski, “La conquista de las comunidades: El movimiento sionista y la comunidad Ashkenazi de Buenos Aires (1935–1949),” *Judaica Latinoamericana* II; and *The Zionist Movement and the Zionist Parties in Argentina, 1935–1948* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes / Hassifiya Haziyonit, 1996).
The Project of the OIA: Integration through Peronization

Peronist populism highlighted a long-standing ambivalence within the Jewish community concerning its proper place within Argentine national politics. Although several prominent Jews had become influential leaders within the country’s various political parties before 1946, the community as a whole and its institutions had traditionally advocated a policy of neutrality with regard to national political questions. While this policy had worked well under the liberal regimes prior to 1943, it now faced a severe test from Perón and his corporatist vision of the state and society. Unlike his liberal predecessors, Perón appealed to the Jews as a collective; as a result, the community was increasingly pressured to respond as a collective and to define its stance on the national political level.

With this in mind, a small group of Jews banded together in February 1947 to form the Organización Israelita Argentina, an openly Peronist political entity that aspired to militate for Perón among Argentina’s Jewish community and represent that community as a whole before the state. Although its exact origins are unclear, it seems the idea was first hatched by Abraham Krislavin, a Jewish Peronist supporter who served as undersecretary of the interior during Perón’s first administration. According to a secret memorandum of the World Jewish Congress, there had been some “first cautious moves to create a Jewish Peronist organization in the middle of 1945,” but these had failed due to lack of support within the community. Now, with Perón comfortably in power, this second effort was launched with the goal of “demonstrating to Perón that there were Jews who supported him.” Although there is no available record of its membership, an early press release in the Yiddish-language daily Di Presse, appearing on February 18, 1947, listed Salvador Woscoff as president of the new organization, with 14 other members comprising its board of directors.

18. Krislavin was the brother-in-law of Angel Borlenghi, Perón’s highly successful secretary of the interior, who was removed from office in 1955 during Perón’s conflict with the Catholic Church; see Rein, Argentina, Israel, and the Jews, 60, 138–39.

19. “What is the OIA?” World Jewish Congress, American Jewish Archives (WJC, AJA), Cincinnati, OH, MS COL 361, box H16, folder 2.


21. See the press release of the Organización Nacional Israelita Argentina (ONIA) in Di Presse (hereafter DP), 18 Feb. 1947, p. 3. The names of the original members listed are Sujer Matrajt, Mauricio Nikiprovesky, Julio Jorge Schneider, Luis Elias Sojit, J. Krasbutch, Samuel Burdman, Carlos Lokman, Pablo Manguel, Samuel Rosenstein, Jaime Weitzman, Gregorio Perlmuter, Manuel Grinstein, José Kafia, and Jaime Rozovsky (spelled here as in the Yiddish text).
According to one of the OIA’s later presidents, Ezequiel Zabotinsky, the majority of these early members were middle-class businessmen and professionals, with few previous bonds between them other than that all were Peronists.22

The message of the OIA was clear: Jews of all cultural and religious backgrounds should unite around Perón and express their loyalty to “el líder” as a collective, much as other social groups had done. In return, they would reap the benefits of full citizenship in the “New Argentina” and win important favors from the regime. In short, they claimed that Peronism offered Jews nothing less than a pathway to complete and harmonious integration in Argentine society. In their first manifesto to the Jewish community, published on February 27, 1947, in the Yiddish press, they declared: “We are with the regime . . . because the Jews have helped to build the greatness of Argentina with their knowledge, art, industry, and trade, and because no government until now has recognized our contribution. Therefore, we support the work of the current Argentine government and work with it so that our fatherland shall be able to accomplish the maximum on behalf of the entire people of the republic, and we take pride in our contribution.”23 In addition, they highlighted a goodwill gesture on the part of Perón, which granted permanent residence to a group of 47 illegal Jewish refugees who had arrived in Argentina after being rejected in Brazil. Finally, the leaders of the new organization called upon “all Jews” to join with the OIA, which “looks out for the interests of Argentine Jews, intervening with the national authorities as a representative of the same.”

Indeed, such words closely resembled Perón’s own appeals to the Jewish community as a corporate political entity to be mobilized collectively in support of the regime and the Peronist movement more generally. In a series of speeches and events held under the auspices of the OIA between 1947 and 1955, Perón consistently voiced his belief that, owing to his government’s public disavowal of racism and discrimination in the country, Jews should participate publicly as a community in Peronist politics. In August of 1948, for example, he declared

22. Zabotinsky interview, 10 July 2000. See also “What Is the OIA?” Wascoff would later become president of the Jewish Hospital. Matrajt was an important textile manufacturer with connections to the army, and Sojít was a well-known newspaper columnist and sportswriter, later appointed to head the Argentine news agency, APA. Both Krislavin and Manguel were attorneys prior to their political appointments under Perón. None of the men, it appears, had played any influential role in Jewish communal politics prior to this time.

before a crowd of OIA supporters that “it is necessary for the Jewish collective to know that in this land it has the same rights as all other Argentine citizens. Consequently, it must participate freely in the economic realm, in the political realm, and in the social realm, with the same rights and the same obligations as all other citizens.” In March 1950, he expressed his astonishment “that the Jewish collective, so large, distinguished, and productive, participates alone in the political life,” calling instead for a Jewish representation in the national parliament under the banner of the Peronist party. And in yet another speech to a group of communal leaders soliciting his reelection in July 1951, Perón declared, “I believe that nobody is better able to judge us in our desires for justice than those men who during the millennia have suffered injustice. . . We seek, we appreciate, and we wish for the Hebrew community to join within our political action. I believe that one of the fundamental things that the Hebrew collective must confront is coming to participate in Argentine politics.”

That Perón intended to effect this participation through the medium of the OIA was also made clear on numerous occasions. In fact, it would appear that Perón initially hoped to use the organization as a direct intermediary with the Jewish community, much as he used the nation’s largest confederation of labor unions, the Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT), as his intermediary with organized labor. To this end, he deliberately showed favor to the OIA, choosing to announce his acts of benevolence toward the Jewish community—such his decision to recognize the state of Israel in February 1949—in the presence of OIA delegations. During a subsequent banquet held in March 1949 to celebrate this act, Perón even stressed the influence of then OIA president, Sujer Matrajt, in “the inclusion in our reformed Constitution of a clause . . . that establishes that in this land racial divisions are not allowed.” “Dear Sirs,”

26. MI, 7 July 1951, pp. 5, 7.
28. IT, 6 Feb. 1949, features a photo of Perón with an OIA delegation. See also La Luz, 11 Mar. 1949, p. 62. The actual decree was finally issued on February 14; Decree #3668 of the National Executive, Archivo del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto (AMREC), Buenos Aires, box 58, exp. 8.
the president continued, “the inclusion of this clause owes itself to the initiative of the OIA, who, through the intermediary of its president, our friend, Sujer Matrajt, brought the fortunate initiative to our attention.”

Perón could be more subtle as well. Knowing that legitimacy and prestige within the community often rested on seemingly small gestures, in 1948 and again in 1950, both Juan Perón and Evita sent their official New Year’s greetings to the Jewish community “by intermediary of the Organización Israelita Argentina,” rather than through the DAIA as he had first done in 1946.

The OIA, for its part, strove hard to persuade Jewish voters of the worthiness of the Peronist cause. On the eve of the March 1948 national congressional elections, the OIA issued a series of advertisements and press releases calling upon Jews to “vote for the candidates of the Peronist Party, in order to reinforce the progress of the Republic . . . and in order to guarantee to the Jews the respect and tranquility they deserve.” Prior to the plebiscite for the new national constitution in December 1948, the OIA urged Jews to “support the reform of the Constitution,” highlighting its provisions against racial discrimination in particular. On November 26, 1948, OIA president Sujer Matrajt even delivered a special radio address to the Jewish community in favor of the measure. Referring to the massive project of constitutional reform, he asked his listeners, “How could the Jewish community . . . which has identified itself plainly

32. Ad in the YIVO Archives, Buenos Aires (YIVO-BA), box OIA.
with the people of the Republic, in order to melt itself . . . into one aspiration of patria, remain indifferent before problems of such magnitude?”

Yet, even more important was the work of the OIA within the Jewish community itself. Here OIA leaders sought to win the support of the Jewish community, by whatever means necessary, in order to emerge as its legitimate representation. In the process, they clearly struggled to gain influence within Jewish communal institutions and to erode the legitimacy of the DAIA. One means of doing this was by hosting elaborate banquets for the entire Jewish community in honor of Perón. Perhaps the most notable of these was held on March 12, 1949, at the elegant Buenos Aires salon of Les Ambassadeurs in celebration of Argentina’s recognition of the State of Israel. The reception drew the attendance of nearly all the major Jewish leaders of the capital, including the president of the DAIA, Dr. Ricardo Dubrovsky, and even Guillermo Schlesinger, the Chief Rabbi of Argentina’s oldest Jewish congregation (the Congregación Israelita de la República Argentina).

Another tactic employed by the OIA was to deny DAIA leaders access to the president. Following Perón’s admission of the 47 Jewish immigrants in February 1947, for example, a delegation of the DAIA’s directive council went to thank Perón personally for his goodwill. They were told, however, that the president was busy preparing for other matters and were finally referred to the minister of the interior after being kept waiting for several hours. By March of 1948, Maximo Yagupsky, the American Jewish Committee’s (AJC) representative in Buenos Aires, alarmingly reported to his superiors that DAIA delegations were no longer “received officially in any of the governmental spheres.” All of this served to precipitate a climate of crisis.

33. La Luz 3 Dec. 1948, p. 524. See also the ad for his speech in IT, 26 Nov. 1948, pp. 3 and 6; and 26 Nov. 1948, p. 4.
34. Rabbi Schlesinger even presented Perón with a “symbolic” miniature Torah in appreciation for this act. See MI, 19 Mar. 1949, pp. 2, 9; and La Luz, 25 Mar. 1949, pp. 92–93. See also DP, 13 Mar. 1949, p. 6; DP, 15 Mar. 1949, p. 1; and IT, 14 Mar. 1949, p. 1. For a list of the institutions in attendance, see DP, 12 Mar. 1949, p. 3. See also the minutes of the Congregación Israelita de la República Argentina (CIRA), 15 Mar. 1949, which describe Chief Rabbi Schlesinger’s participation. The vast majority of the institutions involved had not previously been affiliated with Peronism in any formal way. The CIRA was, in fact, noteworthy as one of the most liberal-leaning Jewish institutions in the country. Even IJA president Simon Mirelman attended. A similar event held in November 1953 drew a crowd of nearly five thousand. See MI, 14 Nov. 1953, p. 2; IT, 8 Nov. 1953, p. 1; DP, 8 Nov. 1953, p. 1; and La Luz, 13 Nov. 1953, p. 450.
36. Letter from Yagupsky to Dr. Slawson of the AJC, 17 Mar. 1948, AJC files, YIVO Archives, New York (hereafter, ACJ, YIVO-NY), RG 347.7.2, FAD-2, Yagupsky.
within the DAIA and to undermine its effectiveness as the established political representation of the larger Jewish community.

In addition, the OIA began soliciting political contributions from members of the community, creating what one observer described as “a state of nerves . . . since the OIA has the power to send campaign investigators to seek out the funds and advise the imposition of fines in reprisal.”37 In one of their bolder moves, the directors of the OIA even announced their intention, in September 1949, to raise some three million pesos for the construction of a new hospital in the province of Entre Ríos under the auspices of the Eva Perón Foundation. On September 15, they called a meeting of the directors of all the major Jewish institutions in the capital to secure donations and select a coordinating committee for the building campaign. According to the editors of the mainstream Yiddish daily Di Idishe Tzeitung, the initiative of the OIA “encountered a sympathetic echo among all circles of Argentine Jewry.”38 A press release in the pro-Zionist Spanish-language weekly Mundo Israelita further reported that the donations were to be collected only on a voluntary basis.39 However, Jacob Hellman, the official representative of the World Jewish Congress (WJC) in Buenos Aires, and a community activist, claimed that the entire episode was little more than a “thieving demand of the OIA to defraud [the community of] three million to construct a hospital with the name of the First Lady.”40 “Thus, men live here as marranos, under a ghastly coercion,” he wrote to his superiors in New York, “and outwardly it will be said that the Jews of Argentina are free and do not experience any anti-Semitism.”41

37. “What is the OIA?”
39. MI, 1 Oct. 1949, p. 2. The minutes of both the CIRA and the German-Jewish Asociación Filantrópica Israelita (AFI) record the event; minutes of the CIRA, 15 Sept. 1949, and the AFI, 6 Oct. 1949. An article from the left-leaning Di Prese further reported briefly on the creation of a special committee to oversee donations for the project. However, it is unclear how the donations were to be solicited; DP, 12 Oct. 1949, p. 3.
41. Letter to Shwartzbart, 14 Jun. 1949, AJA, MS COL 361, H25/16. According to correspondence from the American Jewish Committee, the OIA hospital project was finally abandoned at the end of 1949 due to “silent community opposition”; “The Current Situation in Argentina,” Dec. 1949, AJC, YIVO-NY, RG 347.7.2, FAD-2, Yagupsy. In January 1951, Mundo Israelita further reported on the donation of a check for 40,000 pesos to the Eva Perón Foundation from OIA leaders in the province of Córdoba; MI, 20 Jan. 1951, p. 1.
When such coercive strategies failed to overwhelm the DAIA by the end of 1949, however, the leaders of the OIA decided to change their tactics. This time, they did not directly attack the DAIA but simply circumvented it, appealing directly to several of the most important institutions that made up the DAIA itself. In May 1951, for example, the OIA organized another huge reception for Perón and Evita, attracting as many as three thousand people to Les Ambassadeurs in Buenos Aires. Yet, instead of including Dubrovsky and the DAIA on the speaking agenda, as it had on past occasions, the OIA now asked the president of the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA), Moisés Slinin, to participate. With over 40,000 members, the AMIA (also known as the Ashkenazi kehilla of Buenos Aires) represented the social and charitable nucleus of the country’s Ashkenazi Jewish community and its largest institution by far.\(^{42}\) It was also the largest member institution of the DAIA, and by attracting the support of its president, the OIA thus dealt a blow to the position of its rival. Shortly thereafter, on July 5, 1951, the OIA together with Slinin again contrived to organize a public audience with Perón, this time to solicit his reelection as president. The event was carefully orchestrated, with each of the participants receiving invitations and telegrams in advance of the date. However, according to a dispatch by Saul Sokal of the WJC, “Gossip has it that Dr. Dubrovsky was deliberately not invited to the meeting and that eventually, he himself, contrived to get an invitation.”\(^{43}\) Such an unmistakable snub, Sokal believed, had greatly reduced the esteem of the DAIA in the eyes of the larger community. “After July 5,” he wrote with some degree of exaggeration, “it was heard—sporadically—that the DAIA was finished.”\(^ {44}\)

In addition, the OIA also sought to capitalize on Perón’s friendly relations with the state of Israel after 1949 as a means of improving its position within the community.\(^ {45}\) As stated earlier, Jewish communal identity during this time was

\(^{42}\) The AMIA was originally founded in 1894 as the capital’s Ashkenazi burial society, or Chevra Kadisha. In 1941 it was officially incorporated as a mutual aid society, and in 1949 it was formally designated as the Ashkenazi kehilla of Buenos Aires. On the AMIA and the early history of Argentina’s Jewish community, see Avni, \textit{Argentina and the Jews}; Mirelman, \textit{Jewish Buenos Aires}; Sofer, \textit{From Pale to Pampa}; and Bernard Ansel’s unpublished dissertation, “The Beginnings of the Modern Jewish Community in Argentina” (Ph.D. diss. Univ. of Kansas, 1970).

\(^{43}\) Cable, Sokal to Dr. Maurice L. Perlzweig of the WJC in New York, 20 Jul. 1951, WJC, AJA, MS COL 361, H26/20.

\(^{44}\) On the event, see \textit{IT}, 5 July 1951, p. 4; and 6 July 1951, p. 1. The text of Perón’s speech, in Spanish, appears in \textit{IT}, 6 July 1951, p. 6.

\(^{45}\) On Perón’s relations with the state of Israel, see Rein, \textit{Argentina, Israel, and the Jews}. See also Ignacio Klich, “A Background to Perón’s Discovery of Jewish National
closely tied to the national project in Palestine, and the OIA was not unaware of this fact. As early as 1948, propaganda literature expressed the OIA’s “fervent desire that the partition of Palestine be possible, in order to create the Jewish Nation.”\textsuperscript{46} In addition, when Perón announced his plans to offer official recognition to the new Jewish state on February 5, 1949, he took care to do so in the presence of an OIA delegation.\textsuperscript{47} The first emissary sent by Perón to the new nation was none other than Sujer Matrajt, who bore a handwritten message of greetings from the Argentine president to his Israeli counterpart.\textsuperscript{48} And with the establishment of formal diplomatic relations in 1949, Perón selected OIA secretary Pablo Manguel to be Argentina’s first official plenipotentiary minister.\textsuperscript{49} With the appointment of Manguel, he apparently hoped that the OIA might serve as the nexus between the Peronist regime and the state of Israel, in addition to acting as his point of contact with the local Jewish community. On June 22, 1949, the OIA used Manguel’s selection as yet another opportunity to host an elaborate banquet, in which Perón declared his “great respect” for the state of Israel to a gathering of representatives from “a great part of the Jewish community.”\textsuperscript{50}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Pronunciamento} 47. \textit{IT}, 6 Feb. 1949.
\bibitem{Manguel} 49. For Manguel’s formal appointment, see Decree #14751–m.584 of the National Executive, 24 Jun. 1949, Manguel file, AMREC, leg. 62. The particular designation of plenipotentiary minister was at Israel’s request; telegram from Moshe Sharett to Dr. Juan Bramuglia requesting the status of a legation rather than a formal ambassadorship, AMREC, box 53, exp. 8. According to Jacob Tsur (Israel’s first plenipotentiary minister in Argentina), the Jewish state did not maintain formal ambassadorships at that time; Jacob Tsur, \textit{Cartas credenciales}, no. 4 (Buenos Aires: La Semana, 1983), 53.
\bibitem{Perón} 50. \textit{IT}, 23 June 1949, p. 1; \textit{DP}, 23 June 1949, p. 4. For the text of Perón’s speech in Spanish, see \textit{MI}, 23 June 1949, p. 2. Apparently, the DAIA had originally attempted to host the banquet, but was prevented from doing so by the OIA; Hellman letter to Shwartzbart, 14 June 1949. In many respects, Perón’s frequent pro-Israel speeches at Jewish-sponsored events only served to endorse and reinforce the preexisting Zionist identification within the community. According to Jacob Tsur, for example, “The curious identification of the Jews with Israel is not only a matter of popular choice . . . but also that of the official treatment in various respects”; notes from luncheon discussion between members of the AJC and Jacob Tsur, 19 Aug. 1953, \textit{AJC}, YIVO-NY, RG 347.7.1, FAD-1, box 3, Argentina-Jews.
\end{thebibliography}
Argentina for extended periods to lobby for the Peronist party in the upcoming elections. Furthermore, it was Pablo Manguel who helped organize the reception of July 5, 1951, in which the DAIA and Dubrovsky were conspicuously overlooked.

Yet, despite all of these attempts, the OIA still remained largely unpopular within the Jewish community as a whole during Perón’s time in office. Even the terrible blow to the DAIA’s prestige in 1951 did not appear to translate into corresponding gains for the OIA. According to Maximo Yagupsky, the majority of those who attended the May reception did so for political appearances, rather than any heartfelt enthusiasm for Perón. Even Slinin, who offered laudatory praise for Perón at the July reception, did so only as an individual and not in his official capacity as AMIA president. Moreover, when Perón nominated the OIA’s secretary and later president Ezequiel Zabotinsky to run in the 1951 congressional elections on the Peronist ticket, he was defeated by a wide margin. The district he ran in, which included the older Jewish neighborhood of Once, was the only district in the federal capital in which Perón himself failed to win the popular vote. It would appear, then, that fear and manipulation from the OIA and the state were simply not enough to overcome the endemic mistrust of the Jewish masses for Perón. Nor were they enough to co-opt Zionist support within the community by linking the OIA to Argentine-Israeli relations. Instead, far from embracing the actions of the Peronist state, it would seem that the majority of Argentine Jews simply preferred to retreat from organized politics in Argentina altogether, in effect maintaining their earlier distinction between external and internal domains. As a result, while the OIA did in fact continue to serve as the officially recognized intermediary between the community and the state until the overthrow of Perón in September 1955, it never succeeded in speaking in the community’s name or emerging as its dominant institution.

The Project of the IJA: Integration through Democratization

The OIA, however, was not the only challenger aspiring to represent the Jewish community during this time. In July 1948, Maximo Yagupsky of the American Jewish Committee announced to his superiors in the United States the creation

51. See MI, 16 June 1951, p. 5. See also MI, 14 July 1951, p. 4; and 3 Nov. 1951, p. 4.
52. Letter to Segal, 28 Mar. 1951, AJC, YIVO-NY, RG 347.7.2, FAD-2, Yagupsky.
53. Returns from the 1951 elections in La Nación, Nov. 1951; map of the 1951 electoral districts in La Nación, 6 Nov. 1951, p. 4.
of another new organization, the Instituto Judío Argentino de Cultura e Información (IJA), under the auspices of the AJC. He described the organization as “an autonomous entity” that would “receive the technical cooperation of the AJC” and utilize a program “copied from the program of the AJC.” According to a letter sent from the IJA to the president of the AJC, its stated purpose was to “develop a permanent action in favor of equality for all inhabitants of the country,” “to foment good relations and mutual cooperation between the Jewish community and that of other religions,” and “to lend assistance in cases of proven discrimination against Jews.” In addition, the IJA sought to raise public awareness of the principles of fundamental civil liberties, to encourage Jewish integration into the surrounding society, and to strengthen and consolidate the new state of Israel.

The IJA had its roots in an earlier schism within the DAIA, in which a small but influential minority, led by the powerful Jewish silk manufacturer Simon Mirelman, had protested the DAIA’s pro-Zionist affiliation in international Jewish politics and especially its appropriation of wartime fundraising for Zionist activities in Palestine. Claiming that that DAIA did not “represent in their due proportion all the sectors of the community,” the group officially established a parallel institution, the Organización Judía Argentina (OJA), in November 1945. Primarily concerned with the question of aid for Jewish refugees, the OJA never aspired to replace the DAIA as a representative of the larger community but merely to effect a more balanced distribution of the charitable funds collected from the community. This was achieved in March 1947, and the OJA soon faded from the political spotlight.

Yet, the tensions that had propelled the earlier division remained, and by early 1948 the members of the OJA decided to found the IJA as a direct challenge to the conduct of the OIA and the DAIA. Drawing its principal support from such noteworthy liberal Jewish institutions as the Argentine branch of

54. Letter to Slawson, 4 July 1948, AJC, YIVO-NY, Yagupsky.
55. Letter, 31 Aug. 1948, AJC, YIVO-NY, RG 347.7-1, FAD-1, Instituto Judío Argentina. Although the AJC was originally created in 1906 as a non-Zionist organization, it adopted a more sympathetic attitude toward Zionism in the aftermath of the Holocaust and World War II.
56. Yagupsky, “Excerpts from the annual report of the Argentine Jewish Organization,” AJC, YIVO-NY, RG 347.7-1, FAD-1, box 2, Agencies. For the OJA’s formal declaration to the Jewish press, see “Deklarung fun der Yidish-Argentinier Organizatsie,” DP, 15 Nov. 1945, p. 5; and IT, 15 Nov. 1945, p. 6; and “Di fiktsie fun a fareynikte komitet,” in DP, 15 Nov. 1945, p. 4; and IT, 15 Nov. 1945, p. 9. The same declarations appear in Spanish in MI, 17 Nov. 1945, p. 9; and MI, 17 Nov. 1945, p. 7.
B’nai B’rith, the Congregación Israelita, and the Sociedad Hebráica Argentina, the IJA represented a particular group of Spanish-speaking Jews who constituted the community’s social and cultural elite. About this group, one observer reported, “They do not differ from the majority of Jews in being pro-Israel. However, they still form a social group, which though hard to define and classify, is recognized and identified as an entity.”57 Another, less-flattering description, dubbed them as “aristocrats,” further adding, “the IJA comprises that group of Jews that correspond to the Yahudim in the U.S., it being understood that the term Yahudim does not fit exactly.”58 In addition to Simon Mirelman, its most important founding members included Mario Schteingart, a Russian-born doctor of endocrinology who had previously served as the president of Argentina’s B’nai B’rith, and Alberto Klein, an engineer and former president of the OJA.59

Above all else, the leaders of the IJA advocated an integrationist policy of Jewish political behavior in Argentina very much in accord with the prevailing liberal views of the anti-Peronist establishment. Jews in Argentina should not only participate in politics as individuals, but the community itself should also contribute to the creation of a free and democratic climate in the country that would make such integration possible. In accord with this, the IJA sought to locate the Jewish community’s public political position among the traditional liberal-democratic parties opposed to Perón.60 It was critical of both the OIA and, especially, the DAIA for their willingness to compromise the interests of the larger community to win favors from the regime. According to Maximo Yagupsky, there was concern among some in the community that the oppo-

57. Untitled report on the DAIA, 1953–54, WJC, AJA, MS COL 361, H28/7.
58. “Regarding the Instituto Judío Argentino. IJA. And ‘Cultural Activities,’” 30 May 1951, WJC, AJA, MS COL 361, H26/20. In the United States, Yahudim was used to refer to an elite group of German-Jewish leaders in the early twentieth century, often active in communal philanthropy but considered lacking in religious observance or Jewish national commitment.
59. Also prominent were Enrique Schuster (industrialist and ex-professor of economics, who once described himself as a “free Argentine” in an anonymous letter to La Prensa), Jacobo Wainer (ex-accountant for the Argentine government and professor in economics), and Elias Teubal (wealthy industrialist and ex-president of various Sephardic Jewish organizations); Schuster, Wainer, and Teubal files, AJC, YIVO-NY, RG 247.7.1, FAD-1, Jewish Leaders. On Klein, see letter from Phillip Forman to U.S. Ambassador James Bruce, 12 Aug. 1947, AJC, YIVO-NY, RG 347.7, FAD-1, box 3, U.S. Embassy.
sition parties might come to see the Jews as Peronist sympathizers. To this end, the IJA endorsed a policy of aloofness toward the Peronist regime, arguing against establishing any contact with the government beyond that which was absolutely necessary. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that the leaders of the IJA hoped to cultivate close relations with the U.S. embassy in Argentina through the AJC as a means of protecting the community and resisting pressures for conformity from the state.

As might be expected, such actions had the net effect of casting the IJA as an organization opposed to Perón. In a letter dated January 21, 1950, Yagupsky wrote, “Our prestige has grown as a result of our connections with writers, clerics, and democratic ‘politicians.’ In the light of Buenos Aires public opinion (non-Jewish opinion), the Instituto has become one of the most interesting bulwarks of democratic ideals.”

However, such attention also carried with it substantial dangers. In another letter from January 1950, he claimed that agents of the federal police had been monitoring the IJA and had even summoned the secretary of the organization for questioning, asking him “for a list of the membership and their documents.” Yagupsky himself was also apparently harassed and shortly thereafter was forced to flee to Chile out of fear for his personal safety.

In July 1953, IJA president Simon Mirelman was also temporarily arrested on charges of bank fraud, owing to his indirect involvement in a business deal with Evita Perón’s brother, Juan Duarte. While it is not entirely clear whether the arrest had a political motivation, Maximo Yagupsky indicated in his correspondence this was likely the case, since when a judge ordered Mirelman’s release a week later, he was instead transferred by the authorities to another prison where political prisoners were frequently held. Episodes such as this

62. One exception to this was, of course, the OIA 1949 banquet in celebration of Argentina’s recognition of Israel, which IJA president Simon Mirelman attended; DP, 12 Mar. 1949, p. 3.
63. Correspondence of Maximo Yagupsky and U.S. Ambassador James Bruce, AJC, YIVO-NY, RG 347.7.1, FAD-1, box 3, U.S. Embassy, and South America.
64. Letter to Segal, sent from Santiago, Chile, 21 Jan. 1950. AJC, YIVO-NY, RG 347.7.2, FAD-2, Yagupsky.
65. Letter from Yagupsky to Segal, 6 Jan. 1950, AJC, YIVO-NY, RG 347.7.1, FAD-1, box 2, Agencies, Instituto Judío.
67. “The only explanation,” Yagupsky wrote, “seems to be that they are trying to break his morale. He has never issued a statement supporting Perón and has never played politics with the government.” Mirelman was only released after lengthy intervention from Jacob Tsur, the AJC, and even Ezequiel Zabotinsky; letter to Segal, 27 July 1953, AJC,
clearly mortified IJA leaders, who ultimately curtailed most of the Instituto’s public activities thereafter. As a result, the IJA remained largely ineffectual in its efforts to represent the Jewish community as a whole or to align the community with the parties of the anti-Peronist opposition.

Moreover, right from the beginning, the DAIA viewed the IJA as an unwelcome competitor in the realm of communal politics, one which, unlike the OIA, did not enjoy any official protections from the state. As early as October 1948, for example, the DAIA’s general assembly decided to issue a harsh critique of the IJA in the Jewish press. Appearing in Mundo Israelita on October 16, 1948, the communiqué argued that “the dispersion of efforts for identical aims is not constructive” for the life of the community. It claimed that the community already possessed “a common organ” for collective action, the DAIA, which served as “the integral representation of the collective.” The IJA, the statement continued, constituted a “very clear danger” for the community because of its efforts to deflect energies from “a labor that by definition should be in common solidarity.” Finally, the piece concluded, “We must express our conviction that the Instituto Judío Argentino de Cultura e Información not only has failed in being useful toward the noble ends in which it was created, but rather is actually counterproductive.” In a subsequent dispatch to the paper on October 30, the leaders of the DAIA asserted, “The goals for which this entity has been proposed . . . coincide with those that were entrusted to the DAIA, as the representative entity of the collective.” Throughout this campaign, the DAIA was also bolstered by the pro-Zionist World Jewish Congress, an international Jewish organization that viewed with “serious concern” the actions of its North American rival, the AJC, in Argentina.

In response to this, IJA leaders were forced to expend a great deal of effort in defense of the new institution. In August 1948, Yagupsky and Mario Schteingart, the vice president of the IJA, entered into negotiations with the DAIA in

YIVO-NY, Yagupsky. See also AJC, YIVO-NY, RG 247.7.1, FAD-1, Jewish Leaders, Simon Mirelman. Ezequiel Zabotinsky recalled the case in an interview with the author, 10 July 2000, claiming that his personal intervention with security officials was helpful in gaining Mirelman’s release.

68. MI, 16 Oct. 1948, p. 5. See also letter from Hellman to Marcus, 11 Oct. 1948.
70. Memorandum from Marcus to Wise, 29 Nov. 1948. At the time, the AJC was engaged in an intense competition with the World Jewish Congress for control over the appropriations of Jewish fundraising organizations in Latin America. On their struggle and its influence upon Argentine-Jewish politics, see Bell, “The Jews and Perón.”
an effort to reach a kind of “armed peace.” Following the DAIA’s first attack in the Jewish press in October, Schteingart even attempted to send a private conciliatory letter to the president of the DAIA, lamenting that “so much energy has been wasted on polemic.” “We are certain,” he added, “that the Instituto Judío Argentino, far from being a factor of disunion, will contribute new forces to the collective.” However, with the subsequent publication by the DAIA on October 30, 1948, the IJA was forced to become more aggressive. On November 6, 1948, the leaders of the institution published a public response to the DAIA in the pages of Mundo Israelita, outlining their stated objectives and claiming that “the Instituto never claimed nor aspired to be the representation of the collective. Neither does it desire to replace any institution, nor does it propose to intervene in the life of any of them.”

This final statement was not entirely correct, however. Owing to the composition of the DAIA as an association of institutions, the odd situation arose in which institutions that supported the IJA, such as B’nai B’rith and the Congregación Israelita, also maintained their membership in the DAIA. Furthermore, because these institutions had been among the charter members of the DAIA, they could not be expelled from the organization. Hence, the IJA posed not only an external threat to the DAIA, but an internal one as well. This was quickly borne out in December 1948, when supporters of the IJA actually presented their own list of candidates in the DAIA’s general elections and were defeated by a margin of just nine votes. Although the IJA’s electoral strength was due mainly to the fact that members of the community’s liberal-oriented General Zionist Party had temporarily defected to their camp, and not to its own popularity as such, the 1948 election results clearly represented a triumph for the IJA and established it as a legitimate player in communal politics. “Now war has been opened on the DAIA,” claimed a report written for the World

71. Letter to Slawson, 31 Aug. 1948, AJC, YIVO-NY, Yagupsky.
72. Letter from IJA to Dubrovsky, 26 Oct. 1948, YIVO-BA, Series 1045.
73. MI, 6 Nov. 1948, 6.
74. DP, 17 Dec. 1948, 3.
75. Letter, Hellman to R. Marcus and I. Shwartzbart of the WJC, 6 Dec. 1948, WJC, AJA, MS COL 361, H25/16. See also letter to Segal, 14 Jan. 1949, AJC, YIVO-NY, Yagupsky. In particular, the General Zionists represented a liberal middle-class grouping within the larger Zionist movement worldwide. Although predominant in much of Europe and the United States, General Zionists comprised a minority within the Zionist movement in Argentina, which was led by the working-class socialist-Zionist party Poale Zion. On General Zionism and its relationship with socialist Zionism in Europe, see Mendelsohn, Zionism in Poland.
Jewish Congress, “and the American Jewish Committee people are going full speed ahead against the Congress and the DAIA.”

These tensions between the two organizations finally came to a head on the eve of the DAIA’s 1949 general election. It appears that the general assembly had reached an impasse during its initial meeting on October 27 to elect a new president, with one faction supporting the candidacy of IJA vice president Mario Schteingart and the other remaining loyal to the incumbent president, Dubrovsky. Therefore, it was decided to postpone the elections for at least one month in an effort to find some common ground and avoid a possibly devastating confrontation. During the interim, however, Dubrovsky outfoxed his opponents in the IJA by soliciting an audience with none other than Evita Perón, in an effort to intimidate DAIA leaders into supporting him. Faced with severe challenges from both the OIA and the IJA, it seems that Dubrovsky was not adverse to playing one against the other in order to preserve the integrity of the DAIA. The measure worked, and in the assembly of December 9 a compromise was reached between Dubrovsky and the IJA supporters. Dubrovsky would remain as president of the DAIA, while two members of the IJA would be appointed to its executive board. Dubrovsky had thus saved the DAIA from an internal conquest by the IJA, while the IJA gained a substantial voice in DAIA policy-making decisions. Writing to the AJC in New York, Maximo Yagupsy explained, “We have now managed to get two of our men into the directive body of the DAIA, and in this manner we exercise some control over what is done there.”

Yet, in spite of its obvious political success, the IJA itself was never terribly popular among the community at large. Rather, it remained largely an upper-crust organization. According to its own annual report from early 1950, the


77. Letter to Segal, 30 Dec. 1949, AJC, YIVO-NY, Yagupsy. See also IT, 18 Nov. 1948, which featured a photo of Dubrovsky with Evita and Luis Elías Sojit, a founding member of the OIA. Yagupsy states that Dubrovsky told him personally of the meeting, further adding that the DAIA president had established a bond with the first lady on account of their common interest in spiritualism. Dubrovsky’s interest in spiritualism was also confirmed by Ezequiel Zabotinsky, who mentioned that he had the ability to read palms and see the future. According to Zabotinsky, Dubrovsky even foretold of his own untimely death in 1954. Zabotinksy, interview, 12 July 2000.

78. See Hellman’s letter to Shwartzbart, 9 Dec. 1949, which also makes offhand reference to Dubrovsky’s involvement with Eva Perón; WJC, AJA, MS COL 361, H15/16.

The DAIA and the Jewish National Project

Thus, in spite of everything, the DAIA continued to enjoy the loyalty of the masses within the Jewish community and remained as the community’s hegemonic institution. When Arieh Tartekower of the World Jewish Congress visited Argentina in July 1952, he reported, “There hardly exists any Jewish group or organization in this country that does not recognize the DAIA as the central Jewish body.”83 The reason for this was that among the OIA, the IJA, and the DAIA, only the latter succeeded in representing the true popular sentiment within the community, the Jewish political sentiment, and avoided tying itself too much to the larger non-Jewish political arena. Only the DAIA was able to maintain the delicate balance between external and internal domains that allowed the community to exist as an autonomous entity within the larger Argentine society, while at the same time retaining its distinctly Argentine identity.

Despite competition from the OIA and the IJA, the DAIA continued its work of defending communal interests before the powers that be. That it was able to do so owed itself to the willingness of its directors, led by Dubrovsky, to accommodate themselves to the government and avoid the kind of antagonism

81. Letter from IJA executive board to the AJC, 10 Apr. 1950, YIVO-NY, RG 347.7.1, FAD-1, box 2, Agencies, Instituto Judío.
82. “Regarding the Instituto Judío Argentino. IJA. And ‘Cultural Activities.’”
83. Letter, Tartekower to the WJC in New York, 3 July 1952, WJC, AJA, MS COL 361, H27/12.
that would eventually plague the IJA. Faced with the prospect of displacement at the hands of the OIA during the spring and summer of 1948, Dubrovsky began establishing connections with various Peronist supporters, including several OIA members. He even went so far as to join the Peronist party. Soon thereafter, he apparently consented to an ambitious scheme, hatched by Perón, in which he would travel to the United States in an effort to improve Argentina’s public relations with the American Jewish community and the U.S. government. According to a secret dispatch from Maximo Yagupsky in July 1948, “Dr. Dubrovsky is to endeavor to get help from Jewish leaders and Jewish organizations in the US to bring about a change in American public opinion regarding Perón’s government,” and that he would “prove with facts and statements that Argentina is a much better country for Jews than it was under the former President.” Although the voyage was never undertaken, Dubrovsky demonstrated his usefulness to the regime by illustrating that the DAIA could be utilized to improve Argentina’s international image. As a result, he continued to enjoy the attentions of the president, even as the latter promoted the OIA as his official intermediary with the community. In March 1950, this relationship was again underscored, when—following a meeting of the World Jewish Congress in Paris—Dubrovsky personally informed Perón about his efforts to “clarify certain mistaken notions that predominated among Jews abroad with regard to the current Argentine government.” Later, in 1954, the DAIA even went so far as to sponsor the planting of a forest in Israel in Perón’s name and to publish a small booklet of the president’s most noteworthy statements regarding the Jewish community, entitled *El pensamiento del Presidente Perón sobre el pueblo judío.*

84. Letter, Yagupsky, 10 July 1948, AJC, YIVO-NY, RG 347.7.1, FAD-1, box 2, Jewish Agencies-DAIA. See also letter, Yagupsky to AJC, 25 June 1948, YIVO-NY, RG 347.7.1, FAD-1, box 3, OJA; and confidential report, Jacob Blaustein to Dr. John Slawson of the AJC, 8 Sept. 1948, YIVO-NY, RG 347.7.1, FAD-1, South America, Argentina. A confidential letter from Dr. Itzhak Shwarzbart of the WJC, dated 8 July 1949, also makes reference to the Dubrovsky mission, claiming that Perón approached Dubrovsky with the possibility of visiting the U.S. but the president of the DAIA ultimately refused to go. Whether Perón simply dropped the idea or Dubrovsky later had a change of heart is unclear; WJC, AJA, MS COL 361, H25/15. According to Israeli diplomat Jacob Tsur, Perón was apparently “convinced of the power of world Jewry and its influence over public opinion, especially in North America”; Tsur, *Cartas credenciales,* 52.


86. The practice of planting forests in Israel that carried the names of great leaders was a hallmark of Israeli culture at that time. In 1950, the DAIA had sponsored a forest in the name of General José de San Martín in commemoration of the one-hundredth anniversary of his death in 1850; see, among others, *MI,* 10 Apr. 1954, p. 2; *MI,* 17 Apr. 1954, p. 3; *IT,*
Yet it was within the internal domain of Jewish politics that the DAIA truly reigned supreme. In large part, this was because the DAIA remained, at its most fundamental level, an organization committed to the rebuilding of a Jewish state in Palestine. That Zionism represented a potent force in Argentine Jewish politics is overwhelming clear. “The Zionist parties,” wrote one observer, “are incomparably more vigorous and influential in the Jewish life in Argentina than Zionist organizations in North America or England.”

As early as December 1947, thousands of Jews had gathered in Buenos Aires’ Luna Park stadium to demonstrate their support for a Jewish state. Following the proclamation of Israel’s independence on May 14, 1948, a crowd of some 50,000 people gathered in the Plaza Retiro to celebrate in the shadow of the statute of Argentina’s own hero of independence, José de San Martín. Another 20,000 lined the streets of Buenos Aires and filled the Plaza de Mayo to witness Israel’s first official diplomatic representative, Jacob Tsur, present his credentials to Perón on August 1, 1949. Riding in a horsedrawn carriage, as was customary for such an event, the Israeli diplomat was measurably impressed by the fact that “crowds of Jews had gathered all along the route with flags and cheers.”

According to Tsur, “In the eyes of a great part of these Jews, Israel appeared to be surrounded by a halo of political sovereignty and high position before the world.” In addition, Zionism began to play an increasingly significant role within Jewish communal institutions as well, where Zionist political parties and their allies captured the directive boards of social and charitable organizations ranging from Jewish schools and cultural societies to the AMIA itself.

The DAIA played an active role in cultivating this nationalist spirit, serving both as an intermediary between Argentine Jewry and its counterparts in other countries and as an organizer of Zionist activities in Argentina itself. For example, even as the OIA displaced many of the political functions of the DAIA in early 1948, the DAIA busied itself with sponsoring a petition that urged the
Argentine delegation at Security Council of the United Nations to vote in favor of the Palestine partition of November 1947. Following the establishment of the state, it was the DAIA that greeted its new prime minister, David Ben Gurion, “in name of all the Jews in Argentina.” Speaking at the great gathering in the Plaza Retiro, it was DAIA president Ricardo Dubrovsky who “expressed in the name of Argentine Jewry . . . the aspiration that the Argentine Republic will be the first Latin American nation to recognize the new Jewish state.” On the eve of Tsur’s presentation of credentials, the DAIA further communicated its heartfelt emotions “in the name of the Argentine-Jewish community [yishuv]” and encouraged Jews to line the streets of the procession. Moreover, throughout this time, the DAIA worked tirelessly to promote communal fundraising efforts on behalf of the state of Israel.

In addition, the DAIA spearheaded the community’s response to perhaps the greatest international Jewish political crisis of the era, the dramatic revival of Communist aggression against Jews and the State of Israel. This culminated in November 1952 with the arrest and show trial of 14 Communist Party members in Czechoslovakia (11 of them of Jewish origin), who were accused of acting as agents for an international Zionist conspiracy seeking to undermine the stability of the wider Communist world. Among other things, the charges included allegations against the state of Israel, various Jewish philanthropic organizations, and even the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe themselves. In response, the DAIA issued a stark declaration to the Jewish press that underscored its role.

92. An ad for this petition appears in DP, 23 Feb. 1948, p. 5. The petition was subsequently handed over to the foreign ministry a day later; DP, 25 Feb. 1948, p. 4.
94. La Luz, 21 May 1948, p. 211.
95. DP, 31 July 1949, p. 6; IT, 31 July 1949, p. 7. Significantly, a similar message from the OIA was addressed “To the Jewish collective” (my emphasis); IT, 31 July 1949, p. 6.
96. In 1948, for example, the DAIA-led United Campaign for Israel raised a total of 44 million pesos, roughly $5.3 million at the time; Rein, Argentina, Israel, and the Jews, 128; and Joseph Goldstein, “The Influence of the State of Israel and the Jewish Agency on Community Life in Argentina and Uruguay between 1948–1958” [Hebrew] (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew Univ., 1993).
as the mouthpiece for the entire community. “As the representative institution of the Jewish community in the county,” the document began, “the DAIA has received with consternation the unfounded accusations hurled out in the Prague Proceso against world Jewry, the Zionist movement, and the state of Israel.” “The Argentine-Jewish community,” it continued, is “indissolubly united with world Jewry, and as an integral part of a nation respectful of human rights, the nation of Argentina rejects with all the force of its spirit the false accusations of Prague crossed [signadas] by anti-Semitism and racist demagoguery, and declares that the intention of establishing an official anti-Jewish politics in Czechoslovakia does not have to be tolerated by Jews.”

Such a fierce affirmation in defense of the Zionist movement raised popular passions to a fever pitch within the community and eventually led the DAIA to expel five Jewish institutions that refused to endorse the text. Even more interestingly, however, it also prompted the OIA and Perón himself to react, by issuing a strongly worded statement in support of Israel and condemning Communist aggression against Jews. Clearly then, the DAIA was not passive in the face of OIA or IJA pressure. Instead, it carved out new spaces for its legitimization as the community’s official representative, exerting its strength primarily in the internal domain of Jewish politics, where the OIA (due to its direct association with government) and the IJA (due to its affiliation with the American Jewish Committee) could not enter.

The Victory of the DAIA

Thus, the DAIA was able to retain its position as the legitimate representative of the Argentine-Jewish community by 1955, in spite of attacks from both the Peronist OIA and anti-Peronist IJA. Of the three competing organizations, only

99. El pensamiento del presidente Perón, 31. See also the correspondence from the U.S. embassy in Buenos Aires, which reports on the events, NA, RG 59, 835-413/1-2853; and RG 59, 835-413/1-2953. “It is a sad tragedy,” Perón declared, “that certain frictions between the great powers have made a scapegoat out of the Jew. In the face of the threat of new repression, there is only one road to save the threatened Jews: to facilitate their departure to Israel and to the nations of the free world. In this sense, the doors of the Nation are open for whichever person who suffers this repudiable persecution and if it should become necessary, my government will adopt the appropriate measures.” For a more extensive treatment of the events of December 1952, see Bell, “Bitter Conquest.”
the DAIA embraced a discourse that negotiated the subtle yet key distinction between the external realm of Argentine politics and the internal realm of Jewish communal politics that characterized Argentine-Jewish political behavior and identity. As one observer in 1954 astutely noted, “The DAIA had no other weapon or asset but the loyalty of the Jews, but this loyalty made the DAIA invincible.”

On the one hand, the DAIA was able to remain active in national political affairs, despite the best efforts of the OIA to the contrary, by demonstrating its willingness to accommodate the regime and its continued usefulness to the Peronist state. At the same time, the DAIA also remained fiercely loyal to the Zionist sentiments that shaped and informed the political aspirations of the majority of Argentina’s Jews within the community and its principal institutions. While the IJA might have presented a credible challenge to the DAIA in the national political realm due to its hard-line anti-Peronist stance, many Jews remained deeply mistrustful of its overall intentions in the internal sphere of Jewish politics, due to its affiliation with the non-Zionist American Jewish Committee. As for the OIA, despite the influential backing that it received from the Argentine government, it was never able to gain widespread popularity, because the majority of Argentine Jews simply rejected its message of wholesale political integration under the Peronist party and preferred instead to maintain the internal political life of the Jewish community as distinct from larger politics of the Peronist movement.

Ironically then, pressures from the Peronist state between 1946 and 1955 actually served to strengthen the DAIA’s position, rather than weaken it, and established it as the unchallenged representative of the larger Jewish community (a role in which it continues to the present day). This finding clearly calls attention to the role of populism in the shaping of ethnic politics and communal identity in Latin America and points toward the need for comparative study to determine whether the Jewish experience in Argentina was unique or was shared by other ethnic communities during this time.
