

## From Latin America to Israel: the Story of Postwar Argentinian Jewish Immigration

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### Abstract:

This monograph from Sebastian Klor explores the story of Jewish immigration from Argentina to Israel. Klor sets the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the Six Day War as caesura that form the beginning and end of his research. *Between Exile and Exodus* explores changing political and economic conditions in Argentina in Israel, and concludes that the factors influencing the emigration were diverse and were not clearly bound to Argentinian anti-Semitism or Zionist dreams. Klor portrays Argentinian emigration to Israel as any other form of migration, and suggests not viewing the *aliyah* (ascent in Hebrew, the way immigration to Israel is described) as an exceptional case.

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### Abstract:

This monograph from Sebastian Klor explores the story of Jewish immigration from Argentina to Israel. Klor sets the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the Six Day War as caesura that form the beginning and end of his research. *Between Exile and Exodus* explores changing political and economic conditions in Argentina in Israel, and concludes that the factors influencing the emigration were diverse and were not clearly bound to Argentinian anti-Semitism or Zionist dreams. Klor portrays Argentinian emigration to Israel as any other form of migration, and suggests not viewing the *aliyah* (ascent in Hebrew, the way immigration to Israel is described) as an exceptional case.

This monograph from Sebastian Klor tells the story of the commonly overlooked Argentinian Jewish immigration to Israel. Whereas the Eastern European immigration before and after the Holocaust, as well as the immigration from the Arab countries in the 1950s and 1960s are well-researched, the study of Argentinian immigrants in Israel has been to some extent neglected. Klor's book challenges the self-explaining Zionist approach of earlier studies, which underlined the 'temporality' of the Jewish presence in Argentina. This approach saw the emergence of this Jewish center at the turn of the 19th and 20th century as a short stop-over, which would naturally lead to the final Jewish settlement in Israel. The book is an important contribution to the study of Latin American History and to Israel Studies. It takes the reader to the cabinets of the Israeli leaders who made efforts to attract Argentinian Jews to immigrate to Israel, as well as to the 1950s and 1960s Jewish Argentina shaped by political and economic upheavals which made the country's Jews consider emigration in the first place.

The book is divided into six chapters. The first one offers a historical introduction to the Jewish presence in Argentina, its political and social composition, which later serves the author to explain

the social background of Argentinian emigration to Israel. The second chapter analyzes the forces which impelled and deterred Argentinian immigration to Israel between 1948 and 1967, while the third one offers a general overview of Israel's immigration policy. The fourth part looks at the political side of promoting immigration from Argentina. In the fifth chapter, Klor examines the documentation produced by the Argentine representative of the Aliyah department of the Jewish Agency, as well as the Argentine-Jewish responses to the Israeli involvement in Jewish-Argentinian life. The sixth part offers a sociological and quantitative overview of Argentinian immigrants in Israel.

The book is a good in-depth study exploring the reasons that led Argentinian Jews to emigrate, or conversely made them want to stay in their homeland. *Between Exile and Exodus* takes a closer look at the economic conditions in Argentina and suggests that, next to political instability, this was the main factor that encouraged people to leave. Klor's research is rather convincing in its claim that antisemitism prevalent in Argentina in the 1960s was not a major factor that led to emigration. It would be easy to assume that the 1960 kidnapping of Adolf Eichmann from Argentina gave impulse to blaming Jews for "violating Argentina's sovereignty," to anti-Semitic attacks, and consequently to Jewish emigration. Analyzing the intensified emigration in 1963, the author follows the envoy of the Jewish Agency Moshe Kitron, who does not give much importance to anti-Jewish violence. To my understanding, Klor gives too much credit to the words of Kitron and did not provide enough additional evidence to prove his remarks. Klor is right when he describes the 1963 emigration hype as motivated by diverse factors, yet he seems to be too teleological in expressing his conviction about the lesser importance of anti-Semitic incidents. His research would seem more convincing if he would integrate here also the voices of Jews who did leave for Israel in the early 1960s or those who at least registered as applicants for emigration.

Altogether around 15,000 Jews immigrated to Israel from Argentina between 1948 and 1967. This made up only about 5% of the Argentinian Jewish community of about 300,000. Klor underlines that in the post-war era the Jewish population in Argentina was deeply socially and economically integrated within the rest of the country. He argues that the immigration rate of about 500 persons each year in the examined period was relatively low due to several economic and political factors. First, Israel did not have as much appeal for Jews arriving from developed countries like Argentina. Whereas the establishment of the Jewish State might have been an immigration impulse for the Eastern European Holocaust survivors left with barely anything, or by the poor segments of Jews from the Muslim countries, it was not a strong enough incentive to attract Argentinian Jews. Secondly, the economic conditions in Argentina, especially the devaluation of the peso, would mean for many a social downgrade in Israel: Argentine Jews feared that they would not be able to bring to Israel enough capital to maintain their level of life. Finally, as Klor argues, the Israeli officials were not

capable of preparing immigration programs that would reflect the social and economic composition of Argentine Jewry.

Klor did well-grounded work in researching the archives of the Jewish Agency and its often unsuccessful efforts at promoting the *aliyah*. The weaker side of the book is a lack of complementing this evidence with other sources which would have backed the author's argument. Klor does mention that he conducted interviews with Argentinian immigrants living now in Israel or read their memoirs, but this material is barely visible in his work. Similar problems arise concerning the use of press reports. In the introduction, Klor writes that press reports on emigration would be analyzed in order to balance the material produced by the institutions, yet devotes to press only a minor space in his book. Consequently, his book is located within the narrow borders of political history with a sociological twist, but does not answer broader questions concerning social and cultural aspects of emigration from Argentina to Israel. The author is aware that the research sources should be diversified, but he does not do enough to overcome this problem.

The work would also benefit from studying the Israeli lives of the immigrants. Whereas I understand the author's approach that focuses on the Argentinian factors that made people leave, I think it is problematic to study migration without looking at the situation in the receiving country as well. Klor did not devote enough attention to analyzing non-political – that is economic, cultural or social – settings in Israel that influenced the immigration and absorption of Argentinian Jews. It would be worthwhile to study how the immigrants adapted to life in their new country, what role their shared Argentinian heritage played, if they perceived their emigration as justified in the long-term perspective, and finally how many of them decided to return to Argentina.

Taken as a whole, *Between Exodus and Exile* is an important contribution to understanding Israeli immigration history and leaves many questions open, encouraging further study of the Argentinian Jewish immigration to Israel.

**German Abstract:**

**Aus Lateinamerika in den Nahen Osten: Die Geschichte der argentinisch-jüdischen Auswanderung nach Israel**

Das Buch von Sebastian Klor untersucht die Geschichte der jüdischen Auswanderung von Argentinien nach Israel. Klor definiert die Gründung des Staates Israel in 1948 und den Sechstagekrieg als historische Zäsuren, die den Anfang und das Ende seines Forschungszeitraums bezeichnen. *Between Exile and Exodus* analysiert die politischen und wirtschaftlichen Bedingungen in Argentinien und Israel und findet vielfältige Faktoren, die die Auswanderung beeinflussten, so war sie z.B. nicht eindeutig an argentinischen Antisemitismus oder zionistische Träume gekoppelt. Klor porträtiert die jüdische Auswanderung von Argentinien nach Israel wie jede andere Form der Migration und schlägt vor, dass die Alija (hebräisch für Aufstieg, wie die Auswanderung nach Israel benannt wird) nicht als Sonderfall zu betrachten.

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