

# The role of migration in the development of the Canadian and Brazilian Jewish communities

Joseph B. Glass

*Resumo:* Apesar das diferenças em tamanho, características e desenvolvimento histórico, certas questões são comuns no crescimento das comunidades judias do Canadá e do Brasil em suas respectivas sociedades multiculturais e multiétnicas. Essas duas comunidades judias preocupam-se com as altas taxas de exogamia e com a assimilação. Há tentativas de atacar esses problemas por meio do fortalecimento da educação judaica e das atividades comunitárias. O envelhecimento das comunidades e as baixas taxas de fertilidade têm provocado declínio natural do crescimento. A emigração tem pequena contribuição nos decréscimos populacionais. Grande número de imigrantes da Rússia, do Norte e Sul da África, Israel e Argentina tem aumentado as comunidades judias do Canadá, e existem programas atuantes que estimulam a migração interdiaspórica para o Canadá. A comunidade judia do Brasil, entretanto, não tem conseguido atrair imigrantes judeus para incrementar seu índice populacional. A discussão se estende para o papel da migração no desenvolvimento das comunidades judias no Brasil e no Canadá.

*Abstract:* Despite the differences in their sizes, characteristics, and historical development, certain common issues confront the growth of the Jewish communities of Canada and Brazil in their respective multicultural and multiracial societies. These two Jewish communities are concerned about the high rates of out-marriage and assimilation. They attempt to combat these issues by strengthening Jewish education and communal activities. Ageing communities and low fertility rates have led to declining natural growth rates. Out-migrations contributed slightly to population decreases. Large numbers of immigrants from Russia, North Africa, South Africa, Israel, and Argentina has strengthened Canada's Jewish communities and there are active programs fostering inter-diasporic migration to Canada. Brazil's Jewish community, however, is unable to attract Jewish immigrants to bolster its ranks. The discussion expands upon the role migration plays in the development of the Jewish communities in Brazil and Canada.

## Introduction

In 2005, the population of the Jewish community of Canada stood at around 370,000 and the Jewish community in Brazil was estimated to be between 100,000 and 120,000.

Despite the differences in their sizes, characteristics, and historical development, certain common issues confront the growth of the two communities in their respective multicultural and multiracial societies.

Both communities had their origins during the period of European colonial settlement and underwent rapid growth during the first half of the twentieth century through Eastern and Central European Jewish migrations. During the second half of the same century, Canada continued to receive significant numbers of Jewish immigrants, while Brazil received a small number of immigrants as compared to the first half of the century. The two communities developed with their respective internal diversities with majorities of Ashkenazim (Jews of Eastern and Central European origin) and Sephardi<sup>1</sup> minorities. They also have small but growing ultra-orthodox components.

In multicultural and multiracial societies, great importance is attached to preserving, celebrating, and enhancing group identity. Thus, the Jewish communities in these two countries are concerned about the high rates of out-marriage (estimated at 60 percent in Brazil and 22 percent in Canada) and assimilation. Anti-Semitism is a common concern. In Brazil, the level of anti-Semitic violence has been relatively low but the anti-Israel discourse has been extremely anti-Semitic in certain sectors. Canada recorded higher numbers of anti-Semitic incidents between 2000 and 2005 than in previous years, including more incidents of violence and vandalism. The two communities attempt to combat issues of intermarriage, assimilation, and anti-Semitism by strengthening Jewish education and communal activities.

Ageing communities and low fertility rates have led to

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<sup>1</sup> Sephardim (sing.: Sephardi) are Jews associated with the Iberian peninsula. One sub-group that descends from Jews expelled from Spain in 1492 and Portugal in 1497 settled in the Ottoman Empire. Their traditional language is Ladino. Another group settled in Morocco and spoke a variant of Judaeo-Spanish. A third sub-group, "Spanish and Portuguese Jews", remained in Spain and Portugal as ostensible Christians, and later reverted to Judaism in Italy, Holland, England, or the New World (Mexico, the Caribbean, and South America). Mizrahi (Hebrew: Oriental) is a commonly used term for all Jewish communities historically associated with Africa and Asia and not of Spanish descent.

declining natural growth rates. Out-migrations to Israel, although supported by the communities, contributed slightly to population decreases. Large numbers of immigrants from Russia, North Africa, South Africa, Israel, and of late, Argentina has strengthened Canada's Jewish communities. There are active programs for the recruitment of Argentine Jews to Winnipeg and Montreal. Recent reports point to the interest among certain Brazilian Jews to immigrate to the province of Quebec. The discussion expands upon the role migration plays in the development of the Jewish communities in Brazil and Canada.

## Population – definitions of the Jewish community

According to Jewish tradition, a Jew is a person born to a Jewish mother or a person who underwent the formal process of conversion to Judaism. To be a Jew actually has nothing to do with what one believes or practices. A person born to non-Jewish parents who did not undergo the formal process of conversion but who believes in everything that Orthodox Jews believe and observes every law and custom of Judaism is still not a Jew, even in the eyes of the liberal Jewish religious movements. A person born to a Jewish mother who is an atheist and never practices the Jewish religion is still a Jew, even in the eyes of the ultra-Orthodox. In this sense, Judaism is more like a nationality than like other religions, and being Jewish is like a citizenship.

Demographic data regarding the Jewish populations of Brazil and Canada is drawn from national censuses and their interpretation, and from Jewish community surveys. The censuses have their limitations due to possible errors during the data collection process, the size of the samples, and issues of self-definition.

In the Canadian censuses, a 20 percent sample of Canada's population responded to the two questions of ethnicity and religion. The reliability of the data decreases when dealing with more detailed information (i. e. estimates for small Jewish communities and their components). The Canadian census requires self-identification of both religion and national/ethnic

origin and this self-identification does not necessarily match the religious definition of who is a Jew. Further difficulties compound the issue of identifying the Jewish population when dealing with the unaffiliated population and mixed households (Shahar; Rosenbaum, 2006, p. 1-39; Shahar, 2004, p. 81-85; Heinrich, 2003).

Since 1960, the Brazilian census has used samples for the religious affiliation of the population. Its reliability decreased in 1990 since the sample size used was less than in the previous decennial census. Furthermore, the Brazilian census relates to religion and requires self-identification. There are three different approaches to defining the Jewish population of Brazil: 1) *Nuclear* – those who define themselves as Jewish when asked, as in a census. 2) *Enlarged* – the nuclear population plus those who are of Jewish origin but do not define themselves as such. 3) *Extended* – the population extended more with non-Jewish members of its families, such as spouses and children in mixed marriages (Decol, 2001, p. 147-151). The census data relates only to the nuclear population – those who identify their religion as Jewish. Other estimates of the size of the Brazilian Jewish population include the enlarged and/or extended definitions.

In addition, some descendants of New Christians (*Anousim* or Crypto-Jews) identify themselves as Jewish. They are descendants of Jews who were forced to convert to Christianity under the threat of the Inquisition. Outwardly, they appeared and behaved as Christians while clandestinely continuing to perform certain Jewish rituals and follow various Jewish laws. For generations, the *Anousim* were estranged from Judaism and conversion is required to return them to the Jewish fold. Rabbis have facilitated the conversion of hundreds of *Anousim* over the past two decades. For example, in the late 1990s, a rabbi from Belo Horizonte began making periodic trips to Recife to perform conversions. As of 2001, about 15 families of *Anousim* had formally rejoined the community and others were in the process of converting (Gordon, 2005; Hopstein, 2006; Tigay, 2001; Topel, 2002). The Ashkenazi rabbis of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro refuse to recognize the descendants of

the *Anousim* as Jews and require that they convert to Judaism. However, some *Anousim* believe that conversion is unnecessary and continue to identify themselves as being Jewish.

In the nineteenth century, Moroccan Jewish merchants established themselves along the Amazon River and many engaged in the rubber trade. Some of their descendants continue to practice Judaism and identify themselves as Jewish. Certain rabbis oblige the descendants of these Moroccan Jews to undergo conversion while some members of this community contest this requirement and identify themselves as Jews (A special..., 2006).

In addition, during the last two Brazilian censuses, a growing number of evangelical Christians identified themselves as Jewish. They are members of syncretic movements that merge elements of Judaism with Seventh-Day-Adventism. For example, the leader of the 150 member Aron Habrit [Holy Ark] congregation in Rio de Janeiro explained: "For us, a Jew is any one who follows the rules of Judaism. We are open to any person, of any ethnic origin, with the will to live the religion" (Kehilah Brasil, 2001; Decol, 2002, p. 147-149).

Taking into account the issues of the definition and self-identification of Jewishness, it is more apparent that it is extremely difficult to reach definitive results for the size of both Brazil's and Canada's Jewish populations and their respective communities.

## Canada – Jewish community size and distribution

Charles Shahaar, head of the National Jewish Demographic Study for United Israel Appeal (UIA) Federations Canada, arrived at an overall number of Canadian Jews in 2001 by essentially adding the total number of Jews by religion and Jews by ethnicity from the census, but excluding those Jews by ethnicity who professed another religion. This analysis of census found that Canada's Jewish population in 2001 was 370,520. Researcher Leo Davids held that this figure overstated the Jewish population by including people with multiple ethnic

identities. He suggested that UIA Federations' inclusion of this group in the total was part of "a political strategy to puff up the numbers [...] The federations are in the positive vibes business and they have to sell a certain image to donors. They can go around saying there are 370,000 Jews in Canada, [but] another set of numbers shows there are 40,000 less than that" (Csillag, 2003; Lazarus, 2003).

Jews accounted for 1.3 percent of Canada's population. There were 329,995 persons who identified their religion as Jewish (1.1 percent of Canada's population) and 348,605 who identified their ethnic origin as Jewish (186,475 single origin and 162,130 multiple origin). Canadian Jewry had one of the lowest rates of growth among other religions and ethnic groups in Canada between 1991 and 2001 (Statistics Canada, 2003, p. 9).

The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute (JPPPI) projects the Canadian Jewish population at 381,000 by 2020 (Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, 2006, p. 11). The past and projected low growth rates sounded alarm bells among community leaders for the need to increase the Jewish birthrate and boost immigration. Between 1996 and 2001, there were 21,000 Jewish births with a fertility rate slightly above replacement levels. For the same period, there were approximately 15,000 deaths among the Canadian Jewish population. Part of the reason for the low death rate has been the attrition or greater longevity of the elderly. In addition, an unknown number of Jews left the country. It is apparent that births alone cannot counter the effect of population losses related to emigration and deaths (Csillag, 2005).

The JPPPI estimated that 35 percent of Canada's Jewish population marries out of their faith. According to the census, inter-religious unions became more frequent among Jewish couples, 17 percent were in inter-religious unions in 2001 as compared to 9 percent in 1981. Warren Clark suggested that, "Perhaps because of the cultural diversity of these large cities [Toronto and Montreal], inter-religious unions between Jewish and other religious groups have become more common, particularly with Catholics and Protestants" (Clark, 2006, p. 19).

Canadian Jewry is mainly urban with a high

concentrations in Toronto, 179,100 (48.3 percent) and Montreal, 92,970 (25.1 percent) as well as significant numbers in Vancouver, 22,585 (6.1 percent), Winnipeg, 14,760 (4.0 percent) and Ottawa, 13,450 (3.6 percent). Toronto continues to be a major magnet for Jewish immigrants with nearly 20,000 Jewish newcomers between 1991 and 2001. Other popular destinations were Montreal (5,875), Vancouver (2,400), Ottawa (900), Calgary (840), Edmonton (530), and Winnipeg (475).<sup>2</sup>

The Jewish community of Canada had a slowed growth over the last decade as compared to previous decades. All indicators point to a continued but slowed growth rate in the coming years. Furthermore, the spatial distribution is shifting with Jews leaving smaller and peripheral communities and moving to larger Jewish concentrations.

## Brazil – Jewish Community size and distribution

In 2000, the Brazilian census reported a Jewish population of 86,825. This figure was disputed by some Jewish organizations, which instead placed the number at between 120,000 and 140,000. Israeli demographer Sergio DellaPergola estimated the 2002 population at 97,300. He explained that Brazilian Jewish birth rate was low and that more people die in the community than are born. Due to Brazil's multicultural tradition, there are many mixed marriages and high assimilation rates. The population is steadily decreasing but not dramatically. DellaPergola considered the Jewish population of Brazil as steady, if compared with other communities of the world (Fingerman, 2004). The JPPPI projected a decline in the Brazilian Jewish population to 90,000 in 2020.

The US Department of State, which drew its information

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<sup>2</sup> Jewish populations of 200 or more were found in Calgary 7,950, Edmonton 4,920, Hamilton 4,675, Victoria 2,595, London 2,290, Halifax 1,985, Windsor 1,525, Kitchener 1,385, St. Catherines 1,125, Kingston 1,090, Oshawa 905, Guelph 770, Barrie 715, Waterloo 565, Regina 565, Kelowna 515, Saskatoon 505, Peterborough 355, Fredricton 290, Nanaimo 280, Moncton 265, Prince George 235, Sarnia 220, Quebec City 200, and Sudbury 200.

from an unknown source, reported that approximately 101,062 citizens identified themselves as Jewish with 35,000 Jews in Rio de Janeiro and 29,000 in the metropolitan area of Sao Paulo (United States Department of State, 2006). A study of the Jewish community of Sao Paulo by the Albert Einstein Jewish Hospital showed a Jewish population of 60,000 in the state of Sao Paulo in 2002. This was significantly higher than the official census figure of 44,000. Differing estimates exist for the Jewish populations of other urban areas. The second largest Jewish community is in Rio de Janeiro (25,000 to 30,000), the third largest is in Porto Alegre (10,000 to 12,000) and there are significant communities in Belo Horizonte, Curitiba, Santos, and Recife (Moraes, 2002; Lesser, 2004, p. 274).

Boris Berenstein, head of the Jewish Federation of Pernambuco, estimated 400 Jewish families in Recife. He posited that Recife's Jewish community stagnated due to its geographic and economic limitations. He also reported on other Jewish communities and provided population estimates for Salvador 500, Fortaleza 120, and Natal 40 (Luxner, 2004). Belém and Manaus along the Amazon River, according to an Israeli organization whose mission is to return descendants of Jews to the fold, are home to 450 families and 220 families respectively (Kehilah Brasil, 2006). This figure appears to be inflated. Many are descendants of Moroccan immigrants who traveled in the Amazon in search of economic opportunity during the nineteenth century. Many fathered children with local women. Historian Ariel Segal asserted that Jews and their descendants are still in other Amazonian cities and towns such as Pucallpa, Tarapoto, Nauta, and San Martin. He pointed out that no comprehensive research has investigated the countless villages and smaller habitations scattered throughout the jungle, where Jewish descendants may still reside (Freund, 2003).<sup>3</sup>

Low birth rates and an aging population are factors in the population decline. Inter-marriage has been an important factor

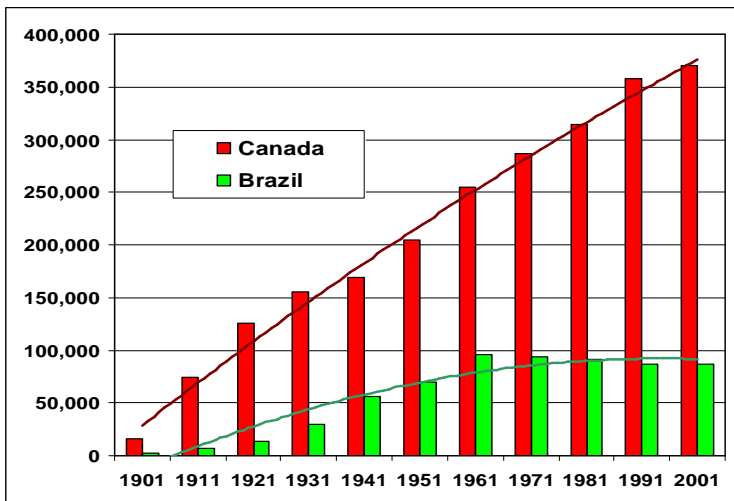
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<sup>3</sup> Synagogue lists indicate the location of other Jewish communities in Brasilia (Federal District), Campinas (São Paulo), Erechim (Rio Grande do Sul), Guarujá (São Paulo), Passo Fundo (Rio Grande do Sul), Pelotas (Rio Grande do Sul), Petropolis (Rio de Janeiro), São José Dos Campos (São Paulo), and Teresópolis (Rio de Janeiro).

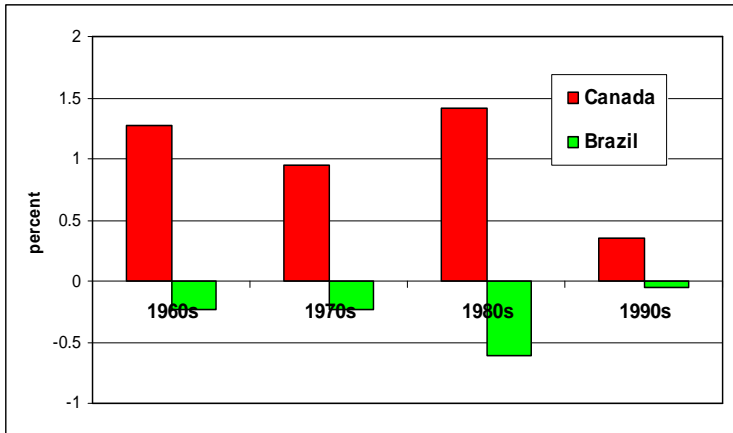


in decreased Jewish identification. The JPPPI estimated that 45 percent of Brazil's population marries out. Rabbi Henry Sobel, head of the 1,800-member-family Congregacio Israelita Paulista in Sao Paulo put the figure at about 60 percent. Rabbi Nilton Bonder of a Conservative synagogue in Rio de Janeiro with 550 member families holds that there are no accurate numbers. He explained: "One core group is those affiliated with synagogues. They send their kids to Jewish day schools, and pay dues to Jewish institutions. Their rate of intermarriage is probably lower than that in the United States. For the unaffiliated, it's maybe 80 to 90 percent. The average of the two groups is probably 40 to 50 percent – comparable to the United States". Brazilians, he says, "are very easy-going socially, a melting pot. Jews really haven't benefited from that" (Weingarten, 2002).

GRAPH 1 – Population growth of the Canadian and Brazilian Jewish communities during the 20th century



GRAPH 2 – Average annual growth rate of the Jewish communities in Canada and Brazil by decade



\* Between decennial censuses – for Canada 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001 and for Brazil 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990 and 2000.

## Internal diversity

The Jewish populations of Canada and Brazil are not homogeneous when dealing with their ethnic origin, religious affiliation, and economic status. Understanding this diversity contributes to understanding the differential growth rates within the communities and issues facing their future growth. Immigrants and their children, in general, have a lower propensity to intermarry or assimilate as compared to Canadian- or Brazilian-born Jews. The ultra-orthodox and orthodox communities, in general, have higher birth rates and lower assimilation rates than their conservative, reform, and secular counterparts.

## Canada

Canada's Jewish population has been significantly impacted by immigrant arrivals in the late twentieth century

from the former Soviet Union, Israel, North Africa, and South Africa. In 2001, 27,790 (7.5 percent) Jews in Canada were born in the former Soviet Union and 13,545 Jews (3.7 percent) were born in Israel. The number of Israelis living in Canada may be as high as 50,000, representing 14 percent of all Jews. This group has not fully integrated into the larger Jewish community. Religious identity is a point of separation. Canadian Jews most often connect to the community and their Jewish identity through synagogue affiliation. In general, Israelis are secular and their identity is drawn from their nationalism and ethnicity and to a lesser extent from their religion (Lungen, 2006). Sephardi and Mizrachi Jews, mainly from Morocco but also from Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, and Lebanon number some 25,000. They are mainly concentrated in Montreal and to a lesser extent in Toronto. The largest number of Jews born in Morocco lives in Montreal (7,295). Toronto is also home to 6,425 Jews born in the United States. By the mid-1990s, an estimated 10,000 South African Jews were living in Toronto.

The flow of immigrants to certain communities and internal migration has brought about changes in their composition. Sephardim and Mizrachim account for one-quarter of Montreal's Jewish population. Since 2004, Montreal has seen an increase in the number of immigrants. According to the general chair of the Combined Jewish Appeal of Montreal, Rickey Blatt, in the two years prior to July 2006, well over 1,000 Jews from around the world chose to immigrate to Montreal. It was projected that by the end of 2006, more than 600 Jews would settle in Montreal. He suggested that the number "may go higher if fears over anti-Semitism, such as in France, escalate" (Arnold, 2006).

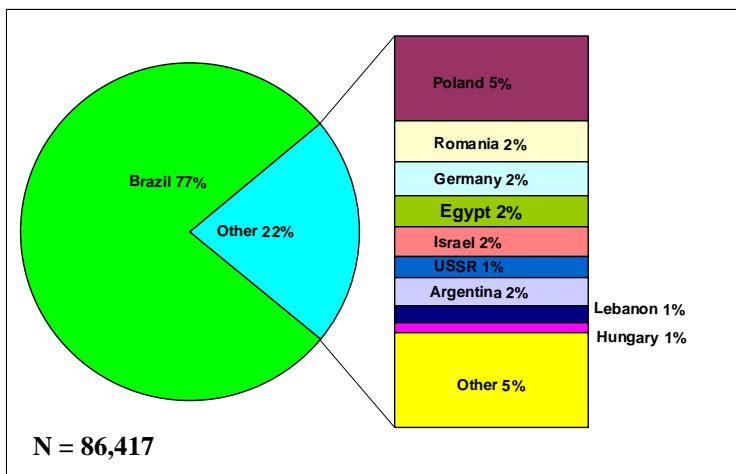
According to the census, nearly 50,000 Jews, about one-eighth of Canadian Jewry, lived below the poverty line, as did some 20 percent of its senior citizens. The highest proportion of poor Jews were found in Montreal, which had a relatively large percentage of ultra-Orthodox and elderly Jews. It was estimated that in 2001, 12 percent of Montreal's Jews were ultra-Orthodox and their proportion is likely to increase due to high birth rates and low out-migration rates (Shahar, 2003).

The discussion of the internal diversity points to differences among the Jewish communities in Canada. The issues facing the communities across the country are not standardized.

## Brazil

The contemporary Jewish community of Brazil, formed primarily after 1920, was ethnically diverse, encompassing Ashkenazim (primarily of Polish and German descent) and Sephardim (the largest plurality was of Egyptian and Lebanese descent).

GRAPH 3 – Place of birth of Brazilian Jews in 1991



SOURCE: Decol, 2001, p. 154

In 1773, a Portuguese royal decree finally abolished discrimination against Jews. They slowly filtered back into Brazil. Following Brazil's independence in 1822, a stream of Moroccan Jews began arriving in Belem and Manaus. By World War I, Belem's Sephardi community reached 800, and there were approximately 7,000 Jews living in Brazil. Almost 30,000

Eastern European Jews came to Brazil in the 1920s. Despite a strict immigration policy in the 1930s, more than 17,500 Jews entered Brazil. In the 1950s, another wave of Jewish immigration brought more than 15,000 Jews to Brazil, including 3,500 North African Jews in the late 1950s. The number of Jewish immigrants in the 1960s dropped, by 70 percent in comparison to the previous decade, to 4,258. The number of Jewish immigrants from the 1970s onward was quite low. Incomplete data point to many years of international migration balances of close to zero and some years of when immigration exceeded emigration by a few hundred (Decol, 2001, p. 147-160; AJYB, 1977, p. 355; 1978, p. 305; 2001, p. 547).

Only a part of the Jewish population is affiliated with synagogues and community institutions. According to the Einstein data, some 60 percent of Jews in Sao Paulo attended synagogue only on High Holidays or for social activities, 13 percent never attended, about 14 percent attended weekly, and 3 percent went every day. The study also indicated a low number of students in Jewish day schools (Lesser, 2004, p. 174).

There is a small but growing Orthodox community. According to information posted on an ultra-orthodox sponsored website, "Brazilian Jews stand between 85 to 100 thousand people, depending who counts and who is considered a Jew. We believe 10% of our society is frum [ultra-orthodox]. Most live in São Paulo, where you will find several Shuls, Colelim, Batei Midrashot, Two yeshivot for men & one for women.<sup>4</sup> Our frum life is located mainly in Higienopolis (half & half Ashkenazi & Sephardic) & Jardins (mostly Ashkenazi). Some still live in Bom Retiro, our old Jewish area" (Kosher Delight).

The Brazilian Jewish community is also economically diverse. There is a wealthy elite, a struggling middle-class and a growing poor population. The devaluation of Brazil's currency, the real, in January 1999, wiped out the savings of many

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<sup>4</sup> Shul = synagogue; Yeshiva (pl.: yeshivot) is an institution for the study of Torah and Talmud; Beit Midrash (pl.: Batei Midrashot) is a post-high school institute for Talmud and rabbinic studies; Colel (or kollel, pl.: kollelim) is an institute for advanced Talmud and rabbinic studies for adults which pays married men a regular stipend to study.

middle-class Jewish families. Some were forced to turn to charity to survive. Jayme Blay, president of the *Federacao Israelita do Estado de Sao Paulo*, an umbrella group of 55 institutions serving the 60,000 Jews of Sao Paulo state. “This included a lot of Jewish entrepreneurs with little shops and businesses, and even professionals like lawyers, doctors and engineers”, Blay says. “Our welfare institutions saw an enormous increase in their workload”. Blay estimated that 10 to 15 percent of Sao Paulo's Jews are receiving some kind of assistance. The *Uniao Brasileiro-Israelita do Bem-Estar Social (UNIBES)*, the Sao Paulo-based organization, was founded in 1915 to help Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. In 2003, UNIBES, with an annual budget of \$2.5 million, provided housing, daycare, and financial assistance to 1,500 families. Fifteen years earlier, there were some 500 Jewish families, mostly older and very sick people who had no other means of support. Because of the economic situation, a new poor developed, mainly young people in their 30s, 40s, and 50s without jobs (Luxner, 2003b).

## Strategies for continuity

### Canada

There are common strategies for Jewish communities across Canada and also specific ones to deal with local issues. Support and encouragement of Jewish education at all levels can be found throughout the country. According to the JPPPI, 55 percent of Canada's Jewish population that attends Jewish day school. Jewish distance learning is possible for individuals and groups in areas where there is not the critical mass to support Jewish educational facilities. National organizations elicit strong community support for Israel both politically and philanthropically. This finds expression through a high percentage of Jewish population having ever visited Israel, 66 percent according to the JPPPI.

“Jewish continuity” is without question among the top

issues in Canadian Jewish communities. According to its mission statement, “the Atlantic Jewish Council is dedicated to enhancing the quality of Jewish life in Atlantic Canada and promoting the continuity of Jewish communities in the region.” Other groups also place “Jewish continuity” high on their agendas. Many institutions, such as the B'nai B'rith, Hillel, and synagogues, engage in hundreds of programs designed specifically to keep the Jewish young in the fold. They are only moderately successful. Chabad has made inroads into communities across Canada with synagogues, schools, outreach centres, and institutions in large- and medium-sized Jewish communities.<sup>5</sup>

Vancouver in 2001 was home to 16 percent of Canada’s Jews. The greatest challenge to its continuity is assimilation. It has the highest rate of intermarriage among Canada’s larger Jewish communities (41 percent). Approximately 30 percent of the city’s Jewish children and youth received formal or informal Jewish education. Half of the Jewish children are raised in intermarried households. Great concern has been expressed that Jewish distinctiveness and values are eroding. It is a phenomenal challenge that has defined the Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver’s mission as follows: “The Federation is committed to building a strong, vibrant and enduring Jewish community in the Lower Mainland, in Israel and throughout the world by nurturing those values, practices and traditions which sustain and enrich Judaism and the Jewish people”. Among its goals, the Federation serves to strengthen Jewish identity, Jewish continuity and participation in Jewish communal life; develop and sustain leadership to carry the community into the future; and make community life accessible and inclusive to Jews from all walks of life in the Lower Mainland (Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver, 2004; Kramer, 2006).

Grassroots programs and innovations attempt to address

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<sup>5</sup> See: “An Annotated Index of Jewish Continuity Programs and Resources”. Compiled by the Canadian Commission on Jewish Identity and Continuity, Jewish Education Service of North America, [www.jesna.org/cgi-bin/dbcanada.php3](http://www.jesna.org/cgi-bin/dbcanada.php3); Atlantic Jewish Council, [www.theajc.ns.ca/about.php](http://www.theajc.ns.ca/about.php). See also: Chabad-Lubavitch worldwide, [www.chabad.org/centers/default\\_cdo/country/Canada](http://www.chabad.org/centers/default_cdo/country/Canada).

issues of intermarriage and assimilation. Two Torontonians, Jerry Maser and Judith Weinroth, concerned about community continuity found that the Jewish singles population in the Greater Toronto Area numbered over 50,000 but those attending all the community's singles programs numbered some 2,000. They developed "Jewish Singles World" as a form of community-building that would bring together single Jews with similar interests. Dating and romance they hoped would ensue and result in a hoped-for population boom (Lungen, 2005).

The communities of Montreal and Winnipeg are concerned with an older population, low birth rates, and out-migration which has led to a decline in population. Immigration to these cities is being encouraged and supported by the local Jewish federations which are taking advantage of provincial-federal accords for sponsoring immigrants. Winnipeg's Jewish population has declined from its height of 19,376 in 1961 to 14,765 in 2001. The rate of decline slowed to 2.7 percent for the decade of 1991 to 2001. Also between 1991 and 2001, Montreal's Jewish population diminished by 8.3 percent. Furthermore, the Jewish community has a larger proportion of seniors (21.6 percent) than Montreal's general population (12.2 percent).

TABLE 1 – Change in Canadian Jewish in communities with populations over 200 between 1991-2001 (percent)

Jewish Community size / Rate of Growth	Rapid decline <-20	Slow to moderate decline -5.1 – -20	Stagnant -5.0 – +5.0	Slow to moderate increase 5.1-20	Rapid increase >20
Large (over 10,000)		Montreal -8.3	Winnipeg -2.8	Toronto CMA 9.8 Ottawa 15.0 Vancouver 15.0	[City of Vaughan (Toronto) 61.2]
Medium (1,000-9,999)	Kingston -23.9	Hamilton -9.5 Edmonton -10.1 St. Catherines -13.1 Windsor -14.6 London -15.0		Calgary 9.8 Halifax 11.8	Kitchener 23.1 Victoria 28.1
Small (200-999)	Fredricton -29.3 Quebec -32.3 Sudbury -46.7 Saskatoon -42.0	Moncton -10.2 London -15.0 Sarnia -13.7 Regina -15.0		Kelowna 6.2 Prince George 14.6	Nanaimo 24.4 Guelph 28.3 Oshawa 37.1 Waterloo 44.9 Peterborough 54.3 Gatineau 65.8 Barrie 240.5



In recent years, Jewish newspapers in Argentina, Brazil, or Central America publish ads from Jewish communities like Basel, Switzerland or Winnipeg, calling on Jewish professionals to join them, with promises of assistance to ease their absorption. Winnipeg maintains a special Spanish-language immigration service for Jews from Argentina, ever since the economic crisis there in 2000 (Beker, 2005).

In Winnipeg, emphasis is placed on reaching out to newcomers and helping them integrate smoothly. By providing immigrants' children with access to the Jewish school system, the community hopes to pave the way for immigrant families to become involved in other aspects of communal life. In 2007, the Winnipeg Jewish community reported that more than 635 Jewish families, some 1,800 people, had made Winnipeg their home in the previous five years (Jewish Winnipeg; Bellan, 2003; Kuropatwa, 2007).



### **Newcomers get a warm welcome to Winnipeg**

By Rebeca Kuropatwa,  
15 January 2007

[...] Daniel Markus, who is from Brazil, immigrated in September 2006. Finding a job and making friends here has given him reasons to put down some roots.

"The Winnipeg Jewish community is so welcoming. I really like it. At first, I was just curious about gaining some professional experience abroad, but finding secure employment and a solid social life has given me reason to want to stay," he says.

Markus, who has a bachelor in social communications, looked into the Winnipeg job market on his first visit here. "Right from the beginning, I got a lot of help from the Jewish community – from orientation, to the exploratory visit, to making the final decision and arrangements," he says.

The "exploratory visit" is a service provided by the Jewish Federation's immigration department. People considering moving here can come for a seven- to 10-day visit, during which they are put in contact with people of their age and profession.

During his visit, Markus attended a GrowWinnipeg job fair, at which three companies offered him jobs. GrowWinnipeg is an employment networking program operated by federation.

Markus is now working for Huston Recruiting Services, he is taking the federation's young adult division's leadership development course, and he is involved with Etz Chayim Synagogue, thinking up new ways to attract more people to its daily minyan.

"People from the community have been just fantastic to me. I received many invitations to go to people's homes for the Jewish holidays," says Markus. "I feel like I now have many new mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and friends. I feel very comfortable in calling Winnipeg my home." [...]

With limited success of slowing assimilation and intermarriage, Montreal has also looked to new immigrants to boost its numbers. The president of the Montreal Federation

CJA, Steven Cummings, told his community in October 2003 to expect an influx of thousands of immigrants – possibly as many as 10,000 annually – over the following two years, primarily from Argentina and France. This estimation was based on the impressions of a delegation of community leaders to Buenos Aires. They had gone to assess the economic distress of the Jewish community (Waller, 2003, p. 320).

Shellie Ettinger, executive director of Jewish Immigrant Aid Services (JIAS) Montreal explained: “The community has made a decision to build through the reception of new immigrants [...] When we saw the drop to well under 100,000 Jews in the last census [2001], it was like, ‘Yeah. We gotta do something’. It became clear that strong continuity was not going to be achieved on the purely local level”. JIAS estimated that close to 1,000 French Jews arrived in Montreal in 2005 and they foresaw a similar number coming in 2006 (Silcoff, 2005).

Mila Voihanski, executive director of JIAS predicted that immigrants would continue coming to Canada from the former Soviet Union, as well as from Argentina, France, and Israel but Jewish emigration from South Africa had all but dried up. Jews in Mexico, Brazil, and Peru had started to express an interest in Canada (Csillag, 2005).

## Brazil

In Brazil a number of strategies have been developed to preserve the Jewish community. Education has been seen as a cornerstone of Brazilian efforts at retraining Jewish affiliation and identity. The JPPPI claimed that 71 percent of Brazil’s Jewish population attends Jewish day school.

Liberal Rabbi Sobel of Sao Paulo held that educational programming at his synagogue is the linchpin. The day school at Sobel’s synagogue is also a boarding school for children whose families cannot afford to keep them at home. The congregation provides food and clothing for the very poor. After-school sessions for 400 children are flourishing. So are a Zionist youth network, a scout movement for boys and girls “to

give a context of Jewish values”, and a summer camp program. He explained that: “My priorities are clearly defined as a rabbi – to make Jews more Jewish” (Weingarten, 2002).

In Recife the 85-year-old Jewish school, Colegio Israelita Moises Schwartz, had 150 students in 2004. “The school faces serious financial problems despite the local Jewish community's relative wealth. Furthermore with mixed marriages, since one of the parents is not Jewish, they tend to send their children to non-Jewish schools instead” (Luxner, 2004).

With the support and assistance of Shavei Israel, a Jerusalem-based group that assists small Jewish communities, a Sephardi *siddur* (prayer book), called “Ner Shabbat” [Sabbath Candle], was prepared. This is a version of one brought to the Amazon region by the first Moroccan Jewish immigrants in the nineteenth century. It includes the traditional Hebrew text of the Sabbath prayer services, together with both a transliteration and translation into Portuguese (A special..., 2006).

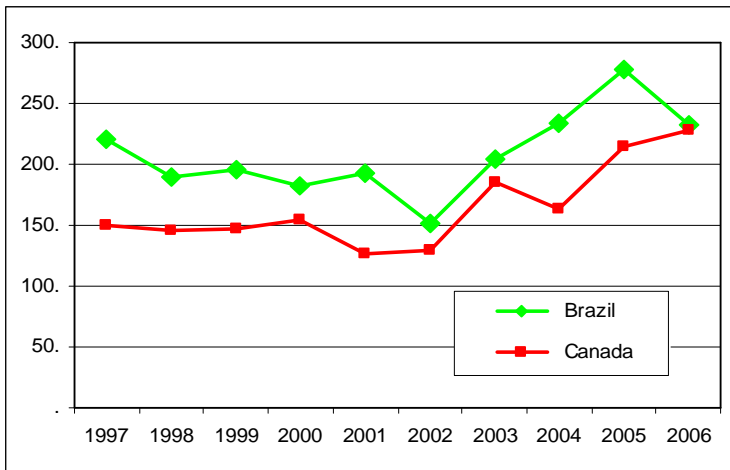
The Chabad-Lubavich group has made efforts at connecting Brazilian Jews to Judaism. Its institutions have grown considerably in recent years with schools and synagogues in several major cities. The embracing of orthodoxy accounted for a dramatic rise in kosher food sales over the past 10 years. Orthodox Jews estimated at 10,000 have been the driving force behind increasing sales (Fonseca, 2006).

In 2003, the Sao Paulo State Jewish Federation developed a broad public relations campaign to publicize various Jewish initiatives to the general Brazilian society. Among its objectives, the campaign tries to reach those who are distant from any kind of Jewish life by rescuing their pride for Judaism and traditions. Another objective was to help improve the public image of the Jewish community, which is sometimes perceived in Brazil as closed and elitist. The campaign pictures five local personalities photographed with Jewish symbols, none of whom is known to be Jewish by the majority of Brazilians (Moraes, 2003). Identification with Israel has been another strategy. Over fifty percent of Brazil's Jews have visited Israel according to the JPPPI. A number of organizations fostered identification with Israel through charitable activities, Zionist clubs,

educational programs, and sports.<sup>6</sup>

Another strategy has been emigration. Although not contributing to the sustainability of the communities of Brazil, the individuals can strengthen their Jewish identity in Israel and other Diaspora communities. Eitan Surkis, Israel’s consul general to Rio de Janeiro pointed to general economic problems and found that the income, especially in the middle class, has been dropping among Jews. This was compounded by the loss of jobs and assets. He alluded to Brazilian Jewish emigration with “the richer Jews are going to Miami, the poor ones to Israel” (Luxner, 2004).

GRAPH 4 – Canadian and Brazilian Jewish migration to Israel, 1997-2006



SOURCE: Israel Central Bureau of Statistics

Detailed information on Brazilian Jewish emigration is only available for Israel. While for other countries – the United States and Canada – details are limited. Between 1948 and

<sup>6</sup> For a list of Brazilian Jewish organizations, see the following portals: [www.netjudaica.com.br](http://www.netjudaica.com.br) and [www.jewishbrazil.com](http://www.jewishbrazil.com). Examples of Israel affiliated organizations include: WIZO, [www.wizosp.org.br](http://www.wizosp.org.br); Na’amat Pioneiras, [www.naamat.org.br](http://www.naamat.org.br), and Confederação Brasileira Macabi, [www.portalcbm.org.br](http://www.portalcbm.org.br).

2006, 10,650 Brazilian Jews settled in Israel. Over the last decade (1997 to 2006) on average 208 Brazilians emigrated to Israel annually. For the United States, only anecdotal information and small local surveys are available to detail the number and location of Brazilian Jews. A 2000 survey found approximately one percent (some 180) of South Florida's Jewish Hispanic adults came from Brazil. The number appears to be increasing with wealthier Jewish families living in high-rise luxury condos that they bought years ago as investments or second homes (Luxner, 2003b; Sheskin, 2004). The analysis of the 2001 Canadian census found Brazilian Jewish immigrants among its communities including 210 in Toronto, 30 in Ottawa, and some in Montreal and recently in Winnipeg. These figures are not very reliable due to the sample size.

## Conclusion – migration: a determining factor for growth or decline

The growth of the Jewish communities in Canada and Brazil is the aggregate of three factors: 1) natural growth (births vs. deaths), 2) migration (immigration and return migration vs. emigration), and 3) identification (conversion and return to the fold vs. assimilation). The Jewish communities have various strategies for maintaining their populations and encouraging growth.

Regarding natural growth, the Jewish communities of Canada and Brazil have limited tools to increase birth rates or to lower death rates. With the exception of ultra-orthodox groups, Jewish community leaders are hesitant to enter into the privacy of family reproductive decisions and to encourage higher birth rates. Some strategies, however, encourage Jewish singles to meet up and start to build Jewish families (and possibly larger ones) earlier in their lives. Another strategy has been to assure families that they will receive community support for the Jewish education of their children. Regarding lowering of death rates, the Jewish communities through the development of Jewish hospitals, homes for the aged, social services, and

charities have enhanced medical and social conditions. This has resulted in better quality of life and greater longevity.

Migration plays an important factor in the growth of Canada's Jewish community and its components. It is a country with political and economic stability. Furthermore, linguistically Canada is an easier country to migrate to than Brazil. English or French is the first language of over 80 percent of Jews in the Diaspora and prevalent second languages for Jews in non-English-speaking and non-French speaking countries. The strategy of Canada's Jewish communities, particularly those which have experienced declining populations such as Winnipeg and Montreal, has been to encourage and facilitate inter-Diasporic migration. The communities have approached Jewish populations in countries where the general economic and/or political conditions have made life for Jews more difficult – the former Soviet Union, Argentina, South Africa, and Brazil. They also encourage and facilitate Jews under threat of anti-Semitism – such as France, Russia, and the Ukraine – to move to Canada. Furthermore, there is a significant migration of Israeli Jews to Canada. This population movement is not promoted but those who reach Canada receive community support like Jewish immigrants from other countries.

For Brazil, it is more difficult to encourage migration of Jews from other countries to strengthen its ranks. Political and economic conditions<sup>7</sup> as well as linguistic barriers inhibit inter-Diasporic migration to Brazil. Portuguese is a language spoken by very few Jews outside Brazil (some 500 in Portugal). The recent economic crisis in Argentina (1999 to 2002) led to the movement of some Argentine Jews to Brazil due to its

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<sup>7</sup> “Brazil’s growth performance has been erratic in recent years but the foundations for a sustained recovery appear to be broadly in place. The measures implemented by the new administration, which took office in January 2003, have contributed to gradually restoring confidence, which had faltered during and in the aftermath of the presidential election in 2002. These measures have succeeded in stabilizing foreign exchange markets, reducing sovereign credit risk, and taming inflation. At the same time, the remarkable external adjustment since the floating of the real in 1999, with continued strong export performance and the ensuing turnaround in the external current account, is making the economy less dependent on foreign financing and, consequently, more resilient to changes in market sentiment.” *Economic Survey of Brazil 2005*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org).

geographic proximity. However, there has not been any large-scale Jewish migration to Brazil since the 1950s.

Emigration has the potential of weakening the Jewish community numerically and its philanthropic financial base. The Jewish communities in Brazil and Canada have made efforts to slow out-migration through fostering a stronger sense of community and Jewish identity (Lesser, 2001, p. 65-73).

The issue of Jewish identification is an area which the spectrum of the Jewish organizations has invested significant resources under the banner of “Jewish continuity”. The loss of Jewish identity or assimilation could lead to the waning of the Jewish population unless concerted efforts are made to decelerate the rate of decline. On the other hand, Judaism allows in-conversion, but does not encourage it. There is no active proselytizing of non-Jews with the exception of those who have Jewish roots. Shavei Israel, founded in 2004, reaches out to “lost Jews” and assists them in coming to terms with their heritage and identity in a spirit of tolerance and understanding. The activities of Shavei Israel focus on descendants of *Anousim*, descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel (such as the Bnei Menashe of India), and descendants of assimilated Jews, who wish to rekindle their connection to Judaism and the Jewish people.

Jewish communities have used identification with the Holocaust and the support of Israel to strengthen Jewish identity. The March of the Living (Marcha Da Vida) is an educational program that brings Jewish teens (from Canada, Brazil and other countries) to Poland on Holocaust Memorial Day, where they march from Auschwitz to Birkenau, and then to Israel where they observe Israel Memorial Day and Israel Independence Day. Its goal is for these young people to learn the lessons of the Holocaust and to lead the Jewish people into the future vowing “Never Again.” Taglit-Birthright Israel provides the gift of first time, peer group, educational trips to Israel for Jewish young adults ages 18 to 26 from around the world. Taglit-Birthright Israel's founders created this program to diminish the growing division between Israel and Jewish communities around the world; to strengthen the sense of

solidarity among world Jewry; and to strengthen participants' personal Jewish identity and connection to the Jewish people.

Both the Canadian and Brazilian Jewish communities are facing similar demographic problems regarding their natural increase and rate of identification despite the differences between the respective host societies. The pivotal element for the growth or decline of these Jewries is migration. For Canada, continued immigration of Jews from other Diaspora communities as well as Israel, offsets the declining natural growth rate and assimilation. Canada is an attractive destination for migration. Specific communities with declining and ageing populations (e.g. Winnipeg and Montreal) increased their efforts to attract Jewish immigrants. Migration should transform the Canadian Jewish population structure by adding to younger population cohorts. Continued investment in the community and Jewish education will foster stronger identification and slow down the rate of assimilation.

For Brazil with a declining natural growth rate, out-migration, and high rates of assimilation, immigration and/or return migration are not viable options to booster its declining numbers. To preserve or enlarge its population, Brazilian Jewry has seen the need to invest inwardly through Jewish education and community development to strengthen Jewish identification and to encourage larger families. Efforts to return *Anousim* (Conversos, or "New Christians"), and descendants of other Jews (e.g. Moroccan Jews in the Amazons) can only slightly offset the high assimilation rate in Brazil.

In summation, the prospect for Canadian Jewry is a slow population increase as long as it is able to continue to attract Jewish immigrants from other Diaspora communities and Israel. Unable to attract new immigrants and with continued emigration, the prognosis for Brazil's Jewish community is not a bright one – a slow but steady population decline.



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