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Polacos, White Slaves, and Stille Chuppahs:
Organized Prostitution and the Jews of Buenos Aires,
1890-1939

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in History

by

Mir Hayim Yarfitz

2012

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Polacos, White Slaves, and Stille Chuppahs:
Organized Prostitution and the Jews of Buenos Aires,
1890-1939

by

Mir Hayim Yarfitz

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles

Professor José C. Moya, Chair

This dissertation explores the particularly prominent role of Jews in coercive sex trafficking, then called white slavery in Buenos Aires when it was considered to be the world capital. The project aims to de-exoticize the subject by comparing Jewish pimps and prostitutes to other immigrants, grounding them in the neighborhoods they lived in, exploring the concrete concerns of their opponents, and connecting the broader discourses around these issues to transnational conversations about migration, sexuality, and the significance of race, ethnicity, and nationhood – the establishment of the boundaries of whiteness – in the furor around white slavery. I introduce new evidence about the Zwi Migdal Society (also called the Varsovia Society), a powerful mutual aid

and burial association of Jewish pimps based in the Argentine capital. Ostracized by the nascent Argentine Jewish community, the Zwi Migdal Society nonetheless developed the same communal structures as those found in conventional voluntary immigrant associations: a burial society, a synagogue, health benefits, and peer recognition. My archival discoveries underline the significance of this battle to the local Jewish community's centralization and the shifting international articulation of norms around morality, marriage, family, and labor, and develop a history that opens into larger issues of migration, identity, women's agency and transatlantic politics. Based on archival research in Buenos Aires, Geneva, New York, London, and Southampton, this project builds upon previous scholarship through new archival discoveries and close analysis of local and international press.

The dissertation of Mir Hayim Yarfitz is approved.

David N. Myers

Lauren Robin Derby

Adriana J. Bergero

José C. Moya, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2012

For Trudi, Stu, and Dan

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Abbreviations

EN	Ezras Noschim
GdF	<i>Gaceta de Foro</i>
JAPGW	Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women
JCA	Jewish Colonization Association
LON	League of Nations
NYPL SIBL	Science Industry and Business Library, New York Public Library
VS	Varsovia Society
ZM	Zwi Migdal

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Vita

Education

- 2007 M.A., Latin American History
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2000 B.A., Phi Beta Kappa in International and Comparative Policy Studies
Reed College, Portland, OR

Professional Experience

- 2012 Lecturer, History Department
California State University, Long Beach
- 2012 Lecturer, M.A. in the Humanities Program
Mount St. Mary's College, Los Angeles
- 2011-12 Teaching Fellow, History Department
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2011-12 Substitute Teacher, Grades 8-10
Sholem Community School, Los Angeles
- 2010 Team-teacher, Graduate Writing Center's Dissertation "Boot Camp"
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2009 Organizing Assistant, History Department Spring Colloquia Lecture Series
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2005-07, '09 Teaching Assistant, History Department
University of California, Los Angeles
- 2004-12 Research Assistant, Faculty Members in History, Religion, and Sociology
University of California, Los Angeles and Santa Barbara

Publications and Invited Lectures

- "Uprooting the Seeds of Evil: Ezras Noschim and Jewish Marriage Regulation, Morality Certificates, and Degenerate Prostitute Mothers in 1930s Buenos Aires," *The New Jewish Argentina: Facets of Jewish Experiences in the Southern Cone*, edited by Adriana Brodsky and Raanan Rein, 55-80 (Leiden: Brill, 2012).
- "Mediators between Police and Prostitutes from Europe to Argentina: International Organizations and Local Authorities, 1890s-1930s," on panel "Historias

- transnacionales: circuitos de vigilancia policial en América del Sur,” Latin American Studies Association Congress, San Francisco, May 23-26, 2012.
- “Maternalist Politics and Latin American Women’s Resistance to Tyranny,” UCLA History M187A/Women’s Studies 186A, May 17, 2012.
- “Dictatorships in Chile and Argentina, 1970s-1980s: US Support and Women’s Protest,” UCLA History 8B, March 1, 2012.
- “Prosopografía Proxenetá: Inmigración Judía, Socorros Mutuos y Comercio Sexual en Argentina, 1906-1930,” *Marginados y Consagrados: Nuevos Estudios Sobre los Judios Argentinos*, edited by Emmanuel Kahan, Laura Schenquer, Damián Setton, and Alejandro Dujovne (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Lumiere, 2011).
- “Uprooting the Seeds of Evil: Jewish Marriage Regulation, Morality Certificates, and Degenerate Prostitute Mothers in 1930s Buenos Aires,” *CSW Update: Special Issue on Thinking Gender 2011* (UCLA: Center for Study of Women); pp. 7-9; presented at Thinking Gender Conference, UCLA, February 11, 2011.
- “Latin America and the Cold War, 1945-1990: Recent Historiography,” Scholar-Teacher Workshop, UCLA History-Geography Project, April 22, 2010.
- “First Wave Sexual Politics: Purity and Prostitution,” UCLA History M187A, April 9, 2009.
- “Caftens, Kurvehs, and Stille Chuppahs: Jewish Sex Workers and their Opponents in Buenos Aires, 1890-1930,” Symposium on Jewish Urban History in the Americas: A Comparative Look at Jewish Buenos Aires and Jewish Los Angeles, UCLA, February 8-9, 2009 and UCLA Center for Argentina, Chile and the Southern Cone Interdisciplinary Workshop, April 7, 2009.
- “Masculinity: Latin America,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World*, ed. Peter Stearns (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); pp. 74-76.

Honors and Fellowships

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| 2011 | Mellon Fellowship for League of Nations Conference in Geneva |
| 2010-11 | Graduate Division Dissertation Year Fellowship, UCLA |
| 2003-04, '05-08, '09-10 | History Department PhD Recruitment Fellowship, UCLA |
| 2009 | Latin American Institute Tinker Field Research Grant, UCLA |
| 2009 | History Department Summer Travel Funding, UCLA |
| 2005 | Center for Jewish Studies Funding for Yiddish Study in Vilnius, UCLA |
| 2004-05 | Foreign Language Area Studies Fellowship, UCLA |
| 2004, 2006 | Graduate Summer Research Mentorship Fellowship, UCLA |
| 2001 | Fulbright Fellowship for research year in Buenos Aires, Argentina |

Introduction

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Buenos Aires was known around the world as a city of sin, where the tango emerged from brothels that housed thousands of foreign-born prostitutes. Prostitution under a regulated brothel structure was legal in Argentina from 1875 to 1936, in a public health-oriented system based on the French model. Although Ashkenazi Jews were not the only immigrant group in Buenos Aires managing legal brothels and clandestine places of assignation, they were the most organized and visible. A group of Jewish pimps, madams, and prostitutes established a legally incorporated mutual aid and burial society in 1906, which would grow to several hundred members, run brothels and other businesses throughout the region, and be officially dismantled in a broadly-publicized court case in 1930. Concerned with their community's reputation, mainstream Jews organized a boycott against those they called *teme'im*, a biblical Hebrew term for "ritually unclean." The local Yiddish press took up an active opposition campaign, publishing hundreds of articles on the subject in the two Buenos Aires daily newspapers.¹ Community leaders worked with Esras Noschim, literally Women's Section, the local branch of the London-based Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women, to combat the co-religionists from whom they were

¹ See for example: "Tmeyim, aroist fun der idisher gezelschaft!" (Teme'im, out of the Jewish community!) *Di Presse* (Buenos Aires) 8, no. 2940, 24 Nov. 1925, 4; "Der kamf kegn di tmeyim vert energish fargezetz," (The struggle against the teme'im strikes a powerful blow) *Di Presse* 13, no. 4747, 23 May 1930, 1; and "Der kamf kegn di froienhandler," (The struggle against the traffickers in women) *Di Yidische Tsaitung* (Buenos Aires) 16, no. 4703, 30 May 1930, 1. Analysis of the Yiddish press will feature more prominently in the book manuscript.

desperate to be distinguished, and cooperated with municipal authorities in pressuring and eventually prosecuting the pimps' society.

While today the idea of organized Jewish traffickers bringing women to Argentine brothels sounds exotic and surprising on several levels, a century ago it would have been a familiar trope, both among Eastern European Jews in the Old and New Worlds, and among a broader trans-Atlantic public. Buenos Aires was described as a favorite destination for white slavers from the earliest associations of white slavery with prostitution, and over time the city became something of a metonym for the phenomenon. Jews were often blamed for the seduction and traffic of women, from the British panic of the 1880s through the Jewish New York “vice trust” broken up in 1913 and the international publicity around the 1930 breakup of the Argentine Zwi Migdal Society, to the Nazi claim that Jews were responsible for 98 percent of the international sex trade.² The history of local Jewish pimps and prostitutes continues to be well known and even still a source of shame among Argentine Jews, but is often framed as “unknown” and certainly exotic by scholars or journalists with an audience beyond the Southern Cone.³

² Nazi claim made in Fritz Hippler, dir., *Der ewige Jude*, 62 min., Deutsche Filmherstellungen und Verwertungs, 1940.

³ E.g. Nora Glickman, *The Jewish White Slave Trade and the Untold Story of Raquel Liberman* (New York: Garland, 2000). The over-exposure of this subject in the Argentine context is criticized by Sandra McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880-1955* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). In the opening scene of Nathan Englander's recent novel, fictional descendants of the teme'im hire thugs to gouge the names of their less-than illustrious forebears out of their tombstones. Nathan Englander, *The Ministry of Special Cases* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007). A fictionalized version of the pimps' society plays an exotic role in a 1979 Jonathan Demme murder mystery

The first chapter frames the Argentine experience of Jewish prostitution in the context of contemporary literature on trafficking in women and the enduring European and North American concerns with white slavery in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Drawing primarily on international press and white slave narratives, my genealogy of the term “white slavery” suggests that the ongoing attraction of white slave stories, despite little evidence of their veracity, was tied to earlier definitions of the term that related to chattel slavery, Barbary Coast and Indian captivity narratives, and industrial labor exploitation. Scholarship on contemporary trafficking which emphasizes women’s agency and places prostitution in the context of migration is of particular utility in this project.

Chapter Two shifts from the global to the local, and focuses on two of the most pervasive aspects of the white slave panics: the association of Jews with the seduction, traffic, and management of once-innocent women, and the image of Buenos Aires as the debauched final destination of girls swept oceans away from home. Given that many ethnic groups were involved in prostitution between the 1890s and World War II, and that Buenos Aires was one of many cities with lots of prostitution in the period, why were Jews so often associated with trafficking, and why did Buenos Aires become a metonym for the phenomenon? After exploring these issues in a transnational context, this chapter turns to the local, with an analysis of unique maps of Jewish brothels and related

addresses in central Buenos Aires in 1895 and 1930. 1895 census data suggest that the

starring Roy Scheider, based on a Murray Teigh Bloom novel. Jonathan Demme, dir., *Last Embrace*, 102 min., United Artists, 1979. An exhibit currently being launched in Germany appears sympathetic to my approach, according to the organizers’ communications with me; see

<http://www.cjudaicum.de/en/content/yellow-ticket-trafficking-girls-1860-1930>

discursive visibility of Jewish prostitution was not simply a result of anti-Semitic exaggeration or mainstream Jewish anxieties; a disproportionate number of Jews in 1895 were involved in legally registered brothels. Over one-third of the women in all the city's registered brothels at that time appear to have been Ashkenazi Jews, who made up more than three-quarters of the women in the police district with the greatest amount of registered prostitutes. This area was then just beginning to become the primary Jewish residential and business neighborhood of Once, and these data reveal that in the symbolic heart of this area stood a de facto red-light zone, in which twenty brothels with nearly 200 women were clustered in one city block. In combination with police records of Jewish men arrested for pimping in the mid-1890s, these data suggest that prostitution was tremendously visible during this initial period of urban Jewish settlement. By the 1920s, Jewish prostitution had become largely centralized under the auspices of the Varsovia or Zwi Migdal Society, and homes and brothels of the teme'im saturated the primary urban Jewish business and residential area. However, as respectable Jews moved westward into the suburbs, the objects of their boycott appeared not to follow.

Chapter Three grapples with the heroization of prostitutes and police. The story of Raquel Liberman, the infamous prostitute whose denunciation of the Zwi Migdal Society helped launch the 1930 court case, is combined with information about other prostitutes in an analysis which foregrounds the possibilities for agency in poor women's lives and further develops this introduction's dissection of the victim narrative of white slavery to envision ways in which Jewish prostitutes in Argentina deployed this discourse for their own purposes. *Stille chuppah*, Jewish religious marriage without a civil component, was often declaimed as a key trafficking recruitment technique. Women in Eastern Europe

sometimes may have chosen quick religious marriage as an emigration strategy, aware that they might end up in prostitution. Police commissioner Julio L. Alsogaray, a driving force pushing the Zwi Migdal to court, and the official to whom Liberman made her denunciation, wrote a memoir of his years fighting predominantly Jewish prostitution. This section examines the tension between his anti-Semitic assumptions and cooperation with Jewish community leaders and his political support of the 1930 coup which brought the first of several twentieth-century military governments to power in Argentina.

The fourth chapter provides a close examination of the Jewish pimps' mutual aid organization through a previously unexamined document produced by the Varsovia Society in 1926. In response to the broader Argentine Jewish community's mobilization against them, sex work managers created a traditional voluntary institutional structure that managed a cemetery, synagogue, and social welfare services. Demographic analysis drawn from this internal financial report as well as immigration, police, and legal records reveals that these individuals acted like other immigrant businessmen, protecting their economic and religious interests, claiming respectability, and strategically identifying as Argentine. Situating this assessment in the broader literature on voluntary associations rather than the literature on crime allows a move beyond the paradigm of martyrdom, criminality, and heroic community monitoring, to imagine both the men and women of the Zwi Migdal as representative immigrants, businessmen and businesswomen, with much in common with other new urban arrivals.

Chapter Five digs into the archival records of Esras Nochim (EN), the Buenos Aires branch of the international Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women. This agency played a central role in the larger community's boycott of the

teme'im, and often cooperated with Argentine authorities and other Jewish institutions in this regard, though not without some conflict. The office's routine work included literal gate-keeping at the docks, assessing the moral fitness of potential new members of the local Jewish community. Even after prostitution ceased to be a central concern in the 1930s, the organization continued to monitor the Jewish community's reproduction through the regulation of immigrant marriages via morality certificates. EN's engagement with prostitutes who were also mothers highlighted the moral policing intrinsic to its work, as some women could be rehabilitated, while others threatened future Jewish generations with hereditary degeneration. This concept of degeneration is further explored in an appendix on the contemporaneous field of Argentine criminology, with particular reference to how these social reformers theorized prostitution. A second appendix gestures towards the clients so often absent from the historical record, with an analysis of tango lyrics, class, and immigrant masculinity.

This project addresses several distinct bodies of literature which are not all frequently brought into conversation: work on contemporary sex trafficking and the history of white slavery as well as prostitution in general; the historiography of Argentine Jewry and migrants to Latin America more broadly, particularly with regards to settlement and assimilation; urban history, belle époque Argentina, and the mala vida; recent work on policing in the Americas, which overlaps with international crime and criminology; analyses of local and international voluntary associations and their interactions with one another and the state; and the larger fields of gender and sexuality in Jewish and Latin American history. It builds on the path-breaking work of Donna Guy and Edward Bristow to elaborate a cultural and social analysis of the role of Buenos

Aires Jewry in and against the sex industry and in international constellations of institutions and discourses. Because most scholarly work on prostitution focuses on the women involved, either as women's work or women's victimization, this project tries to move beyond this dichotomy while focusing on masculinity as well as femininity, to get at a social understanding of the men involved in this segment of the Buenos Aires underworld. Without heroization, this project imagines pimping and prostitution as part of broader labor migrations, and hopes to contribute to greater theorizing of the particular role of the trafficker.

Chapter 1: “The So-called White Slave,” a Genealogy

In order to illuminate the particular historical moment in which the Jewish white slaver was a well-known figure around the world, with Argentina often assumed as the endpoint of his nefarious transit, the concept of white slavery must first be historicized. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, voyeuristic tales of seduction, betrayal, and syphilitic death encouraged European and North American newspaper readers to protect their daughters. A 1913 *New York Times* headline warned “Over 50,000 Girls Disappear in this Country Yearly,” and the article reprinted protective societies’ warnings such as “Girls should never accept sweets, food, a glass of water, or smell flowers offered them by a stranger; neither should they buy scents or other articles at their doors, as so many things may contain drugs.”¹ Spurred by “yellow journalism,” the explosion of mass migration, and the interests of social reformers, mobilization against white slavery succeeded the movements for abolition of African slavery as a major international social cause. Feminists in London, Berlin, and New York rallied against the evils of the “white slave trade,” and organized conferences and rescue missions on behalf of innocent European maidens coerced across the Atlantic by swarthy pimps. However, several decades of historians have demonstrated that white slavery did not actually exist on the scale at which it was publicized, and many contemporary observers also expressed doubt.² Given the relatively few proven cases of innocent woman abducted across

¹ “Over 50,000 Girls Disappear in this Country Yearly.” *New York Times*, September 21, 1913.

² Gretchen Soderlund examines how the *New York Times* became increasingly objective in its approach to this subject matter in the 1910s in “Covering Urban Vice: The New York Times, ‘White Slavery,’ and the Construction of Journalistic Knowledge,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* no. 4 (2002): 438–460.

national boundaries for the purposes of forced prostitution, why did white slavery provoke repeated moral panics on both sides of the Atlantic over more than half a century?

In this chapter, I frame my discussion of the transnational and local phenomenon of Jewish participation in Argentine organized sex work with a genealogy of the term white slavery which argues that the resiliency of the idea was due to the many layers of meaning which attached to the term over time. The aspects of white slavery introduced in this chapter's discourse analysis of narratives published in the US and Britain laid the foundation for the issues to be developed in future chapters tied to race, migration, and women's agency. More than a metaphor, the concept reflected social critiques and both concrete and abstract proposals for social change. Although by the eve of WWI the term "white slavery" was generally understood in the English-speaking world to refer to coerced prostitution, this sensationalistic phrase continued to reflect the nuances of several distinct meanings that had been deployed to various ends for at least a century prior. White slavery differed from its foreign counterparts *La Trata de Blancas*, *La Traite*

Donna Guy shows how the statistics from Argentine municipal prostitutes' health registries were used as evidence for coercive international trafficking, and Mark Connelly assesses the sensationalistic misrepresentation of evidence presented by the 1911 Chicago Vice Commission in subsequent white slavery narratives. Donna Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991). Mark T. Connelly, *The Response to Prostitution in the Progressive Era* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011). For contemporary doubt about the veracity of white slave stories, see "Is White Slavery Nothing More Than a Myth?" *New York Current Opinion* 55, no. 5, Nov. 1913 and "Popular Gullibility as Expressed in the New White Slavery Hysteria," *New York Current Opinion* 56, no. 2, Feb. 1914.

des Blanches, and *Der Mädchenhandel* in the term's close historic association with African chattel slavery and its abolition, industrial labor abuses, and Orientalist fantasies. The Spanish, French, and German terms lack the association with slavery, literally referring to the traffic or trade in women and girls. The Spanish and French terms do specify "white" females, but do not contrast as pointedly with "black" chattel slavery. The coercive element of the traffic was the central shared concern of representatives from the many interested countries who met in international conferences from the turn of the century and later through the League of Nations, as particular countries had very different regulatory approaches to prostitution. International collaboration on the issue tended to reduce white slavery to the particular narrative of a young white Western European female forced into sexual immorality by a man of foreign nationality. The powerful resonance of this term can be illuminated by a close examination of the evolution of meanings attributed to white slavery over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the numerous political movements and social anxieties to which those meanings were linked. Pre-prostitution meanings of white slavery, particularly as chattel, captive, and wage slavery, continued to echo within the popular discourse of white slavery as sex trafficking, manifesting as concerns with racial mixing, Orientalist fantasies, and women's work.

Responses to the white slave panics were not universal, and some contemporary observers argued that the phenomenon was exaggerated. A Boston theater critic in 1913 questioned the credibility of a recent white slave novel, which he called a "tract... to support the agitation against the white slave traffic, [in which] a lurid tale was told of how two innocent girls living in the country were trapped on their arrival in town and

taken to a house of ill fame.”³ The critic belittles the genre as “a revival of a somewhat ancient legend” and praises Teresa Billington-Greig’s recent debunking of the hysteria surrounding the issue. Billington-Grieg was known for distinguishing her feminism from that of the social purity reformers, rejecting white slavery as gossip and media sensationalism.⁴ The theater critic boldly concluded: “there is not, and apparently has not been in recent years, a single well-tested case in which a girl has been trapped into the white slave traffic in this country against her will. Obviously, there are, of course, cases of seduction, and insidious advertisements are sometimes published enticing girls abroad; but the lurid accounts of compulsory detention and outrage appear to be entirely baseless.”⁵ This skeptic suggested that reformers take heed of these facts, and slow their efforts. In the same year, a *New York Times* article also excoriated reformers for mounting “shocking public exhibitions” despite having “reformed nothing” of “this so largely mythical white slave traffic.”⁶ For presumably different motives, before he became mayor of New York and between his two congressional terms, when he was President of the Board of Aldermen in 1920, Fiorello LaGuardia made light of the significance of the work of the Traveler’s Aid Society, said that female immigrants arriving in New York faced little real danger, and disavowed the existence of an organized traffic in white slaves.⁷

³ W. L. Courtney, “Realistic Drama,” *Boston Living Age*, Sept. 27, 1913.

⁴ Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 249.

⁵ Courtney, “Realistic Drama,” 778.

⁶ “Missing Girls and False Alarms,” *New York Times*, December 9, 1913.

⁷ “Travelers’ Aid Praised by Many,” *New York Times*, February 11, 1920.

The history of international prostitution and the language of trafficking cannot be disaggregated from contemporary academic and policy discussions. Women’s rights, violence, and consent have been central to debates over prostitution for over a century, and currently inform global governmental decision-making. Much has been published on sexual trafficking in recent years, and while a full survey of this literature is beyond the scope of this project, several positions are of particular relevance. The two principal positions on contemporary trafficking echo the main two arguments made by feminists and anti-prostitution activists over the past century and a half. The abolitionist position, that all prostitution inherently exploits women, is exemplified by Josephine Butler’s opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts in the 1860s and the radical feminism articulated by, among others, Kathleen Barry, Sheila Jeffries, Catharine MacKinnon, and the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women a century later.⁸ The regulationist position, that prostitution is a form of labor made exploitative by its conditions, was voiced early

⁸ On Josephine Butler, see for example Bruno P. F. Wanrooij, “Josephine Butler and Regulated Prostitution in Italy,” *Womens History Review* 17, no. 2 (April 2008): 153–171; Antoinette M. Burton, “The White Woman’s Burden: British Feminists and the Indian Woman, 1865-1915,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 13, no. 4 (1990): 295–30; Glen Petrie, *A Singular Iniquity: The Campaigns of Josephine Butler* (London: Macmillan, 1971). Kathleen Barry’s most influential work on this subject is *Female Sexual Slavery* (New York: New York University Press, 1979). For a critique of Barry’s position and CATW, see Jo Doezema, “Ouch! Western Feminists’ ‘Wounded Attachment’ to the ‘Third World Prostitute’.” *Feminist Review*, no. 67 (Win. 2001): 16–38. The other key radical feminist works articulating this position include Catharine MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989) and Sheila Jeffreys, *The Idea of Prostitution* (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1997), rearticulated as a global phenomenon in *The Industrial Vagina: The Political Economy of the Global Sex Trade* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2009).

on variously by state public health officials and Emma Goldman, and later reconstrued as some prostitutes began to organize collectively as sex workers.⁹ This perspective, often held by liberal feminists, criticizes the former position for denying prostitutes agency in their own lives and figuring them as victims, a problem that will be further explored below. Recently, scholars and activists have suggested additional positions in an attempt to move beyond a dichotomy of prostitutes as tragic victims and powerful agents, most notably by complicating the idea of consent and putting international trafficking in the

⁹ Emma Goldman, *The White Slave Traffic* (New York: Mother Earth Pub. Association, 1909); published in 1910 as “The Traffic in Women.” The term sex work originated with the political liberation movements and feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, and spread with public health campaigns related to HIV and AIDS. On the language of sex work and liberal feminist position, much has been written, see for example: Elizabeth Bernstein, “What’s Wrong with Prostitution--What’s Right with Sex Work--Comparing Markets in Female Sexual Labor,” *Hastings Women’s Law Journal* 10 (1999): 91; Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema, eds. *Global Sex Workers* (Routledge, 1998); L. McLaughlin, “Discourses of Prostitution Discourses of Sexuality,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 8, no. 3 (September 1991): 249–272; Shonali Choudhury, “‘As Prostitutes, We Control Our Bodies’: Perceptions of Health and Body in the Lives of Establishment-based Female Sex Workers in Tijuana, Mexico,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 12, no. 6 (August 2010): 677–689; Laura Oso Casas, “Money, Sex, Love and the Family: Economic and Affective Strategies of Latin American Sex Workers in Spain,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36, no. 1 (January 2010): 47–65. For a classic analysis of the French regulatory system, the systemic standard for that period, see Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France After 1850* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990). On the British system of regulation see Philip Howell, *Geographies of Regulation: Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

context of migration.¹⁰ Jo Doezema presents a particularly nuanced overview of these older debates and recent positions, which warrants closer analysis here.

Doezema's 2010 *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters: The Construction of Trafficking* connects contemporary policy debates over trafficking to what she calls the

¹⁰ For recent critiques of this dichotomy, see Sallie Yea, "'Shades of grey': spaces in and beyond trafficking for Thai Women involved in commercial sexual labour in Sydney and Singapore," *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 19, no 1 (2012): 42-60 and Veronica Magar, "Rescue and Rehabilitation: A Critical Analysis of Sex Workers' Antitrafficking Response in India," *Signs* 37, no. 3 (March 1, 2012): 619-644. Laura María Agustín is the best-known scholar to interpret trafficking in a migratory framework; see her *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry* (Zed Books, 2007); "The Conundrum of Women's Agency: Migrations and the Sex Industry," in *Sex Work Now*, edited by M. O'Neill and R. Campbell (Cullompton: Willan Publishing, 2006): 116-40; "The Disappearing of a Migration Category: Migrants Who Sell Sex," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 32, no. 1 (January 2006): 29-47; "The Cultural Study of Commercial Sex," *Sexualities* 8, no. 5 (2005): 618-31; and "Migrants in the Mistress's House: Other Voices in the 'Trafficking' Debate," *Social Politics* 12, no. 1 (Spr. 2005): 96-117. On the migration connection, see also Rutvica Andrijasevic, "Beautiful Dead Bodies: Gender, Migration and Representation in Anti-trafficking Campaigns," *Feminist Review* 86, no. 1 (2007): 24-44; M. F. Manalansan, "Queer Intersections: Sexuality and Gender in Migration Studies," *International Migration Review* 40, no. 1 (Spr, 2006): 224-249; Tanja Bastia, "Stolen Lives or Lack of Rights? Gender, Migration and Trafficking," *Labour, Capital and Society* 39, no. 2 (2006): 21-47; Kamala Kempadoo, Jyoti Sanghera, and Bandana Pattanaik, eds. *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered: New Perspectives on Migration, Sex Work, and Human Rights* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2005); Laura Oso Casas, "Money, Sex, Love and the Family: Economic and Affective Strategies of Latin American Sex Workers in Spain," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36, no. 1 (January 2010): 47-65. Julietta Hua provides a thought-provoking critique of human rights discourse around trafficking in *Trafficking Women's Human Rights* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

historical “myth of white slavery.”¹¹ Doezema applies the theoretical concepts of ideology and myth primarily as defined by Terry Eagleton and Ernesto Laclau to the historic campaigns against white slavery in the US and Britain and the recent Vienna negotiations around international human trafficking. Part of her project is to highlight the parallels between popular narratives of white slavery and contemporary framing of trafficking, such as the image of the unwilling victim. She also attempts to move beyond an interpretation in which white slavery narratives distorted a reified truth or allegorized fears of women’s sexuality.¹² Doezema’s solution is the reinscription of myth, in which sex workers “reposition themselves from pariahs to protectors, from fallen women in need of rescue to community educators: experts of safe sex.”¹³ In this effort she foregrounds the question of consent in both past and present debates, as actors disagree about the dividing line between “victim” and “willing whore.”¹⁴

Consent, Doezema argues, while presumed to be a stable concept, should be removed from its central role in the discourse around prostitution, and in part understood as shifting for so-called trafficked individuals at different points. She proposes a new understanding of consent, which other scholars also prescribe.¹⁵ Doezema wants to move

¹¹ Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 12.

¹² Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 11-12.

¹³ Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 174.

¹⁴ Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 14.

¹⁵ On consent see also Ilse van Liempt, “Trafficking in Human Beings: Conceptual Dilemmas,” pp. 27-42 and Donna Dickenson, “Philosophical Assumptions and Presumptions about Trafficking for Prostitution,” pp. 43-53 in Christien van den Anker and Jeroen Doomernik, eds. *Trafficking and Women’s Rights* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

beyond the “modified choice” model, often made by advocates of rights for sex workers, in which women’s lives must be understood as never permitting total freedom of choice, due to hierarchies of race, sex, and class.¹⁶ She argues for a model of sex work that does not rely on consent, in which prostitutes move from vulnerable to “desiring” subjects, seeking the practice of freedom rather than the passive receipt of rights.¹⁷

Although some defenders of abolitionism and radical feminism criticize alternative perspectives on prostitution as excusing the abuse of women, I intend to align myself with the sex workers’ rights activists who have promoted their own health and empowerment through organized autonomy over the past several decades. While this chapter’s discourse analysis could be criticized as an academic method of avoiding the actual abuses endemic to sex work, and I in no way want to minimize the violence that prostitutes routinely face at the hands of pimps, clients, police, and others. Sex workers themselves are often erased in higher-level abolitionist arguments, and I have become convinced that the theoretical underpinnings of this work more respectfully respond to prostitutes as full human beings. My analysis of the Varsovia or Zwi Migdal mutual aid and burial association does not mean to “sanction pimps as legitimate sexual entrepreneurs,” but tries in reserving judgment to allow a broader range of issues to come into view.¹⁸

¹⁶ Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 24-25. For an example of the modified choice argument, see Wendy Chapkis, *Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labor* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

¹⁷ Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 175.

¹⁸ This quote comes from a contemporary radical feminist critique of the legalization of prostitution and defense of Sweden’s current policy that criminalizes clients. Janice Raymond, “Sex for Sale: Why Sweden Punishes Buyers,” *Christian Science Monitor*, September 7, 2010.

Moral Panics and Victim Narratives

How should a historian deal with the fictionalized or exaggerated elements of white slavery narratives? Natalie Zemon Davis in *Fiction in the Archives* suggests a useful response: “the artifice of fiction did not necessarily lend falsity to an account; it might well bring verisimilitude or a moral truth.”¹⁹ Rather than trying to sort out fact from fiction, it is more productive to connect these moral truths to those who might be most concerned with them. I agree with Doezema that the most useful historiographic approach to white slavery “is not to ascertain... whether this misrepresented reality, ... but to investigate the symbolic power carried by ‘white’ when linked to ‘slavery’ in a sexualized context.”²⁰ Historians have long pointed out the statistical exaggerations of anti-white slavery campaigners, and Doezema joins with other critics in suggesting that today’s anti-trafficking campaigners, while not deliberately exaggerating statistics, benefit from inflated numbers, which are notoriously impossible to prove or disprove.²¹

¹⁹ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford University Press, 1990), 4.

²⁰ Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 84.

²¹ On exaggeration of historical white slavery statistics, see for example: Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires*, 119 and Connelly *The Response to Prostitution in the Progressive Era*. On statistical inflation in current anti-trafficking work see Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 6-7; William McDonald, “Traffic Counts, Symbols and Agendas: A Critique of the Campaign Against Trafficking of Human Beings,” *International Review of Victimology* 11 (2004): 143–176; Julia O’Connell Davidson and Briget Anderson, “The Trouble with ‘Trafficking,’” pp. 11-26 in Christien van den Anker and Jeroen Doornik,

Doezema, however, leaves aside “Whatever the historical circumstances in which the term ‘white slavery’ came into being,”²² which I understand to be crucial to the term’s stickiness over more than a half-century, despite repeated debunking of the actual scale of coercive cross-border prostitution.

Some historians have interpreted white slavery in sociological terms, as a moral panic. Mary Ann Irwin frames the impact of the British *Pall Mall Gazette*’s 1885 publication of *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon* as a moral panic caused by the powerful metaphor of white slavery.²³ This moral panic was incited by economic and social tensions that the white slavery metaphor tapped into, due to its interpretation of women’s blurred sexual and economic roles in a moment of changing industrial and urban conditions. Ronald Weitzer argues that today’s organized opposition to sex trafficking, including in US government policy, shares the characteristics of a moral panic, based on false or unsubstantiated claims.²⁴ This goes beyond a moral crusade,

eds., *Trafficking and Women’s Rights* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). On the difficulties of accurate data collection in this arena see Ronald Weitzer, “The Social Construction of Sex Trafficking: Ideology and Institutionalization of a Moral Crusade,” *Politics & Society* 35, no. 3 (September 1, 2007): 455.

²² Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 84.

²³ Mary Ann Irwin, “‘White Slavery’ As Metaphor: Anatomy of a Moral Panic,” *Ex Post Facto: The History Journal* 5 (1996). <http://www.walnet.org/csis/papers/irwin-wslavery.html> accessed 9/17/2008.

²⁴ Weitzer, “The Social Construction of Sex Trafficking,” 447–75. See also M. Woodiwiss, and D. Hobbs. “Organized Evil and the Atlantic Alliance: Moral Panics and the Rhetoric of Organized Crime Policing in America and Britain,” *British Journal of Criminology* 49, no. 1 (January 2009): 106–28; C. Barron and D. Lacombe, “Moral Panic and the Nasty Girl,” *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology-revue Canadienne De Sociologie Et De Anthropologie* 42, no. 1 (February 2005): 51–69.

which he defines as a perceived unmitigated evil which rallies participants to push political elites and institutions to respond, and becomes a moral panic as the menace is portrayed on a scale far beyond objective reality.²⁵ The limitations of this frame can be carried over from Alan Hunt's genealogy of the development of the concept in sociological literature, in which he points out the dangers of what is usually an ahistorical approach to causality.²⁶

The term "moral panic" was first used in an essay by Jock Young in a 1971 volume edited by Stanley Cohen.²⁷ A definition of moral panic that aptly fits white slavery is laid out by Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda in *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* as a situation in which "the public, the media, the police, politicians, and/or social action groups in a particular society at a particular time evidence intense concern over a condition, phenomenon, issue, or behavior that, a sober assessment of the evidence reveals, does not merit such level of concern."²⁸ Moral

²⁵ Ronald Weitzer, "Moral Crusade Against Prostitution," *Society* (April 2006): 33. See also Weitzer, "Flawed Theory and Method in Studies of Prostitution," *Violence Against Women* 11 (2005): 934-49 and McDonald, "Traffic Counts, Symbols and Agendas," 143-76.

²⁶ Arnold Hunt, "'Moral Panic' and Moral Language in the Media," *The British Journal of Sociology* 48, no. 4 (December 1997): 629-48.

²⁷ The term was not first used, despite usual citations, by Stanley Cohen in his 1972 *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, though this work popularized the term. This distinction is made by Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda in *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 12. See also Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (Oxford: M. Robertson, 1980).

²⁸ Goode and Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics*, 124.

crusades and moral panics have some overlap, but are not identical.²⁹ For a situation to be defined as a moral panic, five crucial elements must be present: a heightened level of concern with a particular group or category; increased hostility towards those perceived as causing the behavior; substantial social consensus on the seriousness of the threat (opposition can exist, but must be out-shouted); a disproportionate number of people must be assumed to be involved in the behavior than is actually possible; and the nature of the panic must be volatile, appearing, subsiding, and perhaps re-appearing abruptly.³⁰ White slavery as discussed in this chapter fits many of these definitions, and when associated with Jews and with Buenos Aires, as discussed in the following chapter, with all of them. Most interesting in the concept of moral panic is the question of the irrational: why in a particular moment is the response to a perceived threat so disproportionate to the actual threat?

Goode and Ben-Yehuda theorize that these moral panics occur because of three basic theories, each of which involves morality or ideology, individual personal status motivations, and the social origin of the panic among social elites, the middle-class, or the general public.³¹ In a particular moral panic, more than one of these models can co-exist, but they have generally been used individually to explain a range of historical situations. The grassroots model identifies the origin of moral panics in a latent fear or sense of threat among the general public, which is harnessed and exacerbated by media,

²⁹ Goode and Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics*, 19.

³⁰ Goode and Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics*, 33-41.

³¹ Goode and Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics*, 124-27.

politicians, and so on.³² The elite-engineered model blames a self-aware elite group for intentionally manufacturing a moral panic in order to divert the public from more pressing social problems that threaten elite interests.³³ Stuart Hall used this model to analyze mugging in Great Britain in the early 1970s, and conclude that capitalist elites used the media to elevate the “wrong things” in order to obscure the “deeper causes.”³⁴ Most analyses of moral panics have used some version of an interest-group model, which assert the independent interests of middle-class groups such as police, media, and civic associations that stand to gain from promoting the issue.³⁵ This theory is more often paired with grassroots model than the elite-engineered model. For the issue of white slavery, which became a moral panic in Great Britain in the 1880s and in the United States in the 1900s, with echoes around the world, the first and third of these models are more obviously relevant. If applied to social reform organizations, newspaper owners, and so on, the elite-engineered model begins to also hold some possibility.³⁶

The predominant narrative of white slavery emphasized the victimization of the female subject. The process by which a young naïf from the countryside is overtaken by the confusing customs and characters of city life and beguiled into sin can be traced with little variation from the earliest lurid tales of white slavery to contemporary stories of

³² Goode and Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics*, 127-34.

³³ Goode and Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics*, 135-38.

³⁴ Goode and Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics*, 136; Stuart Hall, et al, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, The State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

³⁵ Goode and Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics*, 138-41.

³⁶ Keire makes this argument with respect to Progressive-Era anti-vice reformers in “The Vice Trust.”

human trafficking.³⁷ The appeal of this narrative to sympathetic would-be rescuers lies in the removal of the subject from culpability, separating the prostitute from the stigma of her ages-old profession. Women's rights activists could take advantage of this validation of women's moral superiority, while social reformers created institutions for the rescue and rehabilitation of the fallen. This story also resonates in Europe with earlier concerns, such as the Barbary pirates stocking the harems of the East, and in the United States with Indian captivity narratives. Removal of blame from the sexual slave and its reassignment to the seducer, trafficker, or brothel-keeper, increasingly identified with undesirable immigrant populations, justified policies and laws which penalized these broader groups. This victim narrative is instructive both in its diverse applications over a lengthy period and in the broader social concerns to which it was linked in the white slavery period, particularly urbanization, immigration, and racial mixing.

From their beginnings in the 1870s, European and later American anti-white slavery organizations conceived of their mission as one of protection and rescue of women who had been victimized by society's double standard of sexual morality.³⁸ This positioning maintained an ineradicable distinction between the victims and their rescuers, which reinforced not only differences of economic class but also of status within the

³⁷ Jo Doezema traces the parallels between white slave and contemporary victim narratives in "White Slaves, Poor Slavs: Melodrama of Trafficking in Women," *Osteuropa* 56, no. 6 (June 2006): 269. Helen Schwenken makes a similar analysis in "Beautiful Victims and Sacrificing Heroines: Exploring the Role of Gender Knowledge in Migration Policies," *Signs* 33, no. 4 (Sum. 2008): 770–76.

³⁸ Ie. Anne Summers describes this orientation held by the Swiss women involved in the early International Abolitionist Federation in "Which Women? What Europe? Josephine Butler and the International Abolitionist Federation," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 62 (Fall 2006): 215–231.

imperial project. A critic of Josephine Butler's campaign for Indian prostitutes emphasizes the "contradictions of a feminist ideology which, while demanding equality for women, prioritized the emancipation of white women, and moreover, made that emancipation dependant on the existence of a colonized Indian womanhood."³⁹ Death is usually presented as the inevitable result of prostitution, implicitly or explicitly caused by syphilis or other sexually transmitted diseases. Elisabeth Bronfen describes the significance of the sacrificed female body in Western culture: "Over her dead body, cultural norms are reconfirmed or secured, whether because the sacrifice of the virtuous, innocent woman serves a social critique and transformation or because the sacrifice of a dangerous woman re-establishes an order that is momentarily suspended due to her presence."⁴⁰ These dead, formerly innocent, women become martyrs to the cause of abolishing this social evil.

In Christian societies, taboos against sexual promiscuity have tended to stigmatize if not ostracize the prostitute, blaming her, like Eve, for the sins of men. An alternate explanation for the infamously ancient profession appeared in early modern Europe, exemplified in the first scene from Hogarth's *The Harlot's Progress*, in which a young woman from the country, dazzled by the bustle of early eighteenth-century London, is snapped up by a sharp-eyed procuress.⁴¹ Both the victim narrative and its dubious veracity were established by 1860, when Henry Mayhew, who interviewed and quoted

³⁹ Burton, "White Woman's Burden," 295.

⁴⁰ Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester University Press, 1992), 181.

⁴¹ Image reproduced in Hilary Evans, *Harlots, Whores & Hookers: A History of Prostitution* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1979), 22.

British prostitutes in *London Labour and the London Poor*, recounted “you seldom, if ever, meet with a woman who is not either a seduced governess or a clergyman’s daughter; not that there is a word of truth in such an allegation - but it is their peculiar whim to say so.”⁴² As in later publicity around white slavery, the power of this narrative resonated far beyond the extent to which it was proven true.

In this chapter, I argue that the genealogy of the term white slavery, as it evolved into meaning coerced prostitution and then transformed into trafficking, contributed to the believability of its central victim narrative. Previous definitions of white slavery, particularly as chattel slavery, wage slavery, and Barbary Coast slavery, amplified the resonance of the innocent inveigled prostitute with other racial and labor-related anxieties. Anxiety, however, should be qualified as a causal mechanism. Alan Hunt convincingly warns of the limitations of using the concept of social anxiety to uncover “what is really going on” underneath social and political controversies, including in campaigns against prostitution. Hunt critiques anxiety theories of social concerns from Stuart Hall’s work onward, primarily noting that social anxiety over various changes should not be credited as a causal mechanism, although it can be helpful in linking targets and a range of sources.⁴³ The concept of moral panic shares these limitations. I hope to ameliorate this problem somewhat by emphasizing the connections uncovered by the genealogical approach, rather than causal explanations.

⁴² Reproduced in Evans, *Harlots, Whores & Hookers*, 106-7.

⁴³ Alan Hunt, “Anxiety and Social Explanation: Some Anxieties About Anxiety.” *Journal of Social History* 32, no. 3 (Spr. 1999): 509-28.

White Slave as Chattel, Captive, and Wage Slave

Whether understood as chattel slave, wage slave, or prostitute, the white slave always dragged the black slave as a shadow. While some critics of white slavery drew on presumed popular opposition to black slavery to create sympathy, others implied that the injustice of white slavery was magnified in comparison to black slavery by the skin color of its subjects. The earliest uses of the term white slavery emerge out of African chattel slavery, to refer to lighter-skinned products of miscegenation maintained in captivity. One self-proclaimed “White Slave Trader,” who held “a private Slave-market on [his] own premises” proudly defended his trade in an 1804 letter to the editor of Boston’s *Christian Observer*, in which he justified the trade both in terms of law and custom, and quoted the Bible to argue that “the White Slave Trade is expressly foretold in Scripture; and that, therefore, we Slavers are only fulfilling a prophecy... ‘in the last days men shall creep into houses, and lead captive silly women, laden with sins, led away with divers lusts’.”⁴⁴ Though the term was not yet used at that time to refer to the use of forced labor for explicitly sexual purposes, this passage implies that sexual duties were understood to be at least a part of the normal labor of the female white slave, as for the black. This is one of the few texts that defend the institution of white slavery, here as part of a defense of chattel slavery itself. After white slavery became generally understood to mean prostitution, the connection to chattel slavery often minimized the cruelty of the latter

⁴⁴ A White Slave Trader, “To the Editor of the Christian Observer,” *Boston Christian Observer, Conducted By Members of the Established Church* 3, no. 5 (May 1804). For more on the sexualized aspects of chattel slavery and abolitionism, see Ronald G. Walters, “The Erotic South: Civilization and Sexuality in American Abolitionism,” *American Quarterly* 25 (May 1973): 180.

institution and innocence of its victims in comparison, as in a 1913 social purity sexual education manual that argued about the coerced prostitute "No other form of slavery which has ever been devised can equal her condition."⁴⁵

Although the concept of slavery has today generally come to be associated with the particular form of African chattel slavery managed by colonial Christian Europe, the term has encompassed a range of institutions in different societies, and would have contained a somewhat broader set of implied meanings for those interested in white slavery a century ago. African chattel slavery would have been the primary referent, as it had only recently been abolished, in some places as late as the 1880s, and fallout from both sides of the abolition movement continued to influence political and social debates. This "peculiar institution" had shaped general understandings of the definition of slavery to such an extent that for most people in Europe and the New World the terms slave and black had become synonyms. Like the term "free black," the term "white slave" would have had the jarring quality of an oxymoron, juxtaposing two inherently contradictory terms. Just as a slave could not be free, a slave could not be white.⁴⁶ This logical impossibility presumably added to the shock value of the term.

The image of the white slave as chattel slave continued to have some resonance after the abolition of chattel slavery, as indicated by the 1882 New York *Police Gazette* image "Selling a White Slave" (Figure 1.1) which shows a fair-skinned woman exhibited by a dark-skinned man apparently clad in an animal skin, subtitled with a warning against

⁴⁵ Thomas Washington Shannon, *Self Knowledge and Guide to Sex Instruction: Vital Facts of Life for All Ages* (The S. A. Mullikin Company, 1913), 585

⁴⁶ Orlando Patterson references this dichotomy in *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 7.

the dangers of racial mixing, citing "beauty and a bad tongue as drawbacks to miscegenation."⁴⁷ This representation illustrates several anxieties that are later linked to both racial and sexual definitions of white slavery: that miscegenation might lead to an inversion of the natural order of things, in which a fair-skinned seller exhibits a dark-skinned animal-clad commodity; and the dangerous beauty of female products of racial intermixing.⁴⁸ The idea of a dark-skinned or foreign purveyor of white slaves later became a central element of the dominant narrative of white slave as sexual victim.

⁴⁷ "Selling a White Slave." *The National Police Gazette* 40, no. 264 (October 14, 1882): 16.

⁴⁸ On the cult of the mulatta, see for example Thomas E. Skidmore, "Bi-Racial U.S.A. Vs. Multi-Racial Brazil: Is the Contrast Still Valid?" *Journal of Latin American Studies* 25, no. 2 (May 1993): 374-75.

Figure 1.1: “Selling a White Slave,” 1882



Europeans became particularly concerned with the defense of their own freedom from slavery in the seventeenth-century capture of hundreds of thousands of European Christians by Muslim raiders from the North African Barbary Coast.⁴⁹ Paul Michel

⁴⁹ This characterization from David Brion Davis, “Declaring Equality: Sisterhood and Slavery,” in Kathryn Kish Sklar and James Brewer Stewart, eds., *Women’s Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of*

Baepler argues that Barbary captivity narratives were among the most popular stories in nineteenth century America. His analysis of these tales in *White Slaves, African Masters* argues that they are intimately intertwined with the American slave narrative and the Indian captivity narrative, which he claims American literary historians have overemphasized, while the three should be considered together.⁵⁰ One such text, Charles Sumner's 1853 *White Slavery in the Barbary States*, compares the abolitionist movement against African chattel slavery to European outrage at the enslavement of European and American Christians in Algiers, describing the rhetorical use made by abolitionists of the situation presumably more objectionable to white audiences.⁵¹ The Barbary Coast captivity narrative was brought across the Atlantic by English immigrants, and influenced the creation in the United States of a new captivity narrative in the late seventeenth century, which generally featured a female victim.

These two types of stories shared the elements of the capture of an Anglo by strangers, followed by struggles, assimilation, and eventually escape.⁵² These same elements also often appear in white slave narratives, with the substitution of a Jew or other foreign immigrant for the Muslim, Native American, or French-Canadian captor. Sexual white slave narratives often reinforced the cultural or racial differences between

Emancipation (Yale University Press, 2007), 5. See also Robert C. Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters* (Macmillan, 2003); Lawrence A. Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen: Barbary Slavery and the American Public, 1785-1816* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

⁵⁰ Paul Michel Baepler, *White Slaves, African Masters* (University of Chicago Press, 1999).

⁵¹ Charles Sumner, *White Slavery in the Barbary States* (J. P. Jewett, 1853), 83-90.

⁵² Linda Colley, "Perceiving Low Literature: The Captivity Narrative," *Essays in Criticism* 53, no. 3 (July 2003): 201. See also her book *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600-1850* (Anchor Books, 2004).

victim and procurer, as in the intense contrast drawn in Reginald Wright Kauffman's 1910 *The House of Bondage* between swarthy Jewish procurer Max and fair subject Mary.⁵³ Similarly, one scholar of captivity narratives argues that they promoted the imperial designs of the West by underlining "a binary division between captive and captor... based on cultural, national, or racial difference."⁵⁴ Captivity narratives of Puritan New England emphasized the cultural abyss between themselves and the Catholic French Canadians or heathen Native Americans, while white slave narratives addressed Great Migration period concerns about less desirable ethnic groups.⁵⁵

The archetypal captivity narrative of Mary Rowlandson emphasized the subject's ultimate redemption and Puritan conversion on the other side of her God-given suffering.⁵⁶ One commentator that the religious beliefs of both American Puritans and British non-conformists (as opposed to Anglicans) encouraged them to perceive captivity as "a God-given affliction designed to chastise the victim into moral and spiritual reformation."⁵⁷ This perspective resonates with the work of fin-de-siècle moral reformers on both sides of the Atlantic, from Josephine Butler to the Hull House social workers.

⁵³ Reginald Wright Kauffman, *The House of Bondage* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1910), 19, 31.

⁵⁴ From Michelle Burnham, *Captivity and Sentiment*, 2, reproduced in Colley, "Perceiving Low Literature," 205.

⁵⁵ For an example of the use of the term in Indian captivity narratives, see John Rodgers Jewitt, *White Slaves of the Nootka: Narrative of the Adventures and Sufferings of John R. Jewitt While a Captive of the Nootka Indians on Vancouver Island, 1803-05* (Heritage House, 1987).

⁵⁶ Tara Fitzpatrick, "The Figure of Captivity: The Cultural Work of the Puritan Captivity Narrative." *American Literary History* 3, no. 1 (1991): 1.

⁵⁷ Colley, "Perceiving Low Literature," 202.

Many captivity narratives, particularly those with female subjects, were generally told by two voices, that of the captive, and that of a minister harnessing the story in order to encourage repentance and urge readers to stay close to the congregation in order to avoid a similar fate.⁵⁸ This dual narration also characterized most white slave stories; although journalists and moral reformers took the place of ministers, they similarly shaped the stories for their own didactic purposes.

Probably the most common usage of “white slave” throughout the nineteenth century was to critique the working conditions of the industrial laborer, as the economic and social upheaval provoked by the Industrial Revolution inspired popular concern with the consequences of factory work, particularly for the most vulnerable. British advocates of slavery in the West Indies used similar language from at least the 1780s to argue that West Indian slaves lived and worked under conditions far superior to those of English child laborers and short-lived miners. Their abolitionist opponents ignored the comparison between chattel and wage slavery, focusing on the treatment of human beings as property as civilization’s foremost evil.⁵⁹ In 1833 (the year of the British Factory Act which for the first time placed significant legal restrictions on child labor) the poem “The Factory Child,” penned in Britain and republished in newspapers from Charleston to Boston, described young children suffering under exhausting hours, tyrannical factory overseers, pitiful wages, and premature death.⁶⁰ White slavery was understood in this

⁵⁸ Fitzpatrick, “The Figure of Captivity,” 2, 4.

⁵⁹ David Brion Davis, “Declaring Equality,” 15.

⁶⁰ On the 1833 British Factory Act, see Harry Hendrick, “Constructions and Reconstructions of British Childhood: An Interpretative Survey, 1800 to the Present,” pp. 33–60 in *Constructing and Reconstructing*

sense on both sides of the Atlantic, and extended to the situations of other exploited workers, such as Russian serfs in the 1840s and English domestic workers in the 1850s.⁶¹ The term appeared in the streets as well as off the presses, as exemplified by an 1863 broadside addressing white slaves as workers in a New York City labor organizing effort.⁶² Children chained to British textile looms in the 1830s shared both output and appellation with garment workers on New York's Lower East Side 75 years later.⁶³ By the turn of the century, the term was also in use to critique labor unions and business monopolies.⁶⁴

In an 1892 review of a book of poetry, a Boston minister praised a blank verse poem entitled "The Slave Girl," written "from the standpoint of a daughter of penury and want, a veritable white slave of the despotism of trade." Although this poem refers to industrial, not sexual, white slaves, the reviewer's emphasis on the "nobility, purity, and unselfishness of the "young waifs... amid the baneful influences of poverty, and the woeful hardships of child labor," echoes sensationalist seduction stories. His call to the

Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood, edited by Allison James (Psychology Press, 1997), 40.

⁶¹ "White Slavery in Russia," *Times of London*, June 3, 1842; A Poor Governess, "White Slavery: To The Editor of the Times," *Times of London*, January 20, 1857.

⁶² Sinclair Tousey, "White Slaves," New York, 1863, NYPL SIBL, American Broadside and Ephemera Collection, Series 1, no. 11440.

⁶³ "A White Slave," *Life* 50, no. 1288 (July 4, 1907): 45. Reprinted from the *New York Evening Sun*.

⁶⁴ For example, see "Trade Union Tyranny," *Los Angeles Times*, April 15, 1903. The resonance of white slavery as prostitution with anti-trust organizing can be seen particularly clearly in the 1913-16 "Vice Trust" case against "Mortche" Goldberg and Yushe Botwin, discussed further in the next chapter. See Keire, "The Vice Trust, 7, for more on the anti-trust metaphor.

conscience emphasizes the poet's sex and appears to target female readers in particular, as he praises women's leadership role in the abolition of chattel slavery and argues for the importance of women's unique moral position from which to "rouse us to a deep sense of our social wrongs."⁶⁵ Women abolitionists were thus called upon to engage with white slavery as wage slavery, just as they were later appealed to with parallels drawn between chattel slavery and sexual slavery.

After the abolition of chattel slavery, the discussion of industrial white slaves was laced with reference to the black slaves of a superseded economic system. Critics of white slavery often referenced the ideals of the movement for abolition of African slavery to plead for similar consideration of other exploited workers, and occasionally weighed in against the termination of the chattel trade. In the 1890s, two Midwestern Christian journals claimed that "for every black man emancipated by Abraham Lincoln there is a white slave in America today in a worse plight" and that "the American black slave had, as a rule, a better time than the American white slave is having. Cane fields and cotton fields had their drawbacks, but it was not a sweatshop."⁶⁶ These writers reflected still-simmering resentments about the Civil War, a backlash against the abolition of chattel slavery and racist concerns about the degradation of workers considered to naturally deserve to be treated better than blacks due to their racial superiority. Twenty years later, an opponent of socialism in the *Los Angeles Times* compared the potential plight of the white slave under a hypothetical socialist government to that of "the black slave [under] a

⁶⁵ Rev. Thomas O. Marvin, "In the City by the Lake," *Boston Arena*, no. 34 (Sept. 1892).

⁶⁶ Hugh Price Hughes, "Evangelization of Great Cities," *Chicago Christian Advocate* 66, no. 45 (Nov. 5, 1891): 745–46; Myron Reed, "Many Pulpit Voices: Religious Thought and Progress in the United States; an Epitome of the Sermons of the Week," *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 1896.

benevolent master,” concluding that “between the slavery of the black man to an individual and the slavery of a white man to a ‘cooperative commonwealth’ the latter would be the more bitter slavery of the two.”⁶⁷ The rhetorical strategy of this analysis implied that the reader might have both sufficient sympathy for the African slave to see the injustice of socialism and the capacity to hold a romantic view of the Southern plantation in which a “benevolent master” provided necessities and even amusements while eliminating freedom of choice.

The concept of whiteness itself was in flux during this period, and discussion of industrial workers often highlighted the slippery racial categorization of immigrants to the United States. A 1907 *New York Sun* article republished in *Life* described garment workers on New York’s Lower East Side as industrial wage slaves, who, although “by some they are called “white slaves.” But they--the “slaves”--are nearer black than white. All of them are foreign-born and most of them are females.”⁶⁸ David R. Roediger has argued that the metaphor of white slavery as industrial wage slavery allowed workers to condemn new inequalities while distinguishing themselves from African chattel slaves.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ “The New Slavery,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 7, 1911.

⁶⁸ “A White Slave,” *Life* 50, no. 1288 (July 4, 1907): 45.

⁶⁹ David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, 1991), 65-66. See also the critique of Roediger’s work in Gunther Peck, “White Slavery and Whiteness: A Transnational View of the Sources of Working-Class Radicalism and Racism,” *Labor* 1, no. 2 (June 1, 2004): 41–64. Other important works on whiteness in the United States include Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (Rutgers University Press, 1999) and Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998). For a more recent survey of the field, see

The discourse of “authentic whiteness” rose and fell in the US between 1890 and 1940, and was closely tied to sexuality.⁷⁰ The boundaries of race are always bound up with sexuality, as the prevention of racial mixing is key to keeping races separate. Fear of racial mixing often appeared in white slave narratives, as a call to protect the sanctity of white womanhood, as demonstrated in this 1913 social purity text: “she was ravished... and taken to a house of ill fame... and there confined and compelled to receive foreigners and turn the earnings over to the aster to whom she was sold by her captors.”⁷¹ The protection of white womanhood from black or foreign Others was a common trope with a range of political uses, from cartoons published in William Randolph Hearst’s newspapers justifying the Spanish-American war to *The Birth of a Nation*.⁷²

The image of the foreign trafficker in women was prefigured by popular images of traffickers in young wage slaves. An 1873 *New York Times* article describes the well-fed, fur-clad, gold-chain covered Italian “owner” of white slave children kidnapped and brought across the Atlantic for factory labor, a “ruffian” reminiscent of the “rufianos”

Daniel Wickberg, “Heterosexual White Male: Some Recent Inversions in American Cultural History.” *Journal of American History* 92, no. 1 (June 2005): 136–57.

⁷⁰ Julian B. Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁷¹ Thomas Washington Shannon, *Self Knowledge and Guide to Sex Instruction: Vital Facts of Life for All Ages* (The S. A. Mullikin Company, 1913), 576.

⁷² See for example the image of a completely naked aristocratic white woman surrounded by men in Richard Harding Davis’ 1897 cartoon “Refined Young Women Stripped and Searched by Brutal Spaniards While Under Our Flag on the Olivette” published in the *New York Journal*, reprinted in Howard Zinn, Mike Konopacki, and Paul Buhle, *A People’s History of American Empire* (New York: Macmillan, 2008), 42.

populating the Buenos Aires underworld.⁷³ Thirty years later, a *Los Angeles Times* European correspondent reported on the circumstances of rural Italian parents duped into selling their sons into wage slavery by duplicitous “contractors for white slaves” in language very similar to the common story of small-town parents inadvertently selling their daughters into sexual slavery: “A well-dressed man, usually an Italian, appears in the poorest and most wretched district he can find and casually displays much money and volunteers his history, which usually runs on the lines that he was once as poor as any of his hearers, but went abroad with a kind friend and returned in affluence as all can see. To the poor parents in the village he offers golden prospects for their children, out of love of mankind, if they will only turn them over to him: comfort, little work, all the money they want, and \$40 or \$50 a year to the parents.”⁷⁴ This narrative differs only from those of female sexual white slaves in the gap between this employer’s “love of mankind” and a professional “suitor’s” love for a daughter.

White Slave as Sex Slave

The application of “white slavery” to cross-border prostitution appears to have spread in influence following a March 1870 letter from Victor Hugo to Josephine Butler that linked African chattel slavery to prostitution in an attempt to bring together the causes of abolitionists and feminists. In this letter, Hugo argued “the slavery of black women is abolished in America, but the slavery of white women continues in Europe and

⁷³ “The Italian Boys,” *New York Times*, August 21, 1873.

⁷⁴ Curtis Brown, “Horrible Slavery of Boys in Europe,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1902.

laws are still made by men in order to tyrannize over women.”⁷⁵ Josephine Butler played a primary role in connecting the movement for the abolition of chattel slavery to the development of a movement in opposition to sex trafficking, initially in response to the Contagious Disease Acts. In 1875, she was instrumental in founding the international organization that became the International Abolitionist Federation, a driving force in opposition to state regulation of prostitution.⁷⁶

This deployment of the language of abolition, a term which by then represented the success of anti-slavery campaigns, was strategic. Women’s rights’ advocates have from the beginning of their activism drawn an analogy between the oppression of women under patriarchy and the situation of slaves. The French Revolution opened up the concept of emancipation to be applied to various groups, including the Third Estate, serfs, Jews, and women. In 1792, German feminist Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel argued that men had enslaved women since the beginning of time.⁷⁷ Women were associated with

⁷⁵ Josephine E. G. Butler, *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (H. Marshall, 1896), 25.

⁷⁶ Anne Summers, “Which Women? What Europe? Josephine Butler and the International Abolitionist Federation.” *History Workshop Journal*, no. 62 (Fall 2006): 215–31. See also Josephine E. G. Butler, Jane Jordan, and Ingrid Sharp, *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns: Child Prostitution and the Age of Consent* (Taylor & Francis US, 2003); Glen Petrie, *A Singular Iniquity: The Campaigns of Josephine Butler* (London: Macmillan, 1971); Bruno P. F. Wanrooij, “Josephine Butler and Regulated Prostitution in Italy,” *Women’s History Review* 17, no. 2 (April 2008): 153–71; Petra De Vries, “Josephine Butler and the Making of Feminism: International Abolitionism in the Netherlands (1870-1914),” *Women’s History Review* 17, no. 2 (April 2008): 257–77.

⁷⁷ Bonnie Anderson, “Frauenemancipation and Beyond,” in Kathryn Kish Sklar and James Brewer Stewart, eds., *Women’s Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 82-83.

slavery in the writings of classical antiquity, as male prisoners of war tended to be killed while women and children were raped and/or made into servants. Historian Gerda Lerner has argued that earlier societies created the model for this treatment of war captives, as women's reproductive potential served as an exchange commodity, an association also explored in Gayle Rubin's classic 1975 article "The Traffic in Women" (the title of which refers to this kind of exchange, not prostitution).⁷⁸ Women involved in the nineteenth century antislavery movement increasingly emphasized their own "social death," stating in their own words "in striving to strike [the slaves'] irons off, we found most surely that we were manacled *ourselves*."⁷⁹

Through the 1870s, these "new abolitionists" campaigned against the entire system of state-regulated prostitution, to which end they faced little success, and began by the end of the decade to emphasize the definition of white slavery as the fraudulent recruitment of women. The image of the innocent young woman tricked into a life of vice

⁷⁸ Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford University Press, 1986); Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," reprinted in Gayle Rubin, *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Duke University Press, 2011): 33-65.

⁷⁹ Bonnie S. Anderson, *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women's Movement, 1830-1860*. Oxford University Press, 2000; p. 122. Orlando Patterson famously connected the concept of social death to slavery. He argues that the concept of freedom in the West emerged from the "social death" of the slave in ancient Greece and Rome, as freedom became the condition of not being socially dead, a concept unimaginable before the development of the institution of slavery. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

became enormously popular on both sides of the Atlantic.⁸⁰ Publications such as William T. Stead's 1885 British newspaper series "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" inspired a ten-thousand-person demonstration in Hyde Park for the protection of virgins; legislators reacted by raising the age of consent and closing loopholes in the law against procuring.⁸¹ International organizing against this form of white slavery took on increasing momentum at the turn of the century, as international organizations and conferences began to be established. One of the first historians to write about the anti-white slavery movement locates the peak of this morality campaign in the United States in the four years before World War I, following the 1910 passage of the Mann Act.⁸²

By the late 1880s, discussion of white slavery as prostitution on both sides of the Atlantic took on the key defining elements that would remain essentially unchanged for the next half century. The first *New York Times* article to discuss white slavery as prostitution explicitly links the trade to Jews, which would, as discussed further in the next chapter, continue to be an underlying theme among broader immigration-related anxieties concerning both North and South America.⁸³ Josephine Butler writes in the

⁸⁰ Edward J. Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice: the Jewish Fight against White Slavery, 1870-1939* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 36-38, also his *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain Since 1700* (Gill and Macmillan, 1977), 86.

⁸¹ Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice*, 37-38. For an excellent analysis of the impact of Stead's exposé, see Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁸² Egal Feldman, "Prostitution, The Alien Woman and the Progressive Imagination, 1910-1915," *American Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1967): 192.

⁸³ "White Slaves for the East," *New York Times*, May 30, 1886.

same year about the transportation of girls for the same purpose from Hamburg to Montevideo and Buenos Aires, which was already becoming synonymous with international prostitution, as the following chapter also explores.⁸⁴

International congresses on the subject of white slavery as “the traffic which, competent authorities declare, is extensively carried on between all the European countries, in young women, who are enticed, induced, or in some cases practically kidnapped, and are taken to the cities for purposes of evil” increased public familiarity with the phenomenon.⁸⁵ Newspapermen’s adjustment to the discourse was indicated by modifications such as “so-called white slave” and “shameful traffic styled ‘white slave trade.’”⁸⁶ The definition of the modern term clearly echoes back to the earlier concept, but without the racial specification. One scholar defines today’s trafficking in women as “transportation of persons by means of coercion, deception or force into exploitative and slavery-like conditions... commonly associated with sexual-slavery and organized crime,” and summarizes the measures taken against it in terms strikingly similar to the organizing of a century ago, as “policies that aim at introducing more stringent criminal legislation and improving international police cooperation, as well as schemes and

⁸⁴ Josephine E. Butler, “Josephine Butler’s Appeal to the Women of America,” *Philadelphia Friend’s Review* 41, no. 49 (July 5, 1888): 201–10.

⁸⁵ Howard M. Jenkins, “The ‘White Slave’ Congress,” *Philadelphia Friends’ Intelligencer* 56, no. 28 (July 15, 1899): 550.

⁸⁶ Jenkins, “The ‘White Slave’ Congress”; “Foreign Echoes,” *New York Times*, September 7, 1902.

campaigns geared towards protecting victims and informing young women about the dangers of trafficking.”⁸⁷

In addition to reflecting racial anxieties connected to chattel slavery, white slave narratives often refracted Orientalist fantasies of European women imprisoned in Eastern harems. Vision of the harem, and ideas of white women forced therein to engage in sexual adventures with darker-skinned men, fascinated Europeans in the colonial period.⁸⁸ A work of pornography widely circulated in the Victorian Era, *The Lustful Turk*, detailed the deflowering and subsequent voracious sexual appetites of European women sold into the harem of the Dey of Algiers, whose foreignness and extreme sexual appetites were underscored.⁸⁹ Art critics and Orientalists were fascinated by the servitude of the odalisque and her “aggregated knowledge of the arts of pleasing.”⁹⁰ These images were both erotic and moralizing, implicitly critiquing racial mixing and promiscuity. The titillating quality of these narratives as well as the connection to the victim narratives further explored in my third chapter can be seen in an 1888 *New York Times* report on a

⁸⁷ Rutvica Andrijasevic, “Beautiful Dead Bodies: Gender, Migration and Representation in Anti-trafficking Campaigns,” *Feminist Review* 86, no. 1 (2007): 25.

⁸⁸ For an interesting exposition of Orientalism and its counterparts among different groups of women in Egypt in this period, see Mervat Hatem, “Through Each Other’s Eyes: Egyptian, Levantine-Egyptian, and European Women’s Images of Themselves and Each Other (1862-1920),” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 12, no. 2 (1989): 133-98.

⁸⁹ Lisa Z. Sigel, “Name Your Pleasure: The Transformation of Sexual Language in Nineteenth-Century British Pornography,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9, no. 4 (October 1, 2000): 402-3.

⁹⁰ “The Odalisque,” *The Aldine* 7, no. 22 (October 1, 1875): 426–429; “The Odalisque.” *The Art Journal (1875-1887)* 2 (January 1, 1876): 15. For some analysis, see Mohja Kahf, *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1999).

British discovery of a white slave market in Constantinople, to which European girls are lured under "promises of munificent remuneration as governesses, pianistes, and other forms of respectable and honorable employment... [Then] they are taken into some of the native houses adjoining the 'Casino' and are there barked, powdered, and rouged by professional 'maquilleurs,' and it is only then that the true nature of the promises and prospects held out to them become clear."⁹¹ This article also gives examples of some of the codes used to discuss different grades of human merchandise, such as "silver spoons" and "sacks of potatoes," with the best sent to the harems of wealthy "pashas and beys" and the lower grades sent for export to other ports (including Buenos Aires) or sold to local brothels.⁹²

Descriptions of the supposedly enormous traffic in European women to Eastern harems referred to African chattel slavery and abolitionism as well as Orientalist imaginings and Barbary captivity stories. In 1822, a London newspaper reported the sale of 10,000 women from Greece to Ottoman harems, and derided the lack of British response: "what a howl would have been set up if so many hundred negroes had been disposed of in the same manner!... The English government is now upholding the system which produces the white slave trade in the east, and affecting great indignation that it should be carried on by other powers of the west."⁹³ In 1886 the *New York Times*' first mention of white slavery as explicitly sexual describes "Slaves Sold to the Turk" for the

⁹¹ "German Slaves in the East: Public Sales of European Girls in Constantinople," *New York Times*, October 14, 1888.

⁹² "German Slaves in the East," *New York Times*, 1888.

⁹³ Unnamed London newspaper cited in "Foreign News," *Baltimore Niles' Weekly Register* 22, no. 569 (August 3, 1822): 358–59.

supply of harems, and while this is described as a “mild and rather human form” of slavery in comparison to the chattel form, it also points out that “Truly not even in America’s palmiest days of slavery was human flesh held so cheap as it is to-day in the land of the Crescent!”⁹⁴ Comparable newspaper stories published in the late 1880s and 1890s made similar comparisons to African chattel slavery and references to the British abolitionist movement, as well as demonstrating slippage around the terms “white” and “Caucasian,” then in definitional flux.⁹⁵

These exotic/erotic Orientalist fantasies and disputes over who would be considered white influenced the internationally popular correlation between Jews and the white slave traffic in this period, as discussed in the following chapter. The map of Othering in this context also extended beyond the Middle East to the Far East. Concern with Chinese prostitution was particularly prevalent in California, where Chinatown symbolized brothels and opium dens.⁹⁶ White women could be dragged into debauchery by Far Eastern men as well as Near Eastern, as noted in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1905, in an article which promised “Uplift for Girl Slave: Beautiful Victim of Opium Dens in

⁹⁴ “Slaves Sold to the Turk,” *New York Times*, March 28, 1886.

⁹⁵ S. Louise Weintraub, “Sterility, Especially in Syrian Women,” *Philadelphia Medical and Surgical Reporter* 58, no. 3 (January 21, 1888): 72; “Slave-girls in Egypt,” *New York Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* 47, no. 4 (April 1888): 519; “The East African Slaves,” *New York Times*, December 8, 1889; Annie Reihardt, “Mohammedan Women,” *New York Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* 54, no. 2 (August 1891): 173–81.

⁹⁶ See Mary Ting Yi Liu, “Saving Young Girls from Chinatown: White Slavery and Woman Suffrage, 1910-1920,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 18, no. 3 (September 2009): 393–417.

Santa Barbara to be Saved.”⁹⁷ As in Orientalist descriptions of sexual excesses in harems, East Asians were implicated as sexually deviant: “the sexual immorality of these people is horrifying... [while] in America woman stands on a pedestal far above the status of her sisters in any other land.”⁹⁸ Benson Tong’s *Unsubmissive Women* provides an excellent social history of Chinese prostitution in nineteenth-century San Francisco, while Brian Donovan’s work on the use of white slavery narratives in anti-vice activism in the US Progressive Era explores the construction of whiteness among immigrant groups as well as Anglo-Saxon fears of African-Americans and Chinese immigrants.⁹⁹ Orientalism continues to influence today’s anti-trafficking work, as “the figure of the ‘suffering Third World prostitute’ serves to symbolize the excesses of the global march of capital, and its negative effects on women” and activists in the global West/North often treat Eastern/Southern prostitutes as though they are unable to speak for themselves.¹⁰⁰

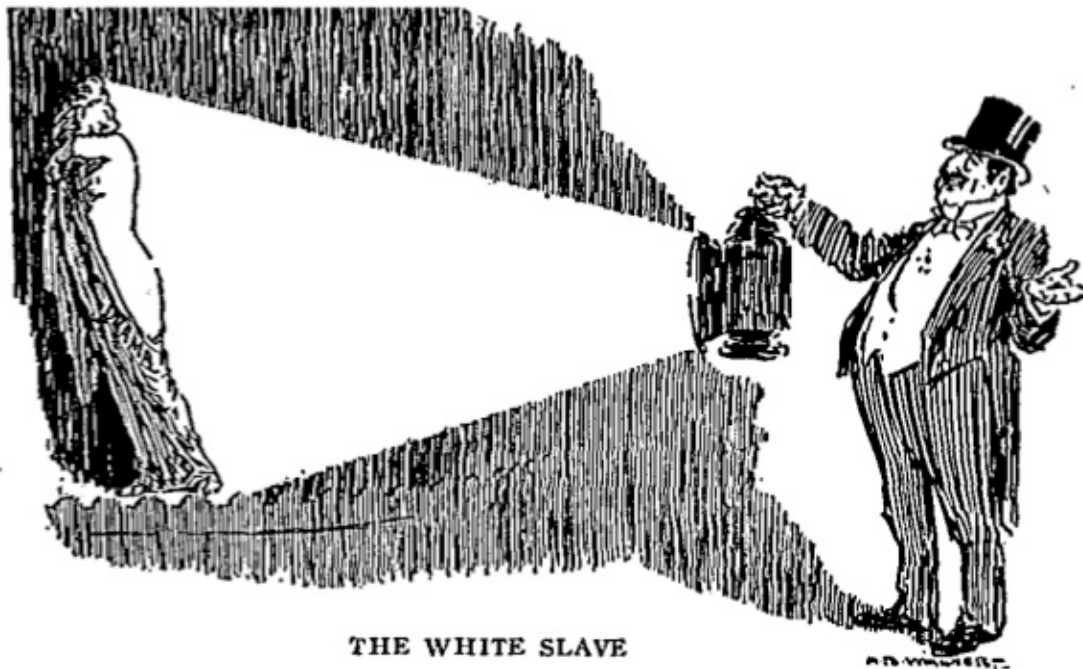
⁹⁷ “Uplift for Girl Slave: Beautiful Victim of Opium Dens in Santa Barbara to Be Saved,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 5, 1905.

⁹⁸ “Stop Slave Trade,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 1907.

⁹⁹ Benson Tong, *Unsubmissive Women: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000); Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-vice Activism, 1887-1917* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

¹⁰⁰ Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, 135.

Figure 1.2: Exposing the White Sex Slave¹⁰¹



Shopgirls and Prostitutes, Immigrants and Nativists

Nineteenth century defenders of industrial white slaves were concerned with working men, women, and children, but as the century drew to a close, female workers moved into the spotlight. Sympathetic depictions portrayed exhausted women in factories and tenement houses, supporting sick husbands and children while suffering from near starvation and painful physical conditions brought on by their working conditions.

Hypocritical employers dissimulated, such as the Boston clothing house “which

¹⁰¹ A. B. Walker, “The White Slave,” *Life* 62, no. 1626 (December 25, 1913): 1155. This appears to represent a theater proprietor shining a light on the hidden white slave.

repeatedly assert[ed] that its clothing is not made in tenement houses” yet sold tenement-made bespoke clothing for 500 times the pennies paid its women workers.¹⁰² Into the first decade of the twentieth century, although the general understanding of the term white slavery emphasized seduction and prostitution, the industrial meaning could still be applied in order to, for example, bemoan the fate of female white slaves in the garment factories of New York’s Lower East Side.¹⁰³ This growing interest in women workers as industrial white slaves may have reflected both the broadening association between white slavery and prostitution and the threat that women’s work outside the home posed to some.

By the 1890s, the figure of the shopgirl, or department store saleswoman, became popularly associated with white slavery in its aspects of both labor exploitation and prostitution. These young women were not only endangered by their public exposure and ruthless employers, but by their constant exposure to luxury goods far beyond their reach.

¹⁰⁴ A Boston minister in 1891 warned that in some of the largest stores in Boston the young women employed are paid a disgraceful rate of wages, with an intimation that they must get what more is necessary to maintain themselves in health and food through nameless vice.¹⁰⁵ An 1894 critic of industrial capitalism lamented the predicament of department store saleswomen, exploited by “white slave dealer” employers, and passé

¹⁰² B.O. Flower, “Society’s Exiles,” *The Arena*, no. 19 (June 1891): 3–27.

¹⁰³ “A White Slave,” *Life* 50, no. 1288 (July 4, 1907): 45.

¹⁰⁴ On respectability and consumption see also Eileen Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999) and Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

¹⁰⁵ Hughes, “Evangelization of Great Cities.”

after only five years of employment, leaving them no recourse but to find other employment (the sexual nature of such implied).¹⁰⁶ The Committee of Fifteen in New York created a sub-committee to investigate the role of department store employment as a stepping-stone to prostitution, and published a report on the subject in 1915, which confirmed the link between the exposure of these young women to a higher standard of living and their downfall, as the most highly paid saleswomen were found to be the most likely to become prostitutes.¹⁰⁷

On the eve of World War One, the public outcry against white slavery as sexual exploitation prompted investigation into women's working conditions. The hypothesis that low wages drove women into prostitution inspired the proposal in 1913 that a minimum wage be established for female workers in the United States.¹⁰⁸ One critic of this proposal insisted that if women's wages were raised, women would be fired from their jobs, creating greater deprivation, as men could then do more work for less pay due to their greater strength (this author is careful to note that the situation would unfold in this way not because of employer preference for men, but because women had been hired

¹⁰⁶ John J. O'Shea, "The White-Slave Trade," *New York Catholic World, A Monthly Magazine of General Literature and Science* 59, no. 351 (June 1894): 418–25.

¹⁰⁷ Citation of the Committee of Fifteen Report from Ruth Rosen's introduction to Maimie Pinzer and Fanny Quincy Howe, *The Maimie Papers: Letters from an Ex-prostitute*, edited by Ruth Rosen, Sue Davidson, and Florence Howe (Feminist Press, 1997), xxi.

¹⁰⁸ "Harvester Girls Get Increase: Big Trust to Raise Wages to Eight Dollar Minimum, International Company Announces All Women in Their Employ Will Receive Better Pay as Result of Inquiry in Illinois by Senate White Slave Commission," *Los Angeles Times*, March 20, 1913.

due to being cheaper workers, and these calculations were all purely economic).¹⁰⁹ Other respondents in this debate held that “the low wage scale is scarcely ever a direct cause for the downfall of young women.”¹¹⁰ Prostitutes themselves weighed in with letters to the Vice Investigation Commission. One prostitute signing her letter K.R.L. agreed with the latter perspective, blaming male seducers rather than low wages: “Girls don't go wrong because they are hungry or because they need clothes. They go wrong because they are tempted by lies and overpowered by the evil in men.”¹¹¹

This prostitute’s articulation of her motivation serves as a reminder that people make meaning of their situations in multifarious ways, always engaged with broader social discourse. As further developed in the third chapter of this project, prostitutes often deployed variations of the victim narrative explored above to their own ends. This framing did not only appeal to paternalistic reformers, but also to frightened immigrants faced with the countless unknown features of their new environment. Many single women arriving in the New World or migrating from countryside to city were just as suspicious of self-styled moral reformers as of potential traffickers, and not without justification, as dock workers attempted to pry into their personal business, perhaps assuming a lack of virtue or legitimate family or work plans (explored further in the Argentine case in my final chapter). Immigrants had a host of reasons to keep their work plans and personal connections secure from the prying eyes of strangers.

¹⁰⁹ “Low Wages Do Not Drive Girls Astray: Social Workers Say Too Much Publicity Has Been Given to This as a Cause,” *New York Times*, June 22, 1913.

¹¹⁰ “Low Wages Do Not Drive Girls Astray.”

¹¹¹ “Women Mock Investigation: Reformers Hear They Are On Wrong Track,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 13, 1913.

The victim narrative and rescue of purported white slaves created a range of opportunities for women (both victims and redeemers) to take on positions of moral superiority over men.¹¹² Early feminists used the Victorian discourse of women's moral virtue, based on her natural maternal tendencies, to justify their forays into the public sphere. Women's natural moral purity would serve better than man's superior intelligence in the realm of social service, they slyly answered their critics. While massive immigration stirred nativist fears in the United States, imperial fears of racial deterioration and decline shook late Victorian Britain. Arguments against women's work in both factory and meeting hall amply exploited both, and many feminists defended their ongoing fulfillment of their domestic duties and even positioned themselves as "mothers of the race," as the literal vessels guaranteeing the future purity of the Anglo-Saxon race.¹¹³ This was certainly not a challenge to the Victorian mythology of women's natural role as custodian of sexual purity. Women's organizations and women as individuals led the fight against prostitution in the US and Europe, due not only to the increase in women's education but also to their desire to loosen men's tight grip on women's public behavior to make way for the New Woman - if a defenseless immigrant girl could be safe on the streets so could anyone.¹¹⁴

Although the victim narrative served as the standard framing device for representations of white slavery, not all examinations of the subject made this argument

¹¹² Walkowitz elaborates on the redeemers' side in *City of Dreadful Delight*.

¹¹³ British feminists' self-positioning as mothers of the race illuminated by Antoinette M. Burton, "The White Woman's Burden: British Feminists and the Indian Woman, 1865-1915," *Women's Studies International Forum* 13, no. 4 (1990): 296.

¹¹⁴ Feldman, "Prostitution, The Alien Woman and the Progressive Imagination," 202-6.

unilaterally. Londres' *Road to Buenos Aires*, while floridly sensationalistic in colorful descriptions of the hubs of the international underworld and his personal participation in the buying and selling of women, posits economic necessity, rather than kidnapping, as the driving force behind prostitution. He describes the position of the women involved as chattel in the hands of money-seeking men, but claims that they are not captured or held against their will. One contemporary reviewer noted that Londres' assessment "is not as terrible as the publishers suggest," perhaps alluding to the images of scantily clad women chained together on the book's cover and dramatic copy promising "startling exposure."¹¹⁵ The publishers are thus given responsibility for the titillating framing of the issue, while Londres' analysis is slightly more complex.

White slave discourses did not merely float in the ether of media and popular culture, but had real policy consequences, particularly in the realm of immigration. One of the earliest historical analyses of anti-prostitution organizing in the US compellingly described two distinct campaigns against prostitution, one nativist or xenophobic and the other anti-nativist or defensive of the rights of immigrants.¹¹⁶ The association between prostitution and immigrants (further explored in the next chapter) created particularly among nativists a call for the deportation of immigrant women of suspicious moral character. Reformers more friendly to aliens argued against this approach. Opponents to the nativist connection between prostitution and immigration included social workers such as Frances Kellor, Jane Addams, Grace Abbott and Lillian Wald. Jane Addams in *A*

¹¹⁵ Review in "New Books in Brief Review," *New York Independent*, June 9, 1928, 557; London edition with chained women on dust jacket in ten printings between April 1928 and Feb 1931, translated by Eric Sutton.

¹¹⁶ Feldman, "Prostitution, The Alien Woman and the Progressive Imagination."

New Conscience and an Ancient Evil warned immigrant girls against quick marriage offers from deceptively pleasant-looking strangers, who might actually be attempting to fill brothels.¹¹⁷ Donovan contrasts Addams' pluralistic racial ideology to the nativist ideas about Anglo-Saxon superiority promulgated by Turner, Stead, and Bell.¹¹⁸ Entrenched elites in Europe and the United States, anxious about a new social order threatening to emerge from this era of mass migrations and shifting labor patterns, conflated women's migration with inevitable sexual slavery, encouraging foreign women to remain in home in their own countries, where they imagined everyone would be safer (an argument often echoed in contemporary trafficking debates).¹¹⁹

The varied aspects of white slave discourse laid out in this chapter allowed female social purity activists to shift their target from the general category of all men and potentially make common cause with male reformers and politicians. Each iteration of the victim of white slavery provided another distinct target. Before the application of the term to prostitution, targets included chattel slave owners for abolitionists, unnatural masters for supporters of African slavery, Barbary Coast traders and harem-keepers for Orientalists, barbaric Indians for those concerned with the dangers of US Western expansion, union bosses for opponents of organized labor, and trusts for anti-

¹¹⁷ Jane Addams, *A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1913).

¹¹⁸ Donovan, *White Slave Crusades*, 64-71.

¹¹⁹ Andrijasevic makes a similar claim for contemporary activists against Eastern European trafficking in women, throughout "Beautiful Dead Bodies." For an example of the common conflation of prostitution and trafficking, the Spanish-language translation of George Bernard Shaw's 1893 play "Mrs. Warren's Profession" was "La Trata de Blancas," The White Slave Trade. George Bernard Shaw, *Comedias escogidas: Héroes, Cándida, Trata de blancas*, translated by Julio Broutá (Aguilar, 1968).

monopolists. As forced cross-border prostitution became the dominant definition of white slavery, new targets included foreign panderers, corrupt police, regulatory systems of prostitution, and the lack of effective international law. Anti-white slave diatribes took on different tones: William T. Stead's 1885 British exposé criticized traditional aristocratic privilege, while French authors tended to defend their system of regulated prostitution, and reformers in the Americas expressed concern with the ramifications of mass immigration. As the next chapters will further develop, these differing agendas often clashed from Buenos Aires to Geneva, as local institutions and the League of Nations engaged with various responses.

Chapter 2: White Slaves and Jewish Masters on the Road to Buenos Aires

“I wanted to ask what your business is. What exactly do you deal in?”

The man from Buenos Aires: “What do I deal in? Ha, ha!

Not in Hanukkah candles, my friend, not in Hanukkah candles!”¹

These lines conclude one of the beloved Yiddish author Sholem Aleichem’s *Railroad Stories*, a series of farcical monologues narrated by a salesman traveling through the fin-de-siècle Jewish Pale of Settlement. In “The Man from Buenos Aires,” an international businessman chronicles his success to the narrator and reader without explicitly revealing the nature of his merchandise. A contemporary reader would probably have recognized the stereotypical attributes of the Jewish “trafficker in human flesh” somewhat before the narrator: “On one finger he sported a heavy gold ring with a diamond whose thousand facets glittered in the sunlight.” The enigmatic businessman illustrates his work: “I provide a commodity that everyone knows about but no one ever

¹ Sholem Aleichem, “The Man from Buenos Aires,” in *Tevye the Dairyman and The Railroad Stories*, translated by Hillel Halkin (New York: Schocken Books, 1987), 176. Originally published in 1909 as “Der Mensch fun Buenos Aires.” The term “Hanukkah candles” is often alternately translated as “prayer books,” but a more accurate translation would be “etrogim,” the Hebrew word for the ritual fruit, a citron, used in the celebration of the harvest holiday of Sukkot as a symbol of purity and perfection. Although more broadly intelligible, these other translations erase the ironic juxtaposition between the purity of the symbol and the violation of purity at the core of the actual business. Thanks to Sasha Sedlerovich for pointing out this translation detail.

talks about... all over the world: in Paris, in London, in Budapest, in Boston – but my headquarters are in Buenos Aires.”² This allusion to Buenos Aires, in combination with the prodigal son’s return to Eastern Europe from America flaunting a fortune of nebulous origin, would at the time have signaled to readers around the world that the eponymous merchant dealt in women, and was presumably on the train searching for new recruits.

By the 1920s, the international traffic in women was firmly associated in North American and European minds with Jewish traffickers and Argentine brothels. As the term white slavery became associated with the transport of women across national borders, generally from the Old World to the New World, or from the Global North to the Global South, the destinations were usually left vague and terrifying, but when specified more often than not turned out to be on the Rio de la Plata. French journalist Albert Londres’ 1923 exposé *The Road to Buenos Aires* sufficiently indicated its subject matter in the title for it to go unsaid in newspaper coverage of the internationally popular work, published in multiple languages and as a play.³ This connection began several decades earlier: In 1888, British moral reformer Josephine Butler appealed to the women of the United States to join British women in the combat against “the enforced movement... of these youthful victims of human cruelty... [of whom] the greater number are probably

² Quote spans pp. 167-76 in Aleichem, “The Man from Buenos Aires.”

³ Albert Londres, *The Road to Buenos Ayres* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1928). First published in French in 1923, circulating in South America in Spanish in 1927. For press coverage of the book’s reception, see for example “New Books in Brief Review: The Road to Buenos Ayres,” *The Independent* 120, no. 4071 (June 9, 1928): 557; “The Parisian Season Starts,” *New York Times*, September 16, 1928. Its rise to best-selling status in the US is described in “‘Boss’ v. ‘Slaves’,” *Time*, May 21, 1928.

engaged for Montevideo and Buenos Ayres.”⁴ In the same year, a *New York Times* article about a market in Constantinople where “European girls... imported for the purpose... are publicly sold as slaves” mentioned Buenos Aires as the prime destination across the Atlantic.⁵ The National Vigilance Association, the largest and most influential anti-White Slavery organization, which grew out of the British white slave panic of the 1880s, was reported to already have been aware by 1891 that “a very large trade is being carried on in European girls for the purposes of prostitution in Buenos Ayres.”⁶ Anti-white slavery activists in the United States generally focused on the exploitation of women within their national borders, particularly before the First World War, but US newspapers in the 1910s and 1920s often referred to South America as the most popular international destination of white slaver traders bringing women across the Atlantic, and as a common destination for those fearing prosecution in the United States who hoped to continue their profession elsewhere.⁷

In the generally uncorroborated mappings of the trade routes and interconnected criminal associations of purportedly internationally organized white slave traders, Buenos

⁴ Butler, “Appeal,” 2.

⁵ “German Slaves in the East: Public Sales of European Girls in Constantinople,” *New York Times*, October 14, 1888.

⁶ “Sanitary Matters in Buenos Ayres,” *The Lancet: A Journal of British and Foreign Medicine, Surgery, Obstetrics, Psysiology, Chemistry, Pharmacology, Public Health, and News* 69, no. 1 (January 17, 1891): 156–57.

⁷ “Vice Trust Exposed and Heads Indicted,” *New York Times*, June 13, 1913; “Police Want Gangster Who Abducted a Girl: Organized Traffic to South America Charged,” *New York Times*, June 23, 1917.

Aires always appeared as a key hub or destination.⁸ Although unsubstantiated, an “organized trade to South America” emerged from a US federal case in 1917, in which witnesses claimed that the defendant belonged to “a band engaged in kidnapping girls, taking them to South American ports, and selling them to confederates in South America.”⁹ The continent of South America often served as a substitute for the city of Buenos Aires, which was the only specific locale mentioned in the previous case. This connection was made by concerned observers around the world, from New York to Latvia to the floor of the League of Nations.¹⁰ The charge that white slaves were destined for South America was so common that a group of Latin American delegates led a protest against the League of Nations in 1927, whose investigations about the traffic in women, they charged, were made by investigators who spoke only English and were biased towards emphasizing the scale of white slavery in non-Anglo countries.¹¹

Buenos Aires maintained this association through the 1930s, no doubt strengthened by the international press coverage in 1930 and 1931 of the Zwi Migdal case. In 1927, under pressure from Esras Noschim and the Polish Ambassador, the Varsovia Society changed its name to the better-known *Sociedad de Socorros Mutuos Sinagoga y Cementerio Zwi Migdal*, the Zwi Migdal Mutual Aid, Synagogue and

⁸ “Man’s Commerce in Women,” *McClure’s Magazine* 41, no. 4 (August 1913): 185.

⁹ “Police Want Gangster Who Abducted a Girl,” 1917.

¹⁰ “Uncover Huge Slave Band: Latvian Police Report Sale of Hundreds of Girls From Russia to South American Buyers,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 1925; “Urges White Slave Curb: Bascom Johnson Says Traffic is Marked in South America,” *New York Times*, December 9, 1927.

¹¹ “Commission Revises White Slave Report: Latin Nations at Geneva Charge It Criticizes Them and Whitewashes Anglo-Saxons,” *New York Times*, November 27, 1927.

Cemetery Society.¹² In the 1930 Polish novel *The Ravishers: A Novel of White Slavery in its Heyday*, a Warsaw Vice Squad director denies passport clearance to Argentina to a beautiful young applicant, telling her “If you wished to emigrate to North America, to the United States for instance or to Canada, I shouldn't put any obstacles in your way. But I know too well what South America has in store for a young, pretty girl.”¹³ A British traveler in 1933 mentioned white slavery as the first negative association with Argentina that might pop up in the foreign reader’s mind.¹⁴ Theater continued to demonstrate interest in the subject, as evidenced by a play produced in New York in 1935 featuring “the snaring of a virtuous girl by an Argentine white slave band.”¹⁵ Some sensationalist sources continued to promote the association between Buenos Aires and white slavery into the 1960s and 1970s, as in a 1979 work which conflates all prostitution with trafficking and describes Buenos Aires as the principal destination of “the overseas trade in girls [which] proved to be one of the most remunerative criminal enterprises of the twentieth century... an international spider’s web along whose threads ‘parcels’... were

¹² I will refer to the Society as Varsovia if discussing its activities before 1927, and as Zwi Migdal if referring to the period after its name change. It was sometimes still called Varsovia after the change, as in “Solo dos nuevas detenciones ha realizado hoy la policía,” *La Critica* 17, no. 6057 (23 May 1930), 5.

¹³ Antoni Marczyński and Anthony Kirkor (pseud.), *The Ravishers: a Novel of White Slavery in Its Heyday* (New York: Ignis Co, 1955). Translated from the 1930 Polish *Szlakiem hańby*.

¹⁴ Dr. Kay Drake, “Philip Guedalla Tangoes Through the Argentine.” *New York Times*, March 5, 1933.

¹⁵ “‘Little Bandit’ Given: Melodrama Opens at the Public Theatre After Brooklyn Run,” *New York Times*, April 19, 1935.

dispatched with all the efficiency of a well-run export business.”¹⁶ A BBC story in April 2012 of a contemporary Argentine anti-trafficking activist who has infiltrated sex trafficking rings in search of her missing daughter, pretending to want to buy women, echoes both white slave stories and the brutal 1976-83 dictatorship in which a successful popular resistance movement grew out of mothers searching fruitlessly for their missing children.¹⁷

The popular association of Jews with the management of Argentine sex work in this period was so great that the term “caften,” the Yiddish word for the long coat worn by religiously observant Jewish men, entered the non-Jewish vernacular as a synonym for Jewish pimp, and appears to also have been used to refer to pimps and traffickers in general.¹⁸ League of Nations investigators reported extensively on “pimps (or caftens as they are called there)” and used the term caften throughout their reports on Argentina to describe both Jews and non-Jews.¹⁹ Argentine Spanish-language press also used the term,

¹⁶ Evans, *Harlots, Whores & Hookers*, 205. See also Sean O’Callaghan, *Damaged Baggage: The White Slave Trade and Narcotics Trafficking in the Americas* (London: Hale, 1969).

¹⁷ “Confronting the People-traffickers,” *BBC*, April 2, 2012, sec. Latin America & Caribbean. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-17560518>.

¹⁸ For this term’s widespread use in the underworld vernacular, see for example Nicolás Aguirre Pizarro, *Señoritas De Salón: Meretrices & Caftens & Cocó: Francesas + polacas + austríacas +--*, Buenos Aires, 1870-1930 (Buenos Aires: 2006). For the term’s use to refer to a long coat traditionally worn by religious Ashkenazi Jewish men, see for example Susana B. Sigwald Carioli, *Historia de barbas y caftanes* (Buenos Aires: Centro Cultural “Jose Ingenieros,” 1976), a brief history of Jewish immigration to the Argentine colonies.

¹⁹ Bascom Johnson, Correspondence report to League of Nations Traffic in Women Committee, June 19, 1924, LON archives, S171 [my numbering 4983]. See examples of other uses of the word caften in Johnson

as did police and other contemporary local observers, such as Victorio Luis Bessero, who described pimps in Buenos Aires as “prowling impudently through our streets, insolently flaunting regal automobiles and valuable jewels.... The ‘caftens’ were often respected people who enjoyed influence in official spheres. Owners of grandiose brothels and of enormous sums of capital, all was achieved with money.”²⁰ Bessero emphasized the free flow of money, “lent to anyone,” which these men used to secure legal impunity, reflecting stock Anti-Semitic associations of Jews with dirty money. Even after Jewish involvement in international sex trafficking declined in the 1930s, anti-Semitic propaganda continued to abuse the connection. Fritz Hippler’s 1940 Nazi propaganda film *Der ewige Jude* claimed that Jews controlled over 90% of the international traffic in women.²¹ Linguistically, in addition to the contribution of caften and polaca to the language of the mala vida, a Yiddish-Lunfardo sub-dialect called Valesko was caricatured by Edmundo Rivero in “Abraham Murieira,” a poem contrasting the popular hero Juan Moreira with the Jewish underworld in the central district of Once.²²

et al, Argentine preparatory materials for Experts’ Report, LON archives S171 [my numbering 4657, 4658, 4669-70].

²⁰ Victorio Luis Bessero, *Los tratantes de blancas en Buenos Aires: El escandalo de la pseudo sociedad “Varsovia” o “Migdal.”* (Buenos Aires: 1930), p. 3. For press usage, see for example “La Colectividad Israelita de Buenos Aires, Ofrecio hoy un Homenaje al Comisario Julio L. Alsogaray,” *La Critica* 14, no. 4854 (5 Feb. 1927): 2. Alsogaray uses the term throughout his memoirs.

²¹ Fritz Hippler, dir., *Der ewige Jude*, 62 min., Deutsche Filmherstellungs und Verwertungs, 1940.

²² Ricardo Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos*, 3rd ed. (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 2006), 275-76; Edmundo Rivero, *Una luz de almacén: El lunfardo y yo* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1982), 29, 172-73.

Londres' *Road to Buenos Aires*, like many other depictions of white slavery in the period, emphasized the key role of Jews in traffickers' international webs. In Londres' sensationalistic account of his foray into the underworld of Buenos Aires, he spends most of his time associating with French procurers, whom he seems to respect as businessmen, and enjoys drinking as their peer. Prejudice emerges in his descriptions of the Jews, whom he describes as "dark Levites, their filthy skins making the strangest effect of light and shade, their unwashed locks corkscrewing down their left cheeks, their flat round caps topping them like a saucepan lid... turning their heads all the time to look after me, just as savages do."²³ He emphasizes the clannishness of the Jewish pimps and procurers, who ignore him suspiciously, as compared with their French and Argentine-born counterparts, who he describes as accepting him without question into their midst, teaching him the tricks of the trade to the point at which he begins to procure women himself (an investigative precedent set by William T. Stead in his 1885 exposé).²⁴ Londres dubs Buenos Aires' infamous brothel-filled port neighborhood of La Boca "the Kingdom of the Polacks."²⁵ In Argentina, the term *polaco* or *polaca* was synonymous with Jew, and continues to be used today to reference prostitution, as in the 2002 play "Las Polacas" and 2003 novel *La Polaca*.²⁶

²³ Londres, *The Road to Buenos Ayres*, 166-7.

²⁴ William T. Stead, *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon: The Complete Expose by the Pall Mall Gazette of the Illicit Traffic in Children, Illustrating the Prevalence of the Criminal Practices Through Which They Are Decoyed from Their Homes into a Life of Shame* (International Publ. Co., 1885).

²⁵ Londres, *The Road to Buenos Ayres*, 176.

²⁶ Patricia Suárez, *Las Polacas: Historias Tártaras, Casamentara, La Varsovia* (Ediciones Teatro Vivo, 2002); Myrtha Schalom, *La Polaca: Inmigracion, Rufianes y Esclavas a Comienzos Del Siglo XX* (Buenos

Londres' presentation of the Jewish trafficker reflected an image by then standard in international portrayals of white slavery, in which traffickers reflected Oriental or explicitly Jewish characteristics. A 1913 letter to the editor in *Life* complained that "the villains of the so-called 'white slave' tales that are now flooding the press, periodicals, pulpits and prosperous playhouses always have 'beady eyes,' 'puffy red lips,' 'pudgy fingers' and 'little streaks of gray hair behind the ears,'"²⁷ Londres describes a trip to Poland in which he explains how Jewish procurers negotiate false marriage contracts with the families of attractive, impoverished girls in their late teens and early twenties, often on the recommendation of matchmakers whom they pay year-round for the privilege.²⁸ This reflects the standard "stille chuppah," or false marriage story, explored further in the following chapters. Jews themselves were quite concerned with both these portrayals and the actual involvement of Jews as traffickers and prostitutes. A young Jewish immigrant to New York reported later of her 1918 arrival at Ellis Island that "You've been told that any man... you don't know, is going to take you to Buenos Aires to a brothel, that was the favorite source of terror to young girls traveling alone."²⁹ Jewish organizations formed branches around the world to combat the image of the Jewish pimp in a self-defensive reaction against anti-Semitism.

The trope of Jewish traffickers bringing captive women to Argentina connected with broader discourses of Jewish white slavers and Buenos Aires as capital city of

Aires: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2003). Marczyński and Kirkor, *The Ravishers*, uses the term *polaca* to refer to all prostitutes in Argentina, whether from Poland, Jewish, or not.

²⁷ Cion, "False Portraits," *Life* 63, no. 1628 (January 8, 1914): 74.

²⁸ Londres, *The Road to Buenos Ayres*, 171.

²⁹ Oral history quoted in Johnson, "Protection, Virtue, and the 'Power to Detain,'" 655

prostitution. This chapter explores these discourses and connects them to the reality of widespread legal and clandestine prostitution in Buenos Aires, in which Jews were the most visible ethnic group as organizers and opponents. Even in the 1890s, as Jewish migration to Buenos Aires mounted and settlement began to shift from the Plaza Lavalle westward to Once, Jewish pimps and prostitutes were highly visible both to authorities and other Jews. A one-block de facto Jewish red light district stood in the symbolic heart of Once at the turn of the century, and while brothels and homes of underworld residents dispersed somewhat over the next three decades, they continued to be concentrated throughout Jewish residential and business zones. However, as the Jewish community in general became wealthier and moved out to Villa Crespo and other suburbs, prostitution remained concentrated in the older, more urban and central zone of Buenos Aires.

Jews as White Slave Traders

As Sander Gilman writes on late-nineteenth-century forensic science: “The madness of the Jews is a sexual madness.”³⁰ The image of the Jew as seducer of innocent young women, often presumed to be Christian, was not new to this period. The satiric graphic images in Hogarth’s 1732 “A Harlot’s Progress” portrayed the Jew as a “lascivious reprobate, willing to lay out significant sums to entice young gentile women into prostitution, and also as one who is sometimes himself the unsuspecting victim of his

³⁰ Sander L. Gilman, “Sibling Incest, Madness, and the ‘Jews’,” *Social Research* 65, no. 2 (1998): 401–33.

kept mistress' duplicity or sexual infidelity."³¹ One critic notes that this "reactivates past antisemitic sentiments, it also represents a consolidation of the image of the Jew as Sissy: effeminate, educated, wealthy - in sum, the badge of modern, tolerant society."³² This insulting characterization of Jewish concubinage and cuckoldry can also be seen in the burlesque play performed weeks after the publication of *Harlot's Progress*, in which a lover induces his would-be mistress with the promise:

I'll take thee into Keeping, take thee Rooms

So large, so furnish'd, in so fine a Street,

The Mistress of a Jew shall envy thee,

By Jove, I'll force the sooty Tribe to own,

A Christian keeps a Whore as well as they.³³

The deception of Jewish merchants by their kept women is further elaborated in the bestselling 1751 book by Eliza Hayward, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, which features a character named Miss Forward who after being abandoned by her lover accepts an "offer made her by a rich Jew merchant of five guineas a week to be his mistress," and then she cheats on him or prostitutes herself, the distinction is unclear, as she "could not

³¹ Frank Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes: A Paradigm of Otherness in English Popular Culture, 1660-1830* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), 54-5.

³² Matthew Biberman, *Masculinity, Anti-semitism and Early Modern English Literature: From the Satanic to the Effeminate Jew* (Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 153.

³³ "The Covent-Garden Tragedy," *Burlesque Plays of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Simon Trussler (Oxford, 1969), 193.

content herself with the embraces nor allowances of her keeper."³⁴ These qualifications on the seductive capacity of the Jewish man, the emphasis on his reliance on financial incentives and cuckoldry, allow for the representation of anxiety about predatory Jewish male sexuality while reducing its threat.

A 1939 Polish policewoman's memoir blames Jews for prostitution in Poland from its earliest years. She argues that Jews were generally those granted permission under 14th century "Magdeburg Law" to open taxed brothels, and Jews helped introduce the traffic in women with the Mediterranean silk trade. Jews, as well as Frenchmen and Saxons, ran licensed brothels in the eighteenth century. In the late nineteenth century, the Russian "Occupying Powers" created conditions which encouraged escape efforts, "taking advantage – since hunger and poverty are bad counselors – of the depression and weakness of the young women, depicting for them the fascinating life with all its beauty and joy, beyond anything they had ever dreamed, which awaited them overseas. Thousands of girls, and young and healthy women, dazzled by these brilliant prospects, went to Prussia, to France, to the Argentine, Brazil, Cuba and other parts of South America. Once in a strange country, with no knowledge of its language, they often became inmates of bordells [sic]. Either they were taken there direct from the train or ship which had brought them there or else, finding themselves unable to cope with the heavy factory work offered to them, they let themselves be persuaded by souteneurs into accepting offers of what seemed to be easier work but turned out to be the hardest work

³⁴ Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes*, 55, quotes from Eliza Haywood, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, edited by Dale Spender in 1986, p. 197.

of all.”³⁵ Jews were concerned with Jewish criminality, or representations of it, in Poland as well.³⁶

Argentine police shared this policewoman’s perspective. The first chapter of Buenos Aires police commissioner Julio Alsogaray’s memoir of his role in bringing down the Zwi Midgdal Society (in the Spanish edition, though not the later French version) is called “El Pueblo Hebreo,” the Hebrew People, and foregrounds the Jewishness of the Society’s members. His description of the problem in his memoirs reveals a preoccupation with Jewish involvement in pimping and organized prostitution, overlooking the activity of members of other ethnic groups. Alsogaray locates the origins of Jewish prostitution in the poverty of major Eastern European industrial centers and ports.³⁷ He separates “los buenos hijos de Israel,” the good sons of Israel, from his subjects, naming exemplary (though non-Argentine) Jews including Lombroso, Marx, and Einstein.³⁸ However, he then identifies essential characteristics which continue to mark even assimilated Jews, such as tenacity in the face of misfortune and the

³⁵ Stanisława Paleolog, *The Women Police of Poland (1925 to 1939)*, translated by Eileen Garlinska (Westminster: The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, 1939?), 4.

³⁶ In the late 1930s, a comparative statistical analysis of Jewish and non-Jewish criminality in Poland was published in Yiddish as well as French and Polish; see Liebmann Hersch, *Yidn-Farbrekhers: A Paralel Tsvishn Der Yidisher Un Nit-Yidisher Farbrekherishkayt in Poyln: Loyt Der Ofitsieler Poylisher Kriminal-Statistik* (Vilna: Bibliotek fun Yivo, Ekonomish-statistische seksie, 1939); published in French as *Le juif délinquant*.

³⁷ Julio L. Alsogaray, *Trilogia de la trata de blancas: rufianes, policía, municipalidad* (Buenos Aires, 1933), 17.

³⁸ Alsogaray, *Trilogia de la trata de blancas*, 14-15.

maintenance of racial purity through prohibition of mixed marriages.³⁹ Alsogaray also describes essential characteristics of the pimp which map onto common anti-Semitic tropes: the caften is the most cowardly of all criminals, avoiding action that might compromise his physical safety; he is driven only by obsession with money, for which he doesn't work, but feeds off of the women he exploits; he lacks firmness and masculinity.⁴⁰ He identifies "degenerative signs," using the day's popular criminological language of the marked physical characteristics of criminality, and claims caftens go so far as to exploit their own wives and daughters, thus denying the natural instinct to protect family honor.⁴¹ No rehabilitation is possible; the psychic makeup of the caften makes deportation the only solution to this social problem.⁴² This proposal of deportation rather than rehabilitation or prevention is reflected in Argentine police reports to the League of Nations, which positioned prostitution as an immigration issue.

Jewish leadership of trafficking and organized prostitution became a major political issue in the United States around the turn of the century, tied to concerns around migration and miscegenation. Anthony Comstock's late-nineteenth-century moral reform campaigns often blamed immigrants for vice. He blamed foreigners, including Jews, for threatening the high culture of the upper class, particularly in peddling pornography and promoting abortion and contraception.⁴³ In 1901, the Women's Municipal League printed and distributed 900,000 copies of a pamphlet entitled "Facts for Fathers and Mothers,"

³⁹ Alsogaray, *Trilogia de la trata de blancas*, 15-16.

⁴⁰ Alsogaray, *Trilogia de la trata de blancas*, 20-21.

⁴¹ Alsogaray, *Trilogia de la trata de blancas*, 24.

⁴² Alsogaray, *Trilogia de la trata de blancas*, 25.

⁴³ Nicola Kay Beisel, *Imperiled Innocents* (Princeton University Press, 1998), 25, 106, 158.

which presented information from judges, police, and religious leaders about Jewish involvement in prostitution cases and the threats thus presented to the daughters of New York City.⁴⁴ Early newspaper exposés of white slavery often blamed Jews for its perpetration, as in 1886 and 1899 *New York Times* articles locating key hunting grounds for recruiters in the Jewish Pale of Settlement and a 1905 *Los Angeles Times* article blaming the Jews as well as French and Italian immigrants for the problem in New York City.⁴⁵ Jewish observers also noted the prevalence of Jewish participants in prostitution with varying degrees of concern, as in a 1918 Jewish immigrant woman's autobiography which describes white slavery as part of the destitution of the region around 14th Street.⁴⁶

Nativist anti-vice reformers found broad popular audiences. Ernest Bell's 1911 book *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls: Or, War on the White Slave Trade* sold over 70,000 copies in its first seven months of publication, and eventually more than 400,000

⁴⁴ Val Johnson, "'The Moral Aspects of Complex Problems': New York City Electoral Campaigns Against Vice and the Incorporation of Immigrants, 1890-1901," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 25, no. 2/3 (January 1, 2006): 85. For Comstock's efforts to find pornographic intent and moral deviance at all levels of society, see the description of his perusal of modern French art in "Mr. Comstock's Work," *New York Times*, November 13, 1887.

⁴⁵ "White Slaves for the East," *New York Times*, May 30, 1886; Bradford Colt de Wolf, "News From St. Petersburg," *New York Times*, June 25, 1899, sec. Foreign Correspondence; "White Slave Trade: New York is Center of Nefarious Traffic in Young Women Imported for Immoral Purposes," *Los Angeles Times*, December 24, 1905.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Hasanovitz, *One of Them: Chapters from a Passionate Autobiography* (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1918), 318. See also Alan Block, "Aw! Your Mother's in the Mafia: Women Criminals In Progressive New York," *Contemporary Crises* 1, no. 1 (1977): 5-22.

copies.⁴⁷ Bell saw himself as a missionary in his own land, fighting against the invasion of non-natives. He ran the Midnight Mission in Chicago, a city of which he complained in 1904: "Chicago had more Jews than Jerusalem, more Scandinavians than Christiania - more prostitutes than Babylon."⁴⁸ He did not condemn all immigrants, however, as vectors of vice, observing "I know of no resorts controlled by English, Scotch, German, or Scandinavian men."⁴⁹ Bell blamed the French and Jews for white slavery, "Jew traders, too, will people our 'levees' with Polish Jewesses and any others who will make money for them. . . . On both coasts and throughout all our cities, only an awakening of the whole Christian conscience and intelligence can save us from the importation of Parisian and Polish pollution, which is already corrupting the manhood and youth of every large city in the nation."⁵⁰

The most well-known identification of Jews with prostitution in the United States in this period emerged from a series of articles by George Kibbe Turner published in *McClure's* magazine in 1907 and 1909 which attributed control of white slave

⁴⁷ Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-vice Activism, 1887-1917* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 63; Ernest Bell, *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls: Or, War on the White Slave Trade* (L.H. Walter, 1911).

⁴⁸ Donovan, *White Slave Crusades*, 63. The Midnight Mission workers characterized their work as that of foreign missionaries inculcating foreigners with Christian and American values: "We constantly minister at midnight in the streets of Chicago to Chinese, Japanese, an occasional Persian, Hindu or Arab, French, Polish, Russians, Germans, Italians, Jews, and almost every nationality under heaven. The Midnight Mission has some features of a foreign missionary society." Bell, *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls*, 414.

⁴⁹ Bell, *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls*, 262.

⁵⁰ Bell, *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls*, 260-62.

procurement in the US to Jewish immigrants. Turner claimed that the international traffic in women was controlled by "a large number of criminals" mostly "Austrian, Russian, and Hungarian Jews" and argued "It is an absolute fact that corrupt Jews are now the backbone of the loathsome traffic in New York and Chicago" and that it was "the Jewish dealer in women, a product of New York politics, who has vitiated, more than other single agency, the moral life of the great cities of America in the past ten years."⁵¹ Turner was a nativist and apologist for Jim Crow legislation, blaming foreign immigrants and migrating African-Americans for Chicago's crime problems. He tended to describe these groups as "savages" creating Chicago's "city savagery" in contrast to the "civilization" of racial evolution and Anglo-Saxon society.⁵²

Turner's accusations helped to overthrow New York's Tammany Hall political establishment, inspired the creation of a Rockefeller-led grand jury and congressional investigations into the subject, and galvanized a self-defensive Jewish reaction.⁵³ The congressional committee's report verified Turner's accusations that "Hebrew" women are

⁵¹ George Kibbe Turner, "The City of Chicago: A Study of the Great Immoralities," *McClure's Magazine* 28, no. 6 (April 1907): 575; George Kibbe Turner, "Tammany's Control of New York by Professional Criminals," *McClure's Magazine* 33 no. 2 (June 1909): 117; George Kibbe Turner, "The Daughters of the Poor: A Plain Story of the Development of New York City as a Leading Center of the White Slave Trade of the World, Under Tammany Hall," *McClure's Magazine* 34, no. 1 (November 1909): 45. See also Feldman, "Prostitution, The Alien Woman and The Progressive Imagination," and Harold Wilson, *McClure's Magazine and the Muckrakers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).

⁵² Donovan, *White Slave Crusades*, 61.

⁵³ Feldman, "Prostitution, The Alien Woman and The Progressive Imagination"; Daniel Czitrom, "Underworlds and Underdogs: Big Tim Sullivan and Metropolitan Politics in New York, 1889-1913," *The Journal of American History* 78, no. 2 (1991): 536-58.

greatly overrepresented as prostitutes in this period in New York, and in fact arrested more than any other nationality for prostitution and brought to the night court, though possible bias is acknowledged due to which parts of the city are focused on by the arresting officers and "the skill of the persons concerned in evading arrest or in dealing with the police."⁵⁴ This investigation also corroborated Turner's discussion of an association of Jewish white slavers: the New York Independent Benevolent Association, legally incorporated in New York in 1904, assisted "its members, many of whom were keepers of disorderly houses, pimps, or procurers, in carrying on their business, and especially in defeating the law." Like the Varsovia or Zwi Migdal Society, this organization provided "a weekly payment to sick members and for burial. They had a cemetery lot in Flatbush where members were buried."⁵⁵ This association also had at least one member in common with the Argentine organization, Max or Motche Goldberg, according to my correlation of press coverage, local records, and League of Nations records.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ United States and William P. Dillingham, *Importing Women for Immoral Purposes: a Partial Report from the Immigration Commission on the Importation and Harboring of Women for Immoral Purposes* (Washington: G.P.O, 1909), 13.

⁵⁵ United States and Dillingham, *Importing Women for Immoral Purposes*, 23-24.

⁵⁶ "Vice Trust Exposed and Heads Indicted," *New York Times*, June 13, 1913; "Head of Vice Trust Faces Court Today: 'Mortche' Goldberg, Indicted in 1913, Caught After Flight to Argentina," *New York Times*, March 25, 1915; "Girl's Jaw Broken by Vice Trust Thug: Grand Jury Witness Against Mortche Goldberg Twice Assaulted and Once Robbed," *New York Times*, August 29, 1915; League of Nations Experts' Report preparatory materials for Argentina, 1924, League of Nations archive, S171 [4710, 4789].

During the proceedings of the 1910 London conference of the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women, Turner's articles and the surrounding publicity were repeatedly decried, suggesting they may have played an inspirational role in the timing of this conference, and that the New York and Chicago discussions had international audiences and implications.⁵⁷ Jews in Chicago and New York also responded defensively, as did a range of non-Jewish interests.⁵⁸ The Chicago B'nai B'rith led local opposition to Turner, and Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch preached a sermon in response.⁵⁹ In November 1909, the twentieth annual convention of Reform Rabbis addressed this issue as among their top concerns.⁶⁰ Rabbi Stephen S. Wise resigned from that body several weeks later in a speech at the Free Synagogue, citing among other reasons the implicit blame placed by leaders on working class Jews for the popular

⁵⁷ Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women, *Official Report of the Jewish International Conference on the Suppression of the Traffic in Girls and Women Held on April 5th, 6th, and 7th, 1910, in London, Convened by the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women* (London: JAPGW Central Bureau, 1910), see especially 34, 46-47.

⁵⁸ For opposition and critique of Turner, see for example: "Gaynor Laughs at Accusation: Says There Is No 'White Slave Traffic' in New York," *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 1909; Sumner, "Tammany Now on Defensive," *Los Angeles Times*, October 26, 1909; "All Lies, Says Murphy: Reiterates His Denial of Protection to 'White Slave' Trade" *New York Times*, October 26, 1909; "City Slandered: McAdoo, Ex-Police Commissioner Declares the White Slave Reports Are All Fiction," *New York Times*, October 28, 1909; "White Slave Story False, Says Guide: Man Who Showed Turner Through East Side Dance Halls Attacks His Veracity," *New York Times*, October 28, 1909; "Mulry Says Turner Slandered the City," *New York Times*, October 29, 1909.

⁵⁹ Feldman, "Prostitution, The Alien Woman and The Progressive Imagination," 196.

⁶⁰ "American Rabbis Meet in Convention," *New York Times*, November 10, 1909.

association made between Jews and the white slave trade.⁶¹ The newly-founded Anti-Defamation League fought against filmic portrayals of “Jewish characters as the criminal, the fire-bug, the usurer, the white slaver,” claiming victory in 1915.⁶²

Turner argued for the protection of the racial purity of Anglo-Saxon women as the basis of civilization and the preservation of the Anglo-Saxon race. Not all anti-vice activists shared these sentiments: In Brian Donovan's analysis of Jane Addams' work, her pluralistic racial ideology provides a welcome contrast to the nativist ideas about Anglo-Saxon superiority promulgated by Turner, Stead, and Bell.⁶³ However, concerns with race and racial mixing underlay much of the local and international discourse around white slavery. The 1910 White Slave Traffic Act, or Mann Act, which prohibited interstate travel for “immoral purposes,” was famously used against African-American boxer Jack Johnson for bringing his white wife across state lines.⁶⁴ In 1912 and 1913, Georgia

⁶¹ “Dr. Wise Out of Rabbis’ Conference: Resigned in Anger Following a Report on ‘The Synagogue and the Workingman’; Refused to Be Muzzled, Resented the Association of ‘Jewish Criminality and the White Slave Traffic’,” *New York Times*, December 20, 1909.

⁶² “The Power of American Jewry,” reprinted from the *Jewish Tribune* in *Life* 65, no. 1693 (April 8, 1915): 640.

⁶³ Donovan, *White Slave Crusades*, 64-71. See also Yoosun Park and Susan P. Kemp, “‘Little Alien Colonies’: Representations of Immigrants and Their Neighborhoods in Social Work Discourse, 1875-1924,” *Social Service Review* 80, no. 4 (December 2006): 705-734; J. Beer and K. Joslin. “Diseases of the Body Politic: White Slavery in Jane Addams’ A ‘New Conscience and an Ancient Evil’ and Selected Short Stories by Charlotte Perkins Gilman,” *Journal of American Studies* 33 (1999): 1-18.

⁶⁴ Freeman Tilden, “His Offensive Success,” *Puck* 74, no. 1899 (July 23, 1913): 3; “The Meaning of the White Slave Act as Shown by Federal Decision,” *St. Louis Central Law Journal* 77, no. 15 (October 10, 1913): 261; “‘White Slave’ Act Upheld: Supreme Court Sustains Law to Stop Traffic,” *Los Angeles Times*,

Representative Seaborn Roddenbery introduced a proposal in the House of Representatives to add the prohibition of miscegenation into the US Constitution, in direct reaction to Jack Johnson's multiple marriages to and affairs with white women.⁶⁵ A Harlem Black Jewish sect leader, Elder W. Robinson, was convicted in 1926 under the Mann Act for having multiple wives.⁶⁶ As discussed in the introductory chapter, sex literally polices the boundaries of race, and sexual purity crusades also address racial purity.

Both the concept of whiteness and Jewish racial identity were in flux in this period. Jews and non-Jews debated the racial character of Jewishness, and Jews in various international contexts were treated both as white and Other.⁶⁷ Jews were often figured as Oriental, particularly in connection with sex trafficking. In a literary presentation of a Jewish man's attempt at kidnapping a woman for white slavery in an Alpine village, the potential trafficker reminds himself, "Don't look at their daughters like

February 25, 1913; D. J. Leab, "Women And The Mann Act," *Amerikastudien-American Studies* 21, no. 1 (1976): 55–65.

⁶⁵ *Congressional Record*, 62nd Congress, 3d. Session (December 11, 1912), 502–3.

⁶⁶ Roberta S. Gold, "The Black Jews of Harlem: Representation, Identity, and Race, 1920-1939," *American Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (June 1, 2003): 183.

⁶⁷ Matthew Frye Jacobson, "Looking Jewish, Seeing Jews," pp. 170-99 in *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998). See also Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (Rutgers University Press, 1999); K. Hodl, "The Black Body and the Jewish Body: a Comparison of Medical Images," *Patterns of Prejudice* 36, no. 1 (January 2002): 17–34; Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

a pimp would, or they'll guess my Oriental ancestry.”⁶⁸ In the New World, where “amazing racial hybrids” threatened old categories, white Anglo-Saxons were warned against mixing with immigrant Jews.⁶⁹ Racial ideas about whiteness and the Jews varied across Latin America. In Brazil, resident Jews were considered non-black and allowed to climb the social hierarchy, while potential immigrant Jews were considered non-white and undesirable.⁷⁰ In the late 1930s and early 1940s, although Jews were then considered non-white in Germany and some other Latin American countries, such as Bolivia, Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo encouraged Jewish immigration to whiten the population and distract international attention from his 1937 massacre of Haitians.⁷¹

Jewish racial identity and desirability also varied in Argentina.⁷² Several famous Argentine novelists of the time wrote explicitly anti-Semitic books; the most well-known are Julian Martel’s 1891 *La Bolsa* and Manuel Galvez’s 1913 *Nacha Regules*. Martel blamed the stock market crash of 1890 on prior speculation spurred by international Jewish capital interests and accused the 2,400 Jews then residing in Argentine of exploiting their wealth, greed, and role in the white slave trade to attack and undercut Christians. He drew on imagery from French anti-Semitism to portray a hidden cabal of

⁶⁸ Jonathan Boyarin, Greg Sarris, and Menahem Prywes, “Europe’s Indian, America’s Jew: Modiano and Vizenor,” *Boundary 2* 19, no. 3 (October 1, 1992): 213.

⁶⁹ Meredith Goldsmith, “The Year of the Rose: Jewish Masculinity in The House of Mirth,” *Mfs-Modern Fiction Studies* 51, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 374, 385.

⁷⁰ Lesser, *Welcoming the Undesirables*, 4-6.

⁷¹ Kaplan, *Dominican Haven*, 23, 26.

⁷² On race in Argentina more generally, see Eduardo A. Zimmerman, “Racial Ideas and Social Reform: Argentina, 1890-1916,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 72, no. 1 (1992): 23-46.

Jewish men dominating Argentine politics, polluting the country with their foreign and decadent ways.⁷³ Anti-Semitic tracts could be found in local kiosks and newspaper stands, such as Tiberio Lolo's 1919 "El Peligro Semita en la Republica Argentina."⁷⁴ In the same year, Buenos Aires Jews faced a kind of pogrom, as popular militias battled Jewish workers in the streets in what became known as the *Semana Tragica*, or Tragic Week.⁷⁵ Argentine popular theater often denounced Jewish migration.⁷⁶ Physical characteristics of Jews were associated with stereotypes such as stinginess, as in a cartoon published in *La Critica* on May 17, 1930, in which a Jew complaining of a stomachache awakens a pharmacist friend in the middle of the night (the two shown facing each other in Figure 2.1), who tells him he doesn't need a prescription when he can just drink a warm glass of water.⁷⁷ In the later period, as nationalism evolved, anti-Semitism mingled with anti-Communism, as rightist factions confused all Jews with Russians and all Russians with Communists.⁷⁸ As in Argentina, Jews in Brazil were also referred to

⁷³ Analysis of Martel's work based on Sandra McGee Deutsch, *Las Derechas: The Extreme Right in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, 1890-1939* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999), 27-28.

⁷⁴ Tiberio Lolo, *El Peligro Semita en la Republica Argentina: Algunas reflexiones y observaciones hechas a la ligera y sin mayores pretensiones* (Buenos Aires: America Latina, 1919).

⁷⁵ Victor A. Mirelman, "Semana Tragica Of 1919 And Jews In Argentina," *Jewish Social Studies* 37, no. 1 (1975): 61-73.

⁷⁶ D. S. Castro, "The Sainete Porteno, 1890-1935: The Image of Jews in the Argentine Popular Theater," *Studies In Latin American Popular Culture* 21 (2002): 29-57.

⁷⁷ Sancha, "Una Mala Noche," *La Critica*, May 17, 1930, 10.

⁷⁸ On nationalism and anti-Semitism, see Daniel Lvovich, *Nacionalismo y Antisemitismo En La Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Javier Vergara, 2003).

generally by the press as “Turks,” “Russians,” or “Poles.”⁷⁹ Argentine racial identity continues to be somewhat unstable, particularly among middle-class residents of Buenos Aires, as porteños struggle with the conflict between their privileged position in Latin America and their marginal position in the world.⁸⁰ Anti-Semitic formulations in Argentina have often referred to Jews as pimps or white slavers, exaggerating the actual historic involvement of Jews in prostitution.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Esther Regina Largman and Robert M. Levine, “Jews in the Tropics: Bahian Jews in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Americas* 43, no. 2 (1986): 169.

⁸⁰ G. Joseph, “Taking Race Seriously: Whiteness in Argentina’s National and Transnational Imaginary,” *Identities-Global Studies In Culture And Power* 7, no. 3 (2000): 333–71.

⁸¹ Examples of this kind of anti-Semitic expression include: *Un Judío Contesta a Tres Argentinos* (Buenos Aires, 1946), a book-length anonymous letter which purports to be by a Jew and justifies anti-Semitic characterizations of Jews as “truhanes, gangsters, canallas y traficantes de blancas,” p. 46. Listed in the back, the work’s publisher also advertises publishing in Spanish *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, work on Henry Ford and the Rothschilds, and on Judaism and masonry. Similar subjects are dealt with by right-wing nationalist Federico Rivanera Carles in *Los judíos y la trata de blancas en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Instituto de investigaciones sobre la cuestión judía, 1986); *El judaísmo y la semana trágica: La verdadera historia de los sucesos de enero de 1919* (Buenos Aires: Instituto de investigaciones sobre la cuestión judía, 1986); and *¡Los judíos son nuestros enemigos! Sus Leyes Ordenan Apartar, Odiar, Robar, Oprimir y Asesinar a Los no-Judíos* (Buenos Aires: Instituto de investigaciones sobre la cuestión judía, 1987).

Figure 2.1: “A Bad Night”



On the Road to La Mala Vida: Buenos Aires as Metonym for White Slavery

Buenos Aires was described as a favorite destination for white slavers from the earliest associations of white slavery with prostitution, and over time the city became a metonym for the phenomenon. In the eyes of feminist moral reformers and Jewish community leaders in Europe and the United States, South America and particularly the exploding capital of Buenos Aires produced a blurred stain of sexual criminality on the world map. Concerns with white slavery referenced both the actual scope of prostitution

in the port capital and the ramifications of mass migration and uncertainty about the post-colonial world order. Argentine officials and image-makers were deeply concerned by the late 1920s with how the rest of the world viewed the republic. Alsogaray's memoir bemoaned the fact that at the International Congresses against White Slavery in 1895, 1899, 1903, 1904, and 1906 in Paris, London, Budapest, Berlin, Amsterdam, Zurich, and Frankfurt, as well as in the League of Nations committee later devoted to the Traffic in Women, Buenos Aires was considered the principal center of this commerce, the "Athens of La Plata."⁸² Uruguayan feminist Doctor Paulini Luisi's 1927 protest against the League of Nations' presentation of its Experts' Report charged that Latin American responsibility was overemphasized (though her concern was in part to distinguish Uruguayan anti-trafficking efforts from Argentine failures).⁸³ Argentine defensive concerns were economic as well as patriotic. The publication of Londres' *Road to Buenos Aires* happened to coincide with the run-up to the Argentine presidential election of Dr. Hipolito Irigoyen, who was elected for his second non-consecutive term. Irigoyen was reputed to resent the book's popularity in the United States, at least in part because a nationalist campaign against US oil interests had been central to Irigoyen's re-election.⁸⁴ As Argentine leaders competed with the United States for European import markets, they hoped to remove the traffic in women from common perceptions of the Argentine international trade circuit.

⁸² Alsogaray, *Trilogía de la trata de blancas*, 102.

⁸³ "Commission Revises White Slave Report."

⁸⁴ The book's popularity and Irigoyen's reaction noted in "'Boss' v. 'Slaves'"; see also David Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987: From Spanish Colonization to Alfonsín* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 208.

The entire continent of South America loomed large on the global map of the interconnected criminal associations who purportedly organized the white slave trade. While US newspapers before WWI generally focused on the exploitation of women from within the nation's borders, that country's press also looked beyond their myopic vision of "America" to acknowledge the southern reaches of the hemisphere as a popular destination for both traffickers bringing women across the Atlantic, and those fearing prosecution in the United States who hoped to continue their profession elsewhere.⁸⁵ Although unsubstantiated, an "organized trade to South America" emerged from a US federal case in 1917, in which witnesses claimed that the defendant belonged to "a band engaged in kidnapping girls, taking them to South American ports, and selling them to confederates in South America."⁸⁶ In the United States in particular, South America may have served as a reverse synecdoche for Buenos Aires, as in the latter case, in which the entire continent was referenced although action was limited to Argentina's capital city. North Americans were not the only ones to vocally distinguish their continent from its southern neighbors on the world map of vice. Evelyn Waugh's 1928 *Decline and Fall* uses the Latin-American Entertainment Company as a cabaret recruitment front to evoke the connection not only as one critic observes "between music halls and white slavery,"

⁸⁵ "Vice Trust Exposed and Heads Indicted," *New York Times*, June 13, 1913; "Police Want Gangster Who Abducted a Girl: Organized Traffic to South America Charged," *New York Times*, June 23, 1917; see also "Urges White Slave Curb: Bascom Johnson Says Traffic is Marked in South America," *New York Times*, December 9, 1927.

⁸⁶ "Police Want Gangster Who Abducted a Girl."

but between the entire region and white slavery.⁸⁷ As noted at the beginning of this chapter, in 1930 Polish novel *The Ravishers*, a Warsaw vice squad officer warns a visa applicant “what South America has in store for a young, pretty girl.”⁸⁸ James Joyce was very interested in the white slave trade to Buenos Aires, which appeared in his work.⁸⁹

Argentina’s infamous reputation was in part shaped by the nation’s relationship to Britain, where the world’s largest international anti-trafficking organizations were based. As Europe and the United States sought neo-colonial relationships to Latin America in the wake of independence from Spain and Portugal, Argentina ended up in the British sphere of influence.⁹⁰ Britain was Argentina’s largest export market from the 1880s, buying from 20 to 40 percent of its exports before WWI, particularly meat and cereals.⁹¹ The dominance of European immigrants flooding into the Rio de la Plata also pushed industrializing Argentina to identify more with Europe than with the rest of Latin America. The legalization of prostitution in Argentina allied the country with French-

⁸⁷ Paul Knepper, “The ‘White Slave Trade’ and the Music Hall Affair in 1930s Malta,” *Journal Of Contemporary History* 44, no. 2 (2009): 205-6.

⁸⁸ Marczyński and Kirkor, *The Ravishers*, 142.

⁸⁹ Katherine Mullin, “Don’t Cry for Me, Argentina: ‘Eveline’ and the Seductions of Emigration Propaganda,” pp. 172-200 in *Semicolonial Joyce*, edited by Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁹⁰ See Andrew Thompson, “Informal Empire? An Exploration in the History of Anglo-Argentine Relations, 1810-1914,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 24, no. 2 (1992): 419–36.

⁹¹ H.S. Ferns, *Britain and Argentina in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1960), 492-93; Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, 154, 168.

style regulationism rather than British-style abolitionism.⁹² This, in addition to British economic involvement in the country, doubtless influenced British concerns with Argentine prostitution, as reformers promoted abolitionism in their quest to overturn the Contagious Diseases Acts (CDA), which regulated prostitution throughout the British Empire. In 1900, the Jewish reformers in Britain working to found the JAPGW used the CDA as shorthand for the regulatory system, noting that the “Contagious Diseases Acts [were] in force in the Argentine Republic.”⁹³

⁹² On the French regulatory system, see Louis Fiaux, *La prostitution réglementée et les pouvoirs publics dans les principaux états des deux-mondes* (Paris: Aux bureaux du progrès medical, F. Alcan, 1902; Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France After 1850* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990); Alain Corbin, “Commercial Sexuality in 19th-Century France: A System of Images and Regulations,” *Representations*, no. 14 (Spr. 1986): 209–19. On British abolitionism, see Glen Petrie, *A Singular Iniquity: The Campaigns of Josephine Butler* (London: Macmillan, 1971); Edward J. Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain Since 1700* (Gill and Macmillan, 1977); Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (University of Chicago Press, 1992); Josephine E. G. Butler, Jane Jordan, and Ingrid Sharp, *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns: Child Prostitution and the Age of Consent* (Taylor & Francis US, 2003); Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003). See also S. A. Limoncelli, “International Voluntary Associations, Local Social Movements and State Paths to the Abolition of Regulated Prostitution in Europe, 1875-1950,” *International Sociology* 21, no. 1 (January 2006): 31–59.

⁹³ *Minutes and Papers of the Gentlemen’s Sub-Committee for Preventative Work*, 188-89. Papers of the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls, Women and Children. Archives of Jewish Care. University of Southampton.

The US meat industry was also in stiff competition with Argentina for the British market, as Argentina surpassed the US as the major British supplier after 1900.⁹⁴ Technological changes continued to make the world smaller, and new trade relationships in conjunction with the collapse of the world economy spurred anxiety about the potential dangers of intercultural interactions. The distance between the United States and Argentina was decreased at this time by the establishment in February 1930 of a passenger airline from New York to Buenos Aires, reducing the length of the transcontinental trip to one week.⁹⁵ At the same time, Argentine exports of beef, flax, alfalfa, and fruit to Europe increased in comparison with the US, provoking competition between the two countries. While the international image of goods passing in and out of the Rio de la Plata continued to be overshadowed by the *Road to Buenos Aires*, a new fear became linked to Argentina in the international press of early 1930: parrot fever.

Like prostitution, parrot fever was linked to sailors and the theater. The first press coverage of Argentine cases began in October 1929, when an actor and an actress died of the illness in Buenos Aires and seven other members of their theater company became seriously ill, all as a result of exposure to the parrot which had played a sailor's pet in the production. The cause of these illnesses was identified upon the death of the parrot actor. Psittacosis, popularly referred to as parrot fever or parrot disease, had begun to spread in

⁹⁴ Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, pp. 171-72; Simon G. Hanson, *Argentine Meat and the British Market: Chapters in the History of the Argentine Meat Industry* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1938), 119-208; Peter H. Smith, *Politics and Beef in Argentina: Patterns of Conflict and Change* (New York: Columbia UP, 1969). See also David M. K. Sheinin, *Argentina And the United States: An Alliance Contained* (University of Georgia Press, 2006).

⁹⁵ "Shrinking the Americas," *Los Angeles Times*, Feb 15, 1930.

rural parts of Argentina several months prior to the theatrical outbreak, and had been first demonstrated to be transmittable from parrots to humans in 1896.⁹⁶ A US Admiral stationed near Panama City ordered his squadron to quarantine their pet parrots as a precaution, but rather than cause their beloved birds to suffer, seventy-four sailors set their parrots free.⁹⁷ As a handful of deaths and widespread parrot fever panic swept the United States, an embargo was placed on parrot imports from South America.⁹⁸

Argentina responded defensively to the US embargo and brouhaha. Some Argentine medical authorities responded to US accusations of the virus' origination in Argentina by denying the very existence of psittacosis in Argentina.⁹⁹ A strongly worded editorial reaction in *La Prensa* connected the international fears of parrot fever to other allegations against Argentine animal and agricultural exports.¹⁰⁰ This editorial claimed that the United States had launched anti-Argentine propaganda campaigns in Germany, France, and Great Britain, which associated Argentine beef with hoof and mouth disease and Argentine fruit with the Mediterranean fruit fly. Flax seed and alfalfa were also condemned. The parrot fever panic, asserted the editors of *La Prensa*, was also instigated by US propagandists, and was equally unfair: not only did official investigations reveal the safety of these Argentine export products, but it was a well known fact that no parrots were exported from Argentina. These allegations by the United States were thus blamed

⁹⁶ "Parrot Fever Germ Was Found in 1892: Spreading of Psittacosis by Birds to Humans Was Not Shown Till 4 Years Later," *New York Times*, Jan 14, 1930.

⁹⁷ Special cable to the *New York Times*, from Balboa, Jan. 13, 1930, published Jan 14, 1930.

⁹⁸ "Consider Embargo on Parrot Imports," *New York Times*, Jan 16, 1930.

⁹⁹ "Consider Embargo on Parrot Imports," *New York Times*, Jan 16, 1930.

¹⁰⁰ Cited in "Buenos Aires Paper Lays Trouble to Us," *New York Times*, Mar 13, 1930.

for recent European criticisms of Argentine imported food products. The bulk of this editorial emphasized US fears of Argentine trade competition in the European marketplace. *La Prensa* thus attempted to vindicate Argentina in European eyes from the jealous rumor-mongering of the United States.

The parrot fever panic imagined an Argentina of tropical jungles full of parrots, rather than the actual geographic spread of the country from the grasslands or “pampas,” inhabited by cattle, to the icebergs of Patagonia, populated by penguins. These ideas about Argentina echoed other Orientalist imaginings of the Southern Hemisphere. Other elements of the story mirrored discussions of the white slave trade. New York parrot “dealers” were blamed for the entry of sick birds into the United States. Parrots were connected to sailors, the most openly acknowledged group to provide patronage to prostitutes. There was a trace of the sexual associated with these salty-tongued naval companions, as the disease was sometimes called “old maid’s pneumonia” and understood to have spread in the United States due to the oral contact between birds and the old women who kept them as pets. Fundamentally, international concerns with both parrot fever and the white slave traffic to Argentina were rooted in fears about cross-border flows, the consequences of travel and trade, and the dangers of cross-cultural contact.

Jews in the Mala Vida, 1890s to 1920s

International impressions of Argentine prostitution and Jewish white slave traffickers were not completely unhinged from reality. In the decades surrounding the

turn of the century, Buenos Aires did have a notable amount of highly visible prostitution. Jewish women made up a disproportionate amount of registered prostitutes in the 1890s, and continued in this position through the 1920s. Jewish men's role in managing prostitution was also conspicuous in the 1890s, and became particularly consolidated in the 1920s, just as local tolerance for prostitution began to decline.¹⁰¹ Data from the 1895 census and police records of arrested pimps in the mid-1890s allow for the reconstruction of the locations of registered brothels in the center of Buenos Aires, comparisons of numbers of Jewish and non-Jewish prostitutes, and discussion of the characteristics of Jewish men arrested for pimping in this period of early Jewish urban settlement. This number of self-identified Jews in the city in 1895 also suggests that a very high percentage of the city's Jews were involved in prostitution at that time, given the numbers of Jews apparently involved in the city's registered brothels and arrested as pimps. Evidence from the 1930 court case against the Zwi Migdal society, together with press and other records of Jewish brothels and related locations, produces a reconstruction of the urban center which reveals the physical integration of the homes and businesses of the *teme'im* into mainstream Jewish life.

The *mala vida*, literally bad life, the Buenos Aires underworld of this era, has been a site of scrutiny by scholars and admirers of the tango and the argot of Lunfardo.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Thanks to Pablo Ben for the idea developed out of James Scobie's work that as the population of Buenos Aires became less dense and mobile and increasingly stabilized in residential neighborhoods in the 1920s, local tolerance for wide-spread prostitution declined.

¹⁰² See Appendix 1 for more on tango and Lunfardo, as well as male sociability. A particularly useful recent contribution to the field is Adriana J. Bergero, *Intersecting Tango: Cultural Geographies of Buenos Aires, 1900-1930* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008).

Argentine novelists, playwrights, and other artists of the time were also inspired by the romantic life of the mala vida. Jorge Luis Borges and Roberto Arlt are the most famous of these, but images of the brothel, the pimp and the white slave are found in works by a range of authors.¹⁰³ A key defining characteristic of this world was the prevalence of male immigrants, who engaged in homosocial spaces from the brothel to the cafe.¹⁰⁴ Among the foreign-born, men outnumbered women by nearly two to one. Among the

¹⁰³ Roberto Arlt, *Los siete locos: Novela* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Claridad, 1929) and *Los lanzallamas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Claridad, 1931) and for interesting interpretations of his work see M. Sierra, "Gender Constructions in Avantgarde Argentine Literature: Productivity and the Human Body in the Works of Raul Scalabrini Ortiz, Roberto Arlt and Enrique Gonzalez Tunon," *Revista de estudios hispanicos* 35, no. 1 (2001): 21–47; Abelardo Hernando, "Clase social y genero sexual en la formacion del sujeto pequeno burgues: Buenos Aires 1920-1940" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 1998) and Claire Solomon, "Fictions of the 'Bad Life': The Discourse of Prostitution in Argentine Literature and Culture" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2007). Borges' short story "Emma Zunz" features a Jewish character in this world; Ilan Stavans, "Emma Zunz: The Jewish Theodicy of Jorge Luis Borges," *Modern Fiction Studies* 32, no. 3 (1986): 469–75. Some other contemporary observations include M. Barres, *El hampa y sus secretos* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta López, 1934); Antonio Ferran, *La mala vida en el 900: Seleccion de textos* (Buenos Aires: Bolsilibros Arca, 1967); Vincente A. Salaverri, *La mala vida: Drama en un acto, tres cuadros y en prosa* (Buenos Aires: B. Fueyo, 1912); Domingo F. Casadevall, *El tema de la mala vida en el teatro nacional* (Buenos Aires: Guillermo Kraft Limitada, 1957).

¹⁰⁴ Pablo Ben, "Plebeian Masculinity and Sexual Comedy in Buenos Aires, 1880-1930," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16, no. 3 (September 2007): 436–58; Sandra Gayol, *Sociabilidad En Buenos Aires: Hombres, Honor y Cafes, 1862-1910* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Siglo, 2000); J. L. Guerena, "The Brothel as Space of Sociability (Prostitution, Spain)," *Hispania-Revista Espanola de historia*, no. 214 (2003): 551–70; P. Howell, "Sex and the City of Bachelors: Sporting Guidebooks and Urban Knowledge in Nineteenth, Century Britain and America," *Ecumene* 8, no. 1 (2001): 20–50.

foreign-born population resident in Argentina, the numbers of men per 100 women were 251 in 1869, 173 in 1895, 171 in 1914, and 138 in 1947.¹⁰⁵

While the absolute majority of these immigrants came in search of work from Italy and Spain, Eastern European Jewish centers also provided an important source of new Argentines.¹⁰⁶ Although most Jewish immigrants sought to make a living off the land in the Jewish Colonization Association's rural agricultural colonies or in traditional urban occupations, some Ashkenazi Jews from among the first major migratory group appear to have been involved in prostitution.¹⁰⁷ Some of these may have already been involved in Eastern Europe. At the height of the Industrial Revolution, a gender

¹⁰⁵ Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos*, 278, citing numbers from Gino Germani, *Política y sociedad en una época de transición* (Buenos Aires, 1968), 252.

¹⁰⁶ See the theoretical discussion of migratory push and pull factors in Jose C. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998). Key works on Jewish migration to Argentina include Haim Avni, *Argentina and the Jews: A History of Jewish Immigration* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991); Adriana Mariel Brodsky, "The Contours of Identity: Sephardic Jews and the Construction of Jewish Communities in Argentina, 1880 to the Present" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2004); Alberto Klein, *Cinco siglos de historia argentina: Cronica de la vida judia y su circunstancia* (Buenos Aires, 1980); Boleslao Lewin, *Cómo fue la inmigración judía a la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 1983); Victor A. Mirelman, *Jewish Buenos Aires, 1890-1930: In Search of an Identity* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1990); Eugene F. Sofer, *From Pale to Pampa: A Social History of the Jews of Buenos Aires* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982); Robert Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina: From the Inquisition to Peron* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publ. Society of America, 1979).

¹⁰⁷ José C. Moya makes a suggestion in this direction in "The Positive Side of Stereotypes: Jewish Anarchists in Early-Twentieth-Century Buenos Aires," *Jewish History* 18 (2004): 21-22.

imbalance was created in Old World manufacturing centers and port cities due to migrations from rural to urban areas, which created a large amount of commercial sex. This decreased by 1900 in most of Europe as the gender imbalance decreased. "Between 1868 and 1893 the number of licensed brothels in the Black Sea port of Odessa fell from 76 to 16; those in Warsaw slumped from 17 to eight between 1889 and 1908, and in Paris, the number of registered brothels fell from 140 to 50 between 1840 and 1900."¹⁰⁸ Women already working as prostitutes may have then sought a more lucrative market in the male-dominated New World. Charles Van Onselen says this was largely "voluntary," to the extent that attempting to escape poverty is voluntary, and women's move internationally and eventually into brothels mirrored male labor migration. (p. 105) The gender imbalance provided demand, and cheap steam travel made the search for "fresh goods" easy.¹⁰⁹

Literary and media references to Jewish women in Argentina in this period generally presumed they worked as prostitutes.¹¹⁰ Possible anti-Semitic distortions of this association preoccupied both contemporaries and later analysts. Sandra McGee Deutsch in her recent book on Argentine Jewish women bemoans the invisibility of Jewish

¹⁰⁸ Charles Van Onselen, "Jewish Marginality in the Atlantic World: Organized Crime in the Era of the Great Migrations, 1880-1914," *South African Historical Journal*, no. 43 (2000): 103.

¹⁰⁹ Van Onselen, "Jewish Marginality in the Atlantic World," 105.

¹¹⁰ In addition to the other references throughout this chapter, see Ana María Shua, *El libro de los recuerdos* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1994), 1, 9, discussed in Silvia G. Dapía, "Polish and Jewish Identities in the Narratives of Ana María Shua," *Polish American Studies* 65, no. 2 (October 1, 2008): 65.

women in this era who were not prostitutes.¹¹¹ Bolesao Lewin, author of one of the first studies of Argentine Jewry, initially published in 1971, vividly describes the “bitterness that invaded [him]” when he discovered that the first chapter of Alsogaray’s memoir was dedicated to the history of the Jewish people, making the unfounded assertion that the evolution of Argentine prostitution was intrinsically linked to the Jews.¹¹² Lewin acknowledges that until 1930 Jewish involvement in the local control of prostitution was very visible, but he relates this to the social phenomena driving massive immigration rather than to any particular aspect of Jewish history.¹¹³ Lewin critiques several sources in his attempt to rescue the Jews from total responsibility for Argentine prostitution. He wrestles with one set of statistics on registered prostitutes between 1899 and 1915 gathered by judge Carlos Bernaldo de Quiros, which implies that between four and five thousand of the 16,468 women registered in that period were Jewish, approximately 25-30%.¹¹⁴ He also emphasizes the high number of foreign women in these statistics, of whom according to him less than 20% are native to Argentina, and over 70% have migrated across the Atlantic Ocean.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Sandra McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880-1955* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

¹¹² Lewin, *Cómo fue la inmigración judía a la Argentina*, 206-7.

¹¹³ Lewin, *Cómo fue la inmigración judía a la Argentina*, 207.

¹¹⁴ Lewin, *Cómo fue la inmigración judía a la Argentina*, 208-9. My calculations based on the same numbers yield a higher proportion of Jewish involvement than Lewin’s calculations, 29.9% rather than his “somewhat higher than 25%”.

¹¹⁵ My calculation based on Lewin’s statistics. He claims that 77% of registered women were foreigners.

Estimating the numbers of Jews historically resident in Argentina has been a matter of debate among historians, in large part because the country had only two national censuses in the main period of Jewish population growth between 1900 and 1960, in 1914 and 1947, and only the latter enquired about religion (although many of those surveyed did not declare one).¹¹⁶ The city of Buenos Aires, where the majority of Jews increasingly lived, took censuses in 1904, 1909, and 1936, of which the latter was the most detailed.¹¹⁷ Rates of immigration, which were more reliably charted, will be discussed further in chapter four, but here the total population over this period is needed to make sense of statistics on the nationality of registered prostitutes. The 1887 Buenos Aires census only found 366 Jews out of a total population of 429,558.¹¹⁸ The 1895 Argentine census counted 6085 Jews out of a total population of 3,954,911, or 0.15%, with only 753 Jews among the 663,854 residents of Buenos Aires, or 0.11%.¹¹⁹

This number of self-identified Jews in the city in 1895 also suggests that a very high percentage of the city's Jews were involved in prostitution at that time, given the numbers of Jews apparently involved in the city's registered brothels and arrested as pimps. The same census data shows 229 Jewish prostitutes in the city's registered brothels, which would make up an improbably overwhelming percentage of the city's Jews if directly compared to the census data of 753 Jews in Buenos Aires. Only a small percentage of the women in the brothels self-identified as Jewish, however, with most

¹¹⁶ Ira Rosenswaiké, "The Jewish Population of Argentina: Census and Estimate, 1887-1947," *Jewish Social Studies* 22, no. 4 (October 1960): 196; Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos*, 136-37.

¹¹⁷ Rosenswaiké, "The Jewish Population of Argentina," 196.

¹¹⁸ Rosenswaiké, "The Jewish Population of Argentina," 195.

¹¹⁹ Rosenswaiké, "The Jewish Population of Argentina," 197.

leaving the religion line blank and some either filling in Catholic or having the blank filled in for them. This does not mean that these women were not Ashkenazi Jews, just that these different counting methods cannot be directly compared. This does provide further evidence for the intense prevalence of prostitution among the city's earliest Jewish residents. Even if a somewhat conservative estimate of the number of immigrants from Poland, Russia, and Romania (the birthplace of 90% of the city's Jews in this period) are presumed to be Jewish, the 71.7% suggested by Rosenswaike, 164 of the women in Buenos Aires' registered brothels in 1895 would have been Jewish, a number equivalent to over 20% of those who identified themselves as Jewish in that year's census.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Rosenswaike, "The Jewish Population of Argentina," 212-14, analyzes the numbers of Jews who do and do not declare themselves as such in the 1936 census.

Table 2.1: Comparison of Registered Prostitutes' Statistics

Nationality	Percentage of nationality in 1909 Buenos Aires population ¹²¹	Registered Prostitutes 1899-1915 % of 16468 ¹²²	Registered Prostitutes 1910-1923 % of 8486 ¹²³	Registered prostitutes Jan-May 1924 ¹²⁴ % of 216
Russian (Jewish)	1.1	22.4	15.6	3.2
Argentine	54.5	19.5	22.6	21.7
French	2.1	15.1	20.5	30.5
Italian	22.5	10.7	9.9	6.4
Uruguayan	0	9.2	9.5	1.3
Spanish	14.2	8.8	12.5	4.6
Austrohungarian (J)	0	6.5	2.3	0.4
Polish (Jewish)	0	0	1.8	27.7
German	0	2.6	0.5	0.4
Rumanian (Jewish)	0	1.1	0.6	0
British	0	0.8	0.3	0
Belgian	0	0.7	0.9	0.4
Paraguayan	0	0.5	0.4	0
Turkish	0	0.5	0.7	0
Brazilian	0	0.2	0.1	0
Chilean	0	0.2	0.2	0
North American	0	0	0.4	0.4
Portuguese	0	0	0.3	0
Ukrainian (Jewish)	0			1.3
Czechoslovakian (J)	0			0.4
Yugoslavian	0			0.4
Other	2.7	1.2	0.7	0
Total	97.1	1.2	100	99.1
Total Jewish	1.1	29.9	20.3	33.3
Total European	42.6	70.4	66.7	76.4

¹²¹ Scobie, *Buenos Aires*, 260, from 1909 Buenos Aires Census, 3-17.

¹²² Raw numbers from Lewin's citation of Carlos Bernaldo de Quiros, 208. My calculations.

¹²³ Mirelman, *Jewish Buenos Aires*, 205, from Records of Buenos Aires Municipal Health Department.

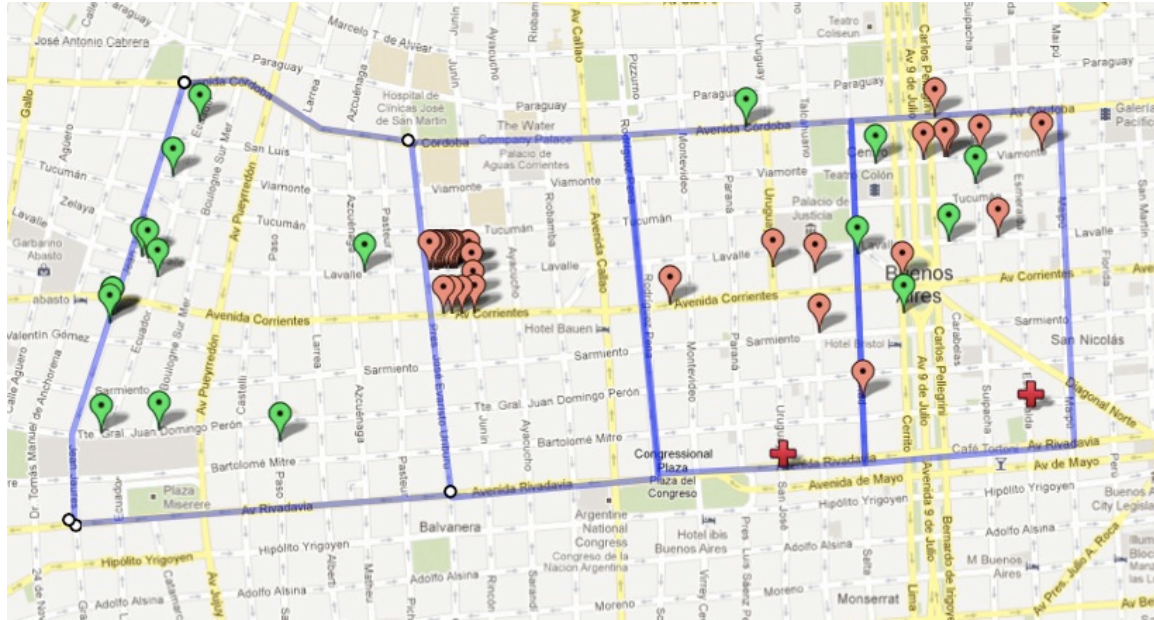
Another version of this data from June 16, 1924, in LON archive, S171, which also notes that "up to 1921 the Poles were counted as Russians and in some instances as Austro-Hungarians."

¹²⁴ My calculations from reply to League of Nations questionnaire sent by Jacinto Fernandez, Buenos Aires Police, July 30, 1924, p. 6, LON archive, 12/39498/28338.

The statistics in Table 2.1 suggest that although Jewish women made up a very high proportion of prostitutes relative to their total numbers in the population, they certainly did not comprise an absolute majority. It is also interesting to note the low numbers of Italian and Spanish prostitutes relative to their total proportion of the immigrant population and the high numbers of prostitutes from France and Uruguay. The high numbers from Uruguay might partially be accounted for by the popularity of traffickers' use of Montevideo as a port of entry into Buenos Aires, potentially causing false claims of Uruguayan nationality. Claims of French nationality might be overinflated, as French women were purportedly the most valued prostitutes. Also note the low numbers of British women in relation to the high levels of concern of British reformers with white slavery. Furthermore, according to the 1895 census data, many women in Argentine brothels were in fact native to Argentina, despite white slavery activists' insistence that "Almost without exception, the inmates of brothels are imported from European and other countries."¹²⁵ One-quarter of the women listed as prostitutes in these data claimed to be Argentine-born, both in the capital and various provinces. They tended to be concentrated in areas with less Jewish women, making up over half the population of district 9, directly west of the most concentrated Jewish area but with no Jewish women. Over half of the women in Hospital Norte claimed Argentine birth, 32 out of 59, while only 7 appear to have been Jews. La Boca, the second-largest area of prostitution, was over a third Argentine and less than ten percent Jewish.

¹²⁵ Minutes and Papers of the Gentleman's Sub-Committee for Preventative Work, (Dec. 17, 1900), 193. University of Southampton Archive, MS 193 Archives of Jewish Care. Donna Guy also makes the point that native Argentine women were an important presence in the city's underworld.

Map 2.1: 1895 Registered Brothels in Central Buenos Aires



Already in 1895, Jews figured prominently in local prostitution. The 1895 census gathered data on registered brothels, which I have assessed in Map 2.1, which shows the four police districts in the center of the city, where most prostitution was concentrated.¹²⁶ The red markers on the map show brothels which include registered prostitutes who appear to have been Ashkenazi Jews, while the green markers show brothels without any Jewish women. Red crosses mark two of the city's first municipal dispensaries where prostitutes were registered and checked for venereal disease; the first opened in October 1888 at Esmeralda 76, the cross further east, and the other in this zone opened in July

¹²⁶ This map can be viewed in an interactive format, with details on each address, numbers of Jewish and non-Jewish prostitutes in each brothel, and source citations, at <https://maps.google.com/maps/ms?msid=205801690951610780493.0004c576e16f6e5e3e529&msa=0>

1891.¹²⁷ The first Jewish settlement area, near Plaza Lavalle, where the majority of city's Ashkenazi Jews lived in 1895, has been noted to include prostitution as one of the area's diverse business at the time.¹²⁸ These maps provide a clearer picture of how prostitution fit into the area. While brothels housing both Jewish and non-Jewish were dispersed throughout the dense urban area near the Plaza, the densest concentration of prostitution fit into a one-block area in what was just beginning to emerge as the primary Jewish neighborhood.

The principal zone of prostitution according to these numbers was the 7th police district, later under the jurisdiction of Chief Julio Alsogaray, which also overlapped with the heart of the area around the Once de Setiembre train station, known as Once, which at the time had not yet become the most visible Jewish neighborhood, with institutions, businesses, and residences concentrating there between 1914 and 1930.¹²⁹ As shown on Map 2.2, all of the 20 registered brothels in the 7th police district recorded in the 1895 census were located on three sides of one square block. One block of Lavalle street, between Junin and De los Andes (today José Evaristo Urriburu) had fifteen registered brothels, occupying nearly every address on the street.¹³⁰ While this was before Once was consolidated as the central residential and business district it would become by the First World War, this intersection later became the symbolic heart of the district, immortalized in a poem by César Tiempo in which the streets Lavalle and Junin are

¹²⁷ Marisa Donadío, "La ciudad de las esclavas blancas," *Documentos e investigaciones sobre la historia del tango* 3, no. 3 (1996), 173-76.

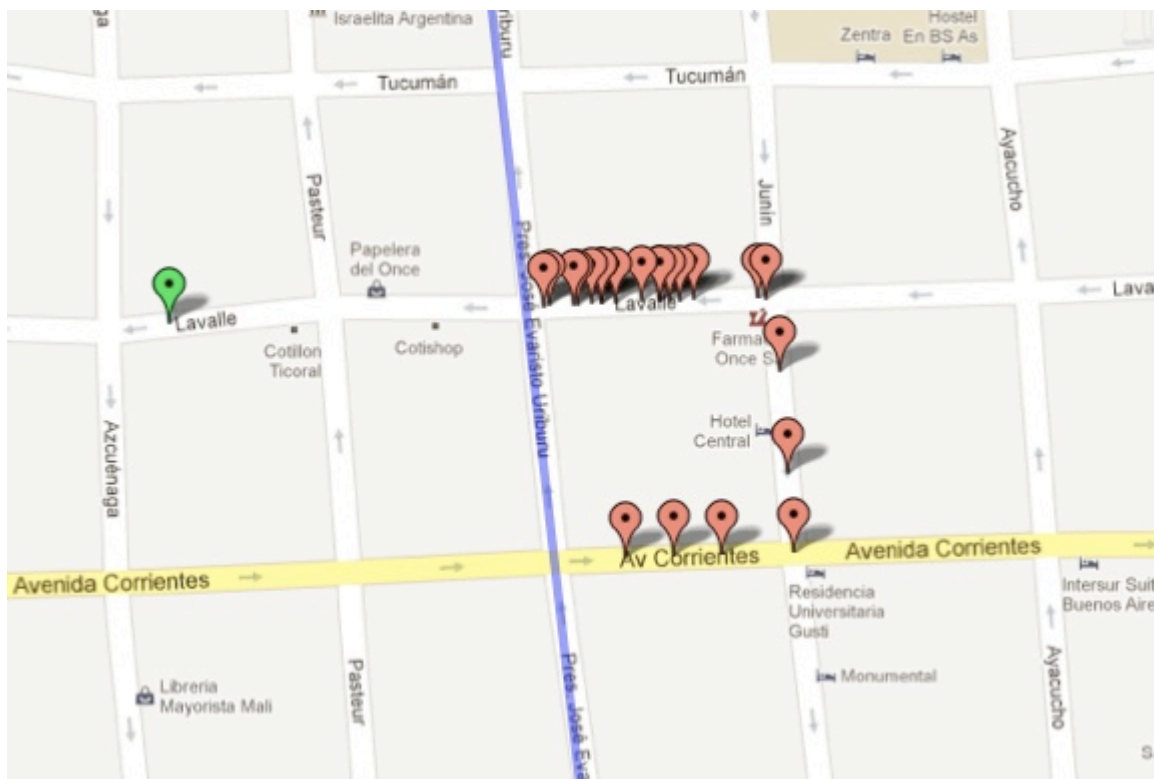
¹²⁸ Sofer, "From Pale to Pampa," 66.

¹²⁹ Sofer, "From Pale to Pampa"; Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos*, 146-52.

¹³⁰ Donadío, "La ciudad de las esclavas blancas," 140-43.

repeated as a refrain in each verse.¹³¹ Although it is possible that clandestine brothels existed elsewhere in the zone, this concentration of all registered addresses in one block is notable. Of the 191 prostitutes registered at these addresses, 147 had Jewish names and nationalities. None of the other census districts had a similar exclusive one-block cluster of brothels, this many prostitutes, or this many Jewish women.

Map 2.2: 1895 Registered Brothels in the Seventh District



The center of Once thus appears to have already been in 1895 one of the city's two main centers of registered prostitution, and certainly of Jewish women. Brothels in this neighborhood alone were arranged in a de facto red light district; other registered

¹³¹ César Tiempo's poem quoted in Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos*, 160.

brothels less than two blocks away in the neighboring zone were dispersed. None of the other census districts in the city had this high a percentage of Jewish women and only one came close to this many registered brothels. The next largest concentration of registered prostitution was in the infamous port zone of La Boca, with 139 registered women of whom only 18 were Jewish.¹³² No other district had more than 41 registered women, with the exception of the zone containing Hospital Norte, the syphilis hospital, where 59 women were recorded, of whom 7 appeared to be Jewish.¹³³ Of city's 28 total census zones, 11 had no registered prostitution at all, and 3 had only 1 registered prostitute. In the remaining half of the zones in which some legal brothel prostitution was reported, prostitutes ranged between 4 and 41, including both Jews and non-Jews, with the exception of the 9th zone. The 9th zone stood directly to the west of the 7th district with its one-block concentration of Jewish brothels, but had no Jews in any of its 14 brothels.¹³⁴

Census data for many of the brothels in the most concentrated prostitution districts of Once and La Boca include managers and pimps with Jewish names, though men from Western Europe and Argentina also appear as both bosses and servants. Ashkenazi Jews figured in these data even more prominently as prostitutes than as pimps or brothel managers. Servants in these brothels were rarely Jews. Clients may have been

¹³² Donadío, "La ciudad de las esclavas blancas," 157-63. The brothels in this zone cannot be mapped, as they are listed by census block rather than address.

¹³³ Donadío, "La ciudad de las esclavas blancas," 153-55. The 1895 census manuscripts are now available online, and in addition to name, profession, sex, civil status, nation or Argentine province of origin, religion, and occupation, also include literacy, education, property ownership, children and years of matrimony, illness or disability, and if orphaned by father or mother. See <https://familysearch.org>.

¹³⁴ Donadío, "La ciudad de las esclavas blancas," 145-47.

caught up in census data collection on more than one occasion; several young Spanish and Italian men working as day laborers appear in some of these brothels. For more on the characteristics of clients, see Appendix 2. Clients are the most difficult underworld players to locate in the historical record. Pimps and traffickers are somewhat easier to discuss, as they can sometimes be found in police records, though such data is rarely easily accessible.

In the mid-1890s, the Buenos Aires Police created bound volumes with the mug shots and physical descriptions of 164 suspects, all listed as *rufián* or *alcahuete*, both meaning “pimp,” nearly all of whom appear to be Ashkenazi Jewish men.¹³⁵ As shown in the examples in Figures 2.2 and 2.3, each of these records includes front and side facial photographs and personal data ranging from parents’ names and length of residence in Argentina to detailed physical characteristics such as arm, ear, and finger lengths, scars, tattoos, and birthmarks, probably for both identification and criminological uses.¹³⁶ For further discussion of Argentine criminology and prostitution, see Appendix 2.

¹³⁵ As many as 157 out of 164 have Ashkenazi names and parents with Ashkenazi names, and emigrated from Russia, Romania, or Austria, from where at that time the overwhelming majority of migrants to Argentina were Jewish. Policía de la Capital, *Galería de sospechosos*, vol. 1 (Buenos Aires: Imprenta y encuadernación de la policía de la capital, 1894).

¹³⁶ Further analysis of Argentine criminology can be found in Appendix 2 and the following recent work: Julia Rodríguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the Modern State* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2006) and “South Atlantic Crossings: Fingerprints, Science, and the State in Turn-of-the-Century Argentina,” *American Historical Review* 109, no. 2 (2004): 387-416.

Figure 2.2: Buenos Aires Police Mugshot, November 27, 1893



Figure 2.3: Buenos Aires Police Record, November 27, 1893

Número 19

Alejandro Brull
Hijo de Jacobo Enrique Brull y de Ethel Brull
 Natural de Rumania (Jersey)

MEDIDA DE IDENTIFICACION

Altura—1 m. 50 cents. 0 m.	Largo del pié izquierdo—25 cents. 5 1/2 m.
Brazos extendidos—1 m. 65 cents.	Largo del medio izquierdo—11 cents. 3 m.
Busto—85 cents. 5 m.	Ergo del auricular izquierdo—9 cents. 0 m.
Largo de la cabeza—19 cents. 4 m.	Largo del antebrazo izquierdo—43 cents. 0 m.
Ancho de idem—15 cents. 0 m.	Color del iris izquierdo—Zona central marron.
Largo de la oreja derecha—6 cents. 6 m.	

FILIACION

Edad—30 años	Barba—Castaña oscura
Estado—Soltero	Pelo—Castaño oscuro
Color—Blanco	Profesion—Alcahuete
Boca—Regular	Residencia—11 años
Nariz—Ligeramente convexa	

SEÑAS PARTICULARES

Tiene una cicatriz contusa en la region frontal, parte media 4 4 centímetros de la raíz de la nariz.—Un pequeño lunar en la region lateral izquierda del cuello á 8 centímetros del lóbulo inferior de la oreja.

Table 2.2 investigates the immigration patterns of these arrested men, comparing their locations of origin to the overall patterns of Jewish immigration to Argentina from these regions. Russia is somewhat underrepresented compared to the percentage of total Jewish migrants from there. Fourteen men come from Warsaw. Austria slightly underrepresented, and Rumania slightly overrepresented. Turkey is particularly overrepresented, with 15 from Constantinople. The disproportionate number of these men recorded as coming from Constantinople may be connected to the significant presence of Jewish women in Constantinople brothels, as described by Bertha Pappenheim. Pappenheim's descriptions also reiterate that fact that Ashkenazi women were not the only Jewish prostitutes, as Sephardic women entered prostitution in Salonika, Philippopolis, Adrinapole, Belgrade, and elsewhere.¹³⁷ Ashkenazi women were also brought as prostitutes to Constantinople and other parts of the Ottoman Empire.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Bertha Pappenheim, *Sisyphus-Arbeit: Reise-briefe aus dem Jharen 1911 und 1912* (Leipzig, 1924), referenced in Lloyd P. Gartner, "Anglo-Jewry and the Jewish International Traffic in Prostitution, 1885-1914," *AJS Review* 7 (1982): 135. See also Rifat N. Bali, *The Jews and Prostitution in Constantinople, 1854-1922* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2008).

¹³⁸ Nancy Wingfield, "Destination: Alexandria, Buenos Aires, Constantinople; 'White Slavers' in Late Imperial Austria," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20, no. 2 (May 2011): 300-1. See also Minna Rozen, *The Last Ottoman Century and Beyond: The Jews in Turkey and the Balkans 1808-1945* (Tel Aviv University, 2005).

Table 2.2: Birthplaces of Jewish Pimps Arrested 1893-4

Country	City/Province	Percentage of arrested pimps	Raw No.	% of Jews in Arg. from region in 1936 ¹³⁹	% of total Jewish migrants to US from region in period ¹⁴⁰	% Jews in pop. of natal region ¹⁴¹
Russia		21.0	33	35.2	65.36	3.29
Austria		17.2	27		25.49	4.68
Turkey		12.1	19	4.5	0.24	4.91
Poland		10.8	17	47.2		16.25
Rumania		10.2	16	7.9	5.80	4.99
	Constantinople	9.6	15			3.94
	Warsaw	8.9	14			41.18
England		7.6	12		0.36	0.85
	Odessa	6.4	10			37.03
	London	4.4	7			2.27
	Vienna	4.4	7			8.95
	Moscow	3.8	6			
Germany		3.2	5		2.48	1.04
France		3.2	5		0.05	0.22
United States		2.5	4			1.97
	New York	1.9	3			19.56
Greece		1.3	2			0.34
	Berlin	1.3	2			4.56
	Galicia	1.3	2			11.09
	Kiev	1.3	2			6.46
	St. Petersburg	1.3	2			1.41

¹³⁹ My percentage calculations from data in Rosenswaike, "The Jewish Population of Argentina," 213.

Austria is not included in these data.

¹⁴⁰ Data on total Jewish immigration from a comparable group of Jewish migrants: all Jewish immigrants to Ellis Island and Castle Island between 1884 and 1903, as recorded by the United Hebrew Charities and reported in the 1904 Jewish Encyclopedia.

¹⁴¹ Also from 1904 Jewish Encyclopedia.

Table 2.3 charts the length of time these arrested men had been in Argentina. Over a quarter had been in the country longer than five years, and sixteen pimps first arrived in the 1860s and 1870s, a time which places them among the pioneering Jewish migrants to Argentina. Their arrival dates span 1869 to January 1894 (final photos appear to be taken the second of Jan, 1894). Some arrivals in the early 1870s, with arrivals increasing through the 1880s, a minor peak in 1890, and a dramatic peak in 1893 (many of those apprehended claim to have arrived within that year, either days or months earlier, of course leading to the question of if it was their first arrival or not). Overall, this data indicates that suspected Jewish pimps were already entering Argentina in the 1870s and 1880s, and even if they were not working in the field before the 1890s, their early immigration relative to other Jews is still significant.

Table 2.3: Jewish Pimps Arrested 1893-4, Length of Residence in Buenos Aires¹⁴²

	<1 mo	1-6 ms.	6m-1y	1-2 ys.	2.5-5 y	6-10 ys	10-20y	>20 ys
Number	16	24	5	22	46	26	11	5
Percent	10.2	15.3	3.2	14.0	29.3	16.6	7.0	3.2

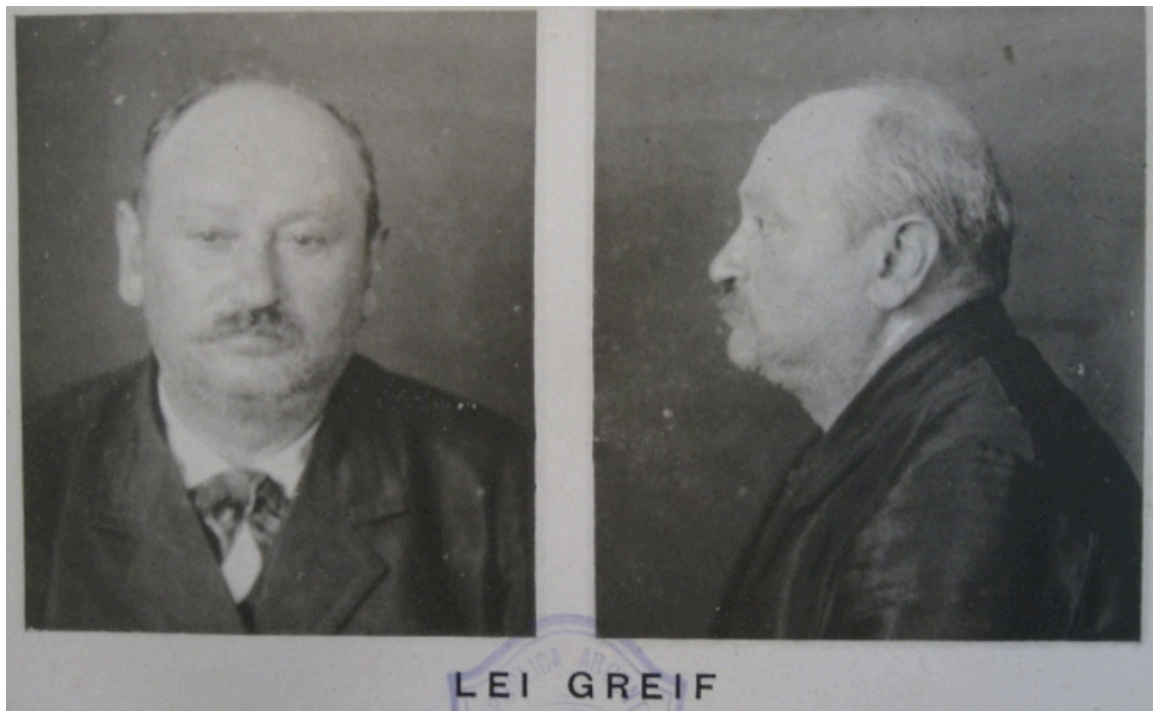
At least one of the men in these police records may have owned one of the many brothels clustered around the block at Lavalle and Junin in Once in 1895. An arrested alcahuete, listed as Lei Greif in the police record, is pictured in Figure 2.4. He was 53 years old at time of arrest in January 1894 and had arrived in Argentina 13 years earlier from Turkey.¹⁴³ A widower with similar name transcribed as Liver Graisf, age 54 in

¹⁴² Data drawn from Carles, *Los judíos y la trata de blancas en Argentina*, 8-32, out of 157 total Jews arrested 1893-4.

¹⁴³ Policía de la Capital, *Galería de sospechosos*, [2146-2147].

1895, is listed in the census data as owner of the brothel at Lavalle 2175-77.¹⁴⁴ These kinds of spelling and transcription errors are common in such records where multiple languages are employed, but cross-referencing data such as birthdates makes identification more reliable.

Figure 2.4: Brothel Owner in Once's 1895 Red-light District

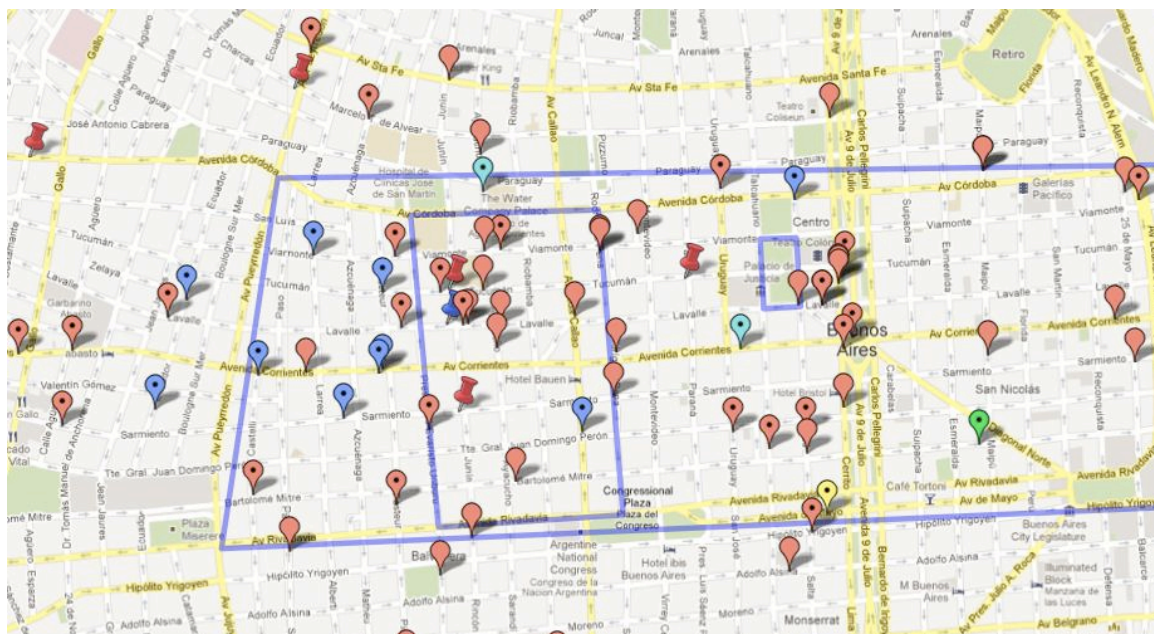


By the 1920s, both legal and clandestine brothels were spread throughout the area of Once. While certainly not a walled-in ghetto, the area outlined in Map 2.3 between the port and Pueyrredon, bordered on the north and south by Cordoba and Rivadavia, contained sections densely populated enough with Jews for Eugene Sofer to argue they

¹⁴⁴ Donadío, “La ciudad de las esclavas blancas,” 142.

“comprised a ghetto.”¹⁴⁵ As can be seen on Maps 2.3 and 2.4, Jewish-run brothels and related dwellings were most densely clustered in the zone of greatest Jewish residential concentration.¹⁴⁶ Traces of the first Jewish settlement district near Plaza Lavalle, marked on Map 3 with a small vertical rectangle, remained in 1930, even as Jewish settlement shifted westward. The greatest concentration of Jewish brothels and related domiciles can be seen in the Jewish center of Once and the Seventh Police precinct headed by Julio L. Alsogaray, marked in the larger vertical rectangle. The large vertical approximate rectangle outlines the main Jewish settlement district described by Sofer.

Map 2.3: Teme'im Brothels and Residences in Central Buenos Aires, circa 1930



¹⁴⁵ Sofer, *From Pale to Pampa*, 73.

¹⁴⁶ For interactive map with details on each address and sources, see

<https://maps.google.com/maps/ms?msid=205801690951610780493.0004c522c16bb0b2b4324&msa=0>

This map shows same urban area as Maps 2.1 and 2.2. Red pushpins mark locations used as headquarters and meeting places by members of the Varsovia Society, with the mansion described in detail in Chapter Four visible on Avenue Córdoba on the far left of this map. Red markers with black dots show brothels run by Varsovia Society or Zwi Migdal members and other Jews, and red markers without black dots show associated residences, cafes, and cabarets, some of which may also have been used informally as brothels.¹⁴⁷ Zwi Migdal member Simon Rubenstein advertised several storefronts next to the Plaza Lavalle for his “El Japon” silk importation business in the mainstream Yiddish press in the mid-1920s (see Figure 2.5).¹⁴⁸ While these advertisements indicated the integration of his business in the Jewish community, noting a main storefront and annex as well as the brands “Wolsey” and “Zimerli,” he was denounced during the Zwi Migdal case as a contraband smuggler rather than a legitimate importer. Roberto Arlt, literary chronicler of the Buenos Aires underworld, wrote in his column in *El Mundo* several weeks before the Zwi Migdal arrests that he was once told

¹⁴⁷ These addresses come primarily from the legal testimony in “Juzgados de Instrucción: Número 3 - Asociación Ilícita,” *Gaceta de Foro*, 15(4729), (1930, November 1), 1, 5-18, hereafter GdF, with others mentioned in Alsogaray, *Trilogía de la trata de blancas*, p 46, 50; “Un Tenebroso Indagado Hoy Compró una Casa al Contado en Novecientos Mil Pesos”, *La Critica*, June 3, 1930, 8; “El gobierno debe limpiar al país de la vergüenza de la trata de blancas,” *La Critica*, Sept. 17, 1930, 1; EN Letter Report 99, May 19 1924, 454-72, EN box 2, IWO; Esras Noschim Letter Report 140, p. 2, Dec. 10 1928, EN box 1, IWO; Letter Report 144, p. 45, Feb 5 1929, EN box 1, IWO; Letter Report 144, p. 45, Feb 5, 1929, EN box 1, IWO; Letter Report 148, pp. 84, 87, 97, 99, July 10, 1929, EN box 1, IWO; Letter Report 149, pp. 127, 131-32, 137-38, Sept. 4, 1929, EN box 1, IWO; EN “Memoria” 1936, pp. 17-21, EN box 3, IWO; LON “codebook,” S171, my numbering 4508, 4511, 4524, 4537, 5037.

¹⁴⁸ Ad for “El Japon,” *Di Presse* 8, no. 2947, Dec. 1, 1925, 12.

by a pimp while walking down Once's main artery Avenue Corrientes that a shop selling fabrics and leather was simply a front for a more nefarious trade.¹⁴⁹ Zwi Migdal members Felipe Schon and Mauricio Caro ran a restaurant, and in union with other members, 3 cafes, a bar, and an inn.¹⁵⁰ Member Mauricio Lachman had cards and envelopes printed with the address of his women's handbag factory on upscale Santa Fe Avenue.¹⁵¹ Caberet Montmartre, the locale frequented by prostitutes in the opening anecdote of Chapter Five, can be found just off of Avenue Corrientes near the port.¹⁵²

Figure 2.5: Simon Rubenstein's Silk Business Ad in *Di Presse*



¹⁴⁹ Reprinted in Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos*, 267-68.

¹⁵⁰ GdF, 14.

¹⁵¹ GdF, 12.

¹⁵² EN "Memoria" 1936, 17-21, EN box 3, IWO.

The blue pushpin in Map 2.3 marks the symbolic center of Once, at Lavalle and Junin, which had been the location of 20 registered brothels in 1895, the largest concentration of registered prostitutes in the city, predominantly Jewish women. Other blue markers locate important mainstream Jewish institutions, including Congregacion Israelita, Temple Max Nordau, the Orthodox Polish Temple, the mikvah or ritual bath, the social center of the Union Israelita Argentina, the headquarters of daily Yiddish newspapers *Di Presse* and *Di Yidische Tsaitung* as well as the Yiddish edition of socialist newspaper *La Vanguardia* and Zionist organizations Poale Sion and the Argentine Zionist Federation.¹⁵³ Light blue markers denote the headquarters of Ezras Noschim, the local branch of the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women, and the homes of several individuals who worked closely with that organization.¹⁵⁴ The green marker is the address of the Argentine Committee for Public Morality, which involved both Jews and non-Jews working against prostitution, and the yellow marker is the address of a clinic that advertised treatment of venereal diseases in the back pages of *Di Presse*.¹⁵⁵ By comparing the red markers with the others on the map, the integration of the homes and brothels of the teme'im with the homes and businesses of those who

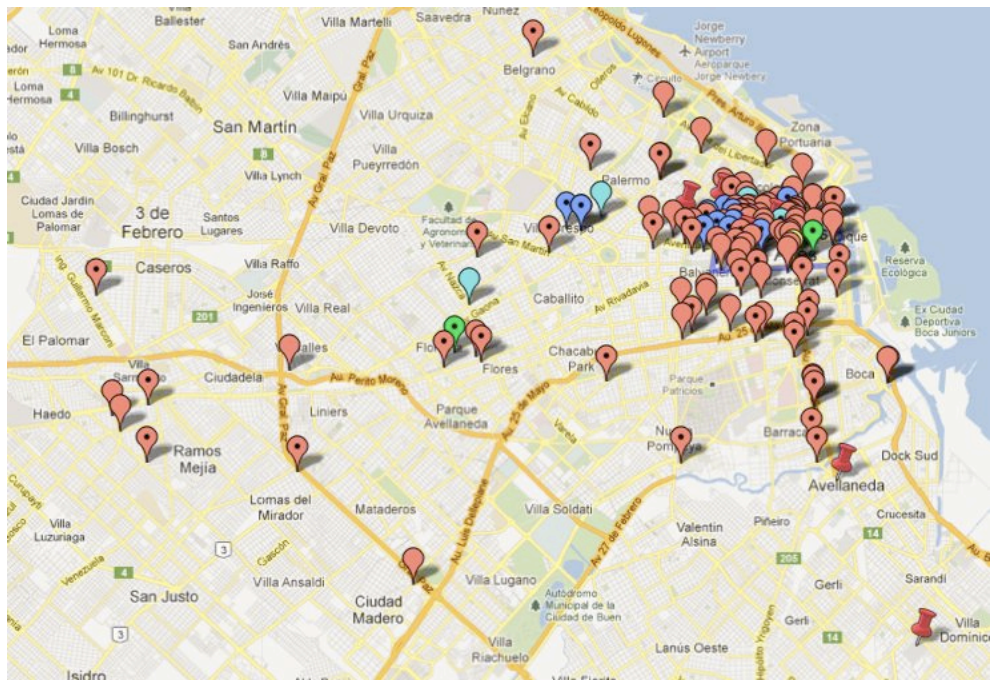
¹⁵³ Addresses from Sofer, *From Pale to Pampa*, 67; Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos*, 157, 163, 171, 188-91, 199, 231; masthead of *Di Presse* and *Di Yidische Tsaitung*; letterhead of Federacion Sionista Argentina from letter of Feb 12, 1932, EN box 2, IWO.

¹⁵⁴ EN Letter Report 146, p. 59, May 3 1929, EN box 1, IWO.

¹⁵⁵ Policlinico Mayo advertisement in *Di Presse*, Jan 1 1931; Argentine Committee for Public Morality address from correspondence with London central office of the International Bureau for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic; 1914-1916, Women's Library, London.

attempted to ostracize them can be clearly seen. A shift is also underway in this period, as the center of gravity of Jewish settlement moved westward and became increasingly residential, while the concentration of brothels run by Jews and associated residences remained in the older areas of the city. Although some brothels can be seen along the main corridor of Corrientes moving to the west, the teme'im did not appear to follow the westward shift toward Villa Crespo, where a quarter of the city's Jews lived by 1936, as indicated by the blue markers on this map.¹⁵⁶ Almost half the members of the Chevra, the mainstream Ashkenazi burial society, lived in Once in 1920, and only a third in 1936.¹⁵⁷ As Jewish residence patterns became increasingly suburban, brothels and residences of the teme'im remained concentrated in more urban areas.

Map 2.4: Jewish Brothels in Buenos Aires, Circa 1930



¹⁵⁶ Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos*, 155.

¹⁵⁷ Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos*, 163.

Map 2.4 shows the entire city of Buenos Aires, with the same markers as those listed for Map 2.3. The concentration of Jewish-run brothels and associated residences in the central region of the city can be clearly seen here, with a few in Flores and scattered along the outskirts of the city along the boundary today marked by Avenue General Paz, as well as in the greater area of Buenos Aires Province. The infamous cemetery of the Varsovia Society is marked with a red pushpin at the lower right corner of the map, with another pushpin closer to the city's southern water boundary marking a 1921 address for the Varsovia Society during a contestation of the organization's juridical status.¹⁵⁸ While several brothels remain in the area of Barracas, which had been along with neighboring La Boca a previous center of prostitution, the only addresses in these data in La Boca itself are that of Café "Boston Bar" and Cabaret Charleston, owned by Society members. When compared with the 1895 data on prostitution in La Boca, the conclusion can be drawn that Jewish prostitutes and brothel managers were less involved in La Boca than the central region of the city. La Boca and Barracas had a sizeable Jewish population in the early migration period, particularly of Sephardic Jews, many of whom moved their homes to the suburb of Flores in the 1910s and 20s, where a few brothels can be found by 1930 (close to the office of the Argentine National Association against the White Slave

¹⁵⁸ Cemetery address according to Ernesto Goldar, *La "mala vida"* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1971); it is possible this is inaccurate, and the address marked here as the original VS headquarters is the correct location. This latter address, marked with a red pushpin in the center of Avellaneda, was given to the the Inspeccion de Sociedades Juridicas by the Registro Civil de Avellaneda as the headquarters of the organization, in response and refusal of the attempt to repeal the organizations juridical status April 19, 1921, denied May 19, 1921. GdF, 11.

Trade).¹⁵⁹ Traces of both these settlements can be seen on this map, with some brothels established in Flores and others remaining in Barracas (a number of the latter were run by the last president of the Zwi Migdal, Simon Brutkievich or Zisman Zusman).¹⁶⁰

The density of residences and businesses of Jewish pimps and prostitutes in the city's original Jewish residential and business districts, as well as the large numbers of Jewish pimps and prostitutes both in the early settlement period of the 1890s and into the peak Jewish immigration period of the 1920s, helps to account for the intensity of the rest of the Jewish community's reaction to the *teme'im*. This concentration in the Seventh Police District in both periods also clarifies the central role played by that district's chief administrator, Julio Alsogaray, in the campaign against Jewish-led organized prostitution. As the center of gravity of mainstream Jewish institutions and residences moved westward in this period along Corrientes Avenue towards Villa Crespo, the *teme'im* did not follow.

¹⁵⁹ Sofer, *From Pale to Pampa*, 73; Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos*, 150. Address for the National Association from a report related to a League of Nations investigation by "the Committee on Trata de Mujeres y Ninas, July 1934 to Dec 1934," 7, 9, EN Box 2, IWO.

¹⁶⁰ "El gobierno debe limpiar al país de la vergüenza de la trata de blancas," *La Crítica*, Sept. 17, 1930, 1.

Chapter 3: Police and Prostitutes as Heroes and Heroines

According to Buenos Aires Seventh District police commissioner Julio L. Alsogaray, Raquel Liberman came to his police station on June 2, 1928 and declared to him that she had abandoned prostitution once and for all.¹ Liberman told the commissioner that she had saved up enough money from prostitution to break off her connection with the Varsovia Society and open up her own antique store, located on Callao 515.² Liberman complained that her whole-hearted attempt to abandon prostitution was derailed by the machinations of Jose Saloman Korn and the Sociedad Israelita de Socorros Mutuos Varsovia, Barracas-Buenos Aires (Jewish “Warsaw” Society for Mutual Aid, of Barracas-Buenos Aires), an organization whose true purpose was the coordination of the importation and management of women for prostitution. After a short time working in her antique store, Liberman claimed, a stranger came into her shop, began to court her, and convinced her to marry him. After the wedding, she realized that this had been a trap set by the Varsovia society to get her back into their ranks: her new husband was a procurer for the society, and he now used his legal connection to her in combination with the powerful pressures of the organization to oblige her to return to prostitution. Her legal attempt to free herself by denouncing these activities to the police commissioner only escalated the pressures against her: she was threatened with facial disfigurement and

¹ GdF, 6.

² This address is on Map 3, where it can be seen to be within a three-block radius of fourteen brothels and residences of Varsovia Society members – if Liberman was trying to run, she didn’t go very far.

death, and bribed with cash and jewels.³ She was told repeatedly by members that she could not be allowed to successfully denounce the organization, or she might inspire the other women also forced into prostitution against their will to “rise up” against their oppressors.⁴

Lieberman’s denunciation helped to launch a legal investigation that resulted in the 1930 arrests of over a hundred members of the Zwi Migdal Society and the dissolution of the organization’s legal status and political hegemony. Observers of this court case both at the time and in recent years have reflected the testimony of Lieberman’s legal council and the interested police commissioner Alsogaray practically verbatim. In the analysis of both contemporary opponents of the society and later historians, Lieberman rises from the mass of silenced and exploited women as a brave and heroic figure, ignoring bodily threats and valuable bribes for the chance to bring her oppressors to justice. The criminal masterminds of the shadowy association react dramatically, worried that one such denunciation might blow apart the terrified silence under which they had kept their chattel for decades.

Lieberman’s denunciation is the launching point for this court case according to the most involved participant to have left a personal record, police commissioner Julio L. Alsogaray, whose account of the legal proceedings and overall description of the rise and fall of Jewish procuring and prostitution in Argentina was published in 1933 in Spanish under the title *Trilogia de la Trata de Blancas: Rufianes, Policia, Municipalidad* (Trilogy of the White Slave Trade: Pimps, Police, Municipality) and in French as *La Prostitution en*

³ GdF, 5.

⁴ GdF, 5.

Argentine: Etude Documentaire (Prostitution in Argentina: Documentary Study).⁵ He gives credit for the successful launch of the case to Liberman's choice to denounce the association. She made her denunciation directly to him in the Seventh District Station of which he had become the chief, though he also notes his personal interest since his entry into the Buenos Aires police force at age fourteen in the activities of Jewish *rufianes* (this term cannot be exactly translated, though is generally, and to my eye unsatisfactorily, translated as procurer, trafficker, or pimp).⁶ Interestingly, the original Spanish version of this text singles out and specifies the Jewish people as responsible for the phenomenon of prostitution or trafficking in women to Argentina, with the first chapter entitled "The Hebrew People," while the French version omits these initial sections that have can easily be read as anti-Semitic.⁷ As in international publicity around white slavery, the power of this narrative resonated far beyond the extent to which it could be proven true.

The narrative structure of the 1930 court case as printed in the lengthy detailed legal summary contemporaneously published in the *Gaceta de Foro* suggests that Liberman's denunciation was the starting point of this case, which inspired a formal legal

⁵ Julio L. Alsogaray, *Trilogía de la trata de blancas: Rufianes, policia, municipalidad* (Buenos Aires: L. J. Rosso, 1933) and French edition *La Prostitution En Argentine: Etude Documentaire*, translated by Charles Louis Constant (Paris, Denoël et Steele, 1935). Citations below are to the Spanish version unless otherwise noted.

⁶ Alsogaray, *Trilogía de la trata de blancas*, 9, 13.

⁷ Argentine historian Boleslao Lewin criticizes Alsogaray's choice to write his first chapter about the Jews, thus implicitly giving them sole responsibility for the international traffic in women to Argentina; Lewin, *Como fue la inmigración judía en la Argentina*, 206-7.

investigation into the activities of the Varsovia Society.⁸ An investigatory committee was formed by the Fiscal Agent Dr. Luis A. Barberis, which included Don Mario Otamendi and Horacio Amadeo Vieyra, the commissioner and sub-commissioner of the Ninth District (covering most of the Jewish area of Once, directly to the west of the Seventh District), and the “ad hoc” Yiddish interpreter Selig Ganapol.⁹ Selig Ganapol was at that time the British-appointed Investigating Officer of the Buenos Aires branch of the London-based Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women, also called Esras Nochim.¹⁰ On March 12, 1930, this group went to the society’s headquarters on Cordoba 3280, where they found the bookkeeper Jacobo Saltzman, who told them that the association was now called the Zwi Migdal Society (the latter name was also fixed in a bronze plate next to the building’s front door). Saltzman assisted them with an examination of the books, papers, and other documents that were kept in a desk, a strongbox, and an archive, which included two books of actas, a registry of members, account books, “bibliorato con sollicitudes de ingreso,” notebooks with telephone numbers of the members, statutes of the society, a card certifying the groups legal status signed by the provincial inspector of juridical societies of the province of Bs As, M. Perez Estrada, mentioned above.¹¹

This narrative arc bothers me for several reasons: 1. This is not the first legal trouble any member of the Varsovia Society has faced, on the contrary, several thousand

⁸ GdF, 5.

⁹ The Ninth District can be seen on Maps 2.1 and 2.2 in the prior chapter, adjacent to the western edge of the Seventh District.

¹⁰ From JAPGW annual reports for 1928, p. 29, and 1932, p. 13.

¹¹ GdF, 6.

prior arrests are mentioned in this legal document, which resulted in hundreds of prior trials;¹² 2. Liberman's life does not match the narrative of inveigled innocent implicit in these legal claims and explicit in the international white slave stories; 3. Alsogaray had an earlier vendetta against the Varsovia society, and appeared to need a figure like Liberman to be able to push through a legal opposition to the organization; 4. It is not clear that the law required such a denunciation for the prosecution of corruption.¹³

The document presented by Liberman's legal counsel argues that the Zwi Migdal was never successfully prosecuted before because the victims did not accuse it and the members had lots of money and powerful influences which ensured that they always emerged successfully from their trials, giving the impression to their victims that due to these triumphs it would be futile to accuse them. Furthermore, they had created a legal fund for the defense of the rufianes and the society made each individual case into a matter of collective interest.¹⁴ Other evidence in the published legal summary clarifies that this was not the first legal case to have ever been initiated involving any member of the society, as this investigation uncovered over 120 prior trials involving members listed in the organization's registry and over two thousand prior arrests.¹⁵ These were only the cases associated with the traceable names in the Zwi Migdal's registries, as the use of aliases is mentioned here as a reason for why an even greater number of prior interactions with the legal system were not found. Other legal decisions had affected the organization,

¹² References to other arrests and trials in GdF, 6.

¹³ The trial summary states that "the crime of corruption can be initiated officially without the necessity of denunciation presented by the victim," GdF, 3.

¹⁴ GdF, 5.

¹⁵ GdF, 6.

such as the 1913 anti-procuring law that other historians claim inspired a temporary exodus of pimps, as thousands of traffickers, mainly Eastern European Jews, fled the city only to return with the renewed immigration wave after World War One.¹⁶ The group's survival was certainly not due to lack of effort on the part of the rest of the Jewish community, as explored in another chapter. So was the relative success of the 1930 case due to a shift in the organization's influence in the legal system, or other factors?

Other evidence presented during the 1930 court case suggests that Liberman's was not the first denunciation levied against the Varsovia Society in any of its incarnations. A November 10, 1927 letter from M. Perez Estrada, the inspector who had earlier certified the legal status of the Varsovia Society, informed the organization's president that denunciations brought to his agency required him to make a visit to the society's Buenos Aires headquarters. The inspector addresses the president with a formal language indicating his interactions with the society are on the same terms with any other business association, requesting that either the president or his secretary meet him at his train to accompany him to their headquarters. It also suggests a certain familiarity with the group, giving them a clear notice of his arrival instead of the unannounced visit of the commission in May 1930, and suggesting an unnamed pastry shop as an initial meeting point.¹⁷ This investigation may have been inspired by a legal brief filed by the JAPGW's Ganapol.¹⁸ Other sources credit the Yiddish newspaper *Di Presse* with an influential role in pushing for the legal prosecution of the Zwi Migdal or Varsovia Society.

¹⁶ Guy, *Sex and Danger*, 121; Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice*, 119.

¹⁷ Letter quoted in GdF, 6.

¹⁸ Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice*, 315.

Victim Narratives

The predominant narrative of white slavery emphasized the victimization of the female subject. As discussed in Chapter One, the process by which a young naïf from the countryside is overtaken by the confusing customs and characters of city life, often but not always in a foreign country, and beguiled into sin can be traced with little variation from the earliest lurid tales of white slavery in 1880s London to contemporary stories of human trafficking in Africa and Southeast Asia. The appeal of this narrative to sympathetic would-be rescuers lies in the removal of the subject from culpability, separating the prostitute from the stigma of her ages-old profession. Women's rights activists could take advantage of this validation of women's moral superiority, while social reformers created institutions for the rescue and rehabilitation of the fallen. This story also resonated in Europe with earlier concerns, such as the Barbary pirates stocking the harems of the East, and in the United States with Indian captivity narratives. Removal of blame from the sexual slave and its reassignment to the seducer, trafficker, or brothel-keeper, increasingly identified with undesirable immigrant populations, justified policies and laws which penalized these broader groups. This victim narrative is instructive both in its diverse applications over a lengthy period and in the broader social concerns to which it was linked in the white slavery period, particularly urbanization, immigration, and changing sexual mores.

In Christian societies, taboos against sexual promiscuity have tended to stigmatize if not ostracize the prostitute, blaming her, like Eve, for the sins of men. Concern with the impact on women of migration from rural to urban areas appeared in early modern

Europe, exemplified in the first scene from Hogarth's *The Harlot's Progress*, in which a young woman from the country, dazzled by the bustle of early eighteenth-century London, is snapped up by a sharp-eyed procuress.¹⁹ Both the victim narrative and its dubious veracity were established by 1860, when Henry Mayhew, who interviewed and quoted British prostitutes in *London Labour and the London Poor*, recounted "you seldom, if ever, meet with a woman who is not either a seduced governess or a clergyman's daughter; not that there is a word of truth in such an allegation - but it is their peculiar whim to say so."²⁰ These allegations of seduction removed the blame from these fallen women, placing it onto their initial seducers. Once fallen, the path to prostitution was inevitable.

¹⁹ Image reproduced in Evans' *Harlots, Whores and Hookers*, 22.

²⁰ Reproduced in Evans, *Harlots, Whores and Hookers*, 106-107.

Figure 3.1: Women Captured by Varsovia Society Members²¹



Interest in Liberman’s story from the press, legal system, and later historians may have had something to do with the elements her story shares with the contagious narratives of white slavery: seduction and trickery; women’s labor as necessarily coercive; prostitution as an inevitable end point. The language of the legal report on her

²¹ From “Solo Dos Nuevas Detenciones ha Realizado Hoy la Policia,” *La Critica*, May 23, 1930.

initial June 1928 visit to Alsogaray implies a personal struggle in her exit from prostitution and entry into “honest work,” reflected in her announcement to the police commissioner that she had left the Mala Vida.²² This sharp distinction between prostitution and honest work is underscored by this overall story, in which the moral of her elaborate forced return to the Varsovia Society is that an exit from prostitution is impossible: should someone escape, the organization will track them down and drag them back. Violence alone is not a sufficient weapon, as she was not simply kidnapped by Korn but seduced into marriage, a turn reminiscent of the Stille chuppah stories from the Pale of Settlement (to be discussed later in this chapter). This removal from her honest work becomes more poignant due to her having escaped the life once before, and allows the specifics of her past, which included no such trickery, to be overshadowed by her later victimization.

Liberman’s denunciation is also foregrounded in the work of Nora Glickman and Isabel Vincent, and although Glickman is primarily a literary critic and Vincent a journalist, the dearth of historical writing on this subject propels the historian to examine their books more closely. While I disagree with their heroization of Liberman, I sympathize with their impulse. I am too cynical to think that a Jewish prostitute would have been taken so seriously by the local authorities at that time that this case would have moved forward as it did were it not meeting the needs of more powerful forces and individuals. These needs might include personal vendettas, such as that hinted at by Alsogaray, shifts in the system of regulated prostitution and the demographic imbalance it fed on, and the larger political environment of Argentina. Historians writing on Argentine prostitution have failed to examine the impact of the important change in

²² GdF, 6.

political climate ushered in by the military coup that instated General Jose Uriburu as president on September 6, 1930. Alsogaray's treatise implies that this change of government, called a Revolution by its supporters, did indeed alter the system in which pimps and brothel owners operated.

Though far from the innocent virgin typically romanticized in white slavery stories, Liberman's story contains enough elements of the victim narrative to be useful in rallying support for the downfall of her exploiters. The quick shift made by both Vincent's narrative and Alsogaray's testimony from Liberman's story to the more dramatic narratives of other women kidnapped and imprisoned by members of the Varsovia Society highlights the difficulty of fitting Liberman's story into the victim narrative mold and the ossification of the necessity for a story of brutal victimization. The forced cloistering of Brony Spigler and the escape attempts of Ita Kaiser, two other prostitutes discussed but not foregrounded in legal testimony, yet dramatically illustrated in newspaper coverage (possibly depicted in Figure 3.1), were much more in line with the traditional shape of the white slave narrative than the less conventional history of Raquel Liberman, due to her apparently consensual past as a prostitute, and the absence of kidnapping or seduction.²³ Liberman's marriage to Korn, who she claims not to have recognized from her prior involvement with the organization, brings another common element of the particularly Jewish white slave narratives to bear, religious marriage under false pretenses. The marriage to a customer in her long-dreamed-of antique store mirrors the stories of newly-wealthy men from neighboring towns returned from America to the

²³ GdF, 6.

Pale of Settlement in search of suitable brides, who discover only on board ship that their “husband” is in fact “married” to several other women for the same sinister purpose.

Stille Chuppah: The Dangers of Quiet Marriage

Marriage to unknown co-religionists often played a key role in the stories of Eastern European Jewish women tricked into prostitution in Buenos Aires. Sometimes men already involved in trafficking women posed as prospective husbands looking for a bride from home to take back to the Goldine Medine (Promised Land). Others appeared to join forces with traffickers shortly after marriage and trans-Atlantic travel, though this might have been a result of the timing of the victim’s realization of the actual situation. One latter such case reported by the JAPGW in 1924 involved a woman who arrived in Buenos Aires with a new husband, who became friendly with some traffickers and attempted to induce her to join the business. She appealed to the JAPGW branch for protection, and they helped her to secure a divorce, though she did not want to bring suit against her husband, and collected funds to return her to her family in Poland.²⁴

This is a common trope in the Jewish victim narrative. An example from the JAPGW Report of 1928:

The Warsaw Committee asked our assistance concerning a young woman who had gone to Buenos Aires to join her husband, and from whom they had heard nothing since her departure. Our Buenos Aires reports show that she was met on arrival by our officer, who found that she was only married by a Ritual marriage.

²⁴ JAPGW Report, 40th Anniversary edition published in 1925 for 1923 and 1924, 28.

Steps were taken to get the marriage civilly legalized. Whilst the negotiations were going on, the woman called at our Buenos Aires office and complained that her husband, a postman, wanted her to become a prostitute. Owing to his ill treatment she pretended to agree to this, and when all the preparations were made, she succeeded in escaping from the house to go to our office. The matter was reported to the Police, but owing to lack of sufficient corroboration, although an arrest was made, the man was liberated. The woman was placed with a respectable family, employment found for her, and she is now earning an honest livelihood.²⁵

This story shares with others the emphasis on the primary problem with *stille chuppah* being the lack of legal protection for the woman thus married. The response by the JAPGW, as illustrated here and elsewhere, was to encourage civil marriage. By 1932, the Buenos Aires JAPGW Committee collaborated with the Polish Consul and other organizations to “safeguard young girls arriving for the purpose of marriage. Every application for a permit of entry for a fiancée must be accompanied by a sum of money to enable the civil marriage to take place immediately on arrival, and in the presence of our officer. It has not infrequently occurred that a young man has changed his mind, or that the girl has taken a sudden dislike to her former fiancé, with the result that she is left stranded. It has also happened that the young man suggests cohabitation without marriage, for the purpose of driving the girl to a life of immorality. The new arrangement will assist our Committee to safeguard the girl.”²⁶

²⁵ 1928 JAPGW Report, 32.

²⁶ 1932 JAPGW Report, 31.

The 1930 court case against the Zwi Migdal Society discussed the use of this marriage strategy by ZM members to recruit women in Poland: “the majority of the traffickers went to Europe, especially to Poland where they contracted religious-only marriages, with young women, to whom they made all kinds of promises of well-being in order to bring them to this Capital, which are agreed to by their parents in the belief that they are actual merchants, as they appear to be so by their clothing and demonstrations they make of money, thus exploiting the ignorance and misery that these poor people are suffering, but the only goal that guides them is to take advantage of this woman in order to prostitute and exploit her.”²⁷ This story was told almost verbatim twenty years earlier in the 1909 Sholem Aleichem story “The Man from Buenos Aires” discussed at the beginning of Chapter Two. The 1925 Soviet silent film *Yevreiskoye Schastye* or Jewish Luck, based on Sholem Aleichem’s Menakhem Mendel stories, implicitly referenced the connection between Jewish marriages, migration to Argentina, and prostitution. In a climactic scene, brides arrive by the boxcar for overseas transport out of Odessa, and while these women are transported by Jewish philanthropist Baron Maurice de Hirsch (founder of the Jewish Colonization Association discussed further in Chapter Five) rather than seductive procurers, their implied final destination is the Buenos Aires brothel.²⁸

1930 Polish novel *The Ravishers* dramatizes the use of this technique by Jewish traffickers seeking recruits in Warsaw to bring to Buenos Aires: “No, it's even better if

²⁷ GdF, 8.

²⁸ Alexis Granowsky, dir., *Jewish Luck [Yevreiskoye Schastye]*, 90 min. (USSR, 1925). The film is glossed in J. Hoberman, *Bridge of Light: Yiddish Film Between Two Worlds*, 2nd ed. University Press of New England, 2010, 92-96, though the connection to prostitution is not made. Thanks to Kalil Cohen for drawing my attention to this film.

[the father]'s conservative,' Klug rubbed his hands with these words, 'because a ritual wedding will do, ha, ha, ha.'"²⁹

Pimps and traffickers themselves, interviewed by undercover League of Nations investigators, affirmed the advantages of this technique: “the best place to secure inexperienced girls was in Poland and the best and safest method was the marriage method. In this way parental objections, the girl’s scruples, passport and other inspection difficulties were overcome. These are very important advantages particularly if the girl is a minor.” One trafficker characterizes another as acting as a *schadken*: “Other girls were also mentioned by 6-T [Chaim Leiser] who said that he could procure them from their parents, provided the investigator would marry the girl selected. Acting in the capacity of a *schatchen* (marriage broker), 6-T is thus able to supply pimps, known or recommended to him, with recruits.”³⁰

Both Jewish anti-prostitution organizations and Argentine officials demonstrated concern with *stille chuppah*. Robert Weisbrot argues that the connection between these false marriages and prostitution played a causal role in the 1927 rabbinic ban on conversions on Argentine soil.³¹ Argentine immigration officials attempted to prevent one variation of this technique, women being brought to the country with promises of marriage to a man she would meet for the first time at the Buenos Aires port. “Girls coming to be married are not allowed to leave the docks until the marriage has taken

²⁹ Marczyński and Kirkor, *The Ravishers*, 51.

³⁰ Experts’ preliminary report on the Argentine, July 7, 1926, 11 and 26; S171, LON archives [my numbering 4581, 4681, 4697].

³¹ Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina*, 162-63. Moshe Zemer argues against Weisbrot’s claim in “The Rabbinic Ban on Conversion in Argentina,” *Judaism* 37(1) (1988), 91-93.

place and this marriage is only solemnized when an investigation by the police reveals that fact that the man in question is a respectable person.”³² In the 1930s, the anti-teme’im institution Ezras Noschim developed a system of morality certificates to try to prevent these kinds of marriages, as will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

Some of these unions may have reflected women’s agency rather than victimization.³³ The strategic choice could have been made by Jewish women in Eastern Europe to enter a religious marriage with a foreign stranger in order to escape the poverty and isolation of their lives.³⁴ A prostitute and a Zwi Migdal member gave testimony possibly reflecting a scenario like this in the 1930 court case. According to the testimony of ZM member Aron Wiernik, he knew Lea Rossman in Poland for many years, and ran into her on his last trip there. She asked him to help her get to Buenos Aires, and since she lacked documents and could not travel alone, he got a passport from a friend in Austria, in which they appeared as husband and wife. Lea Rossman gave concurrent testimony: said she knew him for many years in Poland and in the middle of the previous

³² LON Experts’ investigation handwritten notes from Argentine visit, June 1-15, 1924, p. 1 [my 4652]; S171, LON Archives.

³³ On the concept of agency, see Sherry Ortner’s article “Making Gender: Toward a Feminist, Minority, Postcolonial, Subaltern, etc., Theory of Practice,” 1-20 in her *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997); particularly p. 9 on “victim heroes,” whose agency is removed throughout the narratives of fairy tales.

³⁴ A recent article by Nancy Wingfield makes a similar suggestion in her discussion of white slavery originating in imperial Austria, noting the possibility of “young women, attracted by the anticipated wealth of foreign liberators, hastily marrying these men and going abroad with them in the hope of a better life, often with the full support of their often poverty-stricken families.” Wingfield, “Destination: Alexandria, Buenos Aires, Constantinople,” 292.

January embarked with him from Hamburg, but because she lacked personal documents, they some in Berlin that portrayed them as husband and wife with the last name Zagulski. She admitted to plying the trade of prostitution but denied that Wiernik exploited her.³⁵

Women may have sought *stille chuppah* for its legal benefits, to gain access to otherwise inaccessible internal or external migration. In Argentina and in the Jewish Pale of Settlement, women could not change nationality on their own but only through marriage. *Stille chuppah* might have occasionally been a tool used by women to gain mobility more rapidly than through a cumbersome naturalization process. Radical political groups in the Russian Empire sometimes assisted single female members in contracting fictitious marriages in order to garner internal passports and the legal right to live away from the home of their parents.³⁶ A sensationalist 1925 *Los Angeles Times* article about a Latvian “slave band” supposedly involved in trafficking hundreds of young women to Argentina and Brazil notes in passing that “some couples by mutual consent agreed upon obtaining a divorce upon their arrival either in Buenos Aires or Rio de Janeiro, the girls expecting positions with friends of their temporary husbands.”³⁷ This suggests that women may have occasionally chosen to voluntarily contract non-civilly binding marriages in order to have the temporary legal right to migrate, later dissolving the unions.

³⁵ GdF, 13.

³⁶ ChaeRan Y. Freeze, *Jewish Marriage and Divorce in Imperial Russia* (Hanover, 2002), 17.

³⁷“Uncover Huge Slave Band: Latvian Police Report Sale of Hundreds of Girls From Russia to South American Buyers,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 1925.

The Shopgirl Story: From Pathos to Bathos

Women like Liberman working in big city department stores and small shops were often noted to be particularly vulnerable to the advances of procurers. A young woman working in a Warsaw dressmaker's shop was flattered by a customer into accepting a ticket to Buenos Aires with a promise of "lucrative employment" upon arrival. In the event, she was rescued from the procuress by the JAPGW's dock inspector.³⁸ Certain elements tend to be present in this type of story, particularly the factors making these women particularly vulnerable: their unprotected public interactions and desire for the luxury goods they were surrounded by but could not afford. In this situation, the girl's father had died, forcing her to join her mother in supporting the family. Her vanity was appealed to by the "customer" who noted her good looks and "told her that with her taste and skill she would earn large sums in Buenos Aires."

As introduced in Chapter One, the shop-girl employee and prostitution become so linked in the popular imagination that Edna Ferber in 1918 referred to "the shop-girl story: Torn boots and temptation, tears and sneers, pathos and bathos, all the way from Zola to the vice inquiry."³⁹ The title of this story, "The Girl Who Went Right" implies the more common narrative of the department store girl who "went wrong." The Committee of Fifteen in New York created a sub-committee to investigate the role of department

³⁸ JAPGW Report 40th Anniversary edition published in 1925 for 1923 and 1924, 26-27.

³⁹ Sic, Edna Ferber, "The Girl Who Went Right," pp. 57-71 in *America and I: Short Stories by American Jewish Women Writers*, edited by Joyce Antler (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 58. Note that Ferber was one of the first successful Jewish women writers. Also, the title of this story, "The Girl Who Went Right" implies the more common narrative of the department store girl who "went wrong."

store employment as a stepping-stone to prostitution, and published a report on the subject in 1915 that confirmed the link between the exposure of these young women to a higher standard of living and their downfall, as the most highly paid saleswomen were found to be the most likely to become prostitutes.⁴⁰ Maimie Pinzer, the former prostitute later known to historians as the author of the letters preserved in *The Maimie Papers*, followed this course into occasional prostitution, beginning behind the department store counter, where she flirted with the young male customers who frequently approached department store employees for dates, and after going home with one, began to provide such favors for money.⁴¹

While I believe Liberman's story garnered so much attention in part because it sharpened the distinction between prostitution and honest work, this interpretation elides the fact that she managed to save up enough money as a prostitute to buy her own unrelated business. This was a goal realized by other women as well. While some moved up the ranks from brothel prostitute to madam, others also took their savings outside. Prostitution may have been a response to a change in life circumstance, such as the illness of a family member or the birth of a child, which became less necessary as those circumstances changed, and a less lucrative form of work might have been tenable again. These alternatives allow prostitution to lie on a continuum with other forms of work, done to different degrees at different times and in a range of settings. While the moral power of Liberman's narrative relies on a binary distinction between the *Mala Vida* and

⁴⁰ Citation of the Committee of Fifteen Report from Ruth Rosen's introduction to *The Maimie Papers*, xxi.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, and Pinzer's letter 75, Nov. 27, 1913, 192-193.

honest work, her story also reflects the lived reality in which many women engaged with prostitution in a range of ways beyond the life commitment imagined by moral reformers.

Not all prostitutes were attached to men, and some were able to rise from prostitute to brothel owner, holding full membership in the Varsovia or Zwi Migdal Society. According to her own legal testimony in 1930, Zwi Migdal member Sara Dzigan had come to Argentina 40 years prior, attempted to make a living as a dressmaker but was unable to make enough money, so she began to work as a clandestine prostitute “without being attached to any man who exploited her.”⁴² She bought a house in 1908 which she rented to a prostitute, worked as a registered manager of a legal brothel for a few years, and later lived solely off of renting her property to prostitutes. Member Elke Farber de Milroth testified that she had come to Argentina with her now-deceased spouse who acquired a hair salon and she entered prostitution of her own free will, becoming the manager of a brothel and later purchasing a brothel with her husband that she continued to run.⁴³ Juana Montein retired from practicing prostitution to live a married suburban life and co-own the Charleston Cabaret and Café “Parisien” with other ZM members, the latter located in the fancy neighborhood of Recoleta on the edge of the enormous Palermo park.⁴⁴ Other women owned brothels in collectives with one another, including several in Buenos Aires Province, among them the Noah’s Arc and The Eucalyptus.⁴⁵ The fortunes amassed by several associated women were reported internationally, particularly that of

⁴² GdF, 15.

⁴³ GdF, 15.

⁴⁴ GdF, 11.

⁴⁵ GdF, 11 and “El gobierno debe limpiar al país de la vergüenza de la trata de blancas,” *La Critica*, Sept. 17, 1930.

“Esther the Millionaire.” The *New York Times* reported after the 1930 arrest sweeps that “several women over 60 years of age have been held, one of whom is alleged to have amassed more than 1,000,000 pesos (\$424,000 at par).”⁴⁶

Women members of the Zwi Migdal Society also claimed to have been drawn by the benefits offered to women too old or sick to make a living as prostitutes. Raquel Rotberg testified that she had gone from prostitution to being a doorwoman in brothels, and said she was convinced by Simon Brutkevich (the ZM’s last president) to enter the Society with the claim that it “had as its object to help women who for their age or sickness had to abandon the exercise of prostitution.” She said she joined because she wanted to “help women who in the practice of prostitution were generally exploited as she was or were abandoned upon becoming useless.”⁴⁷

Some of the female members of the Zwi Migdal claimed to have never worked as prostitutes at all. Sara Dressel testified that she came to Argentina in 1890 with her spouse Samuel Starkan, and the two of them worked in real estate until he died in 1903, at which point she remarried Noe Trauman, who she said worked as a tinsmith until he also died in 1912 (Trauman was one of the founders of the Varsovia Society, and appears in the police records of pimps from the mid-1890s discussed in the previous chapter). She buried both of her husbands in the Varsovia Society’s cemetery in Avellaneda, as both were members. She continued to live off of rent from her properties, and while she says she never practiced prostitution herself, she became a member herself due to the society’s benefits, and had owned a brothel for the past 14 years in which another woman worked

⁴⁶ “South America Pushes White Slave Inquiry,” *New York Times*, May 26, 1930.

⁴⁷ GdF, 13.

as the madam, and had run an inn for the past 8 years in a collective with other women.⁴⁸ Many of the women did identify themselves as prostitutes or madams in the 1930 court case, though none of the male members identified themselves as rufianes, all with prior police records as such claiming to have been arrested with others classified as such. These more complicated narratives of prostitution as part of a range of work and life experiences affirm the insights of “sex work” theorists and activists.

Alsogaray, Agendas, and Agency

While Liberman’s story may have been a rhetorical or emotional necessity for reasons discussed above, it may not have been in fact a legal requirement. The necessity of Liberman’s denunciation was highlighted by Alsogaray and later commentators, despite the fact that the header for the published legal summary for the case states that “the trial for the crime of corruption can be initiated officially without the necessity of denunciation presented by the victim.”⁴⁹ Why was the Zwi Migdal Society legally dismantled at this particular moment, in 1930, and not earlier in its nearly four decades long existence as the Varsovia Society? Contemporary and later observers have generally attributed its downfall to Liberman’s denunciation, followed by the perseverance of Alsogaray and Ocampo, and assisted by the activism of the Yiddish daily newspaper *Di Presse*.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ GdF, 15,

⁴⁹ GdF, 3.

⁵⁰ Campaign in *Di Presse* cited as crucial in *The Standard*, May 22, 1930.

While Alsogaray and Ocampo doubtless worked very hard to bring down the Zwi Migdal, the credit for their positive impact on the Jewish community given them by later observers might be slightly misplaced. Vincent connects Alsogaray with “a handful of honest men in high places in Argentina, particularly in the military, men who wanted to end the white-slave trade and lead a revolution against high-level corruption in their country.”⁵¹ While this no doubt reflects the self-image of the police chief and those military leaders who he supported, the revolution referred to here is generally understood by historians to have been a military coup that established a repressive dictatorship.⁵² Fundamentally a reactionary and supporter of the 1930 military coup, Alsogaray characterizes the evolution all of mutual aid societies as initially lacking in specific political direction, and eventually becoming completely authoritarian.⁵³ Changes in policing and prostitution accompanied the political shift of 1930, which might have been part of the larger constellation of forces determining the timing and results of the court case that dissolved the Zwi Migdal.

⁵¹ Vincent, *Traffic in Souls*, 174.

⁵² See ie Spektorowski, *The Origins of Argentina's Revolution of the Right*, and Sandra McGee Deutsch, *Las Derechas: The Extreme Right in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, 1890-1939* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999).

⁵³ Alsogaray, *Trilogía de la trata de blancas*, 122.

Fig. 3.2: Alsogaray Immortalized in *La Critica*⁵⁴



Both Vincent and Bristow introduce Alsogaray as he presents himself in his memoir, as a dedicated and uncorruptable police officer devoted to a life-long battle against the internal enemy of corruption and the external enemy best represented by the Jewish trafficker in women.⁵⁵ Guy is neither laudatory nor critical of Alsogaray, but

⁵⁴ With article “El gobierno debe limpiar al país de la vergüenza de la trata de blancas,” *La Critica*, Sept. 17, 1930.

⁵⁵ Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice*, 316, calls Alsogaray “a man of courage and integrity” while Vincent takes this laudatory assessment somewhat further: “he was a sober, conservative professional... careful, but

associates him with a xenophobic social tendency that preferred to give immigrant Jews the responsibility for the high levels of prostitution in Argentina rather than name other factors.⁵⁶ I might take Guy's attribution a step further, given that the police chief ignores the involvement of other ethnic groups in prostitution, and associates Jews with trafficking to such an extent that if his account was the only one a reader had access to, it would appear Jews were solely responsible for the trade. Although he only occasionally describes the members of the society specifically as Jews, the first chapter of his Spanish-language memoir of his fight against the society is entitled "The Hebrew People" (El Pueblo Hebreo). He attributes to the men of the Zwi Migdal a particularly high level of skill in the seduction, entrapment, and subjugation of women.⁵⁷ Alsogaray disputes what he calls the popular conception of pimps as extravagant and generous with his characterization of the members of the Zwi Migdal as "consumed with the fever to possess more and more money, which they give away only in order to gain the complicity of a third party."⁵⁸

Alsogaray describes the "abominable figure of the Jewish traffickers in white slaves" in the first line of the body of his text, though he is careful to distinguish the "good sons of Israel" from the bad and to give them credit for rejecting these undesirables, going so far as to list names of exemplary Jews from Lombroso to

he was also passionate, a man obsessed with cleaning up the crime and corruption that dominated his beloved country." Vincent, *Traffic in Souls*, 172.

⁵⁶ Guy, *Sex and Danger*, 129.

⁵⁷ Alsogaray, *Trilogía de la trata de blancas*, 61.

⁵⁸ Alsogaray, *Trilogía de la trata de blancas*, 78.

Einstein.⁵⁹ However, he then describes the essential characteristics of Jews, including tenacity and the insistence on maintaining racial purity, that have contributed to the relaxation of morality of some groups of Jewish immigrants.⁶⁰ He locates the origin of prostitution among Jews in the industrial centers and ports of Eastern Europe, such as Odessa, where booming populations “fight for life with resignation and perseverance in the face of misery.”⁶¹ As a result of subsequent immigration, Alsogaray observes that Buenos Aires has since become infamous for the quantity of Jews involved in trafficking and pimping women.⁶² Focusing only on Jewish women, without mentioning or justifying the exclusion of other ethnic or national groups, Alsogaray claims that this traffic began around 1890, in Hungary and Poland, due to the failure of poor Jewish parents to properly educate their children.⁶³ While Alsogaray’s Spanish book foregrounds the role of the Jews in Argentine prostitution, a French version of the text, *La Prostitution en Argentine: Etude Documentaire* which includes a lot of the same text and the lists of names and brothels in the back, doesn’t have any of the first chapters singling out the Jews.

Perhaps because of a need for the sympathy inspired by victimization, Alsogaray’s implicit anti-Semitism abuses the male traffickers rather than their female victims. Vincent might disagree with my critique of the police chief, as she characterizes

⁵⁹ Alsogaray, *Trilogía de la trata de blancas*, 13-15. The mention of Lombroso is particularly interesting due to his influence on Argentine criminology; see Appendix 2 for more detail.

⁶⁰ Alsogaray, *Trilogía de la trata de blancas*, 15-16.

⁶¹ Alsogaray, *Trilogía de la trata de blancas*, 17.

⁶² Alsogaray, *Trilogía de la trata de blancas*, 17.

⁶³ Alsogaray, *Trilogía de la trata de blancas*, 103-4.

Alsogaray as a selfless defender of Jewish women, rhetorically asking if while recording Liberman's denunciation he remembered "the other poor Jewish women he had tried to help in the past."⁶⁴ Alsogaray certainly appeared to remember them in his testimony for the 1930 case, in which he immediately follows his report on Liberman's denunciation with the stories of his attempts to save Bronid Spigler, Ita Kaiser, and Idesa Wiernik from the clutches of Varsovia members.⁶⁵ Throughout his text Alsogaray gives the organized "rufianes" complete responsibility for the social degeneration he bemoans, from bribing officials to corrupting innocent women. Alsogaray tells a story of the power of men and money to pervert justice. The women whose labor produces this money are somewhat elided here, appearing occasionally as slaves or submissive, terrorized "pupilas."⁶⁶ In comparison with the anti-white slavery literature or the documents produced by the JAPGW, Alsogaray's work is less obsessed with inspiring sympathy for innocent women than with provoking vengeance against immoral/sinister/evil men.

The exploiters of victimized prostitutes were almost never identified as the clients who paid for their services and created the demand for their labor, but the men, and sometimes women, who brought them into the business. Among the many artifices of procurers portrayed, most common was the offer of employment combined with flattery, often made by a woman, followed by an advance of money and a steerage ticket, and then the advice to call the female involved an aunt when dealing with authorities.⁶⁷ Traffickers learned more subtle tricks over time, such as providing addresses of "respectable

⁶⁴ Vincent, *Traffic in Souls*, 172.

⁶⁵ GdF, 6.

⁶⁶ For example, Alsogaray, *Trilogía de la trata de blancas*, 49-50.

⁶⁷ This example in the JAPGW Report published in 1925 for 1923 and 1924, 26.

families” to immigration officials.⁶⁸ Immigration officials and dockworkers of reform organizations fought back against this tactic, attempting to check these references against their information about known traffickers and pimps.

Perhaps Liberman had not actually been forced back into prostitution, but had a vendetta against the organization and took the opportunity to join forces with someone powerful enough to do something about it at a political moment when social order was becoming increasingly central. Alsogaray had demonstrated his interest in prosecuting the Zwi Migdal through his role in the cases of Brony Spigler and Ita Kaiser, and would obviously have been thrilled to receive the denunciation of an angry prostitute. He might have even encouraged her to emphasize certain elements of her story, such as the marriage under false pretences, the violent threats and lucrative bribes, and to de-emphasize less useful parts of her history, such as her earlier years as a prostitute, about which she had recorded no complaints. I also wonder whether or not she was actually unaware at the time of her marriage that Korn was involved in the ZM, and if she had really firmly broken with the association or not, or if something else inspired her interest in revenge. The threats and bribes imposed on Liberman by ZM members as reported in the GdF were about her denunciation, not about forcing her back into prostitution.

Prostitutes themselves understood the rhetorical power of the victim narrative. Clients often requested it along with other services. This was reflected in a popular work of fiction first published in 1931 in which prostitutes demonstrate substantial agency, choosing the work and when to enter and leave it.⁶⁹ When a would-be savior enters the

⁶⁸ JAPGW Report for 1928, 30.

⁶⁹ Milton Herbert Gropper, *Ladies of the Evening* (New York: Greenberg, 1931).

protagonist's brothel room and begins to ask her how she began in this line of work, she anticipates his question, explaining "Ain't met a guy yet who didn't ask it sooner or later."⁷⁰ The story becomes a part of what she is selling, as she asks him to specify his desires: "Dearie, I got fifty stories I can spill – what you wanna hear –somethin' funny or sad?" and when he responds "The real story," she continues "Well, dearie, I was a pure an' virtuous maiden, see?... An' a handsome guy with big black eyes deceived me – lured me to New York with promises to marry me."⁷¹

Many single women arriving in the New World appear to have been just as suspicious of self-styled moral reformers as of potential traffickers, and not without justification, as dock workers attempted to pry into their personal business, perhaps assuming a lack of virtue or legitimate family or employment prospects. Immigrants might have had a host of reasons to keep their work plans or personal connections secure from the prying eyes of strangers. When faced with "society investigators" who tried to convince them of the value of a moral life, without the freedoms and income to which they had become accustomed, many prostitutes reacted defensively, as symbolized by this 1931 novel's protagonist, who responds with bravado to a customer who in lieu of her usual services expresses concern for her welfare: "I got you. You're one o' them society investigators. You wanna send me up to some 'school' to make a 'good girl' outa me. Well, brother, it can't be did. I'm a hooker an' I'm one for keeps. Here's you damn money back!"⁷²

⁷⁰ Gropper, *Ladies of the Evening*, 116.

⁷¹ Gropper, *Ladies of the Evening*, 116-17.

⁷² Gropper, *Ladies of the Evening*, 121.

Figure 3.3: Grateful White Slave Thanks “Man of the Day,” Judge Ocampo⁷³



The responses portrayed by saviors of victims are uniformly grateful, as in Figure 3.3, whether traumatized by experience in a brothel or terrified by the realization of “the terrible risk she had run, through her innocence and credulity.”⁷⁴ Being saved meant removal from the brothel and influence of the unsavory characters, sometimes repatriated to Eastern Europe but more often placed in a home with “a respectable Jewish family,”

⁷³ Mirabelli, “El Hombre del Día,” *La Critica*, May 20, 1930.

⁷⁴ From an example in the JAPGW Report published in 1925 for 1923 and 1924, 27.

other work found, and ideally a suitable marriage match made under the approval of the JAPGW.⁷⁵ These assertions appear to be somewhat contradicted by the large numbers of women who refused the help of such organizations: very few of the women whom EN tried to help at the docks each year accepted.

On March 21, 1913, the front page of the *New York Times* publicized a set of letters written by prostitutes that offered suggestions to the Chairman of the Committee on Remedial Police Legislation as to how to best address the city's problems with vice.⁷⁶ After a series of public hearings in New York, at which prostitutes presented their recommendations to the committee, many of them submitted their suggestions in writing. Although the headline describes these letters as "pathetic," no such content appears in the quotes published here. Instead, Chairman Senator Robert F. Wagner is impressed that "the women of the underworld have their leaders among their own ranks... [and] plenty of evidence of ability to present their arguments with striking intelligence." These women demonstrate their willingness to "give every assistance in solving the problems confronting the lawmakers and the city authorities." The article attempts to maintain focus on the "pathetic" and "heartrending pictures of life in the underworld," but much stronger and more powerful are the words of the "outcast women" themselves, demonstrating their own family-like structures, help for lost foreign girls, and opposition to streetwalking, suggesting a segregated red-light district and the reduction or elimination of police involvement. They appear as nothing like victims, but show agency

⁷⁵ JAPGW Report published in 1926, 35.

⁷⁶ "Outcast Women Offer Wagner Help, Pledge Cooperation in Legislature's Efforts to Remedy the Social Evil: Send Pathetic Letters, Favor Segregation, a Social Welfare Commission, and Taking of Power from Police," *New York Times*, March 21, 1913.

in turning away and helping girls who seem to be novices and protecting those few who seem to be enslaved; they organize against men who try to profit off of women, and offer the city help in fighting against exploitative pimps.

Figure 3.4: Joke of the Day: Amigdalitis⁷⁷



Buenos Aires police and immigration authorities did not have the reputation of a heavy hand against the city's clandestine brothels or extra-legal prostitution related business. In Figure 3.4, a front-page cartoon in *La Critica* a few days after the ZM arrests

⁷⁷ *La Critica*, May 28, 1930.

began jokes that the police had waited too long to crack down on the institution because they “suffered from amigdalitis.”⁷⁸ Even after the Zwi Migdal case began, both Jewish and non-Jewish opponents of white slavery expressed concern that nothing would change, as the police were bribed by the traffickers. *La Prensa* and the *Buenos Aires Herald* charged that “the police here do not fulfill their delicate mission with the requisite zeal.”⁷⁹ The press also blamed Argentine passport and immigration systems more broadly.⁸⁰ Traffickers themselves corroborated the ease with which prostitutes could be brought into Argentina: Max Goldberg told the undercover League of Nations’ investigator “when asked as to how a caften accompanied by a prostitute or a girl whom he intends to make prostitute herself, can get into Buenos Aires without being detected by the Immigration officers, said: ‘Don’t you know that all those laws affect the respectable people worse, just like the Sullivan Law in New York State? In New York a gangster can always get an iron (gun); a respectable fellow can’t! The same way with that here.’ Another [unnamed] disorderly house owner interjected: ‘Stuss! (Rot!) It is done every day!’ and 4-P [Harry Kratzenbloom] bragged ‘I travelled across from here in the hottest (strictest) time. Nobody never made anything who did not take a chance.’”⁸¹ When asked about whether anyone was excluded from entering Buenos Aires, Max Goldberg said “You can bring in who you want. They are only strict about girls under 21 or girls that

⁷⁸ *La Critica*, May 28, 1930, 1.

⁷⁹ “Moralizing Influence of the Authorities,” reprinted from *La Prensa* in *Buenos Aires Herald*, June 7, 1930.

⁸⁰ “The Paper Barrier,” *Buenos Aires Herald*, June 25, 1930, 6.

⁸¹ Preliminary materials for Argentine experts’ report, June 1924, Appendix 8 [my 4702], S171, LON Archives.

you have to beat up to make a dollar.”⁸² This suggests both the ease of entry and the probability that most women did not have to be violently coerced.

Argentine authorities’ responses may have been influenced in part by a desire for rehabilitation in the court of world opinion. When the Zwi Migdal arrest sweeps did take place, they were advertised with extensive coverage in local newspapers as though to compensate for prior perceived inaction on the part of authorities. Alsogaray and Judge Ocampo were heralded as heroes (Figures 3.2 and 3.3). The *Buenos Aires Herald*, published in English for an international audience, crowed “That Argentina is no less active than are other civilized lands in her desire to stamp out the last vestiges of the white slave traffic was made amply apparent last night, when police were sent out to ‘round up’ the members of the now notorious Warsaw gang.... What the public was awaiting was the intimation that definite steps were being taken to bring the scoundrels to book. The action of the police authorities last night should dispel any doubt there might have been on that point.”⁸³ Photographs of police arresting ZM members sometimes deployed perspective in such a way that the pimps looked small, old, weak and bedraggled next to the powerful and upright officers, as in Figure 3.5. Ultimately, however, Alsogaray complained that the failure of the Zwi Migdal prosecution to capture most of the members and adequately punish those arrested only succeeded in providing further negative international publicity for the city.⁸⁴

⁸² Preliminary materials for Argentine experts’ report, June 1924, Appendix 9 [my 4703], S171, LON Archives.

⁸³ “White Slavery,” *Buenos Aires Herald*, May 22, 1930.

⁸⁴ Alsogaray, *Trilogía de la trata de blancas*, 103.

Figure 3.5: Police Apprehend Zwi Migdal Members⁸⁵



After Uriburu took power on September 6, 1930, the Zwi Migdal case was taken on as a cause by supporters of the new government, who blamed the prior administration for inaction on vice and corruption. Local employee of the London-based international anti-white slavery organization the NVA complained that under the Yrigoyen administration, the police, particularly Chief Santiago, were in the pay of the traffickers, and nothing would be done – she expressed hope that change would take place after

⁸⁵ From “Los tenebrosos desfilan ante el juez,” *La Critica*, June 2, 1930.

Uriburu's "revolution."⁸⁶ *La Critica* headlined front-page discussion of the case ten days after the coup, arguing in a sub-headline that "The Trial was Blocked under the Previous Government, it Must Go on, Fall who Falls."⁸⁷ These headlines also suggest that Alsogaray's promotion was tied to his work on this case, advertising his leadership in the case with a large and flattering drawing of his face (Figure 3.2): "The Now Chief Commissioner Denounced the Sinister Organization."⁸⁸ Manuel Galvez, author of a 1905 doctoral dissertation on local prostitution, later involved in organized opposition to municipal prostitution, in his 1944 memoir gave Uriburu credit for finally breaking up the Zwi Migdal (although the case began several months before the General took power).⁸⁹ Galvez has also been accused of anti-Semitism, as his 1913 novel *Nacha Regules* exaggerated the influence of Jews on Argentine politics, inflated the number of Jews in the country, and promoted the restriction of Jewish immigration.⁹⁰

Police records also discuss Alsogaray's promotion, the timing of which is directly related to Uriburu's ascension to power. On September 9, 1930, he is retroactively promoted as of the date of the military coup, September 6, to the post of second-in-command of the entire police force.⁹¹ His promotion was short-lived, however, as

⁸⁶ Rosalie Lighton Robinson, letters to Sempkins of Dec. 3, 1928, June 4, 1930, and Sept. 23, 1930. 4IBS/6, FL112 folder, International Bureau for the Suppression of Traffic in Persons, Women's Library, London.

⁸⁷ *La Critica*, September 17, 1930.

⁸⁸ *La Critica*, September 17, 1930.

⁸⁹ Galvez, in Donadío, "La ciudad de las esclavas blancas," 216.

⁹⁰ Deutsch, *Las Derechas*, 227.

⁹¹ "Orden del Dia" for Buenos Aires, Sept. 9, 1930, p. 526 in Policia de la Capital Federal, *Orden Del Dia*, vol. 44, 1930, Police Archive, Buenos Aires.

indicated by his resignation a mere three months later, on December 4, 1930.⁹²

Alsogaray's memoir, first published the following year, is silent on this subject, though he praises the Revolution, which is what supporters called Uriburu's government. A pamphlet in these archives also commemorates an October 11, 1930 event at the Plaza Hotel which honored Alsogaray's promotion, attended by the Police Chief and other high functionaries. While the ZM case is not explicitly mentioned, Alsogaray is credited with cleaning up the neighborhood of Once. The new administration's politics can be clearly seen in the related description of Once: "despite living within her [Once] committees of stalwart extremists, despite the meetings of leftists in Once Plaza, stolen from the comfort of honest people in the neighborhood, regardless of the other circumstances of the neighborhood, it became an exemplary area, where crime appeared as something exotic, the appropriations of the alien disappeared, and good manners became commonplace."⁹³

Alsogaray's memoir also castigates corrupt police and municipal officials, and credits the Zwi Migdal Society's financial influence with ensuring the selective enforcement of laws at both the police and juridical levels. He claims that many members of the Zwi Migdal penetrated important social circles, curried friendships and favors with ministers, legislators, judges, and other high-level administrators, and stood out with particular prominence at the hippodrome (72, 92). He reports that high city functionaries communicated with the Society's leaders using formal address, even "Don," inspiring

⁹² "Orden del Dia" for Buenos Aires, Dec. 5, 1930, p. 752 in Policia de la Capital Federal, *Orden Del Dia*, vol. 44, 1930, Police Archive, Buenos Aires.

⁹³ *Homenaje al Senor Comisario de Órdenes Don Julio L. Alsogaray, Octubre 11 de 1930* (Buenos Aires: Tip. Luis Veggia, [1930/31?]), 6.

others, such as police officers, to imitate their superiors in such signs of respect (87). In addition to his moral critique of the caftens, Alsogaray emphasized that the source of their capital was unclean, in contrast to the clean fields and factories of modern Argentina (58-59). This analysis implicitly defends the nation's old social order and critiques the displacement of the land-owning aristocracy from their traditional status by new money of dubious origin. The police commissioner expressed particular concern for the daughters of "honest families," particularly those for whom city streets bore the family name, and condemned new social clubs and salons, whose recreational façade concealed "scenes of orgy and abandon" (60-61). He dedicated his career to the punishment of gamblers and pimps, seekers of easy money. Like Jewish leaders' boycott of the *teme'im*, Alsogaray's defense of morality reflected anxiety over appropriate economic mobility.

Alsogaray's excoriation of corrupt officials, along with his particular concern for the class ascension of social undesirables, suggest that his dedication to this cause was shaped by a moral agenda prescribing a social order that paralleled the goals of the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women. Police and Jewish reformers did not necessarily work together, as evidenced in a 1929 case in which EN's secretary led a four-day stakeout in La Plata and waited to call the police until after he had removed a captive woman from the premises.⁹⁴ EN also responded defensively to the publication of Alsogaray's memoir, concerned about his characterization of Argentine prostitution as predominantly run by Jews, and refuting his claims with their own statistics.⁹⁵ However, their agendas often intersected. A year after his assignment to head

⁹⁴ May 3, 1929 Letter Report 148, p. 78, EN collection, IWO.

⁹⁵ Ezras Noschim, *Memoria* 1936, 89-90; EN collection, IWO.

the 7th district, Jewish residents of the area presented Alsogaray with an award for his anti-prostitution activity, giving him a champagne lunch and an album with his portrait on the cover in gold.⁹⁶ They joined forces in the 1930 court case against the Zwi Migdal society, and shared disappointment at the numbers of known cafetens who slipped out of the police net during arrest sweeps, with the remainder released from prison within a year. The moral policing of Jewish institutions reflected concern with community reputation and social behavior, while Alsogaray hoped to rehabilitate the reputation of Argentina in the eyes of the world by expelling problematic foreign elements and appropriately assimilating acceptable new arrivals.

⁹⁶ “La Colectividad Israelita de Buenos Aires, Ofrecio hoy un Homenaje al Comisario Julio L. Alsogaray,” *La Critica*, Feb. 5, 1927.

Chapter 4: Sociedad Varsovia as Voluntary Society

In 1926, members of the “Varsovia” Israelite Mutual Aid Society purchased a sumptuous mansion on Cordoba Avenue in Buenos Aires to house their administrative offices, meeting rooms, party halls, and private synagogue. Twenty years after the organization’s legal foundation in the Buenos Aires suburb of Avellaneda, its officers administered a directive commission, judicial body, burial society, cemetery, synagogue, pension plan, and bathhouse. The group’s glossy annual financial report for July 1925 through October 1926 advertised the values of members’ Yom Kippur donations and gifts of chandeliers, oriental vases, velvet draperies, and other opulent furnishings. Nothing in the report revealed Varsovia Society’s dual identity as the world’s most notorious association of Jewish pimps and traffickers in women.

While French, Italian, and other immigrants, along with native-born Argentines, profited from prostitution in legal and clandestine brothels, Jewish pimps were the most visible, due to anti-Semitic distortion and to the business acumen of members of the *Sociedad Israelita de Socorros Mutuos “Varsovia.”*¹ These pimps, madams, and procurers profited from Jewish women’s prostitution throughout Argentina, and perhaps in neighboring countries as well. This chapter argues that an analysis of previously untapped primary sources reveals the behavior of the Varsovia Society to be similar to

¹ Jewish prostitutes have also been particularly visible in Argentina, often to the exclusion of other Jewish women, as Sandra McGee Deutsch points out in her recent book, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880-1955* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2010), 105-6. For theoretical integration of gender studies into Jewish historiography, see Marion A. Kaplan and Deborah D. Moore, *Gender and Jewish History* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2010).

that of other immigrant voluntary associations. Setting aside the stigma of their profession, the group's members resemble other new arrivals: in search of community ties, financial security, peer recognition, and religious familiarity.

The mainstream Argentine Jewish ostracism of the *teme'im* from such community spaces as synagogues, burial grounds, and the Yiddish theater echoed the traditional Eastern European *herem* or Jewish excommunication, as much a social as a religious policing tool.² The apparent religious interest of the *teme'im* prompted the initial foundation of their own institutions: barred from the Jewish cemetery, they created their own burial society and grounds, which evolved into the Varsovia Society and later the Zwi Migdal. *Teme'im* buried before the Varsovia Society's legal foundation in 1906 may have been a part of a similar association, known as the Club de los 40, as early as the late 1880s.³ In 1910, the JAPGW organized an international conference in London to strategize against Jewish prostitution, and although no Argentine representatives could attend, European and American co-religionists discussed the Buenos Aires *teme'im* and the excommunication strategy. Israel Zangwill, British leader of the Jewish Territorial Organization, questioned the efficacy of the Argentine Jewish community's boycott, as the already infamous society operated with sufficient audacity to "have a Synagogue of

² Jacob Katz describes this dramatic ceremony in the synagogue, in which the offending individual was removed from future participation in social and ritual life to an extent dependent on the severity of the transgression in *Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages*, trans. Bernard Dov Cooperman (Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 2000), 84-85.

³ Donna Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1991), 17.

their own, and at the same time conduct houses of ill-fame!”⁴ British Chief Rabbi Dr. Hermann Adler responded with an uncommonly optimistic perspective, that the Varsovia synagogue represented “very extraordinary evidence in favor of orthodoxy. The orthodox congregations boycott these people, but they are still anxious to offer up prayer, and we should be glad to know that they are not lost to all sense of religion... we have the chance of appealing to their better nature.”⁵

Unlike Rabbi Adler, contemporary and later observers of the Varsovia Society have generally expressed incredulity about members’ actual religious observance and mutual aid. Buenos Aires police superintendent Julio L. Alsogaray, whose 1933 memoir of his participation in the investigation and 1930 trial proceedings against the Zwi Migdal has been a key primary source for later historians, insisted that the Varsovia Society’s legal status as a mutual aid and burial society was merely a front for a nefarious cabal of criminal Jews.⁶ Alsogaray characterizes the foundation of the Varsovia Society as a cynical imitation of the organizing techniques of industrial laborers (who had created a large, powerful, and diverse labor movement in Argentina), but reiterates that the association could not possibly function as a true mutual aid society, as “absolutely no

⁴ Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women (JAPGW), *Official Report of the Jewish International Conference on the Suppression of the Traffic in Girls and Women Held on April 5th, 6th, and 7th, 1910, in London* (London: JAPGW Central Bureau, 1910), 67.

⁵ JAPGW, *Official Report*, 69.

⁶ Julio L. Alsogaray, *Trilogía de la trata de blancas: Rufianes, policía, municipalidad* (Buenos Aires: L.J. Rosso, 1933), 80.

human sentiment or sense of solidarity exists” among Varsovia’s members.⁷ Argentine Victor Luis Bessero’s similar 1930 tract, *White Slave Traders in Buenos Aires: The Scandal of the Pseudo-Society “Varsovia” or “Migdal,”* echoes this opinion.⁸ Captions below newspaper photographs of the group’s synagogue in the wake of the globally-publicized 1930 arrests implied that the synagogue’s true function must have been the *stille chuppah*, false marriage or literally “quiet wedding,” the religious ceremony without civil legal status often blamed for the entrapment of young Eastern European Jewish women in prostitution.⁹

⁷ Alsogaray, *Trilogía de la trata de blancas*, 80, 121-22. Scholarship on Jewish participation in Argentine working-class organizing of the period includes: Edgardo Bilsky, “Etnicidad y clase obrera: La presencia judía en el movimiento obrero argentino,” *Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos* 4, no. 11 (1989): 27-47; Jose C. Moya, “The Positive Side of Stereotypes: Jewish Anarchists in Early-Twentieth-Century Buenos Aires,” *Jewish History* 18 (2004): 19-48; Pinye Wald, *Los judíos en las organizaciones obreras y en el movimiento socialista argentino hasta el año 1910 (Yidishe sotsyalistishe un arbeter-bavegung in Argentine biz 1910)* (Buenos Aires: Asociación Judeo Argentina de Estudios Históricos, 1985).

⁸ Victorio Luis Bessero, *Los tratantes de blancas en Buenos Aires: El escándalo de la pseudo sociedad "Varsovia" o "Migdal"* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Aspasia, 1930).

⁹ Captions: “Salon de la sinagoga donde se efectuaban los ‘enlaces’” (Salon of the synagogue where the “engagements” are formalized) in “Se hace difícil la búsqueda de los componentes de la ‘Zwi Migdal,’” (The search for the members of the ‘Zwi Migdal’ becomes difficult) *La Última Hora* (Buenos Aires) 23, no. 9111, 23 May 1930, 3-4; and “Sinagoga que servía para la simulación de los casamientos ordenados por los dirigentes” (Synagogue that functioned for the simulation of the marriages ordered by the directors) in “El Sensacional Proceso a la Sociedad Migdal,” *Caras y Caretas* (Buenos Aires) 33, no. 1653, 7 June 1930, 81.

Scholars have also primarily viewed the group's purported structure and function as a sham. Robert Weisbrot characterizes the association as a "grim parody of Jewish concern for social welfare and communal responsibility," a tragically divisive element within a larger Jewish community already struggling to establish a sense of unity.¹⁰ He expresses shock that the *teme'im* desired the larger Jewish community's recognition of their identity as Jews. While Donna Guy acknowledges that the organization's members may have sought to maintain a religious life alongside their non-traditional profession, she also notes that the group only "ostensibly functioned as a mutual aid society."¹¹ Although most historians have agreed with Alsogaray's assessment of the group's legal status as a transparent deceit, analysis of the association's own 1925-1926 annual financial report suggests that the priorities, structure, and benefits of the Varsovia Society closely resemble the voluntary associations created by other immigrants.

This chapter examines new sources of evidence to extend prior investigations into the phenomena of early twentieth century Argentine Jewish sex work. My spotlight on the particular structure of the Varsovia Society reveals similarities with immigrant voluntary associations. After exploring the foundational literature on Argentine Jewish prostitution and recent scholarship on voluntary societies, I interpret the annual report in combination with immigration and legal records as well as press and other archival sources to address the following overarching questions: What was the organizational structure and membership composition of the Varsovia Society and how did it resemble

¹⁰Robert Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina: From the Inquisition to Peron* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 62, 59-66.

¹¹ Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires*, 22.

more typical voluntary associations? What did these individuals seek through collective organization? What does this story tell us about other voluntary societies?

The Historiography of Argentine Jewish Pimps

Historians writing in English have largely ignored this infamous association in the past several decades, beyond a few colorful footnotes in narratives of the Argentine Jewish experience.¹² The two most heavily archival scholarly works to give the Zwi Migdal or Varsovia Society considerable attention continue to be Edward Bristow's and Donna Guy's, published in 1983 and 1991 respectively. Bristow's *Prostitution and Prejudice* uses archival evidence from eight countries to trace the history of international Jewish prostitution before 1939, and largely emphasizes the organized Jewish opposition through such organizations as the JAPGW.¹³ Guy's *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires* set the standard for contemporary scholarly historical investigation into sex work in fin-de-siècle Argentina, and has informed international scholarship on prostitution and other gender issues across Latin America.¹⁴ While both books trace the social, cultural, and

¹² E.g., Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina*, 62-65.

¹³ Edward J. Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice: the Jewish Fight against White Slavery, 1870-1939*, 2d ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1983).

¹⁴ Andrés Carretero, *Prostitución en Buenos Aires*, 2d ed. (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1998) is heavily indebted to Guy. Earlier Argentine scholars' analyses of local prostitution include: Adolfo Bátis, *Buenos Aires, la ribera y los prostíbulos en 1880: Contribución a los estudios sociales (libro rojo)* (Buenos Aires: Aga-Taura, 1960); Rodolfo Kusch, *De la mala vida porteña* (Buenos Aires: A. Pena Lillo, 1966); Jose Leon Pagano, *Criminalidad argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1964); Rafael Ielpi and Hector Zinni, *Prostitución y*

legal history of prostitution, Bristow follows Jews around the world and Guy explores various groups in Argentina. Both of their discussions of the Varsovia or Zwi Migdal Society emphasize its dramatic denouement in 1930 over its prior quarter century of operations, perhaps due to source limitations. A chapter in Victor Mirelman's 1990 book on the history of Argentine Jewry also highlights the community's battle against these undesirables, in the context of anti-Semitism.¹⁵

Bristow and Mirelman's emphases on the Argentine Jewish struggle against Jewish prostitution and pimping mirrors the concern of their subjects about potential damage to the community's reputation. Founder of Argentine Jewish journalism Jacob S. Liachovitzky wrote a Yiddish article about the Varsovia Society's cemetery in Avellaneda titled "A Shameful Stain for the Living," which reflected this fear of

Rufianismo (Buenos Aires: Encuadre, 1974); and Francis Korn, *Buenos Aires, los huéspedes del 20* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1974).

¹⁵ Victor A. Mirelman, chapter 9 in *Jewish Buenos Aires, 1890-1930: In Search of an Identity* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1990). Other surveys of Argentine Jewish history include: Ricardo Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos*, 3rd ed. (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 2006); Raanan Rein, *Argentina, Israel, and the Jews: Peron, the Eichmann Capture and After* (Bethesda: Univ. Press of Maryland, 2003); Efraim Zadoff, *A Century of Argentinean Jewry: In Search of a New Model of National Identity* (Jerusalem: Institute of the World Jewish Congress, 2000); Haim Avni, *Argentina & the Jews: A History of Jewish Immigration* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991); Boleslao Lewin, *Como fue la inmigración judía en la Argentina*, 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 1983); Eugene F. Sofer, *From Pale to Pampa: A Social History of the Jews of Buenos Aires* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982); Alberto Klein, *Cinco siglos de historia Argentina: Crónica de la vida judía y su circunstancia*, 2nd ed. (Buenos Aires: Germano Artes Gráficos, 1980); Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina*; and Nathan Fruchter, *Di geshikte fun Argentine*, 2 vols. (Buenos Aires: Kaufman, 1944-1945).

contamination.¹⁶ In February 1927, a committee of Jewish residents of the heavily Jewish section of Buenos Aires for which Alsogaray was the police superintendent gave him a public award in appreciation of his work cleansing the neighborhood of pimps and prostitutes.¹⁷ Alsogaray's acceptance speech in turn praised the "group of distinguished members of the Israelite community... and their prestigious organs of publicity" for their cooperation in his efforts.¹⁸ His memoir, published six years later, repeats this theme in distinguishing the "good sons of Israel" from the bad and lists the names of exemplary non-Argentine Jews, including Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso and Albert Einstein.¹⁹ However, the bulk of his memoir is riddled with anti-Semitism, framing the entire epidemic of local prostitution with discussion of the essential racial characteristics of Jews and the claim that of 800 registered prostitutes in 1930, organized Jewish pimps exploited ninety percent.²⁰

¹⁶ Jacob S. Liachovitzky, "Di meysim in Avellaneda: A shendlek flek far di balekhaim," n.d. IWO (Idisher Visenshaftlecher Institut), Ezras Noschim Collection (hereafter cited as EN), Box 3, in envelope 13 (my numbering). This collection also reveals that Liachovitzky was also a co-founder and secretary of the local organization of both Jews and non-Jews called the Argentine Committee for Public Morality and Against the White Slave Trade (Comité Argentino de Moralidad Publica y Contra la Trata de Blancas) active between 1908 and 1910, in which doctor Manuel Galvez and socialist legislator Alfredo Palacios were involved, among other prominent Jewish and non-Jewish *porteños* (residents of Buenos Aires).

¹⁷ "La colectividad israelita de Buenos Aires, ofreció hoy un homenaje al Comisario Julio L. Alsogaray," *La Critica* 14, no. 4854, 5 Feb. 1927, 2.

¹⁸ "La colectividad israelita de Buenos Aires," 2.

¹⁹ Alsogaray, 13-15.

²⁰ Alsogaray, 243.

Guy notes this tendency of Alsogary's memoir and Bessero's similar tract (both used as key evidence in the 1930 trial and by later analysts) to exaggerate the particularly Jewish characteristics of local pimps.²¹ Her discussion of the Varsovia Society tries to assess Jewish pimps' political and economic power and their role in larger battles around prostitution in Argentina. Her overall argument emphasizes prostitutes themselves as a locus for elite Argentine control over working-class women in general, rather than pimps.²² More recent works on Jewish prostitution by literary scholar Nora Glickman and Canadian journalist Isabel Vincent also center on particular prostitutes, seeking like Guy to give women agency.²³ Both of these books posit Raquel Liberman, a long-time prostitute who launched the 1930 court case by denouncing the Zwi Migdal to municipal authorities, as a somewhat idealized heroine. Liberman's story has captured the imagination of Argentine dramatists and fiction writers and reflects the lived reality in which many women engaged in prostitution in a range of ways beyond the coerced life

²¹ Guy, 124.

²² See for example Guy 44.

²³ Nora Glickman, *The Jewish White Slave Trade and the Untold Story of Raquel Liberman* (New York: Garland, 2000) and Isabel Vincent, *Bodies and Souls: The Tragic Plight of Three Jewish Women Forced into Prostitution in the Americas* (New York: William Morrow, 2005). Laura María Agustín has written extensively on the problem of sex workers' agency, proposing that sex workers be viewed similarly to other migrants and granted relief from the usual narrative of complete victimization, see *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry* (London: Zed Books, 2007) and "The Conundrum of Women's Agency: Migrations and the Sex Industry," in *Sex Work Now*, ed. M. O'Neill and R. Campbell (Cullompton: Willan Publishing, 2006), 116-40.

commitment that reformers imagined.²⁴ A chapter on prostitutes in Sandra McGee Detsch's recent book on Jewish women in Argentina, the first historical monograph on the theme, further explores the question of agency and criticizes Esras Noschim for flattening the complexity of women's choices.²⁵

With some notable exceptions, much of the energy behind Latin American Jewish historiography has emanated from Israel and Latin America rather than North America.²⁶ Beyond the scholarship discussed above, this generalization holds true for this sub-topic as well. Haim Avni, an Israeli senior scholar of Argentine Jewry, recently published a book in Hebrew comparing the Argentine and Israeli experiences of Jewish prostitution.²⁷ Also only available in Hebrew, Israeli poet and journalist Ilan Shainfeld published a book framing this as a "silenced story," "Argentine Jewry's dark secret."²⁸ Scholars based in the Southern Cone might disagree with this characterization, particularly Ricardo Feierstein, who devoted a chapter in his multiple-edition textbook on

²⁴ Myrtha Schalom, *La polaca: inmigracion, rufianes y esclavas a comienzos del siglo veinte* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2003); and Patricia Suárez, *Las polacas: Historias tártaras, Casamentara, La Varsovia* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Teatro Vivo, 2002).

²⁵ Deutsch, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation*, 104-122.

²⁶ Judith Laikin Elkin, whose work in the 1980s was among the first English language historical scholarship on Latin American Jewry, reviews recent works in the field in "Rethinking Latin American Jewish Studies," *Latin American Research Review* 45, no. 2 (2010): 253-265. Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein propose the alternate term "Jewish-Latin American" and justify this usage in the first two chapters of their edited volume *Rethinking Jewish-Latin Americans* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008).

²⁷ Haim Avni, *"Teme'im": Saḥar Be-Nashim Be-Argeṭinah Uve-Yiśra'el* (Tel-Aviv: Yedi'ot aḥaronot, 2009).

²⁸ Ilan Shainfeld, *Ma'aśeh Be-Ṭaba'at, Sidrah le-sifrut yafah* (Yerushalayim: Keter, 2007).

Argentine Jewry to the subject, and Uruguayan Yvette Trochon, whose hefty tome compares international prostitution across all ethnic groups in Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay.²⁹ Scholars have often used Gerardo Bra's 1982 Argentine work as a source, although it lacks source references and fictionalizes elaborate scenes and Spanish-language dialogue between Yiddish-speaking new immigrants.³⁰ Also in the early 1980s, during a brutal and anti-Semitic military dictatorship, urban street corner newspaper kiosks sold an anti-Semitic propaganda piece which reproduced police photographs from the 1890s to lay exclusive blame on the Jews for the country's entire history of white slavery.³¹

This chapter features the members and structural composition of the Varsovia Society in an attempt to address the gap in recent English-language scholarship. I respond

²⁹ Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos*, 266-303; and Yvette Trochon, *Las rutas de eros: La trata de blancas en el Atlántico Sur: Argentina, Brasil y Uruguay* (Montevideo: Ediciones Santillana/Taurus, 2006), especially 265-358.

³⁰ Gerardo Bra, *La Organización Negra: La increíble historia de la Zwi Migdal* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1982). Although also lacking a scholarly apparatus and rigorous source citation, Larry Levy, *La mancha de la Migdal: Historia de la prostitución judía en la Argentina*, (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2007) must be mentioned.

³¹ Federico Rivanera Carles, *Los judíos y la trata de blancas en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Instituto de Investigaciones sobre la Cuestión Judía, 1986). The extensive documentation of the anti-Semitism of the *Proceso* military regime includes David Sheinin, "Deconstructing Anti-Semitism in Argentina," in Kristin Ruggiero, ed., *The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America and the Caribbean: Fragments of Memory* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 72-85; Daniel Lvovich, *Nacionalismo y antisemitismo en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Javier Vergara, 2003); and Leonardo Senkman, ed., *El antisemitismo en la Argentina*, 2d ed. (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de America Latina, 1989).

to other scholars' source limitations with new archival findings and connect these data to literature on immigrant voluntary associations, Erving Goffman's theorization of stigma, and Thorstein Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption.³² This fills out the story of temporary Jewish overrepresentation in the organization of prostitution in Argentina, an interesting anomaly in its own right, and elucidates broader immigrant adjustment and association.

I also respond to Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein's call to frame scholarship on Latin American Jewry in the context of Latin America as well as the Jewish diaspora.³³ This is a uniquely Argentine story, shaped by the particularities of Argentine immigration, rural and urban settlement, changing public health regulations, criminology and penal reform, and popular attitudes toward prostitution. The rise and fall of organized Jewish prostitution in Argentina reacted to local demographic, economic, and political conditions. The 1930 breakup of the Zwi Migdal Society shared causal factors with the end of electoral democracy and the institution of military dictatorship in the same year.³⁴

³² Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963).

³³ Lesser and Rein, *Rethinking Jewish-Latin Americans*; and "Challenging Particularity: Jews as a Lens on Latin American Ethnicity," *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2006): 249.

³⁴ This era's rightward turn in Argentine politics has been recently elucidated in Federico Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism: Ideology, Violence, and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy, 1919-1945* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2009), as well as Alberto Spektorowski, *The Origins of Argentina's Revolution of the Right* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2003); Sandra McGee Deutsch, *Las Derechas: The Extreme Right in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, 1890-1939* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999); and Sandra McGee Deutsch and Ronald Dolkart, eds., *The Argentine Right: Its History and Intellectual Origins, 1910 to the Present* (Wilmington: SR Books, 1993).

These individuals strategically embraced an Argentine identity: in the early days of the arrest sweeps against them, embattled members decorated their Cordoba Avenue mansion with Argentine flags.³⁵

Finding Pimps in the Archives

Primary sources for a detailed social history of the Varsovia Society have been difficult to locate. Jewish community shame and the editorial decisions of Argentine police and military leaders over numerous repressive decades have largely wiped out any paper trail left by the infamous group and its opponents. This article highlights the discovery of a 36-page document produced by the Varsovia Society itself, preserved among other sensitive records kept for decades under lock and key in a local archive. This annual financial report, prefaced by a statement by then-President Zacarias Zytznitzky in Yiddish and Spanish, details nearly 300 members' names and their itemized payments to the Varsovia Society between July 1, 1925 and October 30, 1926.³⁶ Perusal of this source reveals the names of active contributing members and how much each paid for operations including entry fees, monthly dues, cemetery, synagogue, real estate, and *beneficencia* (charity) and itemized donations announced on Yom Kippur. A careful analysis of the Yiddish and Spanish text creates an outline of the group's administrative structure; some of the furnishings and uses of the group's luxurious headquarters at

³⁵ "La Migdal embandero ayer su sede social," *El Diario* 49, no. 14983, 26 May 1930, 20.

³⁶ This document was found in IWO's EN collection.

Avenue Cordoba 3280 in Buenos Aires; and the operations of the association's synagogue and burial society.

Buenos Aires police already identified ten of these 1926 Varsovia Society members as pimps in 1893 and 1894. The police of the capital city maintained bound volumes of mug shots and descriptions of personal characteristics of *sospechosos*, or suspects, all listed as *rufián* or *alcahuete*, both words meaning “pimp,” with a disproportionate number of apparently Jewish men, as discussed in Chapter Two. This source provides detailed physical and demographic information for some of the earliest members of the Varsovia Society and their peers. While it is possible that the police targeted these Jewish men as undesirable and labeled them as pimps due to anti-Semitism, a relatively high number of Jews may have already been bringing women to Argentina for prostitution. If police accusations were even partially correct, *rufián* and *alcahuete* would have made up a notable percentage of the professions of some of the earliest Jewish immigrants to Argentina in this period.³⁷

Ship manifests from transatlantic vessels arriving in Buenos Aires, handwritten immigration lists recently catalogued by a local organization, provide another untapped source of these migrants' demographic information. Spelling variations complicate the use of these data, but when correlated with birthdates and other arrest data, around 90 of the 1926 members of the Varsovia Society can be cross-referenced. These data include dates and ports of arrival and departure, age upon arrival, nationality, civil status, stated profession, and occasionally birthplace. This information also suggests whether group

³⁷ Jose Moya makes a suggestion in this direction in “The Positive Side of Stereotypes,” 21-22.

members travelled together, made multiple trips, or travelled together with others sharing their last name.

A detailed legal summary of the 1930 prosecution of the Zwi Migdal Society supplies further demographic information.³⁸ In addition to summarizing the case's evidence, development, and witnesses' testimony, this four-column, 20-page document lists those sought and arrested by the prosecution, and includes for the 112 arrested individuals details of nationality, age, civil and naturalization status, stated profession, length of residence in Argentina, criminal charges, and arrest numbers (for which unfortunately no corresponding files remain in police archives).³⁹ Names of 326 members are also listed here as sought but not captured, with no further information beyond alternate name spellings and occasionally aliases. Correlation with other data suggests some had already died or left the country, while many others escaped just before the arrest sweep. The names of those sought for arrest seem to have been drawn from the Society's own records, by then somewhat outdated, the seizure of which is described in this legal summary.⁴⁰ The legal summary's list includes all but a dozen of the 275 names

³⁸ "Juzgados de Instruccion: Numero 3 - Asociacion Ilicita," GdF 15, no. 4729 (1 Nov. 1930): 3-23.

³⁹ Three hundred and twenty six names are also listed here as sought but not captured, with no further information beyond alternate name spellings and occasionally aliases. This can also be correlated with the Buenos Aires police department's *Órdenes del día* from 26 May 1930: Policía de la Capital Federal, *Orden del día* 49 (Buenos Aires: Servicio de Aprovisionamiento, 1936), 305-7. No such arrest orders appear among similar records from the 1893 and 1894 arrests.

⁴⁰ GdF, 6.

in the Varsovia Society's 1926 annual report, confirming this theory.⁴¹ These data can also be correlated with the Buenos Aires police department's *Órdenes del Día*, or arrest orders, from May 26, 1930.⁴²

Immigrant Voluntary Societies

Most of the omnipresent voluntary mutual benefit societies in Argentina in the early part of the twentieth century provided the same services as their counterparts in other places: principally burial and health care, as well as pensions, emergency costs, and cultural benefits such as education.⁴³ Although the Varsovia Society's operations mirrored these functions, neither contemporary nor later observers of the institution classified it with the broader category of immigrant associations. In a 2005 special issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* devoted to the subject, Jose C. Moya defines the immigrant voluntary association and surveys the historiography of this

⁴¹ The exact number of members listed in this document is difficult to ascertain, due to name and spelling variations. Between 275 and 280 members were named in one or more places in this document. Confusion over names plagued the prosecution, causing the arrests of twelve unrelated individuals with identical names to those listed in the arrest orders. "Detuvose a otros socios de la Migdal, los pusieron luego en libertad: Eran honónimos de los buscados!" *La Critica* 17, no. 6064 (30 May 1930), 6.

⁴² Policía de la Capital Federal, *Orden del día* 49, 305-7.

⁴³ Ronaldo Munck, "Mutual Benefit Societies in Argentina: Workers, Nationality, Social Security and Trade Unionism," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30, no. 3 (1998), 573-90, 578. See also Samuel L. Baily, "Mutual Assistance Societies and the Development of the Italian Community in Buenos Aires, 1858-1918," *Desarrollo Economico* 21, no. 84 (1982): 485-514.

institution in North and South America. He delineates the category as an intermediary institution between basic kinship ties and such non-voluntary structures as the state. He notes widespread variability and visibility, and points out the historiographical emphasis on larger groups with more political involvement, despite the greater numeric significance of smaller groups such as hometown associations.⁴⁴ While many scholars have emphasized either the continuation of premigratory practices or the influence of the host society in their analyses of the formation of such groups, Moya argues that the migration process itself influenced these associations more than specifics of cultural background or host society.⁴⁵ The process of migration disrupted both traditional and modern social welfare institutions, from local kinship and religious structures to state welfare and insurance providers, creating the need for health care and other social services filled by voluntary associations. Migration also produced stronger ethnic or national identification against host society natives and other newly arriving groups. In their introductory article to the same journal issue, Marlou Schrover and Floris Vermeulen underscore the significance of voluntary associations in immigrant identity definition, as new arrivals come together either to protect their interests in the face of

⁴⁴ Jose C. Moya, "Immigrants and Associations: A Global and Historical Perspective," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31, no. 5 (Sept. 2005): 833-864, 834-35.

⁴⁵ Moya argues against Daniel Soyer's observation that the host environment was the central shaping factor in the structure of immigrant associations, though Soyer does not ignore Old World institutions; Moya, "Immigrants and Associations," 837-40. See Daniel Soyer, *Jewish Immigrant Associations and American Identity in New York, 1880-1939* (Wayne State Univ. Press, 2002).

exclusion or to distinguish themselves from the host society, emphasizing or de-emphasizing their differences.⁴⁶

Much of the historical literature on voluntary associations prioritizes the United States, particularly that focusing on Jewish migratory settlement. Scholarship on Jewish immigrants tends to emphasize associations created around place of origin, called *landsmanshaftn*, the Yiddish term for immigrant aid societies based on birthplace.⁴⁷ In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jews established *landsmanshaftn* across their varied host societies. Recent arrivals across the Americas shared the “mania” among both Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants in the United States to found new organizations.⁴⁸ Membership in such groups peaked in Argentina just before the First World War, with according to one estimate, over 60% of all Argentine workers in 1913 affiliated with a mutual aid society.⁴⁹ Ronaldo Munck has published the historical work most focused on these institutions in Argentina, grounded in labor history and engaged in questions of class identity formation. He claims that the percentage of mutual aid society members plummeted in the 1920s and thereafter (particularly under Peronism) as labor unions and government social security programs took over their central functions. Munck calls for more study of the specific “social life of the various societies, the lived

⁴⁶ Marlou Schrover and Floris Vermeulen, “Immigrant Organisations,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31, no. 5 (2005): 823-832, 824-26.

⁴⁷ See also Michael R. Weissner, *A Brotherhood of Memory: Jewish Landsmanshaftn in the New World* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

⁴⁸ Moya, “Immigrants and Associations,” 834-39.

⁴⁹ Munck, “Mutual Benefit Societies in Argentina,” 579.

experience of the [mutual benefit societies'] members, their aspirations and dreams."⁵⁰

Although it is unlikely Munck would include the Varsovia Society in his implicitly limited category of voluntary associations, this proposed analytical direction connects this article's related approach to the Varsovia Society to prior investigation of immigrant associational life in Argentina.

Munck's focus on mutual benefit societies and Jewish migratory scholarship's stress on *landmanshaftn* exclude the broader classification of immigrant voluntary associations, which Moya defines as including both of these and several additional categories, namely: secret and criminal societies; rotating credit associations; mutual aid societies; religious associations; hometown associations; and political groups.⁵¹ This umbrella would certainly cover the Varsovia Society, regardless of sub-category. Another possible context for the infamous organization also falls within Moya's classification system: the historiographical literature on criminal associations, particularly recent interest in Jewish gangsters.⁵² Critics considered it to be a criminal society, but the

⁵⁰ Munck, "Mutual Benefit Societies in Argentina," 579, 582-86, 590.

⁵¹ Moya, "Immigrants and Associations," 840-51.

⁵² See Rose Keefe, *The Starker: Big Jack Zelig, the Becker-Rosenthal case, and the Advent of the Jewish Gangster* (Nashville: Cumberland House, 2008); Charles Van Onselen, *The Fox and the Flies: The Secret Life of a Grotesque Master Criminal* (New York: Walker and Co., 2007) and "Jewish Marginality in the Atlantic world: Organized Crime in the Era of the Great Migrations, 1880-1914," *South African Historical Journal* 43 (Nov. 2000): 96-137; Daniel Vyleta, "Jewish Crimes and Misdemeanours: In Search of Jewish Criminality (Germany and Austria 1890-1914)," *European History Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (April 2005): 299-325; Robert Rockaway, *But He Was Good to His Mother: The Lives and Crimes of Jewish Gangsters* (New York: Gefen Publishing House, 2000); and Jenna Weissman Joselit, *Our Gang: Jewish Crime and the New York Jewish Community, 1900-1940* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1983).

group's self-definition, legal status, and organizational apparatus suggest that the Varsovia Society functioned more like a mutual aid society.

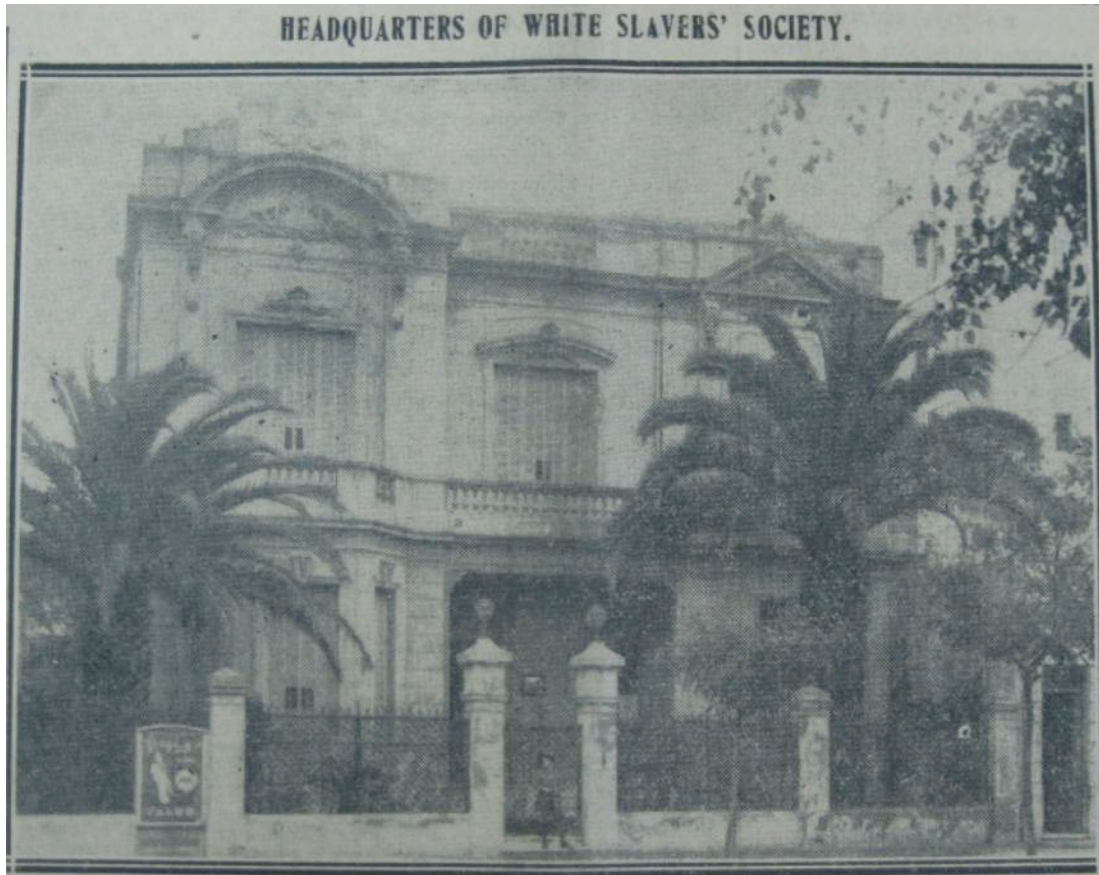
The Varsovia Society in 1926: Structure and Membership

Twenty years after its legal establishment in Buenos Aires province, the Varsovia Society's 1926 annual financial report broadcast the ascendancy of its finances. President Zacarias Zytnitzky's introduction vouches for the institution's "continuously improving" economic status, with financial details backed up by receipts maintained in the group's headquarters and available for interested members to consult. According to a plaque in their honor on the wall of the mansion's meeting hall, photographed by the newspaper reporters who invaded the mansion in the wake of the 1930 arrests, Zytnitzky led the association from 1926 to 1928 alongside Vice President Filipe Shoon (see figs. 1 and 2).⁵³ The group's commercial success enabled the purchase of a mansion on Cordoba Avenue for the substantial sum of 150,000 pesos with a 45,000 peso mortgage (this down payment would be worth around 1,600,000 in 2010 US dollars or 6,000,000 in 2010 Argentine pesos).⁵⁴

⁵³ Photograph in "Se hace difícil la búsqueda de los componentes de la 'Zwi Migdal,'" *La Última Hora* 23, no. 9111 (23 May 1930), 3-4.

⁵⁴ These figures are approximate, as the historical analysis of inflation and exchange rates is complex and controversial. These calculations were based on the exchange rates and commonly used inflation indices of Consumer Price Index and value of consumer bundle. Samuel H. Williamson, "Six Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount, 1790 to Present," *MeasuringWorth*, accessed Feb. 15 2010,

Figure 4.1: The Varsovia Society’s Cordoba Avenue Headquarters⁵⁵



The Varsovia Society’s formal administrative structure resembled that of a mainstream voluntary society.⁵⁶ According to the lists of officers’ names in Yiddish and Spanish on the front and back covers of the financial report, the institutional structure of

<http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/>; and at the same site, Lawrence H. Officer, “Exchange Rates Between the United States Dollar and Forty-one Currencies.”

⁵⁵ Published with article “Police Raids a ‘Wash-Out’: Only Ten White Slavers Caught,” *Buenos Aires Herald*, May 23, 1930, p. 1.

⁵⁶ Titles of officers and burial society functions mirror that of two New York Jewish family circles whose bylaws are reproduced in William E. Mitchell, *Kinship, Ethnicity and Voluntary Associations: Jewish Family Life in New York City* (New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction, 2009), 217-26.

the Varsovia Society comprised a Directive Commission with five officers and twenty-seven members, a five-member judicial body, and several functionaries devoted to bookkeeping, the synagogue, and the burial society. Directive Commission officers held positions of President, Vice-President, Secretary, Sub-Secretary and Treasurer. The judicial body, referred to as a *geshvoirene*, Yiddish for jury, also had a President, a Secretary, and three judging members in a structure reminiscent of a traditional *Beit Din*, or rabbinic court. Other titled positions included an inspector, two *revisadores de cuentas* (accountants or bookkeepers), a *gabay* (beadle or synagogue warden), and two *mlotshes* (burial society administrators). The relatively higher financial participation and greater frequency of mentions throughout the report of these officers and the twenty-seven members of the Directive Commission indicate that they were more involved than other members in the society's functions. These forty-three office holders combined contributed a third of the organization's total collected revenues for this period.

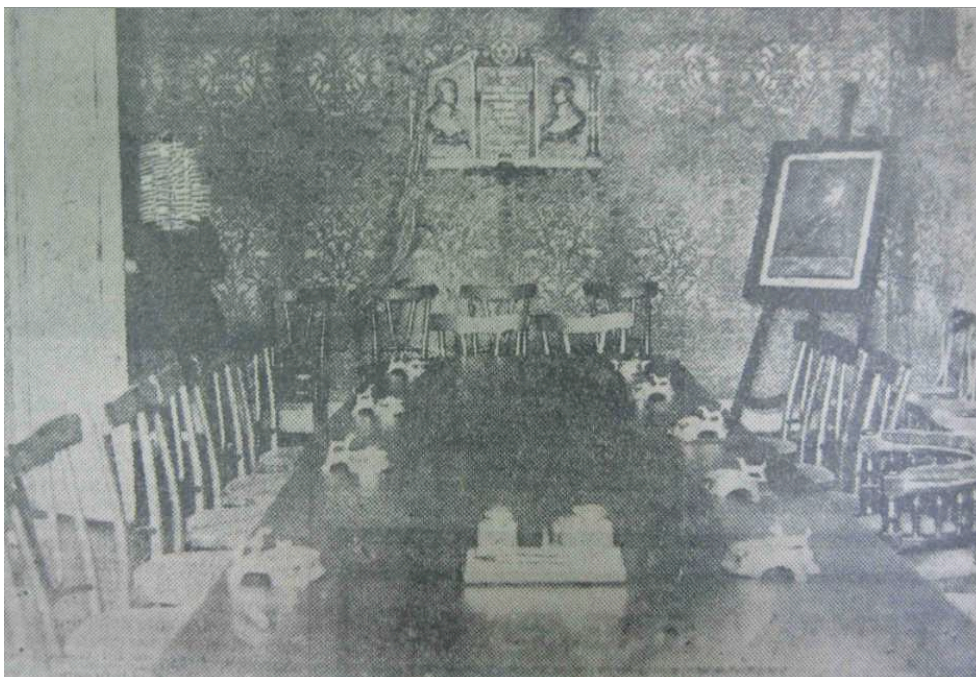
Varsovia Society officers and members engaged in multiple group activities. Their jury probably mediated internal disputes. The group organized recruitment of new members, as President Zytnitzky thanks the members of their Directive Commission for their "publicity and activity" which resulted in the addition of 34 new members over the prior year (1).⁵⁷ These new members can be identified in the report, as they are the only ones to pay *cuotas de ingreso*, or entrance fees, generally of five pesos. Monthly pensions paid for a form of health insurance, credited with the treatment and recovery from illness

⁵⁷ Page references to the Varsovia Society's Annual Report will be cited using parenthetical in-line citations.

of “various” members over the prior 16 months (1). Some membership contributions seem to have been required and others voluntary.

Group officers and possibly the entire membership body participated in a voting system; a “carved mahogany ballot box” was donated for *escrutinio*, the counting of votes (33). Meetings included an “Extraordinary Assembly” to authorize the purchase of the Cordoba Avenue property (2). The association operated under a set of statutes, recently reformed by a “technical commission” of seven Directive Commission members and officers (2). Meetings occurred multiple times throughout each year, and the meeting at which this particular Statute revision commission had been appointed was numbered “95,” suggesting that 94 prior meetings had been held over the prior twenty years. These meetings may have occurred in the Cordoba Avenue mansion’s meeting room in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: The Varsovia Society’s Cordoba Avenue Meeting Room



Combined analysis of this report and the immigration records, police and legal summaries, and other primary sources detailed above, outlines group members' ages, nationalities, arrival dates, purported professions, and relationships to one another. Of the Society's 75 active members in 1926 for whom age information can be found in immigration or police records, the average age was just below 46. Fifteen were under the age of 35, and a dozen were age 60 or older. Most members arrived in Argentina when they were in their 20s, like the young single male majority of all immigrants in the period.⁵⁸ The association's name (Varsovia is the Spanish word for Warsaw) suggests the following question: Was the Varsovia Society originally a Warsaw landsmanshaft, or hometown association, the most common variety of Jewish immigrant organization? Few details of exact localities of origin can be drawn from these data, as only 17 individual's birthplaces are specified in the immigration data and none in the arrest records. The organization's first president, Luis Migdal, hailed from Warsaw, as did co-founder Bernardo Gutvein and three other members active in 1926.⁵⁹ These data are insufficient

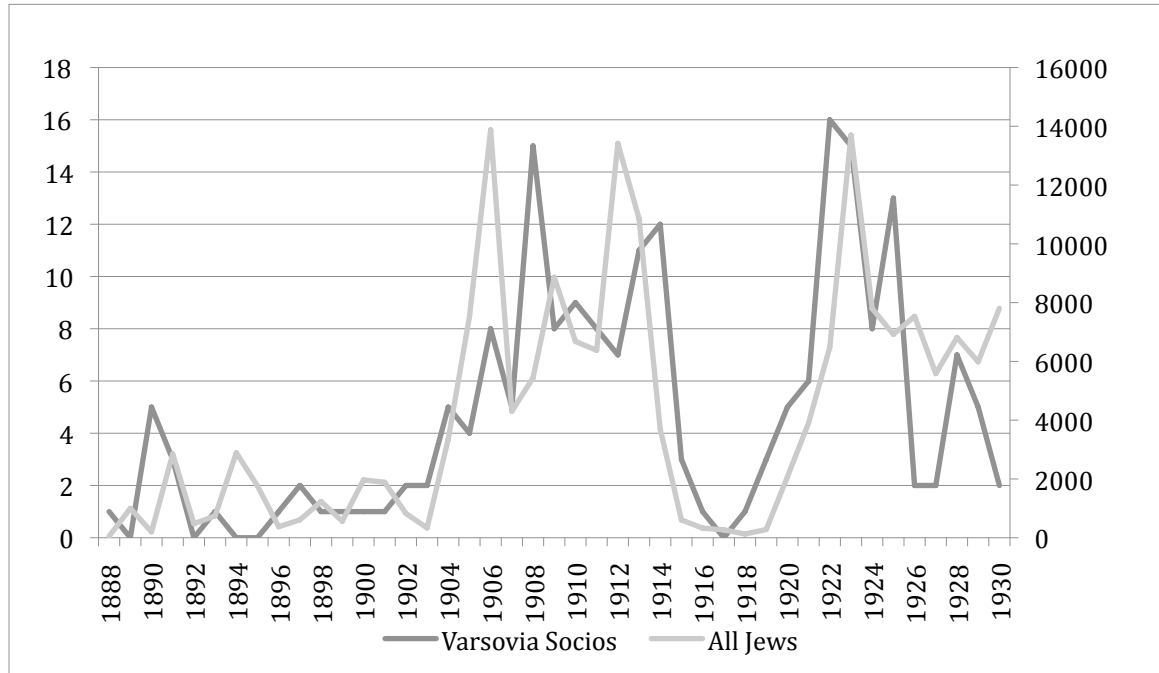
⁵⁸ On the demographics of Argentine immigration in this period, see Fernando Devoto, *História de la inmigración en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2003); Jose C. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998); and Avni, *Argentina and the Jews*. See also Samuel L. Baily and Eduardo José Míguez, eds., *Mass Migration to Modern Latin America* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2003). Allen Wells notes that in the Dominican Republic in the 1930s, eugenics and scientific racism worked in favor of Jewish immigrants, considered to be of superior racial stock compared to blacks. Young single male Jews were particularly encouraged to immigrate, in hopes they would intermarry with Dominican women. Allen Wells, *Tropical Zion: General Trujillo, FDR, and the Jews of Sosúa* (Duke Univ. Press, 2009), 24-26, 109-10.

⁵⁹ Data on founders from Policía de la Capital. *Galería de sospechosos*.

to conclude that the founders thought of their organization as a landsmanschaft, although five of the 17 members with geographic origin data did come from Warsaw, and the original organization's name suggests that they had the model in mind.

While most of these immigration data do not record particular towns or regions of origin, they do register the nationalities of 66 of the 1926 Varsovia members: 35 percent Russian (23), 22 percent Polish (14), 18 percent Argentine (these 12 included those naturalized as Argentines), and the remaining 25 percent German, French, Romanian, American, British, Swiss, Ukrainian, and unknown. All those called Polish arrived in or after 1922, with one exception in 1920. All but two Russians came before WWI, with these two in 1923. The distinction between these two classifications was one of shifting boundaries around the same region, rather than shifting places of origin. The Jewish Pale of Settlement changed in this period from Russian to Polish territory, with the 1917 overthrow of the Czar and the regranting of Polish territory from 1918 through the early 1920s. By 1930, Argentine court records classified as Polish many of the same individuals earlier identified in immigration documents as Russian.

Chart 4.1: Annual Immigration to Argentina, Varsovia Socios and All Jews⁶⁰



The rate of arrival in Buenos Aires of 1926 Varsovia socios, compiled from immigration and legal data, closely mirrors the overall pattern of Jewish immigration, as can be seen in the similarities between the two lines in Chart 4.1. The main period of Jewish immigration to Argentina is generally agreed to have begun with the 1889 arrival of 820 Jewish settlers on the *Weser*, increasing from that point to a peak in 1894-95, with some decline followed by a revival in 1904 and a steady increase until the beginning of

⁶⁰ Data on Varsovia Socios from CEMLA records and GdF. This includes multiple trips by the same individual, but eliminates possible redundancies across different source data sets. Overall Jewish immigration data from Feierstein, p. 399. He draws this data from Simón Weill, *Población Israelita en la República Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Bené Berith, 1936), which although problematic is the most complete body of data on Jewish immigration available for this period. Rosenswaike’s article discusses the problems with charting Argentine Jewish demographics through census and other data, including Weill’s data.

World War I.⁶¹ As Chart 4.1 demonstrates, immigration resumed after the war, averaging around 7,000 Jews a year until 1930, when the international depression and restrictions of the new Argentine government began to cut off this flow.⁶² The early peak of 1894-95 is reflected in the police data on pimps arrested at that time, which also identifies the arrival of suspected Jewish pimps and traffickers from as early as the beginning of the 1870s (not included in this chart). This indicates that suspected Jewish pimps were already entering Argentina in the 1870s and 1880s, and even if they were not working in the field before the 1890s, their early immigration relative to other Jews is still significant.

For 1926 Varsovia socios, out of a total of 217 trips portrayed in Chart 4.1, the peak frequencies occurred in 1890, 1908, 1914, and the early 1920s. The steep decline during the years of WWI, with peaks before and after, reflects larger immigration rates of both Jews and non-Jews.⁶³ The 1908 peak suggests a phenomenon endemic to this subgroup, probably related to the law passed in that year by Buenos Aires city officials which changed brothel regulations and effectively benefited owners and managers, making it possible for women between the ages of 18 and 22 to register and allowing unlimited recruitment for downtown brothels.⁶⁴ This may very well have encouraged a

⁶¹ Ira Rosenswaik, "The Jewish Population of Argentina: Census and Estimate, 1887-1947," *Jewish Social Studies* 22, no. 4 (October 1960): 195-214; pp. 195-96. Haim Avni compares several other sources for the period 1901-1914 in *Argentina y las migraciones judías: De la Inquisición al Holocausto y después* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Milá, 2005); p. 458.

⁶² Rosenswaik, pp. 197, 201-4, 210-11.

⁶³ For overall European immigration in this period, see Fernando Devoto, *Historia De La Inmigración En La Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2003), especially the graph on p. 248.

⁶⁴ The content and implications of this law are discussed by Guy, pp. 61-62.

temporary increase in traffic, which might then have been reduced in response to public protest and new legal changes.

These data also indicate that many of these individuals shared familial relationships before their arrival in Argentina. Twenty-three last names are each shared by two members, five names by three members, six names by four members, and two names by five members. Shared names are no guarantee of shared family of origin or marital relationships, particularly with such common names as Cohen and Levy, but other indicators also suggest that these individuals may have been related. Eleven pairs of members arrived in the same ship on the same date to Buenos Aires, suggesting they travelled together. The two members of six of these pairs shared the same last name, probably confirming a familial relationship. One pair of 1926 members, the Kroters, were ages thirty-five and two upon their arrival in 1908, suggesting that they were father and son or uncle and nephew, and the younger grew up to share the elder's business. The Springfeders, who arrived together in 1924, were probably a married couple, as the "de" in her name suggests it was her married name, and the two listed the same occupation, as *rentista* (independently wealthy, source of income unspecified). Certain families had more members in the organization, as suggested by the numbers of last names shared by three, four, or five members. President Zacarias Zytnitzky returned to Argentina in 1932, on the same boat as a man five years older who shared his last name and had been a member of the Varsovia Society's board of directors in 1926. Two other pairs of board members shared last names with one another as well. These familial connections indicate that the Society shared with voluntary associations like family circles and cousin's clubs the function of sustaining kinship relationships in the quest for occupational

advancement.⁶⁵ The association thus assisted in the migratory phenomenon of chain migration.

An analysis of the professions stated by members at their point of arrival into the country and their 1930 arrests produces a distribution less like the general Argentine immigrant population in this period and more like that of other Jews. Assessment of the occupations listed in immigration and arrest data produces a proportional representation of members professional identity claims: out of a total of 168 individuals for whom this data is available, 35% (58) state their profession as merchant or trader (comerciante). Other significant groups include 9% (14) as tailor or dressmaker, 5% (9) as hairdresser or barber, 5% as day laborer (8), and 4% (6) as farmworker. Other professions include 3% (5) travelling salesman or peddler, 2% (4) independently wealthy (rentista), 2% (4) shoemaker, and 2% (3) broker. There are also individual representatives of watchmaker, tinsmith, sculptor, bronze-caster, belt-maker, photographer, locksmith, student, and dental technician, among others.

Unfortunately, little comparative statistical data on Jewish immigrant employment in Argentina is available for this period. One estimate for 1935 associates 57% of Argentine Jews with commercial activity, with only 9% in agricultural labor.⁶⁶ In the Eastern European Jewish Pale of Settlement, Jews were generally excluded from agricultural work, as well as many professions, and thus tended to concentrate in trade

⁶⁵ On Jewish family clubs and occupational assistance, see Mitchell, 86.

⁶⁶ Feierstein p. 132.

and artisanship.⁶⁷ According to the 1931 Polish census, only 4% of Jews worked in agriculture, as opposed to 60% of non-Jews.⁶⁸ 37% of Jews were in commerce, versus only 6% of non-Jews, and 42% of Jews were artisans, versus 19% of non-Jews.⁶⁹ While a small number of highly successful Jewish merchants were granted special privileges and mobility, thus tending to remain in Eastern Europe rather than emigrate, most were in less privileged fields such as petty trading, brokerage, or pawnshop ownership.⁷⁰ In Argentina as well, the category of comerciante reflected a broad range of earnings and prestige.⁷¹ The percentage of Varsovia members listing their profession as comerciante mirrors the prevalence of this occupation among Eastern European Jews more generally.

An breakdown of overall Argentine immigrants' trades in the period 1894 to 1903 provides a picture quite distinct from that of Jews, with the largest categories and most relevant smaller categories as follows: 41.6% farmworkers, 15.7% Day-laborers or workmen, 4% merchants, 3.8% dressmakers, 3.8% servants, 0.8% shoemakers, 0.6%

⁶⁷ Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); pp. 100-103.

⁶⁸ Joseph Marcus, *Social and Political History of the Jews in Poland, 1919-1939* (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1983); p. 437.

⁶⁹ Marcus, p. 437. Commerce is defined broadly in this data to include banking and insurance, and artisanship is lumped together with mining and industry, where presumably more of the non-Jews were concentrated.

⁷⁰ Nathans, pp. 40, 59, 86.

⁷¹ Mark D. Szuchman and Eugene F. Sofer, "State of Occupational Stratification Studies in Argentina: Classificatory Scheme," *Latin American Research Review* 11, no. 1 (1976): 159-171; p. 164.

tailors, 0.2% barbers.⁷² Another comparison can be drawn from the Argentine census data processed by James Scobie. He notes the numbers of those employed in various professions in 1869, 1895 and 1914 and the percentage of each of those in the latter two dates who are foreign-born.⁷³ While he does not include the merchant category or the underworld, his statistics show that in general, the foreign-born are over-represented as agricultural or day laborers as well as tailors and shoemakers. Day labor or agricultural work and commerce are thus essentially reversed in importance between the general immigrant population and Jewish immigrants, with the occupational affiliation claimed by members of the Varsovia Society echoing the pattern of other Jews, not that of Argentine immigrants in general.

The annual report is silent on the infamous business of the Varsovia Society's members. The only information from which prostitution might be inferred is the mention of the purchase of a bed for their mansion headquarters, among other detailed luxury furnishings (33-34). This silence may have been for the purpose of easy deniability should the publication fall into the wrong hands, or their code of conduct and irrelevant to their internal financial discussion. Perhaps, as insisted upon by most of those put on trial in 1930, this was merely a mutual aid and benefit society of Jewish individuals associated with various professions, not a cabal of pimps, madams, and traffickers in women.⁷⁴ The

⁷² Immigration Department, Ministry of Agriculture, Argentine Republic, "The Immigration Offices and Statistics from 1857 to 1903: Information for the Universal Exhibition of St. Louis (U.S.A.)", Buenos Aires: Argentine Weather Bureau, 1904; p. 26.

⁷³ James R. Scobie, *Buenos Aires: Plaza to Suburb, 1870-1910* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); p. 265.

⁷⁴ GdF.

society was legally incorporated, paid taxes on its land in Avellaneda and to the municipality of the city of Buenos Aires, as well as interest on the mortgage for the Cordoba property (3). Legality alone, however, is insufficient proof of members' innocence, as prostitution itself was legal (although regulations, including those pertaining to the management of prostitutes, were modified in various ways throughout this period).

Twenty of the Varsovia Society's members mentioned in this source have clearly female names, and the equivalence of their payments to the organization with those of other members suggest that they may have shared relatively equal status with many of these men. None of these women held any official positions in the organization, but three of them were among the top fifty total contributors (out of this fifty, over half were formal office holders). This may suggest that at least certain women had some influence over the organization's decision-making, if money had any correlation to power within the association. If they followed a more democratic decision-making process, at least these twenty women would have had votes. Five of these women appear to have joined the association within the prior year, making up a significant proportion of the new members paying the group's entrance fee, and indicating an increase over time in women holding official membership.

In their self-identification of occupation upon arrival or arrest, these female members are more explicitly associated than male members with the underworld. Two are listed in the arrest records as prostitutes, one as a madam (*dueña de casa de tolerancia*), and one as a brothel doorkeeper (*portera*). Three self-identify as comerciantes and two as domestic servants or housewives. Nearly all of those described

as rentistas or without occupation are women. None of the men, even in their arrest records, are described as pimps or traffickers in women specifically (though this may well have been the “commerce” implied in their self-description as comerciantes).

Contemporary critics and many later observers, as noted above, have generally framed their criticisms of the Varsovia and Zwi Migdal Societies and of prostitution more generally in an assumption of female victims and male exploiters (as seducers, traffickers, pimps, and clients). The evidence of women members of the Varsovia Society suggests that women played some role in the upper echelons of the management of sex work, in addition to their better-known role as brothel managers or madams. According to the lawyer of the ex-prostitute whose denunciation sparked the 1930 court case, no women were allowed to be members while engaged in prostitution, as all members were involved in “exploiting and obliging” prostitutes.⁷⁵ Women thus appeared to at least occasionally have had the opportunity to move up from the practice of prostitution into its management.

Burial, Religiosity, and Respectability Among Pimps

Denied access to the burial grounds of the rest of the Jewish community, the Varsovia Society created a cemetery as its foundational act.⁷⁶ Internationally, many

⁷⁵ GdF, p. 6.

⁷⁶ Alsogaray, 123; GdF, 6. For more on Jewish cemeteries in Latin America, see Aviva Ben-Ur and Rachel Frankel, *Remnant Stones: The Jewish Cemeteries Of Suriname: Epitaphs* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2009).

landsmanshaftn and other Jewish voluntary societies were instituted for the collective purchase of burial plots.⁷⁷ Members examined as witnesses in the 1930 Zwi Migdal case claimed that they had joined the group only in search of a Jewish burial society, and had no idea about any connections to prostitution.⁷⁸ Period photographs of the Varsovia Society's cemetery in Avellaneda show men's and women's elaborate tombstones with traditional Hebrew and Yiddish inscriptions from as early as 1904, including the stone for the organization's founder, later namesake, and first president Luis Migdal, who died February 3, 1908.⁷⁹ Born Lewek Migdal in Warsaw in 1852, his tombstone describes him as the association's *grinder*, Yiddish for founder or leader.⁸⁰ The Hebrew inscriptions on these tombstones provide additional evidence that despite their daily activities, members

⁷⁷ Weisser, 164.

⁷⁸ GdF.

⁷⁹ These sixteen photographs of the cemetery are kept in Box 3 of IWO's EN collection. Today, the cemetery is kept under lock and guard, and has suffered from both disrepair and vandalism, some of it perhaps in an intentional effort to erase the names on the tombstones from public record. In the opening scene of Nathan Englander's recent novel, fictional descendants of the *teme'im* hire thugs to gouge the names of their less-than illustrious forebears out of their tombstones. Nathan Englander, *The Ministry of Special Cases* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

⁸⁰ Birth information for Lewek Migdal from the Mormon Church's on-line Jewish Records Indexing for Poland, Warszawa Gubernia, Lowicz Births 1837-1865, film 811071, accessed 1 Dec., 2009, <http://data.jewishgen.org/wconnect/wc.dll?jg~jgsys~jripllat2>. These data correspond to those in the police record.

maintained a strong Jewish identity.⁸¹ The front of the cemetery, as seen in Figure 4.3, was decorated with an enormous menorah.

Figure 4.3: Entrance to the Varsovia Society's Cemetery⁸²



The Varsovia Society provided burial services both for members and sponsored non-members. Services look to have been performed quite lavishly, as nearly 20,000 pesos were spent on these ceremonies over the 16 months covered by this report. This

⁸¹ Avni goes so far to suggest that these Hebrew inscriptions marked them as “traditional Jews,” “*Ṭeme'im*,” 88.

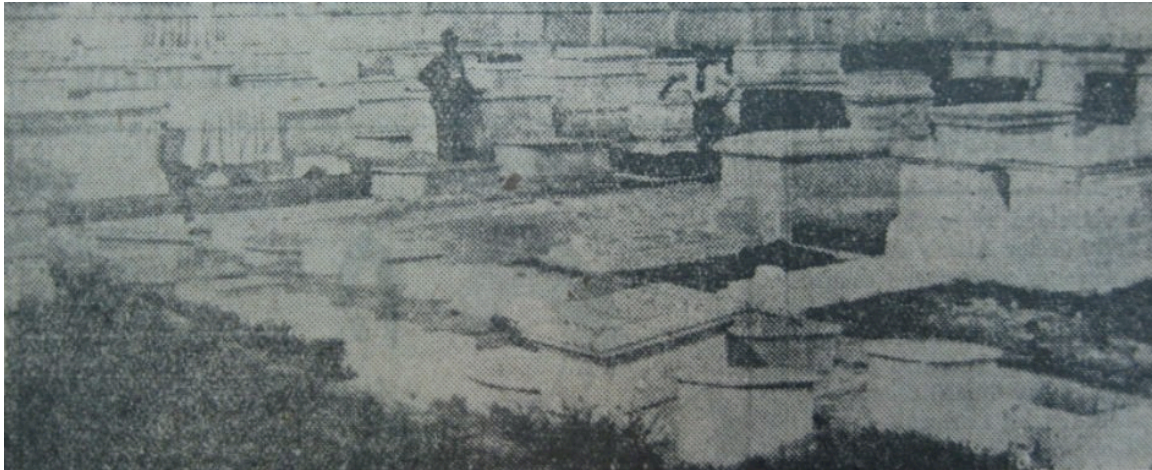
⁸² With article “En sus indagatorias los tenebrosos niegan la asociacion ilicita,” *La Ultima Hora*, May 27, 1930, p. 5.

record, along with the Avellaneda burial ground itself, corroborates the association's sepulchral activities as more than just a cover for other functions. Furniture described for this purpose included a "black embroidered funereal carpet" and fifty "low stools" for sitting *shiva*, the traditional Jewish mourning ritual (33-34). The group's 34 newest members made the largest cemetery donations, suggesting that a greater fee towards this end was required at initiation. Nearly all other members made ongoing contributions to the burial fund. During the period covered in the 1926 annual report, the Society paid 4,149.92 pesos to expand their cemetery with the purchase of an additional 3,000 square yard plot under joint ownership with the *Sociedad Israelita de Socorros Mutuos Ashquenasum* (Ashkenazim Israelite Mutual Aid Society) (2).⁸³ This information confirms that the Ashquenasum Society existed as an independent entity before the 1927 name change from Varsovia to Zwi Migdal, the point at which some contemporary and later observers have asserted that the Ashquenasum was founded as a splinter group.⁸⁴

⁸³ This new land is here described as measuring 3071.22 v.c., which stands for *varas cuadradas*. The *vara* is a unit of measurement of roughly 34.1 inches, and *cuadrada* means squared, thus this is around 3,000 square yards.

⁸⁴ This theory that the Ashquenasum split off from the Varsovia Society in 1927 is put forth in Alsogaray, 139; and GdF, 11.

Figure 4.4: Plots in the Varsovia Society's Cemetery⁸⁵



The *Chevra Kadisha*, or Burial Society, in Jewish Eastern Europe guaranteed traditional ritual adherence around death and burial for all Jews in the local community.⁸⁶ Members of the closed society of the *Chevra Kadisha* formed a social and economic elite, to the extent that these groups often took over local community leadership in the wake of the Russian abolition of the traditional self-governing structure (the *kehilah*) in 1844.⁸⁷ Burial Societies were among the first Jewish groups in the United States to act independently of a synagogue.⁸⁸ The Varsovia Society's burial functions connected it to both other Jewish groups and to other immigrant groups in general, who also sought burial among their compatriots immediately upon resettlement. Other Argentine

⁸⁵ With article "En sus indagatorias los tenebrosos niegan la asociacion ilicita," *La Ultima Hora*, May 27, 1930, p. 5.

⁸⁶ Katz, 133-34.

⁸⁷ Katz, 134; Soyer, 17-18.

⁸⁸ Soyer, 47.

voluntary societies, like their counterparts in other countries, dedicated the bulk of their expenditures to medical expenses and funeral costs.⁸⁹

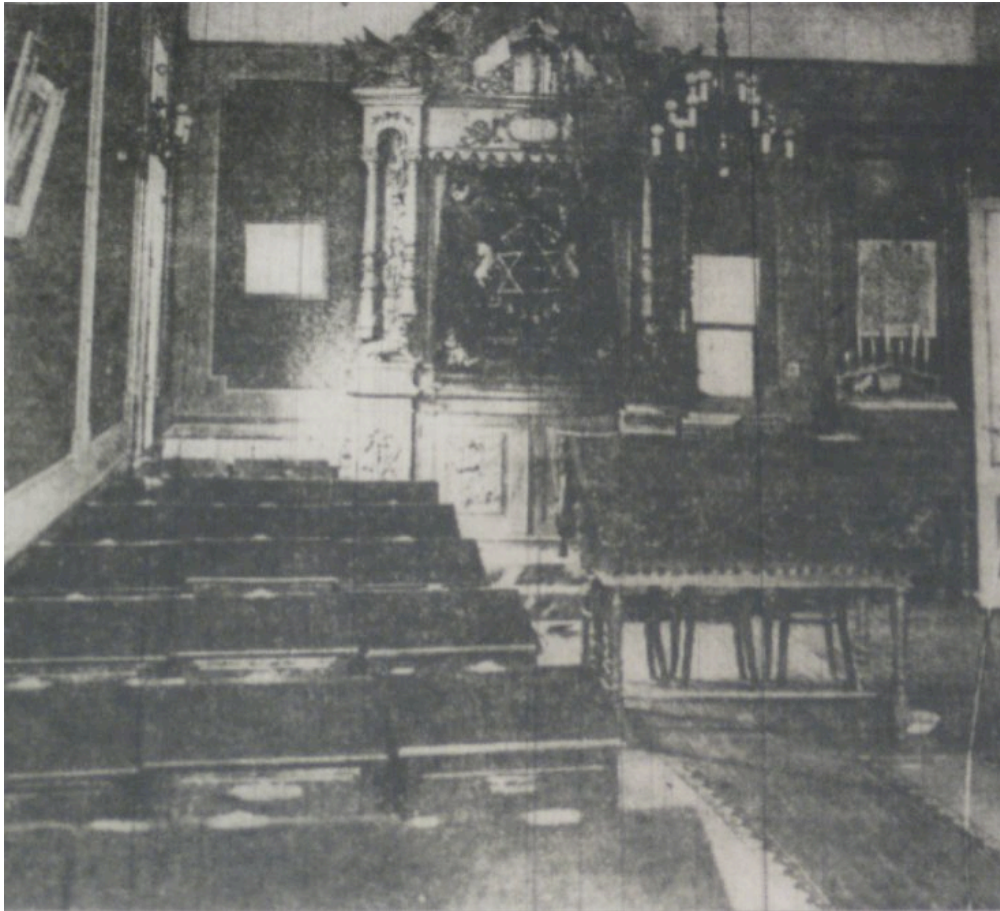
The Varsovia Society's Cordoba Avenue headquarters contained a synagogue space that further confirmed their valuation of Jewish religious life. Journalists' 1930 photographs of the interior of the Varsovia synagogue reveal many elements of a well-appointed, traditional Jewish ritual space (see Figure 4.5). Decorative rugs frame a central aisle leading to an altar draped with fringed coverings, like those commonly to support the Torah during readings. A curtain decorated with lions (a traditional symbol representing the Jewish people) and a Star of David shields an elaborately carved wooden arc that would conventionally hold a Torah scroll.⁹⁰ Carved tables hold piles of books and a 7-branched candelabrum. Another newspaper photograph confirms these traditional elements, and shows the larger space to be lined with dark wood pews.⁹¹ Some of these furnishings may have been those detailed in the annual report's list of donations collected for the *Templo* (Temple), which included two desks, an engraved silver plaque, a Torah cover bordered with gold velvet, several sets of bibles, prayer books, an oak altar, and several hundred pesos' worth of candles (23, 32-34).

⁸⁹ Munck, 578.

⁹⁰ "El sensacional proceso a la sociedad Migdal," *Caras y Caretas* 33, no. 1653 (7 June 1930), 81.

⁹¹ "Se hace difícil la búsqueda," *La Última Hora*, 3.

Figure 4.5: Varsovia Society Synagogue



A list of members' Yom Kippur contributions made on September 17th, 1926 further suggests that the Varsovia synagogue space was used for actual religious purposes. According to the Hebrew calendar, this date corresponded with *Kol Nidre*, the eve of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, when tradition encourages charitable contributions to be pledged at the synagogue. The Varsovia Society's report also contains a separate itemized list specifying individuals' Yom Kippur contributions. The individual donations of 187 members made at that time totaled over 30,000 pesos (equivalent to roughly 1,300,000 in 2010 Argentine pesos or 335,000 in 2010 US dollars, about a fifth of the year's total contributions). At least 187 members must thus have been present at

what may have been some version of a holiday service.⁹² Over half of the total synagogue costs collected over the year was pledged on Yom Kippur (13,985 pesos out of 26,805), and nearly half of the total year's charity collection (7842 pesos out of 15,855). Charity descriptions included protection of widows and orphans, as the report mentions two financial transactions, loans up to 14,000 pesos, made to one "Widow Corradi and Son" (3, 6). A child who had lost only a father would have been considered an orphan according to Ashkenazi Jewish custom, and charitable donation in many Jewish communities places particular emphasis on the needs of widows and orphans.

The Varsovia Society's Cordoba Avenue headquarters highlighted their economic advantage over other voluntary associations. The building housed their administrative offices, meeting rooms, a synagogue space, an elaborate bar, and at least one *salon de fiestas* (party hall), where they hosted lavish parties and wedding receptions. Alsogaray criticizes these celebrations, which he claims included the formal presentation of female arrivals in underworld versions of debutante balls.⁹³ Newspaper photographs of the interior and exterior of the Cordoba property reveal a luxurious building ornamented with courtyards and gardens (see Figure 4.1; the structure has since been replaced by apartment buildings).⁹⁴ Members' donations of furnishings, detailed in the annual report, give a sense of the interior's luxury (33-34). Three members pooled 5,000 pesos to purchase two chandeliers for the party hall and the women's "toilette." A stove and

⁹² Inflation calculations based on Williamson.

⁹³ Alsogaray deploras these events, which he describes as made even more shameful by being held on national holidays, Alsogaray, 62-63.

⁹⁴ See for example photo spread in "Los tenebrosos de la 'Migdal' gustan del confort: Hace tres meses el fiscal Barberis solicitó que se allanara la Migdal," *La Critica* 17, no. 6061 (27 May 1930), 8.

several bronze flowerpots featured “oriental” designs, and a donated balcony and theater box enhanced the sumptuous ballrooms. More prosaic furnishings included brass lighting fixtures, wardrobes, chairs, mirrors, carpets, small tables and corner stands, and one bed. Costs outlined indicate that the group maintained a *casa baña* (bathhouse), which if used as a *mikvah* for ritual purity provokes a host of *halachic* (Jewish legal) questions (3).

Five individual members purchased the mansion in their names rather than in the name of the Varsovia Society, but paid for it out of funds contributed towards this cause by the broader membership. President Zytznitzky explicitly thanked three of these individuals for becoming legal owners for the sake of the group, without obtaining any personal benefit in exchange for their risk (1). Real estate was also one of the itemized categories for which members paid the association routinely, and nearly 70,000 pesos was collected over the period covered by this annual report. The Argentine *Consejo Nacional de Educación* (National Council of Education) took over the Cordoba property after its confiscation in the 1930 court case, and lobbied the court for it to be formally declared without an owner in order to benefit from its later sale.⁹⁵

Forbidden from engaging with other Jews, the *teme'im* focused their quest for respectability on one another. Like Lara Putnam's West Indian migrants to Costa Rica and Eileen Findlay's Puerto Rican prostitutes, these marginalized individuals used

⁹⁵ “El Consejo Nacional de Educación reclama los bienes de la Migdal,” *La Nación* 61, no. 21112 (6 June 1930), 30; and “Zwi Migdal Case: Board of Education Takes a Hand,” *Buenos Aires Herald* 54, no. 8493 (6 June 1930), 3. The *La Nación* article confirms that the mansion was legally registered in the names of five individual members rather than that of the Society.

bourgeois symbols to seek respectability.⁹⁶ Thorstein Veblen's foundational work on conspicuous consumption theorizes the significance of the "invidious distinction attaching to wealth" and the symbolic tactics by which individuals seek to demonstrate superiority over their neighbors.⁹⁷ This concept elucidates the status-seeking behavior of the members of the Varsovia Society in their mansion, cemetery, and public Yom Kippur contributions. Just as most voluntary associations had some degree of moral character standard for admission, requiring endorsements of current members, background investigations, and votes on acceptance, the Varsovia Society's founding members established a formal mandate to "accept only those of good reputation."⁹⁸ Although "kosher" Jews spearheaded a boycott against the *teme'im*, ostracism was incomplete, as pimps and prostitutes interacted daily with other members of Argentine society: policemen and judges; politicians and city officials; doctors and health administrators; furniture makers and launderers; and prostitutes' clients. Physical proximity and economic necessity forced other Jews to do business with the *teme'im* despite condemnation of their activities. Jewish prostitution was integrated into the initial center of Jewish life in Buenos Aires, around Plaza Lavalle, between Lavalle, Viamonte,

⁹⁶ Lara Putnam, *The Company They Kept: Migrants and the Politics of Gender in Caribbean Costa Rica, 1870-1960* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2002), especially 139-72; Eileen J. Suárez Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁹⁷ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*, 2d ed. (B.W. Huebsch, 1912), 26.

⁹⁸ Soyer, 42; and Guy, 22.

Libertad and Talcahuano streets, although this integration may have become less pronounced as Jews moved westward.⁹⁹

As British Chief Rabbi Adler expressed at the 1910 JAPGW Conference, something resembling morality could be found in the Varsovia Society's synagogue and burial ritual. Erving Goffman observes that a stigmatized individual might defend his normalcy by "citing his acquisition of a spouse and children, and, oddly, by attesting to his spending Christmas and Thanksgiving with them."¹⁰⁰ The material benefits provided to cover the gap in local service provision were only a part of what drew Varsovia members, as in other voluntary associations. The collective mutual aid structure allowed personal dignity in the receipt of benefits structured as rights rather than charity. Relatively egalitarian organizations also created status shifts from Old World hierarchies and labor patterns in the larger industrial work world.¹⁰¹ While nothing in these sources specifies the work that Varsovia Society members were engaged in or how they thought about it, they probably viewed prostitution as a business similar to any other. Raquel Liberman's legal counsel in the 1930 case testified that the society "operated as if it was involved in a 'licit' business. The women exploited are perfectly documented, their procurement, transport, and sale are organized as if trading in merchandise, all of which is organized under an iron discipline and the direction of a commission."¹⁰² This testimony also employed the word "trabajar," the Spanish verb meaning "to work," in

⁹⁹ Guy, 18-19.

¹⁰⁰ Goffman, 7 n. 10.

¹⁰¹ Soyer, 7, 19.

¹⁰² GdF, 5.

reference to these activities, and its tone suggests that the term was used by those involved and seemed jarring to outside observers. A newspaper report a month after the arrests describes the daily publication of “a price list of ‘goods’ on offer, showing that even this terrible trade has its market fluctuations due to unspecified causes.”¹⁰³

The insistence of the *teme'im* on Jewish identity fueled the self-defensive rage of their co-religionists. They needed other Jews around them, involved in communal life, in order to act as Jews. “Kosher” Jews may have found this identification acutely disturbing because of the historic anti-Semitic connections between Jews and the immoral acquisition of wealth. In the wake of the 1930 court case, contemporary observer Victorio Luis Bessero described “‘caftens’... prowling impudently through our streets, insolently flaunting regal automobiles and valuable jewels, without any protective measures against these subjects that live a life of luxury and of pleasures at the expense of the lucrative market in white flesh.... Owners of grandiose brothels and of enormous sums of capital, all was achieved with money.”¹⁰⁴ This description reflected stock anti-Semitic associations of Jews with the shameless display of dirty money. Mass migration provoked the collapse of many traditional boundaries of social class and produced anxiety among traditional elites. Alsogaray claimed that many members of the *Zwi Migdal* penetrated important social circles, carried friendships and favors with ministers, legislators, judges, and other high-level administrators, and stood out with particular prominence at the hippodrome.¹⁰⁵ He also reported that high city functionaries communicated with the society’s leaders

¹⁰³ “Head of the White Slavers? Englishwoman arrested in Paris: Sequel to *Zwi Migdal* Disclosures,” *Buenos Aires Herald* 54, no. 8511 (24 June 1930), 1.

¹⁰⁴ Bessero, *Los tratantes de blancas en Buenos Aires*, 3.

¹⁰⁵ Alsogaray, 72, 92.

using formal address, even “Don,” as in the case of Mauricio Caro, the last treasurer of the Zwi Migdal, inspiring others, such as police officers, to imitate their superiors in such signs of respect.¹⁰⁶

In addition to his moral critique of the corruption spread by these individuals, Alsogaray emphasized that the source of their capital was unclean, in contrast to the clean fields and factories of modern Argentina.¹⁰⁷ This analysis implicitly defends the nation’s old social order and critiques the displacement of the land-owning aristocracy from their traditional place by new money of dubious origin. The police commissioner expressed particular concern for the daughters of “honest families,” particularly those for whom city streets bore the family name, and condemned new social clubs and salons, whose recreational façade concealed “scenes of orgy and abandon.”¹⁰⁸ Opposition from inside and outside the Jewish community thus reflected concern with not only morality but also Jewish economic mobility and social respectability. Prostitution and pimping stood out among limited avenues available for economic advancement; the work did not require education and could be very lucrative. A certain parallel can be drawn with Jewish money-lending in medieval Europe: both professions grew from limited economic options, restricted landholding, and demand for a service that others were not inclined to supply due to social stigma.¹⁰⁹ It should be noted, contrary to anti-Semitic propaganda,

¹⁰⁶ Alsogaray, 87.

¹⁰⁷ Alsogaray, 58-9.

¹⁰⁸ Alsogaray, 60-61.

¹⁰⁹ A contemporary international business parallel can be drawn to the concentration of Jews in the international ostrich feather trade. Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Plumes: Ostrich Feathers, Jews, and a Lost World of Global Commerce* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

that Jewish religious law forbids both charging interest and prostitution. If given more professional options, Jews would surely have made other choices, and in the absence of anti-Semitism, the widespread blame placed in particular historical periods on the Jews for the entirety of each of these stigmatized professions would not have taken root.

Pimps represent capitalist greed taken to the extreme, willing to sell human flesh. Yet even among such individuals, the Varsovia reflected an interest in cooperative society. Members engaged in collective activity to protect both themselves as individuals and their peers. Placing this particular and peculiar voluntary association at the center, rather than at the margins of analysis of immigrants' institutions reveals something important about more mainstream groups as well. Like other migrants, Varsovia Society members embraced their ethnic identity and sought social services. In contrast to the Jews who organized against them, who more closely approximated the model of new ethnics trying to assimilate as good Jews and good Argentines, these immigrants crowded the docks to lure new arrivals with furs and jewels. They showed off to one another, tried to top each other's extravagant donations to the group's mansion, and made large cash promises on Yom Kippur. To the shame of other Jews, they remained within the Jewish idiom, recognizably Jewish to outsiders, to other Jews, and to themselves. As prostitutes, pimps, madams, and fellow travelers of the sex trade, publicly shunned by other Jews, these individuals built an institution to meet their most pressing needs, essentially the same as those of other immigrants: for communal activity, welfare, and social status among peers. This reminds us that more mainstream voluntary associations also served many purposes, furnishing a place for immigrants who suffered indignities at work and in substandard housing to show off to one another, to hold offices and titles, and to be

recognized within a small world. Beyond reflecting the values of the world they chose to leave and assuming the dominant values of their new home, new immigrants came together to structure their own universe.

Chapter 5: Ezras Noschim, Jewish Marriage Regulation, Morality Certificates, and Degenerate Prostitute Mothers

In 1936, a Jewish immigrant “massage nurse” came into the Buenos Aires office of the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women to request the certification of morality legally required by the state but issued by the JAPGW to bring her daughter from Poland to join her in Argentina. The JAPGW determined that she was actually a prostitute, and refused to grant her the morality certificate. She begged “with hot tears, that only a mother could shed,” and argued that when her daughter arrived, she planned to leave prostitution and establish a small business.¹ While the JAPGW prevailed in its refusal, it strongly encouraged her to pursue this new career path, and agreed to reconsider in the future, as her “maternal feelings provide[d] the basis for the consideration of the possibility of her rehabilitation in a short time.”² This prostitute’s motherhood provided a point of leverage for the reform organization to pressure her to leave prostitution, as she needed the agency’s stamp of approval to reassemble her family.

The morality certificates required for Jewish marriage and immigration into Buenos Aires in the mid-1930s supported a system of community policing which attempted to cleanse future generations of any association with prostitution. This type of case, in which a mother of Jewish children was found to be working as a prostitute, created a conflict for the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women:

¹ *Memorias de la “Ezras Noschim” de Buenos Aires* (1936), 19-20.

² *Memorias*, 21.

while mothers were the key conductors of morality, prostitutes could only degenerate the race. Reformers responded to this tension by regulating community morality more broadly through interrogations of maternal fitness, enforcement of limitations on marriage, and restrictions on the immigration of individuals manifesting possibly degenerative influences.

The international Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women was founded in Britain in the 1880s primarily to fight against Jewish involvement in cross-border prostitution. The first JAPGW branch outside of Europe was established in Buenos Aires in 1901 and referred to locally as Ezras Noschim (EN), or Women's Section, as in the segregated area for women in the traditional synagogue. This name referred to the work focus on such women's issues as traffic in women or "white slavery," spousal abandonment and bigamy, divorce and alimony, and the custody of minor girls. Men and women worked together as members. EN quickly became by far the international organization's most active local office, due to the predominance of prostitution in the city of mostly male immigrants, and high-profile Jewish involvement both as traffickers and prostitutes. EN's pressure influenced the 1928 dissolution of the Varsovia Society, although this only resulted in a temporary reemergence under a new legal name, Zwi Migdal. EN also played a key role in the 1930 court case that finally dismantled the Zwi Migdal, removed the association's legal status, closed its headquarters and cemetery, and drove many members from the country, substantially reducing Jewish involvement in organized prostitution.

Most scholars who have acknowledged Jewish participation in international prostitution between the 1890s and 1930s have tried to absolve Jews at large for

responsibility by juxtaposing the Jewish pimps and prostitutes with the energetic fight of Jews around the world against those among them who would sully their name. EN and the JAPGW figure prominently in this battle, as they took a leading role in combating the traffickers and attempting to rescue Jewish women from prostitution, and Jewish and non-Jewish organizations on both sides of the Atlantic praised their work. While Jews worked internationally both separately and together with other opponents of “white slavery,” Argentine Jews were particularly aggressive and organized, using the local Yiddish press, the legal system, and other forms of collective pressure to defend their community’s reputation. They were determined to define acceptable limits of work and leisure, family structure and religious expression.

This chapter explores the connections between EN’s regulation of marriage, migration and motherhood in the 1930s and its moralistic opposition to prostitution in previous decades. As Ashkenazi Jews moved out of the range of effective self-rule within their traditional communities and migrated in massive numbers to newly industrialized cities, marriage and family patterns changed, women’s autonomy increased, and religious authority lost ground to civil law. Jewish community leaders often responded with anxiety to modern developments. Prostitute mothers stood at the intersection of these two interests, shaping acceptable morality and discouraging prostitution. They aroused fear of degeneration, as they could spread profligacy through heredity. Prostitutes who fit the white slavery narrative of seduction and abandonment could be potentially rehabilitated, but contaminated future generations would be beyond redemption (and could, like the *teme'im* of the Varsovia and Zwi Migdal Societies, clamor for inclusion in the Jewish community). Morality certificates issued to prospective Jewish immigrants and spouses

beginning in 1931 reflected an effort to consolidate religious authority in a moral key. Although EN moved away from anti-prostitution work in the 1930s, its concerns continued to center on women's appropriate sexuality and on the policing of the community's moral boundaries. EN defended the Jewish community's future by monitoring how it would grow through procreation and immigration.

Ezras Noschim vs. the Teme'im

The JAPGW was founded in 1885 in London as the Jewish Ladies' Society for Preventative and Rescue Work, and a three-man Gentlemen's Sub-Committee for Preventative Work was created in 1889 to supervise the actions of the association's agents. In response to the growing work of the Gentlemen's Committee, the Society changed its name in 1897 to the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women.³ Trafficking to Argentina dominated the Association's early discussions. In 1896 the Gentleman's Committee found that "the traffic to, and the houses of ill-fame at [Buenos Aires were largely] in the hands of Jews."⁴ In the final years of the nineteenth century, the Committee contacted individuals in Buenos Aires including the British

³ The word Children was added to JAPGW's name in 1933. The Association was subsumed by the Board of Guardians for the Relief of the Jewish Poor on January 1, 1947, and became part of Jewish Care on January 1, 1990. Minute books and other papers of the Association's founding and early years are in restricted access at the University of Southampton.

⁴ *Minutes and papers of the Gentlemen's Sub-Committee for Preventative Work*, 172-73. Papers of the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls, Women and Children. Archives of Jewish Care. University of Southampton.

Counsel General, the President of the Republic, the Chief of Police, staff of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Consulates, and Rabbi Henry Joseph, in hopes of forming a local branch of the organization.⁵ The Baron de Hirsch's international Jewish Colonization Association (JCA), which funded the establishment of rural Jewish settlements in the Argentine pampas, played an important albeit little-publicized patronage role in the JAPGW's work, and was particularly committed to supporting the work of the Buenos Aires branch. During the First World War, JAPGW leadership in London considered suspending funding to Buenos Aires as the war had interrupted the international traffic in women along with other transatlantic activity, but decided to maintain the office as the JCA's grant "was mainly given because of the work in Buenos Aires and it would have to be kept on."⁶ The JCA's financial support of the international organization's work was contingent on the JAPGW's prioritization of the Argentine branch.

Both EN and the international JAPGW articulated the motivation behind their work as interlocking concerns about anti-Semitism and Jewish moral purity. British Chief Rabbi Dr. Hermann Adler opened the JAPGW's 1910 international conference in London with a prayer that framed the event's purpose in this language, asking for God's help in the battle against moral corruption: "Create in us a clean heart so that we may battle against all things evil and impure."⁷ A particularly Jewish language of moral purity became imbedded in the Argentine opposition to Jewish prostitution, as local anti-prostitution crusaders referred to pimps, prostitutes, madams and traffickers as

⁵ *Minutes*, 153-57, 172-73.

⁶ *Minutes*, 39, 105-6, 125-26.

⁷ Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women, *Official Report of the Jewish International Conference on the Suppression of the Traffic in Girls and Women* (London, 1910), 18.

“tame'im,” Hebrew for ritually unclean.⁸ Among other strategies, the use of the term tame'im may have helped to shield this work from non-Jewish eyes.

This distinction between purity and impurity played out in a dynamic relationship: “kosher” Jews’ refusal to risk contamination by proximity inspired the 1906 creation of the Varsovia Mutual Aid and Burial Society. Because they were not allowed to access the main Jewish cemetery, pimps and traffickers built their own in a Buenos Aires suburb, creating a legal institution that expanded to meet other needs. British territorialist Israel Zangwill (founder of the offshoot of Zionism which sought Jewish territory outside of Palestine) expressed concern for the inefficacy of Argentine Jews’ approach at the 1910 London conference: “there is the weapon of boycott, but... these people form societies of their own, as in Buenos Ayres. They are independent of those who would turn them out. They have a Synagogue of their own, and at the same time conduct houses of ill-fame!”⁹ Exclusion from the mainstream Argentine Jewish community thus inspired the tame'im to build organizational solidarity amongst themselves.

Organized Jewish opposition to this element internationally and locally relied on what one scholar has referred to as a “‘rationalist fallacy’ about prejudice,” namely that “anti-semitism could be mitigated by improving the behavior of deviant Jews, and particularly by Jews openly and conspicuously combating the traffic.”¹⁰ The welcome speech at the 1910 JAPGW conference contended that “the pride and the honor and the

⁸ For more on this language, see Haim Avni, “*Tame'im*”: *Saḥar Be-Nashim Be-Argeṭinah Uve-Yiśra'el* (Tel Aviv, 2009).

⁹ JAPGW, *Official Report* (1910), 67.

¹⁰ Bristow, p. 5.

security of our race are at stake.”¹¹ Concerned that the international opposition campaign might provide negative publicity, JAPGW Chairman Claude G. Montefiore argued “that people were afraid that by advertising their work too much they were calling the attention of their Christian fellow citizens to such evils in the Jewish community.”¹² This tragic irony was also articulated by the German-Jewish feminist activist Bertha Pappenheim at the JAPGW’s second international conference in 1927: “If we admit the existence of this traffic our enemies decry us; if we deny it they say we are trying to conceal it.”¹³ Fears about the association between Jews and the traffic were particularly strong in the Argentine case. A 1932 JAPGW report held the 400 members of the Zwi Migdal responsible for the anti-Jewish sentiments of the larger population against the 300,000 Jews in Argentina.¹⁴ During the 1930 court case against the Zwi Migdal, the Polish Ambassador defended the broader Argentine Jewish community against being tarred with

¹¹ JAPGW, *Official Report* (1910), 25.

¹² Clipping from *The Jewish Chronicle* (1923, February 23), 2 describes the JAPGW conference held the preceding Sunday, February 18 at the West Central Jewish Girls’ Institute, Tottenham Court Road.

¹³ Edward Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight Against White Slavery, 1870-1939* (New York, 1983), 4-5; Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women, *Official Report of the Jewish International Conference on the Suppression of the Traffic in Girls and Women and the Preventive, Protective and Educational Work of the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women* (London, 1927), 97.

¹⁴ Julio L. Alsogaray, *Trilogía de la trata de blancas: rufianes, policía, municipalidad* (Buenos Aires, 1933), 259.

the same brush, pointing out that “he always upheld their honor and that he repudiated the mixing up the whole Community with the evildoers of the Zwi Migdal.”¹⁵

Despite these concerns about publicizing its work, EN advertised its office hours and services in both Jewish and non-Jewish local newspapers published in several languages. The *Buenos Aires Herald* included the organization in the “Strangers’ Directory” of local services for new immigrants and visitors, and advertised the Association’s representation in Geneva at the League of Nations.¹⁶ EN’s monitoring of community morality centered on marriage and physical mobility. The organization mediated between prospective husbands and newly arriving immigrant brides. These women would generally be housed in the Immigrants’ Hotel until the moment of marriage. Eager prospective husbands would often go to the EN office in hopes of preventing their fiancées from staying in the Immigrants’ Hotel longer than strictly necessary. EN also answered requests from various parties, including the Polish Consulate and the Montevideo branch of the JAPGW, about the moral antecedents of individuals wishing to travel, which they would investigate to determine if those named were of satisfactory morality.¹⁷

EN’s day-to-day gate-keeping work took place in the busy Buenos Aires port. As passenger ships arrived at the dock, the organization’s inspector intercepted young women who appeared to be travelling alone or in suspicious company. If arriving women had friends or relatives to meet, the inspector tried to ensure that these individuals were

¹⁵ “Juzgados de Instrucción: Número 3 - Asociación Ilícita,” *Gaceta de Foro*, 15(4729), (1930, November 1), 21.

¹⁶ “Strangers’ Directory,” *Buenos Aires Herald* (1930, June 5), 18.

¹⁷ JAPGW – EN, *Informe* (1934), 111-20.

indeed who they claimed, and not madams or pimps engaged in subterfuge. Depending on current immigration laws and the agency's shifting relationship with Argentine authorities, the inspector was in some periods allowed to go on board steamships before the passengers disembarked. EN reported interactions with hundreds of women each year, who were then escorted to meetings with friends or relatives, or to the Immigrants' Hotel, where aid in securing employment and lodgings was provided.¹⁸ The primary involvement of the organization seemed to be with regard to minors, who would be detained by immigration authorities until the EN office could vouch for the honesty of the prospective husband.¹⁹ Dock-work was central to the Gentlemen's Committee's original vision of the agency's undertakings in Buenos Aires, which imagined in 1900 that "Traffickers would be arrested in the docks and houses of ill-fame entered by the Police, accompanied by [our inspector]."²⁰ In reality, successful interventions in actual trafficking occurred in relatively few cases: in 1925, out of 450 interactions with women at the docks, the JAPGW inspector intercepted only four women headed into "the hands of people known to be undesirable, who had gained their confidence."²¹ Dock inspectors demonstrated to new arrivals the community's concern with protecting young women, and intervened in the meetings of migrants with other Jews, attempting to ensure that they did not interact with the undesirables and thus join their ranks.

¹⁸ *JAPGW Annual Report (1925)*, 24.

¹⁹ JAPGW – EN, *Informe Primer Semestre de 1934, Presentado por Secretaria al Comité Ejecutivo el día 20 de noviembre de 1934 (IWO)*, 19.

²⁰ *Minutes*, 154-56.

²¹ *JAPGW Annual Report (1925)*, 24.

Jurisdictional tensions appear to have existed between EN and the most important local branch of a non-denominational international anti-prostitution organization, the National Vigilance Association (NVA). The NVA's local secretary and dock worker Rosalie Lighton Robinson first arrived in Buenos Aires from England in October 1913 after a visit from NVA's founder Alexander Coote, and arranged with immigration authorities to board arriving steamships and intervene with women travelling alone.²² In a letter to NVA Secretary Frederick Sempkins sixteen years later, Robinson claimed that while the Jewish Society (meaning EN) was established in the area much earlier, the NVA was responsible for initiating work at the port, one of several areas of dispute between the two organizations. In 1925, changes in customs regulations caused the termination of all such on-board inspections, and while EN's on-board inspections were restored the following year, the inspectors of non-Jewish societies were not allowed to resume these operations.²³ Dr. Samuel Halphon, the Argentine Grand-Rabbi, served as president of EN in the 1920s and his personal interventions with Argentine authorities were credited with the restoration of EN's on-board inspections.²⁴ These interactions with the state suggest that Argentine authorities viewed the entry of new prostitutes as a particularly Jewish problem.

²² "Woman Who Fought White Slave Traffic," *Buenos Aires Herald*, clipping in Archives of the International Bureau for the Suppression of Traffic in Persons 4IBS/6, FL112, 1J, Women's Library, London.

²³ *JAPGW Annual Report* (1925), 33.

²⁴ Samuel Halphon, "Letter to S. E. el Sr. Ministerio de Hacienda de la Republica Argentina" (1921, November 14); Selig Ganapol and Samuel Halphon, "Letter to Samuel Cohen" (1922, February 8), IWO.

The Yiddish theater also became a battleground between the *teme'im* and their opponents. Pimps provided financial backing and enthusiastic audiences for Yiddish theatrical productions.²⁵ The intensity of the *teme'im*'s protest against the 1927 production of Leib Malach's *Ibergus*, or Regeneration, which criticized the traffic in Jewish women, drove the author out of Buenos Aires to Paris, where he soon died.²⁶ After the denouement of the Varsovia Society, productions such as Isadore Solotarevsky's melodrama *Di vayshe shklavin*, The White Slaves, featuring international Yiddish theatrical stars Stella Adler and Samuel Goldenberg, could run without protest.²⁷ Renowned New York-based Yiddish actor Boris Tomashevsky became involved as a "respectable" informant on the Jewish role in bringing prostitutes to the Rio de la Plata region for the League of Nations' 1920s investigation into the international traffic.²⁸ In the 1920s, the Excelsior Theater, the most prominent Yiddish theater in Buenos Aires, issued multi-colored Spanish and Yiddish advertising posters which warned in Spanish "Highly moral shows for families. The establishment reserves the right [to refuse] admission," and in Yiddish "Teme'im are forbidden to enter" (see excerpt from poster in

²⁵ Nora Glickman and Gloria F. Waldman, eds. and trans., *Argentine Jewish Theatre: A Critical Anthology* (Lewisburg, 1996), 9.

²⁶ Glickman and Waldman, *Argentine Jewish Theatre*, 21. See also Harley Erdman, "Jewish Anxiety in "Days of Judgement:" Community Conflict, Antisemitism, and the God of Vengeance Obscenity Case," *Theatre Survey* (1999), 40(1), 51-74 and Boleslao Lewin, *Cómo fue la inmigración iudía a la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1983), 211.

²⁷ Zachary Baker, "Art Patronage and Philistinism in Argentina: Maurycy Minkowski in Buenos Aires, 1930," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* (2001), (3), 107-119; fn. 13.

²⁸ LON archives, S171, p. 7 of key to Special Experts' investigative reports.

Figure 5.1). The president of the Chevra Kadisha, the mainstream Jewish community's burial society described this tactic as blocking the teme'im from accessing "the rooms of theatres so that their children should not see them."²⁹ Protection of children and families, and the defense of clean leisure opportunities, justified this engagement.

Figure 5.1: Yiddish Theater Poster Excerpt Limiting Entry



EN scored at least a partial victory against the teme'im over the name of their infamous Society. In 1927, EN employee Selig Ganopol complained to the Polish government's representative in Buenos Aires that the society that bore the name of the Polish capital city constituted an insult to respectable immigrants. The Ambassador of Poland launched a formal protest, arguing that the notoriety of the Varsovia Society was causing "offense to Polish national honor."³⁰ EN also lodged a protest in 1928 with the inspector responsible for legal societies, requesting that the organization's legal status be withdrawn as it was "a band of undesirables (pimps)."³¹ The Varsovia Society was then legally dissolved, technically ceasing to exist. Responsibility for this event was proudly

²⁹ GdF, 7.

³⁰ Alsogaray, 140; GdF, 7.

³¹ GdF, 7, 21.

advertised by the international JAPGW in its February 1928 report to the League of Nations' newly formed Traffic in Women and Children Committee: "A society of persons calling themselves the Jewish Warsaw Society, and alleged to be largely composed of traffickers, has been deprived of its rights of recognition on the intervention of our Committee with the Polish Consul and the Argentine Government."³² Although the Varsovia members continued their activity as a legal association under a new name, the JAPGW's celebration of this symbolic disassociation from the Ashkenazi Jewish community's homeland echoed the logic of the boycott: if organized prostitution could not be stopped, at least its perpetrators could be publically separated.

International publicity sensationalized the dramatic late-night arrest sweeps, and the *New York Times* credited EN and Argentine Chief Rabbi Dr. Samuel Halphon: "it was largely due to his untiring efforts over a long period that an international white slave organization was broken up, at least as far as its Argentine operations are concerned."³³ However, most of the 424 targeted members escaped before arrest, and the 120 imprisoned were released after less than eight months.³⁴ While the court found that some individual members may indeed have been white slave traffickers, no victims had come forward to substantiate the original charges, and no evidence proved that the society itself

³² Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women, *League of Nations' Advisory Commission for the Protection and Welfare of Children and Young People, Traffic in Women and Children Committee, Seventh Session: Report of the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women for the Year Ending December 31st, 1927* (Geneva, 1928), 5.

³³ "Argentine Rabbi Praised: Dr. Halphon, Sailing for Europe, Lauded for His Work," *New York Times* (1930, December 9).

³⁴ "Not Proven: Zwi Migdal Members Released," *Buenos Aires Herald* (1931, January 28).

operated on the white slave market or that all its members were thus involved. Instead, “the records of the society show that it devoted a good deal of attention to the maintenance of the Jewish faith, to the assistance of poor Jews, and to the administration of a burial ground.”³⁵ Frustrated NVA employee Rosalie Lighton Robinson expressed her bitterness about the lack of resolution to the case more directly than EN leaders, writing in an attempt to resign her post in January 1931 “you see the whole affair has fizzled out, and nothing at all has been done!”³⁶ She blames both the corrupt police leadership and the law, noting the irony that “it seems there is no law to punish the offenders! However, many of the worst offenders have already left the country, not knowing that there is no law to deal with them.”³⁷ EN continued their work, shifting the balance of their priorities.

In the decades before the court case, EN worked with other local Jewish community institutions to block the teme'im from participating in Jewish events and organizations. The editor of the Yiddish-language daily the *Yiddishe Tsaitung*, who had published articles against the teme'im for over sixteen years, testified in the 1930 court case against the Zwi Migdal Society that “organizations dedicated to the protection of women... had always resisted undesirable contact with the Varsovia, either direct or indirect... none were invited from the Varsovia by any of the Jewish institutions to participate in any action whatsoever; they were systematically excluded; moreover, all the institutions would safeguard themselves that members of the Varsovia should not

³⁵ Court finding quoted in “Not Proven,” *Buenos Aires Herald* (1931).

³⁶ Rosalie Lighton Robinson, Letter to Frederick Sempkins (1931, January). Archives of the International Bureau for the Suppression of Traffic in Persons 4IBS/6, FL112, 1J, Women’s Library, London.

³⁷ Rosalie Lighton Robinson, Letter to Frederick Sempkins (1930, July 8). Archives of the International Bureau for the Suppression of Traffic in Persons 4IBS/6, FL112, 1J, Women’s Library, London.

even surreptitiously enter their places.”³⁸ The Association Talmud Torah Max Nordau had a clause in its membership statutes that potential members could not provoke the slightest suspicion regarding their moral conduct.³⁹ The United Jewish Association of Polish Residents shared this membership policy, and claimed to return any donations sent by members of the infamous society.⁴⁰

The battle against the teme'im may well have served a catalyzing role in the centralization of local Jewish institutions. Many other Argentine Jewish organizations cooperated with EN's efforts in addition to supporting the boycott in their own projects. Acting Vice-President Elena R. de Aslan testified in the 1930 court case that 52 local cultural and benevolent societies supported their work, “which comprise as members nearly all the honest and industrious Jews of Buenos Aires,” and had jointly thanked EN on May 25, 1930, for the organization's leadership in bringing the Zwi Migdal to justice.⁴¹ EN worked particularly closely with Soprotimis, the Society for the Protection of Jewish Immigrants, and often cooperated on requests from Eastern Europe to find missing relatives, and shared information on the morality of suspicious new arrivals.⁴² Soprotimis also often contributed to EN's coffers, and was listed on EN's letterhead.⁴³ In April of 1930, before the Zwi Migdal court case generated widespread publicity for EN,

³⁸ GdF, 7.

³⁹ GdF, 7.

⁴⁰ GdF, 7.

⁴¹ GdF, 7.

⁴² EN, Letter to Max Glucksmann (1930, April 23). IWO.

⁴³ EN, Letter Report 146 (1929, May 3); EN, Letter to Leonard G. Montefiore, President du Comite Financier, JAPGW, (1928, Dec 20).

the other organizations listed as close local collaborators on EN's letterhead were: Congregación Israelita de la Republica Argentina; Chevrah Keduscha Ashkenazi, the main Jewish burial society; Sociedad de Beneficencia de Damas Israelitas, the Jewish women's charity organization; and Sociedad de Beneficencia Ezrah, the "Ezrah" charity society. Despite the apparent collusion of the local Jewish community with EN's work in this period, EN complained to the London office of the JAPGW about the difficulty of raising sufficient funds to operate, and continued to solicit the bulk of their operating budget from abroad.⁴⁴

As these organizations evolved over time, so too did their connection with EN. In 1944, EN continued to receive donations from Ezrah, the Sociedad de Beneficencia, and the Chevrah Keduscha, whose restructuring had resulted in a name change to Asociacion Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA). New contributors included the Jewish Union from Galitzia and three charity organizations predominantly geared towards children: Asilo Israelita Argentino para Huerfanos y Ancianos, the Argentine Jewish Asylum for Orphans; Asociacion Israelita de Proteccion al Infant 'B. Joilim,' the Bikur Cholim Jewish Society for the Protection of Children; and Hogar Infantil Israelita Argentina, the Jewish Argentine Infants' Home. Both the Israelite Congregation and the Paso Temple collected donations for EN at their 1944 High Holiday services, as did the Jewish neighborhood association for Villa Mitre y Villa del Parque.⁴⁵ AMIA by this time had become EN's major local donor, contributing nearly half of their 1944 income.⁴⁶ This

⁴⁴ JAPGW – EN, *Informe* (1934), 21-22.

⁴⁵ EN, *Reseña de las Actividades desde el 1 de Julio de 1944 Hasta el 30 de Junio de 1945* (1945), 5. IWO.

⁴⁶ EN, *Reseña de las Actividades desde el 1 de Julio de 1943 Hasta el 30 de Junio de 1944* (1944), 5. IWO.

network of connections suggests that by the mid-1940s, EN was firmly embedded in the mainstream charity constellation of the Buenos Aires Jewish community.

Prostitute Mothers and Degeneration

Returning to the case with which this chapter began, EN made implicit moral judgments of the women it worked to save, which can be read as evidence for a particular vision of ideal family structure and sexual behavior. The organization's responses often reflected the language and assumptions of the Italian school of positivist criminology, led by Caesar Lombroso and William Ferrero, which then dominated Argentine legal and penal thought.⁴⁷ Lombroso and his disciples examined the physical characteristics of criminals, which they argued could be passed along with their antisocial behaviors from one generation to the next. Acquired characteristics could be inherited, creating new generations "born to crime." In language popularized on both sides of the Atlantic by Max Nordau, the "degeneration" of subsequent generations thus caused increasing criminal behavior. The purpose of reform and punishment became the protection of society at large rather than punishment of guilty individuals.⁴⁸ Boycott tactics against the teme'im echoed the criminological proscription of separating social contagion.

⁴⁷ See Julia Rodríguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the Modern State*. (Chapel Hill, 2006) and Kristin Ruggiero, *Modernity in the Flesh: Medicine, Law, and Society in Turn-of-the-Century Argentina* (Stanford, 2004).

⁴⁸ Mary Gibson, "The Female Offender and the Italian School of Criminal Anthropology," *Journal of European Studies* 12(47), (1982): 155-165; 157.

Analyses of female criminality centered on the prostitute as archetype of women's moral degradation. According to these theories, women were responsible for both the biological and moral propagation of the species, shaping the nation's future citizens.⁴⁹ In 1875, Argentine municipal authorities, following Lombroso, undertook the legal regulation of prostitutes, in which a state-sponsored brothel system controlled the spread of venereal disease through regular examination and quarantine of prostitutes (though not their clients). The idea that women were more likely than men to transmit syphilis owed more to judgments of women's sexual immorality than the dictates of germ theory.⁵⁰

Because maternity represented the apogee of female function, the very existence of the prostitute mother became something of a paradox in this intellectual schema. Lombroso and Ferrero's influential book *The Female Offender* claimed that the exaggerated sensuality of prostitutes destroyed the "spirit of self-abnegation inseparable from the maternal function."⁵¹ Prostitutes' embodiment of women's degeneration clashed with idealization of motherhood as the opposite of criminal degeneration. Prostitute mothers would also threaten future generations with their degenerative influence. The possibility of prostitute motherhood thus created a theoretical tension that posed a conundrum for agencies that interfaced with actual cases.⁵²

⁴⁹ Rodríguez, *Civilizing Argentina*, 117.

⁵⁰ Donna Guy, "Medical Imperialism Gone Awry: The Campaign against Legalized Prostitution in Latin America," *White Slavery and Mothers Alive and Dead: The Troubled Meeting of Sex, Gender, Public Health, and Progress in Latin America* (Lincoln, 2000): 17-32; 20.

⁵¹ Caesar Lombroso and William Ferrero, *The Female Offender* (New York, 1895), 153.

⁵² For more on Argentine state and social agencies' regulatory responses to motherhood in this period, see Marcela Nari, *Políticas de maternidad y maternalismo político: Buenos Aires, 1890-1940* (Buenos Aires,

Concern with the moral purity of future generations of Argentine Jews motivated EN's response to prostitute mothers. While some of the cases in their records describe fallen but salvageable women, most prostitute mothers emerge as beyond reform, dangerous to their children and the broader community: "Fortunately, the number of prostituted mothers is very small compared to those who have not established homes. The fall of the former is much deeper and is the prototype of a complete degeneration. The responsibility assumed by a prostitute mother is much more serious than that of a single woman, because with the desecration of her own home, she violates the sacred principles of family, sowing the seed of evil in the breasts of her relatives."⁵³ EN thus distinguished between prostitutes with and without children, placing blame for the degeneration of future generations on these unfit mothers.

As Lombrosian criminology emphasized the influence of heredity, the only hope of preventing the seeds of evil sown by prostitute mothers from being reaped by their deviant offspring was to remove the source. Frustrated with the lack of legal leverage, EN's tactics often included Jewish community pressure and bringing in family members who EN "believed [it] could use as effective auxiliaries."⁵⁴ In one case, EN brought in relatives to pressure a mother whose hairdresser husband was noted to not have been the cause of her descent into prostitution; instead she drew him into becoming her pimp. This placed her outside of the standard narrative of male seduction and exploitation, and gave her the responsibility for endangering their children. EN threatened the couple with

2004) and Guy, "Mothers Alive and Dead: Multiple Concepts of Mothering in Buenos Aires," *White Slavery and Mothers Alive and Dead*, 191-206.

⁵³ *Memorias*, 5.

⁵⁴ *Memorias*, 4-6.

removing their legal custody over their children and the husband with expulsion from the country. The association supported other children's removal from the care of undesirable parents. EN wrote a letter in support of a man's 1931 petition to the Defender of Minors to take custody of a fourteen-year-old girl whose mother was reportedly a procuress.⁵⁵

Given the emphasis on heredity and morality, the distinction between prostitution and any female sexual activity outside of marriage was often blurred, and women who pursued extra-marital sexual activities were pathologized and deemed beyond hope of rehabilitation. EN describes one such case as an example of "sexual pathology, as one of the causes in which prostitution originates."⁵⁶ This wayward young woman lost her mother in Krakow at an early age, by which time her father had already emigrated to Buenos Aires and she was left in the care of other relatives. When she turned 18, her father brought her to Buenos Aires, at which point EN became involved as it had to give permission for the minor to disembark.⁵⁷ Father and daughter soon came into conflict around her friendship choices, and he turned to EN for help with her disobedience. Despite initial skepticism, the EN office verified that "the young woman was currently living a disorderly or wild life, maintaining relations with various men."⁵⁸ She was summoned to the office and told in no uncertain terms that "because she was still a minor, this was sufficient to deprive her of her liberty, imprisoning her in some establishment," although EN privately noted this threat to be empty due to lack of actual

⁵⁵ EN, Box 3, item 30, IWO.

⁵⁶ *Memorias*, 37.

⁵⁷ *Memorias*, 35.

⁵⁸ *Memorias*, 35-36.

legal leverage.⁵⁹ The association's prognosis for her future was poor: she continued to hold down a factory job which suggested that her sexual licentiousness was driven by sensual rather than material need (although critics often linked women's factory labor to sexual promiscuity and other negative social outcomes).⁶⁰ EN placed her in the charge of a family who controlled her activities, but noted that "given her morbid character there is not much hope that she can be regenerated [regenerarse: the opposite of degenerated], as it is possible that in the face of such restriction on her movements she could disappear entirely into a life of shame."⁶¹ A similar young woman rebelling against a strict aunt began to spend time "in certain circles of friends with depraved morals, in which sensuality dominated.... [She soon] initiated her sexual life and within a year she changed lovers twice."⁶² She was also diagnosed as beyond hope of redemption.

Some women who themselves sought protection at EN's office were denied it on the basis of a judgment of sexual pathology. In 1936, several women came to the organization claiming persecution by individuals coercing them into prostitution. EN staff interpreted them as "sick women, generally young girls, [with] complaints against imaginary enemies, soliciting our protection.... who suffered from persecution mania, particularly concentrated all their fears around the existence of evil-minded individuals who sought to seize them and deliver them by violent means to a dissolute life. According to medical opinion, these failures of their mental functions had a probable

⁵⁹ *Memorias*, 36-37.

⁶⁰ Factory work was also criticized as a source of women's degeneration, as for example noted by Nari in *Políticas de maternidad y maternalismo político*, 86-88.

⁶¹ *Memorias*, 38.

⁶² *Memorias*, 40.

sexual cause.”⁶³ Ironically, “evil-minded individuals who sought to deliver [women] by violent means to a dissolute life” was the basic definition of white slavery which had preoccupied the organization for decades. After the 1930 court case, EN assumed that white slavery would no longer be a substantial threat to Jewish women. A certain distrust of women’s evidence comes through in these cases, connected to the stigmatization of women’s sexuality.

Although motherhood could not provide a sure exit route from the moral degradation of prostitution, maternity could sometimes be a way out, if connected to desirable behavior and salvaged by marriage. In the case used to open this chapter, EN determined that a prostitute mother’s maternal feelings suggested the probability of her rehabilitation. Another young single mother, who had been seduced and abandoned when pregnant, was judged redeemable even though she had begun “relating freely with men, without considering the consequences, until her degradation was complete.”⁶⁴ In this situation, however, perhaps because she had been the victim of a predatory man, EN assessed that she might be saved if “she met a man who would take an interest in pulling her out of the mud, in order to make her his wife.”⁶⁵ Sometimes, although under unpredictable logic, a male savior and the legitimacy of marriage could rehabilitate certain fallen women. The variability in EN’s responses suggests the improvised nature of the line between purity and impurity.

⁶³ *Memorias*, 53-54.

⁶⁴ *Memorias*, 10.

⁶⁵ *Memorias*, 10.

Marriage, Morality Certificates and Community Gatekeeping

In 1931, in the wake of the dénouement of the Zwi Migdal Society, EN harnessed its community influence to intercede in the creation of new Jewish family units: in order to conduct a Jewish marriage, Argentine Ashkenazi rabbis began to require an EN-authorized certificate of morality for both bride and groom.⁶⁶ Concerned with its reputation, the Jewish community granted the organization jurisdiction to investigate and certify individuals' moral character, and to block certain undesirable unions from taking place. These investigations were required for brides being newly called from Eastern Europe, and marriages often took place before leaving the port. Certificates may have also been required in other nuptial circumstances. Documents sent to Eastern Europe to be filled out by the prospective bride and her family included a warning letter from EN in Yiddish urging that caution be exercised in responding to such calls, as young women could easily be entrapped by men of dubious character.⁶⁷ The morality certificate also became necessary for relatives to bring minor children to the country. EN thus shifted from anti-prostitution work to a gate-keeping function for the family structure of the Buenos Aires Jewish community, to guarantee a clean future generation, free of the lingering taint of the *teme'im*.

⁶⁶ *Memorias*, 68. The 1934 annual report mentioned that the group's Secretary and "one of the most active advisors," Efraim Dubrowsky, in the face of certain defects in the organization of "Jupe-Kedischen," "are studying the best way of organizing this religious service, in order to make Ezras Noschim's control more efficient." JAPGW – EN, *Informe* (1934), 11.

⁶⁷ *Memorias*, 48.

The requirements for issuance of the morality certificates indicated that EN's primary concern was the prevention of *stille chuppah* (literally, "quiet wedding canopy" in Yiddish, but generally translated as "false marriage"), a Jewish wedding that complies with rabbinic but not civil law, which was often identified as an aid to women's exploitation. The data requested for the groom's application implied an investigation of social stability. Connection to business was emphasized, through both his employment history and connection to businessmen who could provide references. Argentine residence questions, references from other local Jews, and membership in associations underscored the importance of connection to the proper elements of the mainstream Jewish community. Prospective brides had less to prove beyond the relationship to the caller and names of other relatives in Argentina. Locality of origin and names of relatives there were required, but no further details of women's pre-immigration life. The primary concern thus seemed to be if the groom was a known pimp or trafficker, rather than the bride's social position.

Stories about white slavery among Jews were often connected to fears of false marriages. Men could "marry" a woman (or several) in Europe in a religious ceremony, escort her to Argentina, deliver her to a brothel, and be free of any binding legal responsibility upon arrival. French journalist Albert Londres's *The Road to Buenos Aires* explained how Jewish procurers in Poland negotiated false marriage contracts with the families of young, attractive, impoverished girls, often on the recommendation of matchmakers whom they paid year-round for the privilege.⁶⁸ Press coverage of the 1930 court case often referred to these false marriages as a primary form of recruitment, taking

⁶⁸ Albert Londres, *The Road to Buenos Ayres* (New York, 1928), 171.

place either in Eastern Europe or in the Zwi Migdal's own facilities. An Argentine correspondent for the *New York Times* reported that "In some cases, girls sent by agents in Europe under promises of marriage or employment on their arrival were met here or in Montevideo by white slavers. In other cases the slavers would go to Europe to bring girls here to go through false marriage ceremonies in the Zwi Migdal Synagogue."⁶⁹ This premise was often central to descriptions of traffickers' interactions with local authorities: "On arrival here they declared that [the women imported into Argentina by the society] had come out to be married to men to whom they had become engaged in their native lands in Europe, and, sure enough, the 'bridegrooms-to-be,' accompanied as a rule by venerable-looking but temporary parents, went to the Immigrants' Hostel to claim their 'brides,'" at which point technically-correct paperwork blocked further interference.⁷⁰

By the 1930s, oversight of Jewish marriage replaced the fight against prostitution as the predominant concern of EN, although the underlying drive continued to be the entry of immorality into the main body of the Jewish community as well as the reproduction of undesirable behaviors in future generations. In 1932, out of the 1209 total cases which EN reported to the JAPGW London office, over half related directly to the regulation of Jewish marriage. By far the largest single category was 343 cases of questionable religious marriage, in which EN urged civil as well as religious commitment. Other categories of EN's work included religious divorce, prevention of

⁶⁹ "World Drive Opens on White Slavers, Argentine Group is Assured of Cooperation of Societies in Twenty-seven Countries; Centre of Traffic Found: Buenos Aires Vice Organization Masqueraded as Sick Benefit and Burial Association," *New York Times* (1930, June 3).

⁷⁰ "Wives of the White Slaver: Charitable Institution as 'Exchange,'" *Buenos Aires Herald* (1930, May 11).

illegal marriage, reconciliation of married couples, disembarkation of minors and prospective brides, and bigamists. Only 89 cases were identified as specifically dealing with prostitution or white slavery.⁷¹ Similar numbers were reported in 1935, with over half of the specified cases connected to marriage or divorce. Out of 1372 total cases, only 46 port inspections were reported, and no cases of white slavery or prostitution specified, a major shift from the organization's emphasis in earlier decades.⁷² For comparison, in 1926, at the peak of the Varsovia Society's strength, EN reported that its inspector met and interrogated 774 young women at the docks who were "either unaccompanied or in doubtful company."⁷³

This shift in focus also reflected decreasing migratory flow. Increasing immigration restrictions during the Argentine military dictatorship of the 1930s more sharply regulated the entry of single women claiming to be heading for marriage. Under these circumstances, the contractual legal commitment would have to be carried out as soon as the immigrant arrived, with the marriage often taking place at the dock.⁷⁴ In 1936, EN verified that the Directorate of Immigration was under orders to strictly enforce this requirement, and "make any immigrant return to their native country whose legal commitment [marriage] cannot be immediately realized; in anticipation of which the authorities require the bride to deposit a return ticket at the Argentine Consulate."⁷⁵ EN

⁷¹ *JAPGW Annual Report* (1932), 30.

⁷² "Planilla Estadística Correspondiente al Periodo Comprendido Desde el 1 de Enero 1935 Hasta la Fecha 18 Dec 1935," *JAPGW Annual Report* (1935).

⁷³ *JAPGW Annual Report* (1925), 33.

⁷⁴ *Memorias*, 42.

⁷⁵ *Memorias*, 42.

implicitly criticized this policy, noting the ease with such an engagement might be broken, or the bride might be forced to comply with an undesired marriage contract.⁷⁶ EN complained that this problem was compounded by Argentina's lack of a civil divorce law: "The amoral situation in which these young women fall into, due to the duplication of their single and married status, can only be resolved through their religious union with another man, which would be equivalent from a legal perspective to concubinage, as no civil divorce law exists in the country."⁷⁷ EN began to work together with the Polish Consulate and Soprotimis to verify the morality of the groom and the form in which the engagement was contracted.⁷⁸

As in EN's earlier years, bigamy was a major concern, and pre-existing families were assisted in being brought from Europe. In 1934, the association intervened in sixteen cases to prevent marriages from taking place, either due to the discovery that individuals were already married or because their pasts did not offer a moral guarantee.⁷⁹ EN identified four cases of bigamy, in which men "without worrying about the fate of their abandoned families in Europe, here formed new illegal homes, thus engaging in the crime of bigamy." EN attempted "to normalize the material and legal situation of the original families."⁸⁰ EN often facilitated financial support of spouses still in Eastern Europe, and routinely ran announcements in the Argentine Jewish press searching for

⁷⁶ *Memorias*, 43.

⁷⁷ *Memorias*, 44.

⁷⁸ *Memorias*, 44-45.

⁷⁹ JAPGW – EN, *Informe* (1934), 16.

⁸⁰ JAPGW – EN, *Informe* (1934), 20.

individuals declared missing by relatives in Eastern Europe.⁸¹ By the mid-1940s, much of its work involved mediating alimony payments to support the children of separated immigrant parents. In a 1944 annual report, EN proclaimed its success in securing \$20,000 from fathers separated *de facto* for the provision of food for their children, and justified somewhat coercive techniques in ensuring payment with the failure of the local legal system to address such situations.⁸²

The group's report to London headquarters for the first half of 1934 stated that out of 119 requests, 27 morality certificates were denied based on the discovery that applicants were already married, lacked "moral guarantee," or failed "to fulfill the legal and moral requirements... lack of sufficient data, verification of married civil status, doubtful morality, or for the couple's resistance to obtaining the obligatory Civil Registry identification card."⁸³ In 1935 the EN gave out 48 such morality certificates, and rejected one application due to the discovery of the "irregular civil status" of the applicant.⁸⁴ In 1936 they gave out 211 morality certificates, many for husbands attempting to bring already established families to join them, to whom the EN gave "for obvious reasons... preferential attention," and rejected six applications based on "the applicants' lack of

⁸¹ For example, "Personas Buscadas," *Israel Ilustrada* (1926, June 11), 17; "Personas Buscadas," *Israel Ilustrada* (1929, August 2 and 9), 17.

⁸² Sociedad Israelita de Proteccion a Niñas y Mujeres (Ezras Noschim), *Informe Sintetico Sobre las Actividades Desde el 1º de Julio de 1943 Hasta el 30 de Junio de 1944* (Buenos Aires: 1944), 4. IWO.

⁸³ JAPGW – EN, *Informe* (1934), 10-11, 16, 55.

⁸⁴ *Memorias*, 47.

moral responsibility.”⁸⁵ These data show the organization’s preference for marriages already established in Eastern Europe.

EN was not the only Argentine Jewish community organization to issue morality certificates, although it alone focused on marriage. The Union Israelita Residentes de Polonia en la Argentina or Poilisher Farband cooperated with the Polish Ambassador Mazurkiewicz “to show that no person had been given consideration at the Consulate unless he presented a card signed by the Union of Polish Jews, testifying to the perfect morality of the bearer.”⁸⁶ EN may have engaged in something of a territorial dispute with the larger Farband, which also claimed to have been founded at least in part to combat the *teme’im*, and open conflict developed between late 1931 and late 1933.⁸⁷ The Farband accused EN’s principal employee Selig Ganopol of condescending to clients, being physically violent, taking actions in secret, and generally acting “as if someone had appointed him guardian of our morality.”⁸⁸ Various parties thus competed to articulate the local Jewish community’s values and community boundaries: who would be included and excluded, elevated and punished.

During the 1930s, EN’s control over Jewish marriage fit into a matrix of broader community concerns that reflected self-defensive concerns and connected prostitution to motherhood, procreation, immigration and family structure. EN shared some of the

⁸⁵ *Memorias*, 51.

⁸⁶ GdF, 7.

⁸⁷ Polish Minister Plenipotentiary refers to both Poilisher Farband and EN leading the battle against the *teme’im* in a note to the court, and Poilisher Farband President Felix Herselkovitch testified that this was one of the reasons for the organization’s foundation. GdF, 7.

⁸⁸ EN Box 3, 11th item in box, in unnumbered packet of Spanish and Yiddish correspondence. IWO.

structure and interests of established Jewish philanthropic and general social service associations, and interacted with anti-white slavery organizations both in Argentina and internationally. The community institutions given most attention by historians, the Kehila, rural colonies, schools and synagogues, did not reflect the full range of Jewish concerns in the first decades of the century. Prostitution and the fight against it reflected a wider spectrum of interests, fears, and priorities. EN's morality certification system and particular concern with prostitute mothers as a degenerative influence on future generations revealed deep anxiety with the legacy of the substantial local connection between Jews and organized prostitution. Through pressure on immoral and potentially immoral Jewish families, Ashkenazi Jewish social reformers in Argentina attempted to delineate the boundaries of membership in their own community.

Conclusion

The image of the swarthy Semitic seducer haunted social reformers and parents of young white women around the world at the fin-de-siècle. Voyeuristic publications exaggerated the numbers of innocent victims drugged through steerage en route to the underworld of Buenos Aires. Narratives of the white slave united the shadowy Others of the US and Europe – black and Jew – in transatlantic debates over immigration, miscegenation, urbanization, marriage, suffrage, and the end of Empire. The association of white slavery with both the Jews and the city of Buenos Aires resonated with other concerns that exacerbated the publicity around these connections, as illuminated by the genealogy of the term “white slave,” which was intrinsically tied to race and labor. The portrayal of prostitutes as hapless victims links historical and contemporary responses to trafficking in women, and while removing blame from women and positioning reformers as rescuers, it also erases the voices and complex realities of many sex workers’ lives.

Although perhaps exotic to the modern reader in the US, Jewish pimps and prostitutes were all-too-familiar neighborhood fixtures in the early urban settlement of Jews in Buenos Aires. Denial of significance and self-defensive emphasis on opposition hides the visibility of Jewish participation in the port capital’s enormous underworld, which was interwoven into the geography of the city’s first Jewish neighborhoods. Pimps and prostitutes, madams and brothel servants flaunted their wealth and articulated their identity as Jews in the balconies of the Yiddish theater and on the street. Women asserted their agency as they chose to move in and out of prostitution, amassed wealth, and purchased property. Members of the Varsovia or Zwi Migdal Society shared

demographics and aspirations with other immigrants, which they expressed in common collective and religious idioms. The boycott against the *teme'im* may have been one of the most important collective activities of Buenos Aires Jewry, articulating relationships between institutions and the boundaries of acceptable activity. Prostitution thus becomes an integral part of the Argentine Jewish settlement narrative.

Argentine prostitution captured the attention of international reformers organizing against the transnational flow of prostitutes. Experts from the League of Nations' Committee on the Traffic in Women gathered information from Argentine police, immigration officials, and municipal authorities, and went undercover to collect data directly from the underworld. The London-based Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women focused much of their international effort against Jewish prostitution on Argentina. This organization monitored incoming migrant flows: employees searched every trans-Atlantic ship arriving at South American docks for suspicious young women, patrolled immigrant hotels, and served as gatekeepers for employment and marriage references. The League of Nations hoped to unify divergent national approaches to global sex traffic, while the local Jewish Association sought to moderate the damage done to community respectability by drawing a hard line between moral and immoral elements. Despite differences in agendas and resources, these international bodies worked closely with Argentine authorities, and often served as mediators between new arrivals and local institutions. Even as they blamed police for collusion with illegal activity, reformers relied on police muscle.

Despite pressure from these reformers to crack down on coercive pimps and clandestine prostitution, local police were widely known to accept bribes and otherwise

benefit from the lucrative sex industry. Police superintendent Julio L. Alsogaray crusaded against organized Jewish prostitution, played a central role in the 1930 court case against the Jewish pimps' mutual aid society, and published a 1933 memoir narrating this work and excoriating police corruption under the Yrigoyen administration. Despite the inherent anti-Semitism of his writing, shared with other authorities in this period of rising nationalism, Alsogaray articulated and helped to realize the moral gate-keeping of local and international Jewish reformers. Morality became a battleground between *teme'im* and their opponents, as pimps claimed respectability through their voluntary society, prostitutes claimed victimhood when it served their interests, and local and international institutions from *Esras Noschim* to the League of Nations used moral claims to shape marriage and migration.

Appendix 1: Crying Tango Men¹

While the clients of prostitutes remain even more veiled in the historical record than prostitutes and pimps, clues to their cultural milieu appear in tango lyrics. The archetype of the tango narrator is the *compadrito*, the unhappy and unemployed alcoholic son of disenchanted immigrants, unable to prove his love or his manhood, hanging around brothel waiting rooms, hoping for a free ride.² James Scobie's classic study of the modernization of Buenos Aires touches on the masculine archetypes that developed within the capital city's cultural production of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. He summarizes the romanticized virility of the gaucho bursting with "reckless, defiant courage... who sauntered into a group, carelessly dragging the ends of his poncho on the ground so as to brush the boots or spurs of bystanders and thus invite a knife fight to the death."³ Scobie argues that these masculine archetypes scorned emotion, sentimentality, and romantic love, and although he associates these archetypes with the rise of the tango, he fails to acknowledge the significance of the deeply sentimental content of the tango itself. Tango lyrics reflected the sense of tragic isolation and betrayal felt by the sons of immigrants whose reality failed to reflect their parents'

¹ This conceptualization owes much to conversations with Adriana Bergero.

² See the description of the *compadrito* in Adolfo Batiz, *Buenos Aires, la ribera y los prostbulos en 1880: Contribuci3n a los estudios sociales (libro rojo)*. Buenos Aires: Aga-Taura, 1960; pp. 43-45, and the compelling collection of literary references to this archetypal figure in Horacio Salas, *El Tango*. Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1995; pp. 69-75.

³ Scobie, James R. *Buenos Aires: Plaza to Suburb, 1870-1910*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974; p. 228.

dreams.⁴ The protagonists of tango narratives voiced not the defiant courage of the gaucho, but the legacy of failed conquests, told through sleepless nights of weeping alone.

While most scholarly analyses of the tango have emphasized (and often glamourized) the rampant prostitution, alcoholic drinking, gambling, and knife fights of the tango underworld, and some acknowledge that “tangos sang and danced the dark side of development.”⁵ While tango has been lauded as a genuine expression of “los problemas de los oprimidos, las frustraciones, los amores y desencantos... de la mayoría de los pueblos latinoamericanos,” the frustrations themselves, rather than their

⁴ There is a large body of literature on the tango, which cannot all be mentioned here. Of particular use has been Raul Horacio Campodonico and Fernanda Gil Lozano. “Milonguitas en-cintas: La mujer, el tango y el cine.” Pp. 136-53 in *Historia de las mujeres en la Argentina*, vol. 2, edited by Fernanda Gil Lozano, Valeria Silvina Pita, and Maria Gabriela Ini. Buenos Aires: Taurus, 2000.

A contemporary description of the arrabel and a lexicon of Lunfardo can be found in Barres, M. *El Hampa y Sus Secretos*. Buenos Aires: Imprenta López, 1934.

Other glossaries of Lunfardo include Vicente Capparelli, *Recopilacion de voces del lunfardo, de lo sordido, de lo popular y del reo*. Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1980; Oscar Conde, *Diccionario etimologico del lunfardo*. Buenos Aires: Libros Perfil, 1998; Athos Espindola, *Diccionario del lunfardo*. Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2002; Luis C. Villamayor and Enrique R. Del Valle. *El lenguaje del Bajo Fondo (Vocabulario Lunfardo)*. Edicion Critica con Prologo y Notas. Buenos Aires: Schapire s.r.l., 1969.

⁵ Quote from Savigliano, Marta E. *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*. San Fransisco: Westview Press, 1995; p. 29. Her analysis explores the “colonizing gaze” in the “exotic spectacle” of the tango. The political implications of her argument focus on the international position of Argentina in relation to Europe and the United States, and broad theories of the power dynamics of sex and race, but don’t engage the internal dynamics of Argentine politics.

implications, have been the focus.⁶ Tango lyrics contain both an explicit critique of the failures of Argentina's industrial development to provide its sons with sufficient employment and family-building opportunities, and a more sinister suggestion of burgeoning proto-Fascism.

Without employment, unable to compete for the love of a woman, the *compadrito's* masculinity has been so threatened it seems out of reach. Action is impossible, he can only listen, in tearful silence, indulging in a *mufa*, to the *tanguista* who affirms his pain.⁷ Somewhere between the *flaneur* of Benjamin and Baudelaire, the Dominican *tigre*, and the Mexican *macho*, the *compadrito* bemoans his emasculation through his tearful tango tales.⁸ He has given up trying to prove his courage through

⁶ Quote from Luis Vitale, *Identidad Latinoamericana y Musica Popular: Del Tango a La Salsa*. Buenos Aires: Leopardo, 2000; p. 28. See also Abelardo Hernando, "The Luck That Is Roberto Grella: The Tango, Sex and Society in Argentina." *Revista Iberoamericana* 68, no. 201 (2002): 1025–1040 and Blas Matamoro, *La Ciudad Del Tango: Tango Historico y Sociedad*. Buenos Aires: Galerna, 1982.

⁷ Julie Taylor, "Tango." In *Rereading Cultural Anthropology*, edited by George E Marcus, 377–389. Durham: Duke University Press, 1992 describes *el mufarse* as "a particular form of moping that amounts to a national institution... a depression, but with a cynicism about the depression itself, an awareness that it can feel good to throw practicalities aside, have one of the demitasse coffees over which many a tango was written, and contemplate one's bad luck and its universal implications."

⁸ Walter Benjamin depicts the Parisian *flaneur* in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire." In *Illuminations*, 155–200. New York: Schocken Books, 1968. On the Dominican *tigre*, see Lauren Derby, *The Dictator's Seduction: Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo*. Duke University Press, 2009. The Dominican figure of the *tigre* exemplifies the most manly of men, whose manliness is dependent on his use of women. This conception of masculinity goes beyond the characterization of relational definitions of masculinity as "anything that women are not" to a reinforcement of male power through particular

knife fights with his peers, and, tired of watching men with fancier clothes and thicker wallets walk away with the women he desires, he resigns himself to self-pity.

From the earliest tango recordings, tango narrators expressed their anxiety about their low social standing, inadequate educational backgrounds, and frustrated desires to compete with more “cultured” men. Often native-born children of immigrants, the *compadritos* wallowed in the unfulfilled dreams of their parents, unable to secure the work or women they felt they deserved.⁹ Although the extreme demographic imbalance between men and women of the early European immigrant waves adjusted somewhat in the following decades, men continued to greatly outnumber women, and working-class

constructions of the female. Masculinity is reinforced in terms of Gail Rubin’s traffic in women, through the transmission of power between men in the bodies of women. Derby’s article offers a counter-narrative to the analysis of *tigueraje* in Christian Krohn-Hansen, “Masculinity and the Political Among Dominicans: ‘The Dominican Tiger’.” In *Machos, Mistresses, Madonnas: Contesting the Power of Latin American Gender Imagry*, edited by Marit Melhuus and Kristi Anne Stolen, 108–133. New York: Verso, 1996. On machismo in Mexico, see Chapter Seven of Steve Stern, *The Secret History of Gender: Women, Men, and Power in Late Colonial Mexico*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995. Stern argues that subaltern masculinity fundamentally depended on homosocial bonding, in which men affirmed their patriarchal standing through public leadership, engaged in metaphorical conquest dramas (i.e. cockfights and Indian bullfighting), and engaged in specifically masculine play (170-3). Subaltern men defended their masculine authority through family dynamics, which occasionally spiraled into the violent scenes analyzed in the text as a logical extension of male authoritarianism. While elite males “feminized” subaltern men and made use of their women to underline their superiority, subaltern men “redefine[d] manliness on the terrain of personal courage” (168). In all of these arenas, lower-class affirmations of masculinity depended on courage in the face of adversity, a risk-based system that could easily tip into extreme confrontation. See also Matthew Gutmann, ed. *Changing Men and Masculinities in Latin America*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003.

⁹ Scobie, p. 229, claims that the *compadrito* was “invariably” the native-born son of immigrants.

men were at a serious disadvantage when competing with the *niños bien*. Men in unskilled and low-skill labor were far more likely to remain unmarried than men in higher socio-economic positions, out of necessity rather than choice. Popular wisdom in Spain lauded Argentina as “the place for young women to go if they wanted to marry above their rank.”¹⁰ While wealthy men were able to access both upper-class women for marriage and lower-class women for both paid and unpaid diversion, lower-class men were generally unable to marry even women of their own class, much less gain social mobility through connection with women of higher social standing.¹¹

Far worse than the inadequate numbers of women is the fact that the *compadritos* see other men succeeding in their romantic conquests, men whose social standing *compadritos* can envy, but not hope to attain. Envy becomes bitterness, as one narrator loses his love interest to a man “mejor que tiene mas patacones, / que es de buenas relaciones y un magnifico señor,” and deep in sour grapes, he blames himself for daring to dream: “que yo no tengo modales pa meterme en sociedad, / y que es una barbaridad pensar que somos iguales.”¹² In comparison to the well-born *niño bien*, the cultivated and educated oligarch, the *compadrito* has no chance of success. He loses women to

¹⁰ See Jose Moya’s convincing demographic analysis in *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998; pp. 255-59.

¹¹ Savigliano makes the intriguing argument that the “whining” of tango narrators aimed to attract the sympathy of upper-class women who otherwise ignored them in *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*; pp. 64-5 and “Whiny Ruffians and Rebellious Broads: Tango as a Spectacle of Eroticized Social Tension.” *Theatre Journal* 47 (1995): 83-104.

¹² “Que suerte la del ingles,” in Pedro Eliseo Arias and Leonardo Capristo, eds. *Carlos Gardel: Compilacion Poetica*. Vol. 1. Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 2003; p. 54.

unattainable goods and status symbols: cigars, champagne, fancy restaurants, grey fox fur, European titles, Harrods and Ford.¹³ Unlike the anarchists and socialists of the prior generation, the compadrito does not claim a utopian, anti-capitalist morality, but rather a bitter anti-decadent fatalism.¹⁴ Given the choice, he would prefer to be one of the men he envies, but as he clearly cannot, he directs his vitriol at the decadent lifestyle, pointing out with smug inculpability the tendency of prostitutes to fall fatally ill with syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases.¹⁵ The Mala Vida can only provide time-limited pleasures, oblivion, and death. Decadence will ultimately destroy itself. Although he too is clearly implicated in this scheme, the tango narrator envisions no other alternative.¹⁶

The tears in tango lyrics do not represent a socially acceptable, New Age male sentimentality. Tango narrators bemoan their own tears as weak, and compare themselves in their failure and weeping to women and boys: “Ioro, como ioro un niño, porque no mi corriesponde”;¹⁷ and most shameful of all, as an adult, his mother catches

¹³ “Margot,” “Zorro gris,” “Que suerte la del ingles,” and “Muñequita,” Arias and Capristo, *Carlos Gardel*, pp. 83, 88, 54, and 69 respectively.

¹⁴ Writings of leftist social critics, such as F. de R. Climent, Emma Goldman, and Angel M. Gimenez. *La prostitucion clandestina: Estudio de patologia sexual; La tragedia de la emancipacion femenina; La prostitucion en Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Claridad “Biblioteca Juridica,” 1930 provide another interesting perspective on the subject.

¹⁵ “Carne de cabaret” and “Pobre paica,” Arias and Capristo, *Carlos Gardel*, pp. 78-9.

¹⁶ Lugones resolves his opposition to decadence and “the disintegrating character of modern life” with the articulation of fascist ideology. Alberto Spektorowski, *The Origins of Argentina's Revolution of the Right*. Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2003; p. 76. See also Allan Metz, “Lugones, Leopoldo And The Jews - The Contradictions Of Argentine Nationalism.” *Ethnic And Racial Studies* 15, no. 1 (1992): 36–60.

¹⁷ Iorar is llorar, to cry. “Puntana,” Arias and Capristo, *Carlos Gardel*, p. 29.

him crying over lost love “aunque quise ocultarle me pena, / yo sé que mi madre, llorando me vio.”¹⁸ The *compadrito* has no option of killing for vengeance, to perhaps revenge his manhood, but must instead cry alone into countless dawns, his only option to drink himself into oblivion, “a ver si el vino me hace olvidar.”¹⁹ His isolation is so complete, that after his death, only the distillery mechanisms and wine-barrels will cry for him: “llorarán mi muerte/ llorarán los alambiques/ y las pipas de aguardiente.”²⁰ Over the course of the 1920s, death increasingly becomes the only foreseeable future in tango lyrics, as “El taita del arrabal” with whom the narrator identifies as a peer, falls into a tragic, hubristic morphine death.²¹ The *compadrito*’s fascination with death, rather than a different kind of life, potential employment, or the possibility of new love, leads him to ask of the woman who last abandoned him, only that after his death, that he not be utterly forgotten, “te pido que cuando muera, / no me has de echar en olvido.”²² Although this fascination with death may seem less dangerous than an explicit fascination with violent revenge, the fatalism of this mentality ultimately leads to even more sinister implications.

The tragedy of the tango is ultimately the failure of modernity to live up to its promises. The *compadrito*, son of hopeful immigrants, is unable to secure employment that will enable him to rise in social standing or to find a wife and build a family. He is unable to become the all-powerful provider, husband, and father at the top of Modernity’s social hierarchy. Having failed his mother and lost sight of his father, without work or

¹⁸ “La Cartita,” Arias and Capristo, *Carlos Gardel*, p. 120.

¹⁹ “La copa del olvido,” Arias and Capristo, *Carlos Gardel*, p. 103.

²⁰ “El sapo y la comadreja,” Arias and Capristo, *Carlos Gardel*, p. 105.

²¹ “El taita del arrabal,” Arias and Capristo, *Carlos Gardel*, p. 108.

²² “Dos cosas te pido,” Arias and Capristo, *Carlos Gardel*, p. 111.

family to ground him or give him hope, he turns from the empty pleasures of the Mala Vida to the patriotic promise of an ordered future. The centralized nation becomes his substitute father, the local militia and later the military, his family. His own fatalism, bred in the seedy taverns, morphine dens, and brothels of the Buenos Aires underworld, leads him to cynicism, dogma, and violence. Suicide and genocide become logical options. By the 1930s, militarism restores modernity's potential to create order. Like the well-muscled Herculean demigod that appears over the horizon at the end of Leopoldo Lugones' allegory predicting the fatal outcomes of anarchist-inspired freedoms,²³ nationalistic militarism answers the individual tragedies of these disenfranchised men, to reappear in ever more terrifying guises throughout the century.

²³ "Los Caballos de Abdera" in Leopoldo Lugones, *Strange Forces*. Buenos Aires: Latin American Literary Review Press, 2001. This allegory refers to the Greek myth of the trials of Hercules, in which Hercules kills the man-eating horses of Abdera. In Lugones' *Animal Farm*, horses allowed the luxury of total (anarchist) freedom become increasingly rebellious and violent, ultimately turning on their benevolent human keepers. These fears of the wild crowd are salvaged by the radiant vision of Hercules, the god-like force of order arriving to save the grateful survivors from the consequences of their misguided idealism.

Appendix 2: Criminologists on La Mala Vida

Pimp and prostitute, murderer and masturbator, abortionist and alcoholic, the colorful and dangerous inhabitants of the social margins fascinated the law makers and experts of fin-de-siecle Argentina, inspiring intellectual debates and social reforms framed in the scientific language of criminology, eugenics, forensic anthropology, sexology, hygiene, anthropometrics, and legal medicine. Criminal courts, new professional journals, and developing medical and penal institutions served as battlegrounds, classrooms, and laboratories for the radical ideas of men consciously crafting the modern nation. Argentine criminologists and intellectuals such as Jose Ingenieros, Carlos Octavio Bunge, Jose Maria Ramos Mejia, and Pedro Gori shaped the creation of social institutions and the trajectories of public policy.¹ They grappled with ideas imported from Europe in search of appropriate solutions to the local social problems that accompanied the rapid economic and demographic growth of the late nineteenth century, and became particularly engaged with the Italian and French schools of European positivist thought. Aguste Compe's positivist motto "Love, Order, Progress" directly inspired President Julio A. Roca's

¹ On local policy debates around prostitution, see Ernesto J. J. Bott, *Las condiciones de la lucha contra la trata de blancas en Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires: Oceana, 1916.

Some of the related debates in the Buenos Aires Municipal Council can be found in Angel M. Giménez, *Contra la reglamentacion de la prostitucion: abolicion de las ordenanzas municipales y profilaxis de las enfermedades venereas: proyectos y discursos pronunciados en el concejo deliberante de Buenos Aires en las sesiones del 7 de enero, 16, 19 y 21 de mayo de 1919, y texto de las sancionadas*. Buenos Aires: Talleres Graficos "Optimus," 1919.

slogan “peace and administration,” as Argentine policy makers in the 1890s promoted “faith in progress and order” as part of a constellation of modernizing thought based on liberalism, scientific racism, and the Italian positivist criminology of Cesar Lombroso, Enrique Ferri, Alejandro Ferrer, and Raffaele Garofalo.²

² See the introduction to Comte, Auguste. *A General View of Positivism*. Dubuque, Iowa: Brown Reprints, 1971; Ricardo D. Salvatore, “Criminology, Prison Reform, and the Buenos Aires Working Class.” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23, no. 2 (1992): 279-99; Spektorowski, *The Origins of Argentina’s Revolution of the Right*, pp. 38-9; Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, p. 155; and Kristin Ruggiero, *Modernity in the Flesh: Medicine, Law, and Society in Turn-of-the-Century Argentina*. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2004. The development of Argentine criminology also be fruitfully compared to the relevant broader literature on the early development of criminology, particularly that focused on gender issues, such as: Alan Block, “Aw! Your Mother’s in the Mafia: Women Criminals In Progressive New York.” *Contemporary Crises* 1, no. 1 (1977): 5-22; Lila M. Caimari, “Whose Criminals Are These? Church, State, and Patronatos and the Rehabilitation of Female Convicts (Buenos Aires, 1890-1940).” *Americas* 54, no. 2 (1997): 185-208; Timothy J. Gilfoyle, “Introduction - New Perspectives on Crime and Punishment in the American City.” *Journal Of Urban History* 29, no. 5 (2003): 519-524; J. Messerschmidt, “Feminism, Criminology And The Rise Of The Female Sex Delinquent, 1880-1930.” *Contemporary Crises* 11, no. 3 (1987): 243-263; Robert A. Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984; Rafter, N. “The Unrepentant Horse-slasher: Moral Insanity and the Origins of Criminological Thought.” *Criminology* 42, no. 4 (2004): 979-1008; Shapiro, *Breaking the Codes*; E. G. Spencer, “Vitiation and Degradation: A History of Criminology in the 19th Century as Discourse and Practice,” *Central European History* 38 (2005); and D. J. Steffensmeier, “Organization Properties And Sex-Segregation In The Underworld: Building A Sociological Theory Of Sex Differences In Crime.” *Social Forces* 61, no. 4 (1983): 1010-1032.

Argentine lawyers began to express interest in the Italian Positivist School in the 1880s, far sooner than intellectuals of other Latin American republics. By the 1860s, the Italian scholars whom the Argentines cite as their primary sources of inspiration in this arena became interested in an eclectic form of positivism, which shared little rigid doctrine beyond a fundamental commitment to empiricism. They drew from the philosophy of knowledge of Frenchman Auguste Comte, the British evolutionism of Charles Darwin, and the German materialism embodied in Ernst Haeckel's monism, in which physiology and the individual cell determined human intelligence and morality. Cesare Lombroso and his later colleagues embraced positivism as part of the general climate of enthusiasm for empirical science, and began to use the term criminology in the 1880s to distinguish their practice from traditional legal study.³ Argentine penalist Norberto Piñero proclaimed to his 1887 inaugural class in Penal Law at the University of Buenos Aires that the "Positivist school would change the world for the good of humanity" and declared his affiliation with the theories promulgated at the First Congress of Criminal Anthropology, which took place in Rome two years prior. On February 18, 1889, a group of prominent jurists, lawyers, doctors, and other professionals established the "Society of Juridical Anthropology," created "to complement European science with

³ Mary Gibson, *Born to Crime: Cesare Lombroso and the Origins of Biological Criminology*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002; pp. 18-38. See also S. A. Cole, "The Criminal Body: Lombroso and the Anatomy of Deviance." *Theoretical Criminology* 8, no. 4 (2004): 509-512.

Argentine and indigenous American facts of anthropology and sociology.”⁴ Buenos Aires’ police department developed a department of anthropometrics in the same year. In 1891, La Plata, the capital of Buenos Aires Province, established their own department of anthropometrics, directed by Juan Vucetich, who achieved international renown through his development of a new system of fingerprinting, which was used in Spain, Brazil, Chile, and other countries.⁵

Argentina was the first Latin American country to publish a journal of criminal philosophy: the short-lived *Revista Criminal*, founded by Pedro Bourel in 1873 and lasting only one year. A quarter century after this short-lived publication, lawyer and Italian exile of anarchist leanings Pietro (referred to in Spanish as Pedro) Gori established the disciplinary journal *Criminologia Moderna* in 1898. After its final issue in January 1901 (upon Gori’s departure from Argentina), its work was continued by the internationally acclaimed *Archivos de Psiquiatria y Criminologia*, founded in 1902 by Francisco de Veyga, who named Jose Ingenieros as its director. The directors of the two journals, although committed to similar causes, fought over political ideologies: Gori maintained his commitment to anarchism, while Ingenieros was committed to socialism – two strands of leftist revolutionary thought that while extremely popular among the working class and the intelligencia in Argentina at that time, fought bitterly against each other.

⁴ Rosa del Olmo, *Criminología Argentina: Apuntes para su reconstrucción histórica*. Buenos Aires: Depalma, 1992; pp. 2-5.

⁵Del Olmo, *Criminología Argentina*, pp. 8-9.

Analysis of advertisements for the offices of criminologist lawyers and doctors, as well as the printing presses and pharmacies with whom they did business, in the back pages of *Criminologia Moderna*, reveals that all of these men chose to locate their offices in the same area: the bustling commercial and financial district surrounding and just north of the city center's Plaza de Mayo.⁶ These offices often sat on the same blocks as the city's central banking institutions and nestled between expensive porteño shops and high-class residences along elegant Florida Street, an area which boasted the highest rents in the entire city at that time.⁷ While this new professional aristocracy may have comprised the core of the board members and contributors to the two journals, the new immigrant population and highly organized literate working class also found a voice in debates about crime. The pages of these journals express a surprisingly diverse array of opinions about crime and gender issues, from Lombroso's ideas about the peculiar nature of the female criminal to arguments over maternity and infanticide to debates about the applicability of traditional models of honor to modern society.

Cesar Lombroso, the Italian "father of criminology," explains his approach to female criminality, which centers on the archetype of the prostitute, in great detail in *La Donna Delincuente*, first published in 1893 and co-authored by William

⁶ I have developed a map based on advertisements listed in *Criminologia Moderna*, I:1-IV:21 (Buenos Aires: Nov. 20, 1898-Jan. 1901).

⁷ See Real Estate Values in Census Districts 1 and 2, City of Buenos Aires, 1887, and Photos 1 and 2, Scobie, *Buenos Aires*, p. 117.

Ferrero.⁸ In general, Lombroso focused on the development of categories for the deviant criminal, separating from occasional criminals the “born criminal,” who despite popularization indicating otherwise, made up only a third of all perpetrators of crime. He argues that women are naturally closer than men to criminal behavior due to their natural characteristics and developmental inferiority to men, and demonstrates particular interest in the female prostitute, whom he places in a distinct criminal category. Maternity functions as the apogee of female function, the opposite of criminal tendencies.

Despite the close cooperation between Italian and Argentine criminologists, Argentine intellectuals also distinguished themselves from their European interlocutors. They also emphasize the importance of maternal sentiment, citing vanity, arrogance, and jealousy as motivating factors in women’s criminal behavior. Women’s peculiar capacity for simulation becomes central to particular criminal activities, and popular notions of masculine honor, such as that defended in the duel and in various crimes of passion, come under attack. One 1899 article addresses both masculinity-related crimes of honor, such as the duel, and the particularly feminine crime of infanticide. Author Ricardo del Campo, an attorney whose leadership positions in the journal included Editorial Secretary and Editor-in-Chief, criticizes the hypocrisy of public reaction to honor-related crimes, in which “honor is cleansed with the blood of the delinquency, [and] the fact loses its criminal

⁸ Caesar Lombroso and William Ferrero. *The Female Offender*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895.

character before the public awareness of such a deliberate cause.”⁹ This concordance of public opinion, he argues, tends to influence judicial tolerance of such criminal cases. On the other hand, crimes motivated by less socially intelligible factors, such as insanity, epilepsy, and the other “organic perturbations,” tend to encourage some variety of “lynching” by a public that fails to understand these more complex motivational factors.

Del Campo’s discussion of infanticide focuses on the case of the “dark-skinned” Marcelina Arteyas, “a mother unnatural to the point of giving death to five children, two of whom, twins, were murdered together, without any vacillation or later remorse,” and whose own mother, currently living in Buenos Aires, was also responsible for similar crimes on the same basis of being unable to provide for the subsistence of her offspring. Del Campo describes Marcelina Arteyas as a classic case of the congenitally criminal woman, based on the frequency and style of her crimes, on her “profound physico-physic perversion,” and on her complete lack of conventional moral sensibility, reflected in the total absence of maternal sentiment. The author’s tone oscillates between sympathy for the plight of the economically destitute mother and condemnation for the sexual and moral choices of two generations of unchaste women, finally appearing to lay the blame for these actions on the on the apparently contradictory influences of nature and society: “Daughter of chance, unconscious depository of all the accumulated moral mud in the heredity

⁹ Ricardo del Campo, “Madres Criminales: Los Infanticidios de la Magdalena,” *Criminologia Moderna* II:9 July 1899, pp. 277-79.

and the school of a mother equally prostitute and delinquent, no, is she perhaps a horrible victim of nature, the organic detritus of the social environment?"

Along with women's natural tendencies toward criminal behavior, Del Campo attributes infanticide to racial characteristics, claiming that the crime is far more common among peoples of "the Latin race" than among those of "Anglo-Saxon" origin," due both to differences in the economic conditions of the two groups and to the greater moral and juridical liberty improving the social and economic status of women of the latter race. The other interlocutors in these journals negotiated the issue of race in various ways. While some articles draw on the Darwinian legacy of scientific racism, others take a divergent approach, for example, the Italian correspondent Napoleon Colajanni published an exclusive 1899 article in *Criminologia Moderna* arguing against the idea of racial purity and pointing out that the "distinction between superior and inferior races is, at the minimum, of an extreme relativity."

Jose Ingenieros, iconoclastic intellectual, socialist politician, and director of *Archivos de Psiquiatria y Criminologia Aplicadas a las Ciencias Afines*, takes an approach to prostitution quite distinct from Lombroso's. Ingenieros' lyric introduction to Eusebio Gomez's 1908 investigation into prostitution in Buenos Aires assesses the difference between "criminality" and the "profligate life" based on the distinction between legality and morality.¹⁰ This argument proves ultimately

¹⁰ Jose Ingenieros, "La Mala Vida," *Archivos de Psiquiatria y Criminologia Aplicadas a las Ciencias Afines*, VII (Sept. – Oct. 1908), 513-21; also published as the introduction to Eusebio Gomez, *La Mala Vida En Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires: Juan Roldan, 1908.

surprising in comparison with the views of other criminologists, as he finds in the local pimp and prostitute not the crisis of moral degradation lamented by social reformers but the potential for new models of morality.

Ingenieros begins his assessment of the theme with a summary of contemporary critiques of the city's internationally-renowned underground world of pimps, madams, and prostitutes, critiques which he describes as consistently outraged at the moral vacuum on display, the misery and sickness of this "antisocial parasite." He suggests, in contrast, a kind of moral relativism, noting the historically bound nature of insanity and delinquency, which allows people labeled crazy or delinquent in their own era to be later lauded as heroes or precursors of a later artistic or intellectual movement. As legal definitions of crime change, so do ethical norms that regulate conduct. Gomez' subjects inspire a questioning of the boundaries of the profligate life, the transition between honesty and crime, and the zone distinguishing good from bad. These denizens of the urban underworld could be exemplars of a type of immorality that could later be determined as a new form of virtue or honesty. For the present, Ingenieros notes with apparent sympathy, all people labeled "abnormal" present certain "excessive" personality traits against which "normal" people can measure their own similar characteristics: miserliness demonstrates the importance of saving; dishonesty inspires sincerity; vanity encourages modesty; and apathy promotes ambition. This iconoclastic Argentine intellectual thus defends the social utility of the Mala Vida.

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