

**Jewish *polacos*, Argentina, and the Yiddishland:  
Negotiating Transnational Identities, 1914-1939**

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## Spelling and Transliteration

As this work relies heavily on Yiddish sources, extensive transliteration was necessary. The transliteration is usually based on the standardized YIVO transliteration system. There are several exceptions to this system. If a title or a name had a widespread and more easily identifiable Latin spelling (in Spanish or Polish), it is this spelling that I followed. For instance, I spelled the Buenos Aires daily newspaper as *Yidische Zaitung*, instead of *Yidische Tsaytung*. Similarly, I transliterated the name of the travel writer as Peretz Hirschbein, instead of Perets Hirschbeyn, as suggested by the YIVO. By analogy, I decided to use the widely acknowledged Spanish spelling of Samuel Rollansky, rather than transliterate it from Yiddish as Shmuel Rozhansky. I also decided to spell *yidishkayt*, not *yiddishkeit*, as suggested by the YIVO. In terms of the few cases of Hebrew transliteration, the Library of Congress system was followed



# Introduction

Before 1889, the year when the trans-Atlantic ship *Weser* docked in the port of Buenos Aires, for the majority of Polish Jews Argentina was a *terra incognita*. However, the situation changed very quickly. The passengers aboard the *Weser* were the forerunners of Eastern European Jewish immigration to Argentina. In the following four decades, Argentina, next to the United States and Palestine, would become the main country of destination for Russian, Polish, Hungarian, Romanian and other Eastern European Jews searching for safety, civil rights and better economic prospects.<sup>1</sup> This doctoral project explores the background and aftereffects of their journey, both for Jewish Poland and for Argentina. My study elucidates the evolution of transnational migrant networks across the Atlantic and sheds light on heterogeneous ethno-national and diasporic processes that the emigration engendered. Two issues are of key importance in this research project: 1) ethnic identity in the context of diasporism and Jewish and Argentine national projects and 2) the emergence of a diasporic political, social and cultural *shared space* between Jews in Poland and Argentina.

My dissertation approaches Jewish migration to Argentina as a continuous process that took place on both sides of the Atlantic. I tackle it as a socio-cultural dialogue on Jewish ethnicity, modernity and diasporism. Jewish migration to Americas was not merely an answer to pogroms and economic hardships experienced back home. In my view, it had no less to do with the changing economic and social setting, the erosion of the *shtetl* and the political reconfigurations in Europe.<sup>2</sup> Of no lesser importance were Argentine programs fostering emigration that, although never geared towards Jews specifically, allowed many to settle in Latin America. My dissertation looks at emigration from two ends (Argentine and Polish), challenging the linear approaches that often do not pay enough attention to pre-migration visions of a new country and post-migration links with the homeland. In this way, I follow José Moya, who, in his study of Spanish immigration to Argentina, criticized that “the notion of new country's superiority and the assimilating power of its environment made pre-arrival

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<sup>1</sup> Haim Avni, *Argentina y las migraciones judías. De la inquisición al holocausto y después* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Milá, AMIA, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2005); Víctor A. Mirelman, *En búsqueda de una identidad. Los inmigrantes judíos en Buenos Aires 1890-1930* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Milá, 1988); José C. Moya, “The Jewish Experience in Argentina,” in *The New Jewish Argentina: Facets of Jewish Experience in the Southern Cone*, ed. Adriana Brodsky and Raanan Rein (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> For instance, memoirist Avraham Zemba wrote that both socialism and Zionism took a big share of Orthodox youth, who “joined the general drunkenness from the wealth of new ideas and hopes,” Avraham Zemba, “Shtiblakh be-varshah,” in *Mosadot torah be-eiropah ba-binyanam u-ve-hurbanam*, ed. Shmuel Mirski (New York: Hotsaat Ogen, 1956), 364, quoted in Kenneth Moss, “Negotiating Jewish Nationalism in Interwar Warsaw,” in *Warsaw. The Jewish Metropolis. Essays in Honor of the 75th Birthday of Professor Antony Polonsky*, ed. Glenn Dynner and François Guesnet (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 412-413.

traits more or less irrelevant.”<sup>3</sup> Mass migration to the Americas created a new form of Jewish diasporism the study of which requires historians to capture both life in the host country, as well as the impact that trans-Atlantic migration had on the communities back in Europe. The geographies of Jewish identities need to be studied as a continuous development, rather than a sudden rupture of Jewish life in Europe. Tracing the images of Argentina constructed and circulating among prewar Polish Jews, this dissertation adds another layer to the study of Jewish migration from Eastern Europe to Argentina.

Jewish emigration from Poland to Argentina serves as a case study of how ethnicity evolved and was transformed among migrants and their children, and the dynamics that emerged between putting roots down in a new country and commitments to the Old Country. I focus on a generation of migrants, Polish Jews, who relocated to Argentina and represent a *transitory stage* within the evolution of individual and collective ethnic identities. Emigration transformed Polish Jews into Argentine Jews and the children of these migrants became Jewish-Argentines. Obviously, these gradual phenomena were typical for all migrants and migrations, yet in the case examined here, a number of additional factors were at play. First, the Poland-centered ethno-national identitarian project centered around the Yiddish language demanded new attitudes to Jewish ethnicity and nationhood. It suggested a transformative path towards a progressive, secular, ethnic Jewishness that could be relevant both in Eastern Europe and in the Americas. I believe that even as Argentine Jewish culture developed in a multiethnic Buenos Aires and Jews shaped their ethnicity *vis-a-vis* other migrant communities, the Jewish case was modified by a desire to forge a new secular Yiddish culture, often looking to Poland in doing so. In this sense, the Old Country was not simply a reservoir of conservative norms, but a spring of new ideas on Jewish life in a diasporic world. Second, the dynamics between Poland and Argentina did not always reflect the standard narrative of Jewish immigration to the Americas, in which the new country was imagined as positively better and more central, standing at a higher cultural level. In Jewish Poland, the social imaginaries of Argentina were very complex, as Argentina was rarely imagined as an unambiguously desired destination, often criticized as hazardous and challenging. From the perspective of civil rights and economic opportunities Argentina did offer Jews a better promise, but in terms of ethno-national Jewish political, social and cultural life Poland was clearly much ahead. It was in Poland where Zionist and non-Zionist visions of the Jewish future were conceptualized and hotly debated, and where secular Yiddish

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<sup>3</sup> José Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 3-4. For a general study of “those who stayed,” see: Andreas Gestrich and Marita Krauss (eds.) *Zurückbleiben. Vernachlässigte Teil der Migrationsgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006).

literature, journalism and scholarship grew strong roots. These issues also influenced the process of Jewish-Argentine identity formation and Argentine national belonging. The preconceptions about Argentina formed in Poland, as well as the discussions on Jewish nationhood that migrants brought from Eastern Europe, complicated the ways in which Jewish migrants began to identify as Jewish-Argentines.

Simultaneously, the Argentine nation-state, its melting pot policies and its efforts at nationalizing immigrants challenged the diasporic framework by offering Jewish immigrants the promise of secular universal citizenship and national inclusion. Already in the context of Jewish emancipation in Western Europe, a civic belonging to a general national community often demanded from Jews the breaking of their national identification with Jews elsewhere and to transfer this national sentiment to other citizens of their country of residence.<sup>4</sup> In twentieth century Argentina, the local national discourse challenged the ethno-national identification with Jews in other parts of the world. Jews were supposed to (and many wanted to) be foremost Argentine, hence diasporic Jewish-national alternatives were approached with ambiguity by nationalist politicians and those Jews who grew up with these assumptions. Despite the discrepancies between Argentine national belonging and diasporic Jewish identifications, both phenomena proved to be compatible and amenable to cross-pollination in early twentieth century Argentina. This harkens back to historian David Biale, who insisted that Jewish identities are formed in relation to their gentile neighbors: “[...] for every period of history, interaction with the non-Jewish majority has been critical in the formation of Jewish culture. Even those Jewish cultures thought to be most insular adapted ideas and practices from their surroundings.”<sup>5</sup> Jewish society in Poland was never hermetically sealed, but involved interaction, cooperation and common practices, as Bartal and Ury write.<sup>6</sup> I take their call further when discussing the place of Jews in Argentina. Life in Buenos Aires was characterized by a “cultural porosity” and a constant exchange between the Jewish and non-Jewish world, what some Yiddishists (especially in the 1930s) interpreted as posing a certain ethnic danger. Whereas in Argentina the criteria for national belonging allowed Jews to imagine themselves as Argentines, in Poland the national discourse largely placed them outside of it.

My study captures and enhances the meaning behind alternative visions of Jewish

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel H. Weiss, “A Nation Without Borders? Modern European Emancipation as Negation of *Galut*,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 34, no. 4 (2016): 71-97.

<sup>5</sup> David Biale, “Preface. Towards a Cultural History of Jews,” in *Cultures of the Jews*, ed. David Biale (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), XX.

<sup>6</sup> Israel Bartal and Scott Ury, “Between Jews and Their Neighbours. Isolation, Confrontation, and Influence in Eastern Europe,” in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry, Volume 24: Jews and Their Neighbours in Eastern Europe since 1750*, ed. Israel Bartal, Antony Polonsky and Scott Ury (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), 5-8.

ethnicity and nationalism, which were at play in a globalizing Jewish world before 1939. Jewish national claims were then regularly raised not only by Zionists, but also by Bundists, Diaspora Nationalists and other political movements.<sup>7</sup> As Jews migrated to the Americas, this socio-political aspect gained additional importance and contributed to the development of diasporic identities. My dissertation brings together the impact of Yiddish-centered ethno-national revival, the entanglements of diasporism and civic promises offered by Argentina in order to find ways of understanding the complex experiences of Jews migrating from Poland to Argentina. This study thus challenges commonly held notions that, in the early twentieth century, contacts between Argentine and Eastern European Jews were weak or non-existent. Traditional scholarship tended to approach the migration of Eastern European Jews to the Americas exclusively from the perspective of the host country, discussing mostly the social integration and acculturation of Jewish immigrants, the economic and social changes of their community and the formation of Jewish institutions in the new country.<sup>8</sup> Until recently we knew much less about the impact of this migration on the home country and the diasporic links that emerged between Polish Jews, who decided to leave for Argentina and those who remained in Europe. Despite the publication of numerous books on Polish and Argentine Jewries, there is no single comprehensive study that rigorously examines Polish-Argentine Jewish dynamics that emerged due to the massive movement of people between these two countries.

## **Nation, Ethnicity and Diasporism**

### *Diasporism*

In terms of the conceptual framework of my dissertation, the notions of diaspora, ethnicity and transnationalism are of crucial importance. While numerous scholars attempted to give it a comprehensive definition (James Clifford, William Safran), “Diaspora” was and remains a

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<sup>7</sup> The General Union of Jewish Workers in Lithuania, Poland and Russia (*Der Algemeyner Arbeter Bund in Lite, Poyln un Rusland*), was a Jewish socialist party established in 1897 in Vilna. The Bund combined the working-class agenda with addressing the question of Jewish nationalism. In opposition to Zionism in the 1920s, the Bund argued for *doikayt*, believing in seeing a Jewish future in the diaspora, while emphasizing the ethno-cultural importance of Yiddish. In the late 1930s, the Bund was the dominant Jewish organization in Poland. See also the concept of “international Yiddishism” by a Warsaw Bundist Khayim Shloyme Kazhdan: Jordana de Bloeme, “A Revolutionary Language: Khayim Shloyme Kazhdan’s ‘international Yiddishism’ and the Language of the Jewish Worker,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 43, no. 3 (2013): 236-248.

<sup>8</sup> Boleslao Lewin, *Como fué la inmigración judía en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 1971); Judith Laikin Elkin, *Jews of the Latin American Republics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Robert Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina: From the Inquisition to Peron* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publishing Society of America, 1979); Haim Avni, *Argentina y la historia de la inmigración judía (1810 -1950)* (Jerusalem, Buenos Aires: Magnes Press, AMIA, 1983).

very contested term.<sup>9</sup> Jews are often labeled, both popularly and in the academia, as a classic Diaspora. The Jewish dispersion around the world started with a Jewish settlement in various countries of the Middle East and spread to Europe after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. In the centuries to come, Judaism imagined the Jewish presence outside of the borders of the former Jewish state as “exile,” a temporary stage that will end when the Messiah reunites the Jews again in the Land of Israel. The Jewish dispersion around the world came to be imagined as something negative, with “victim diaspora” and “homelessness” becoming leitmotifs of Jewish literature, art, culture and prayer.<sup>10</sup> Discussion of the role of the Land of Israel and of Jewish diasporism were continued in the Middle Ages and in the modern era, when both rabbinic authorities and West European Jewish *maskilim*, like Mendelssohn, Friedländer or Geiger, refused to see Palestine as Jewish national property or a national homeland.<sup>11</sup> Following the Great Migrations at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, Jews entered another form of diasporic existence. Whereas after centuries the Jewish dispersion around Europe was relatively “normalized” and taken for granted, Jewish immigration to the USA, Australia, Canada and Argentina had reinvigorated discussions about the way that diasporism and dispersion influence Jewish lives.

In the late modern era, “the pathological condition” of Jewish exile and diasporism was tackled by the Zionist movement. Zionism argued for the need of Jewish return to the Land of Israel and criticized the very concept of Jews feeling at home in European or American countries. Diasporism was equated with powerlessness and passivity concerning Jewish oppression by gentile governments. The leading Zionist thinkers including Theodor Herzl or Ahad Haam stood behind the notion of the “negation of diaspora” and emphasized the inferior situation of stateless Jews. Other Zionists followed this narrative. Yehuda Leib Pinsker focused on the hostile environment in which Eastern European Jews lived, while Micha Yosef Berdichevsky and Haim Brenner emphasized the “distortion of Jew's inner life” brought on by life in exile.<sup>12</sup> Criticism of the diasporic condition was for some thinkers relevant not only in

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<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Ruth Mayer, *Diaspora. Eine kritische Begriffsbestimmung* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2005) or the introductory article by Anna Lipphardt, “Diaspora. Wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Annäherungen an das Forschungskonzept,” in *Praktiken der Differenz. Diasporakulturen in der Zeitgeschichte*, ed. Miriam Rürup (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> William Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return,” *Diaspora* 1 (1991): 83.

<sup>11</sup> Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Land of Israel: From Holy Land to Homeland* (London: Verso, 2012), 107-118 and 179-196. Sand argues that rabbinic authority, broadly speaking, feared the power of nationalism, whereas in the nineteenth century West European Jews became nationalized in their respective nation states. Sand concludes that ultimately Zionism prevailed, what resulted in the “Zionization of religion” and the appropriation of Jewish history and tradition for the Zionist cause.

<sup>12</sup> Shalom Ratzaby, “The Polemic about the 'Negation of the Diaspora' in the 1930s and its Roots,” *The Journal of Israeli History* 16, no. 1 (1995): 19. For Ahad Haam's attitude to Yiddish, see Zalmen Zilberweig, *Ahad Haam un zayn batsiung tsu yidish* (Los Angeles: "Elisheva," 1956). For a general study of Zionism and its

the Eastern European context, but in new diasporas that thrived in the Americas. Nahum Sokolow argued in 1926 that strengthening support for Zionism in America was not enough and that American Jews should stop believing that American diasporic life was a relevant option.<sup>13</sup> For his part, Chaim Weizmann wanted to enlist American non-Zionists for his project of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, which did not immediately envisage relocation to Palestine.<sup>14</sup>

My understanding of Diaspora goes beyond the ethno-religious yearning for Zion and is based on current Diaspora Studies. I believe that despite the focus of Jewish Studies on the “exile from Zion,” Jews quite often felt comfortable in their diasporic condition.<sup>15</sup> Despite repeated violence, Jewish communities flourished outside of their primordial homeland, be it in medieval Spain or the Hellenistic world.<sup>16</sup> Yerushalmi correctly noticed a duality of attachment both to the ancient land of origin and the desire to fill the place of living with familiarity and to perceive it as Jewish. Following Rebecca Kobrin, I suggest a broader concept of Jewish Diaspora, one that goes beyond Zionist longings and reclaims the meaning of identification with an Eastern European center of an imagined Jewish nation.<sup>17</sup> I believe that Kobrin’s approach is very revealing for my study of Jewish-Polish immigration to Argentina. Migrating Jews often imagined Poland as an Eastern European Zion, even as they were engaged in building their lives in Argentina.<sup>18</sup>

Jewish emigration from Poland to Argentina is a lens for observing how diasporism and nationalism coincided and competed. Polish and Argentine nation-state nationalism saw the Jews as subjects to be excluded or included into the national framework, whereas the supporters of a Yiddish-based diasporic Jewish nationalism wished to offer a counter “diaspo-national” narrative. The 1920s and 1930s were years when this sometimes conflicting, sometimes complementary movements were most clearly visible. In Poland, the early 1920s were a period of a blossoming of Diaspora Nationalism, whereas in the 1930s Zionism gained

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relationship with the Diaspora, see Gideon Shimoni, *The Zionist Ideology* (Hannover, NH: University Press of New England, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> “Negation of Diaspora Urged by Nahum Sokolow in Farewell Address,” JTA, March 15, 1926.

<sup>14</sup> Shimoni, *The Zionist Ideology*, 116-118.

<sup>15</sup> Yosef Yerushalmi, “Exile and Expulsion in Jewish History,” in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World, 1391–1648*, ed. Benjamin R. Gampel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 12, 14.

<sup>16</sup> Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 5-9.

<sup>17</sup> Rebecca Kobrin, “Conflicting Diasporas, Shifting Centers: Migration and Identity in Transnational Polish Jewish Community,” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2002); Rebecca Kobrin, *Jewish Bialystok and its Diaspora* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> This was visible, for instance, in the work of Shmuel Agnon. According to Ber Kotlerman interpretation, Agnon’s *Poland Stories* “sacramentalized” Poland by endowing it with Jewish meanings and creating parallels with the Holy Land. See Ber Kotlerman, “Romanticization and Criticism in Agnon’s *Poland Stories*: Polish Jewry as an Archetype of a Jewish Community in Exile,” in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry, Volume 28(2016): Jewish Writing in Poland*, ed. Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska et al. (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2016), 249-260.

a bigger following, though both were criticized by the anti-nationalist and non-nationalist Orthodoxy and communists.<sup>19</sup> Interwar Warsaw had two key Jewish national figures: the Zionist Yitshak Grünbaum and the folkist Noah Prilutsky, who embodied two diverse national Jewish options. By looking at the transnational Yiddishist activism, the emigration policies of the Polish government and the evolving status of Jews in Argentine nation, this study reconstructs the mosaic shaped by both nationalism and diasporism. Although the triumph of Zionism overshadowed the ethno-national manifestations of Jewish diasporism, diaspora nationalism continues to be used as a resource base for diaspora scholars. Sander Gilman rejected the binarity of a diaspora and a center, suggesting a *frontier* as a counter-model for analyzing Jewish history.<sup>20</sup> Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin see in Jewish diasporism a power resource and use it as a normatively appealing counter-model for Zionist-centered Jewish identifications.<sup>21</sup> Whereas Zionism emphasizes the territorial foundations of Jewish identity, diasporism puts the focus on genealogy and a shared past.<sup>22</sup> For Boyarin diaspora is both a model of historical Jewish experience and a model of contemporary hybrid identities.<sup>23</sup> Acknowledging this and following the Boyarins, I use the diasporic lens for analyzing the diversity and hybridity of Jewish-Argentine cultural identifications.

When discussing Jewish diasporism, historian Simon Dubnow saw Jews as a nation in a spiritual, social and cultural sense, but one without a political-territorial basis.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, in his vision of Jewish diaspora nationalism (autonomism), the main nation-building factor was the Yiddish language. Dubnow suggested a vision of an autonomous and ex-territorial Jewish nation, while relying on the concept of diasporism in his historical studies. Whereas most of the research, and Jewish folklore, look for the roots of diasporism in the dispersion from the land of Israel, my study focuses on new forms of diasporism that

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<sup>19</sup> Kenneth Moss, "Negotiating Jewish Nationalism in Interwar Warsaw," 398-399. Moss explains that Jewish diaspora nationalism was eclectic and included a variety of practices that were often formed by engaging with Zionism.

<sup>20</sup> Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Frontiers. Essays on Bodies, Histories, and Identities* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 1-31.

<sup>21</sup> Julie E. Cooper, "Diasporic Critic of Diasporism: The Question of Jewish Political Agency," *Political Theory* 43, no. 11 (2015): 95-97.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and Ground of Jewish Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 4 (1993): 712-717.

<sup>23</sup> James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 271.

<sup>24</sup> Roni Gechtman, "Creating a Historical Narrative for a Spiritual Nation: Simon Dubnow and the Politics of the Jewish Past," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 22, no. 2 (2011): 98-124. See also Grit Jelik, "Zukunfts Diaspora. Simon Dubnows Vision von einer a-staatlichen jüdischen Moderne," in *Praktiken der Differenz. Diasporakulturen in der Zeitgeschichte*, 62-95, and Anke Hilbrenner, *Diaspora-Nationalismus. Zur Geschichtskonstruktion Simon Dubnows*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 2007).

evolved after the Great Migrations to the Americas.<sup>25</sup> Prior to emigration, American countries were popularly imagined as a “land of gold,” but the first years in the new country often saw a reverse tendency, with Jewish Poland being re-imagined by migrants as a better space (since Jewish) and positioned in contrast to the challenging and *goyish* Argentina. In the era of mass migration, multiple diasporic longings were at play and were never exclusive. Involvement with Jewish Poland did not, in my view, challenge the formation of a Jewish-Argentine identity, but rather contributed to the diversity of simultaneous ethnic attachments. Following Roza Tsagarousianou, I prefer to research the connectivity and linkages that transnational migration demanded, rather than to draw on a feeling of displacement or exile.<sup>26</sup> I argue that migrant Polish Jews carved their identities both in the context of diasporism and Jewish and Argentine nationalisms. This was a simultaneous and not exclusive process. By succeeding in Argentina, they did not shed their diasporic identifications, but shifted them to another level. For instance, the help campaigns organized by Argentine Jewish-Polish immigrants for the benefit of Jews in their native Poland not only underlined their diasporic self-perception and belongings, but also defined them as generous and successful Jewish-Argentines. Celebrating the Yiddish writer H. Leivick at the PEN Club Congress in Buenos Aires in 1936, Argentine Jews embraced the meaning of Yiddish as the glue connecting the diaspora, while manifesting their Argentine pride in hosting “their,” meaning Yiddish, representative.

### *Ethnicity*

This study of Jewish-Polish immigration to Argentina is a case for analyzing ethno-national diasporas. Although some scholars argued for the exceptionalism of the Jewish diasporic experience due to its longevity and the traumas it experienced, recent studies see Jewish migration and Jewish diasporism in the modern period as one case within a pool of analogous phenomena among other groups.<sup>27</sup> Ethnic groups place emphasis on a common origin, claim a common distinctive history and destiny and feel a sense of collective uniqueness and solidarity.<sup>28</sup> As peoples scattered around the world, they became more aware of the things they imagined they shared in common. In that context, the notion of ethnicity

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<sup>25</sup> For the notion of Jewish diasporism, see Jonathan Stratton, “(Dis)placing the Jews: Historicizing the Idea of Diaspora,” *Diaspora* 6 (1997): 301-329, and Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, “Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity,” 693-726.

<sup>26</sup> Roza Tsagarousianou, “Rethinking the Concept of Diaspora: Mobility, Connectivity and Communication in a Globalised World,” *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2004): 52.

<sup>27</sup> Gabriel Sheffer, “A Nation and Its Diaspora: A Re-Examination of Israeli-Diaspora Relations,” *Diaspora* 11, no. 3 (2002): 331-333.

<sup>28</sup> For migrant solidarity in historical perspective, see Joachim Balcke, Rainer Leng, Peter Scholz (eds.), *Migration als soziale Herausforderung. Historische Formen solidarischen Handelns von der Antike bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2011).



became plausible. To be clear, ethnicity is a modern term for patterns and characteristics that were earlier labeled differently. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, “race” was a commonly used term, one that was also applied to and by the Jews.<sup>29</sup> Only much later, especially after the Holocaust, was race written out of the sociological dictionary. This created a space for the notion of ethnicity, which came to be defined around the 1960s in relation to debates on migration and migrants.<sup>30</sup> As Peter Wade wrote, “ethnicity” was used to dismantle “race.”<sup>31</sup> In the years to come, ethnicity made a career (at least in the US) as the assimilationist “melting pot discourse” was replaced by the empowerment of cultural pluralism or multiculturalism. In 1963 Fredrik Barth’s classic study emphasized for the first time the internally and externally constructed character of ethnicity.<sup>32</sup> Initially, ethnicity was seen as something primordial and permanent, bound to group values, traditions and practices.<sup>33</sup> Later, a situational approach saw ethnic ties as bound by time and situation and consequently impermanent. Since the 1990s a new, post-ethnic approach became more pronounced and scholars begun to perceive ethnicity as a social construct, suggesting that ethnicities were selected, invented and constructed, and were not innate.<sup>34</sup>

Ethnicity obtained visible cultural and political power in Latin America.<sup>35</sup> Race, *mestizaje* and nation-ethnicity relations are a very fertile field of research, with a clear recent trend to reclaim indigenous histories.<sup>36</sup> Both in the popular and scholarly context, we now talk about Japanese-Brazilians, Arab-Argentines and Jewish-Argentines, as *hybrid* or *hyphenated identities* gain increasingly more scholarly and popular recognition.<sup>37</sup> Ethno-national

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<sup>29</sup> The term was used, for instance, by the famous Jewish-German sociologist Arthur Ruppin. See the work of Amos Morris-Reich: “Arthur Ruppin’s Conception of Race and the Middle East,” *Transversal: Zeitschrift für jüdische Studien* 7, no. 2 (2006): 19-32; “Arthur Ruppin’s Concept of Race,” *Israel Studies* 11, no. 3 (2006): 1-30.

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Sarna, “Ethnicity and Beyond,” in *Ethnicity and Beyond: Theories and Dilemmas of Jewish Group Demarcation* (Studies in Contemporary Jewry), ed. Eli Lederhendler, vol. XXV (2011), 108-112.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), 14-20.

<sup>32</sup> Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (New York: Little, Brown & Co, 1969). See also Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1963) and Michael Novak, *The Rise of Unmeltable Ethnics* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1972).

<sup>33</sup> Ewa Morawska, “Ethnicity as a Primordial-Situational-Constructed Experience: Different Times, Different Places, Different Constellations,” in *Ethnicity and Beyond Ethnicity: Theories and Dilemmas of Jewish Group Demarcation*, ed. Eli Lederhendler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3-25.

<sup>34</sup> Werner Sollor, *The Invention of Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Mary Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Ethnicities in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); David Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

<sup>35</sup> Sarah Albiez et al., “Introduction,” in *Etnicidad, ciudadanía y pertenencia: prácticas, teoría y dimensiones espaciales*, ed. Sarah Albiez et al. (Madrid: Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2011), 17.

<sup>36</sup> Hendrik Kraay (ed.), *Negotiating Identities in Modern Latin America* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> Jeffrey Lesser, *A Discontented Diaspora: Japanese-Brazilians and the Meanings of Ethnic Militancy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Jeffrey Lesser (ed.), *Searching for Home Abroad: Japanese-Brazilians and Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Jeffrey Lesser and Ignacio Klich (eds.), *Arab and Jewish Immigrants in Latin America: Images and Realities* (London: Frank Cass, 1998); Edmundo Murray, *Becoming gauchos Ingleses: Diasporic Model in Irish-Argentine Literature* (Bethesda, MD: Mausnel, 2009). For

diasporas often develop a sense of “diaspora consciousness” marked by multiple identifications.<sup>38</sup> My research shows that this sense of belonging “both here and there” was a feature visible among migrant Polish Jews in Argentina. Despite numerous frictions and internal and external debates, the migrant generation voiced their simultaneous belonging to Argentina and to the transnational and imagined polity of Yiddishland. Drawing on Benedict Anderson’s approach that sees nations as constructed and imagined, I go further and see the transnational space of Yiddishland as an imagined diasporic Yiddish nation. On the basis of Roza Tsagarousianou, I argue that the Jewish diaspora in Argentina, its ties, alliances and belongings towards the Jews in Poland were continuously reconstructed and reinvented.<sup>39</sup> Similar tendencies were observed in the case of pre-1948 Argentine Zionism, which was also an imagined ethnic space that envisioned Jews as united by a shared heritage and past, yet saw their immediate future in Argentina rather than in Palestine.<sup>40</sup>

By focusing on Polish Jews, I underline the power of subethnic identifications. The Polishness of many immigrants was overshadowed by Argentine visions of Jewishness earlier formed, which saw Jews as *rusos*, or Russians. Simultaneously, the stigma of female-trafficking was attached to Jewish-Polishness, as Jewish prostitutes were popularly nicknamed *polacas*. In an attempt to challenge these stereotypes, Polish Jews (although not all of them) sought to reclaim their presence in Argentina's ethnic mosaic. Demanding a subethnic recognition within the Jewish community and within the Argentine nation, Polish Jews used methods similar to a classic minority, the *Sephardim*, who were largely not even seen as Jews by some Argentines. Both *Sephardim* and Polish Jews faced the challenge of insufficient communal recognition and were accused of separatism when they attempted to found their subethnic institutions.<sup>41</sup> *Sephardim* liked to imagine their roots in the Spain of the Golden Age, similar to the way some Polish Jews liked to dream about the glory of Jewish Poland. My study suggests the usefulness of re-examining the status of Polish Jews in Argentina by pointing to the ruptures and wrinkles within the structure of a presumably

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race and ethnicity in Latin America, see Paulina Alberto and Eduardo Elena, *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* (London: Pluto Press, 2010); Luis Roniger and Mario Sznajder (eds), *Constructing Collective Identities and Shaping Public Spheres. Latin American Paths* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1998).

<sup>38</sup> Steven Vertovec, “Conceiving and Researching Transnationalism,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, no. 2 (1999): 447-462.

<sup>39</sup> Tsagarousianou, “Rethinking the Concept of Diaspora,” 52.

<sup>40</sup> Raanan Rein and Mollie Lewis, “Judíos, árabes, sefardíes, sionistas y argentinos: el caso del periódico *Israel*” in *Árabes y judíos en Iberoamérica. Similitudes, diferencias y tensiones*, ed. Raanan Rein (Sevilla: Tres Culturas, 2008), 83-115.

<sup>41</sup> *Sephardim* are Jews descending from medieval Spain who, after the expulsions in the 15th century, settled in North Africa, the Balkans and the Middle East. They constituted around 10-15% of Jewish immigration to Argentina. *Ashkenazim* are Jews originating from Central and Eastern Europe, whose vernacular language was usually Yiddish. For the a study of the *Sephardim* in Argentina, see Adriana M. Brodsky, *Sephardi, Jewish, Argentine: Community and National Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 1-4.

unified hegemonic Argentine Ashkenazi majority.

Recent trends in Latin American Jewish Studies criticize a “Jews only” focus and encourage research on Jews to be contextualized with other ethnic groups, while giving weight to the examination of “Argentine lives.”<sup>42</sup> While earlier scholars looked at Jewish Latin American Diasporas in a comparative perspective, or placed them next to Canadian, South African or European Jewish communities, preference is now given to the way Jews interacted within the multiethnic societies they lived in. A few years ago, Raanan Rein and Jeffrey Lesser proposed a new research agenda for Latin American studies, arguing that the study of Jewish experiences in Latin America should not be regarded as a study of an “exceptional case,” but rather as an opportunity to explore how ethnicity influenced Latin American societies in general. Analogous calls were also raised by scholars of Polish Jewry. Bartal and Ury criticized the assumption of a perennial, inherent divide and conflict between members of different ethnic groups in Eastern Europe, suggesting a reciprocal model that allows Jews to be simultaneously the agents and the receivers of influence.<sup>43</sup> In questioning Jewish exceptionalism, Lesser and Rein emphasized the need to embrace the heterogeneous voices of Latin American Jews and see them in relation to problems experienced by other migrant groups. They argued that the importance of the home countries and Israel for the immigrants and their descendants needs to be rethought and include multiple answers and opinions.<sup>44</sup> My study takes the call of Rein and Lesser somewhat further. Although I acknowledge similarities between the experiences of Jews and other immigrant groups, as well as an obvious need to examine the Argentine lives of the immigrants, I suggest an additional lens of diasporic linkages. In this way, I answer the call of Rein, who wrote that the increasing legitimization of transnational links should lead to broadened research that would include more pluralistic and diverse forms of Latin American Jewish experiences.<sup>45</sup> Looking at the process of emigration, the construction of “Argentina” in Jewish Poland and the way that Argentine Jews saw themselves within the framework of the Yiddishland allows me to examine how patterns of ethno-national and diasporic identities emerged, dovetailed and evolved. While I analyze how Jewish-Polish subethnicity in Argentina was formed in dialogue and along with *argentinidad*, I also look at how diasporic linkages complicated the relationship between immigrants and the host nation.

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<sup>42</sup> For references to these tendencies, see the historiographic section “Latin American Jewish studies” (pages 24-29) later in the introduction.

<sup>43</sup> Bartal and Ury, “Between Jews and Their Neighbours,” 4-6.

<sup>44</sup> Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein (eds.), *Rethinking Jewish-Latin Americans* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008).

<sup>45</sup> Raanan Rein, “Historiografía judeo-latinoamericana: desafíos y propuestas,” in *Marginados y consagrados. Nuevos estudios sobre la vida judía en Argentina*, ed. Emmanuel Kahan et al. (Buenos Aires: Lumière, 2011), 27-46.

## *Transnationalism*

Another key term relevant to my study is *transnationalism*. As in the case of diaspora and ethnicity, this notion is unclear and used in multiple contexts. Thomas Faist noted that both transnationalism and diaspora are “awkward dance partners” as the terminological overlap leads to the inflation of meanings and consequently makes an understanding of social realities impossible.<sup>46</sup> Both diaspora and transnationalism refer to cross-border phenomena engendered by voluntary or forced migration. Some theoreticians have argued that diaspora is in fact one of many transnational communities that transnationalism constructs.<sup>47</sup> Transnationalism is a relatively new term that gained in popularity since the 1990s. In 1992 Glick-Shiller, Basch and Szanton-Blanc coined a definition of transnationalism that they saw as “the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement.”<sup>48</sup> Later, the academic trio developed the term “transmigrants,” which they defined as “immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state.”<sup>49</sup> For its part, “transnationalism” is still less politicized than “diaspora,” which is often used by political actors to advance a national or nationalist agenda.<sup>50</sup> Transnationalism allows scholars to speak of hybrid or creolized identities, as it offers a way of being constrained from the unidirectional focus of emigration from one country to another.<sup>51</sup> I believe it is useful to analyze the notion of “transnational” in comparison with the term “international.” Whereas “international” has come to denote the relations between states, governments and other official bodies, “transnational” emphasizes people and groups who act across nations and share a common attribute of dispersal.<sup>52</sup> Although processes that transcend national borders are described as transnational,

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<sup>46</sup> Thomas Faist, “Diaspora and Transnationalism: What Kind of Dance Partners?” in *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*, ed. Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 9.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Faist, *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Östen Wahlbeck, “The Concept of Diaspora as an Analytical Tool in the Study of Refugee Communities,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28, no. 2 (2002): 221-238.

<sup>48</sup> Nina Glick Shiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton-Blanc, “Transnationalism: A New Analytic Framework for Understanding Migration,” in *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered (Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences 645)*, ed. Nina Glick Shiller et al. (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1998), 1-24.

<sup>49</sup> Nina Glick Shiller, Linda Basch, Cristina Szanton-Blanc, “From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (1995): 48-63.

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>51</sup> Joy Owen, “Transnationalism as a Process, Diaspora as Condition,” *Journal of Social Development in Africa* 30, no. 1 (2014): 42.

<sup>52</sup> Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Yitzhak Sternberg, “Introduction. Debating Transnationalism,” *Transnationalism: Diaspora and the Advent of a New (Dis)order* ed. Eliezer Ben Rafael et. al. (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009), 1.

transnationalism itself is constructed *vis-a-vis* or next to the national.<sup>53</sup> Transnationalism is a term related to people who belong to transnational entities, such as linguistic groups, religious communities, regional populations, nomadic people, etc., and usually comes as a result of migration and of retention of real or imagined relations with the homeland. Transnational ties are often anchored in a narrative of special ideological significance.<sup>54</sup> Transnationalism is used to describe migrants' durable ties across countries and, in a broader sense, also includes collective actors and networks.<sup>55</sup>

The concept of transnationalism is fruitful for my research on Jews migrating from Poland to Argentina. Although most studies of transnational phenomena refer to recent times of intensified globalization, sociologists of migration have long recognized that earlier migrants also maintained ties with their homeland. Scholars admitted that "old migrations" had patterns of transnational ties, but it was usually not at the center of their research.<sup>56</sup> The bulk of research on historical migrations has been focused on how migrants adapted themselves to their place of immigration, rather than on how they continued to look back on their place of origin.<sup>57</sup> My study applies the tools of transnational interpretation to historical phenomena from the beginning of the twentieth century and includes both geographic ends of the migration process. I perceive my study group as transmigrants, whose identities were multiple and generated from their simultaneous positioning in Poland and in Argentina. This follows the argument of Glick Shiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc that transmigrants "make decisions, feel concerns and develop identities within networks that connect them to two societies simultaneously."<sup>58</sup> And as noted by James Clifford, "Diaspora cultures [...] mediate, in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place."<sup>59</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s, the technological development did not allow transnational relationships as we might imagine them now, yet transmigrants had various ways to accommodate and resist the circumstances and ideologies they encountered on the transnational field. The continuous movement of people and ideas, as well as the cultural content transferred in print, were two major arenas that knit a patchwork

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<sup>53</sup> Mohammed A. Bamyeh, *Current Sociology* 41, no. 3 (1993). *Transnationalism*: 31.

<sup>54</sup> Ben-Rafael and Sternberg, "Debating Transnationalism," 1.

<sup>55</sup> Faist, "Diaspora and Transnationalism" 9.

<sup>56</sup> Robert Smith, "Diasporic Membership in Historical Perspective: Comparative Insights from Mexican and Italian Cases," *International Migration Review* 37, no. 3 (2003): 725; Ewa Morawska, "The New-Old Transmigrants, Their Transnational Lives and Ethnicization: A Comparison of 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> Century Situations," *European University Institute Working Papers EUI*, no. 99/2; Ava F. Kahn and Adam D. Mendelsohn, *Transnational Traditions. New Perspectives on American Jewish History* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2014); for a transnational perspective on Jewish-German history, see Tobias Brinkman, *Migration und Transnationalität* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2012).

<sup>57</sup> Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 13-15.

<sup>58</sup> Glick Shiller, Basch, Szanton-Blanc, "Transnationalism: A New Analytic Framework," 1-2.

<sup>59</sup> James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation*, 255.

of transnational connections between Argentina and Jewish Poland. These were “social fields that crossed the national boundaries.” To be sure, transnational relations influence and are influenced by the hegemonic structure of nation-states and by national movements that foster ideologies of identity.<sup>60</sup> It is also clear that transnationalism does not hinder integration, but results rather in a “complex amalgam of structures that combine elements of transnationalism and assimilation.”<sup>61</sup> Migrating Polish Jews were impacted both by Argentine nationalism and local discussions about the place of immigrants in the nation, as well as by Jewish national movements (both Zionist and Diaspora Nationalist). At the same time, the involvement of migrating Polish Jews in cross-border debates on Jewish ethnicity and nationhood posed a challenge to the influence of the Argentine national project.

## **Yiddishland and Transnational Jewish Ethnicities**

“Yiddishism” and “Yiddishland” are the key concepts that serve in my analysis of Jewish experiences in-between Poland and Argentina. My dissertation engages in a discussion about language ideologies – ideas about the interplay of language, ethnicity and nation – and explores the meaning of language for hyphenated immigrant Jewish identities. Yiddishism was a cultural-linguistic form of Jewish nationalism and a bearer of a cultural identity. The term was used during the 1908 Czernowitz language conference and was popularized in essay writing by Hersh Dovid Nomberg and Der Tunkeler.<sup>62</sup> Some saw it in a more radical light, as the Yiddish writer Dovid Bergelson, who defined Yiddishism as a “belief that all forms of Jewish cultural life should give way to a new monolingual, secular Yiddish culture.”<sup>63</sup> Yiddish was one of the most successful “power for language” movements ever. It was a cultural movement that sought recognition across borders and helped Jews mark their diasporic ethno-national identity. In this way, Yiddishism corresponded with non-Zionist alternatives such as Territorialism and Diaspora Nationalism. As Kenneth B. Moss wrote, the institution of a full-fledged, separate Jewish version of the institution of culture was something peculiar to East European modernity. It did not have an analog in Western Europe, where emancipation and integration were bound up with the dissolution of Jewish identities

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<sup>60</sup> Ibidem, 14-16.

<sup>61</sup> Christian Joppke and Ewa Morawska, “Integrating Immigrants in Liberal Nation States: Policies and Practices,” in *Toward Assimilation and Citizenship*, ed. Christian Joppke and Ewa Morawska (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), 3.

<sup>62</sup> Yehiel Scheintuch, “Veidat tshernovitz ve-tarbut yidish,” *Huliot* 6 (2000): 260-261.

<sup>63</sup> Kenneth B. Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 6. For a historical study of the Yiddishist movement, see Emanuel S. Goldsmith, *Modern Yiddish Culture: The Story of the Yiddish Language Movement* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000). See also Moss’s other contribution in the subject: “Yiddishist Myths, and the Myth Yiddish Studies Can’t Live Without,” *In geveb* (December 2015) [accessed January 3, 2017].

(except of religious ones), nor in the Americas were the concept of secular citizenship had included Jews into the nation.<sup>64</sup> In Eastern Europe, the productive potential of a separate Jewish language, the ethno-politics of Polish and Ukrainian neighbors and earlier tsarist repression functioned as an axis of individual and collective Jewish identities. By claiming selfhood and Yiddish-centered Jewish culture, Eastern European Jews sought a modernity of their own making.<sup>65</sup>

Various Jewish political movements, like Bundism and Labour Zionism, relied heavily on the power of Yiddish as a factor defining linguistic, ethnic and national identity.<sup>66</sup> Yiddishism was envisioned by the Jewish intelligentsia, but their project included bringing the new Jewish culture to the masses. One of its first theoreticians was Chaim Zhitlowsky, who imagined the Yiddish language as a site (whether actual or virtual) of Jewish sovereignty and cultural autonomy, if not nationhood.<sup>67</sup> For advocates of Yiddish, the ideal of *kultur-arbayt*, or cultural work, became a slogan for popular efforts and was transformed into an agenda with a clear programmatic and pragmatic dimension. Despite and in light of growing acculturation in Poland and elsewhere in the world, in the 1920s and 1930s, more and more Yiddishist activists engaged in debates about transnational Yiddishland encompassing Eastern European Jewish communities scattered around the world. Yiddishism was to a great extent a response to non-Jewish national movements gaining in strength among the nations that lived together with the Jews, chiefly the Poles. As Dovid Katz noted, through Yiddishism Eastern European Jews acquired an advanced language of culture that empowered them and placed them on the same level as their neighbors.<sup>68</sup> While traditional Jewish life was eroding, Yiddishism and Yiddishland diasporism proposed an interesting alternative. It gave Jews a sense of possessing a virtual cultural homeland, national language, national literature and national goals. Following the 1909 conference on Yiddish in Czernowitz, Yiddish came to be

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<sup>64</sup> The situation in Poland was very different. Many politicians refused to grant Jews the right to feel Polish or to see themselves as Polish citizens. This was clearly visible by in the early 1920s when making difficulties in recognizing the citizenship of around 600,000 Jews, many of them refugees from Russia. The issue re-appeared again in 1938 concerning when it came to the Jews from Polish lands, who were expelled by Nazi Germany. See Jerzy Tomaszewski, "The Civil Rights of Jews 1918-1939," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry. Volume 8: Jews in Independent Poland 1918-1939*, Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1994, 115-128.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, 10-16.

<sup>66</sup> See Gertrud Pickhan, *Gegen den Strom: der Allgemeine Jüdische Arbeiterbund "Bund" in Polen 1918-1939* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2001); Jack Jacobs (ed.), *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Bund at 100* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001). Support for Bundism rose significantly in the late 1930s, especially in the big cities. In the 1938/1939 municipal elections, the Bund won 17 out of 20 seats held by Jewish parties in Warsaw, and in Łódź 11 out of 17. In January 1939, there were almost 37,000 Bund members in Warsaw, which made up a majority of the organized Jewish workforce and basically every 10th Jew in the city. See Bernard Wasserstein, *On the Eve: The Jews of Europe Before the Second World War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 411.

<sup>67</sup> Jeffrey Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland: Postvernacular Language and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 36-37.

<sup>68</sup> Dovid Katz, *Yiddish and Power* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 272-273.

seen as political gunpowder.<sup>69</sup>

Yiddishism grew strong roots in Argentina and the transnationalism and diasporism of the movement influenced the way immigrants in Argentina shaped their identities. The Yiddishland framework allowed Argentine Jews to be in permanent cultural, political and social exchange with Jews in Poland, USA and other countries. As a language that the majority of Jews spoke, Yiddish was a *lingua franca* that permitted communication and the transfer of cultural contents and ideas across borders. Despite being initially perceived as peripheral from the Eastern European perspective, few Argentine Jews were quick to embark on the ship of the Yiddishist agenda. This came as a result of a relatively late Jewish immigration to Argentina and its social composition. Those Polish Jews who settled in Argentina in the 1920s and 1930s grew up on the highly politicized “Jewish street” of Poland. Some arrived after journalistic and partisan experiences with Bundism, Labor Zionism or communism. For this generation, it was obvious that Jews needed a Yiddish press to voice their interests, Jewish progressive schooling to educate the younger generations and that the task of the Yiddish press and literature was to raise ethno-national awareness. Yiddishist discourse relied on literary, pedagogical and journalistic forms in which Yiddish was deployed as a national language. As Jewish realities changed, Yiddishists believed that ethnicity could be preserved by linguistic self-reflexivity.<sup>70</sup>

Another term often used in discussions on Yiddishism and diasporic Jewish identities is “yidishkayt.” I understand yidishkayt as an identitarian core around which the Eastern European project for a progressive version of Jewishness was envisioned to be built. The term encapsulates both Yiddishness and Jewishness and sees the Yiddish language and Yiddish cultural production as pillars of Jewish identity. Yidishkayt served as a basis for an identitarian project of reshaping Ashkenazi Jews, both in Eastern Europe and in new diasporas, into an ethno-national group with its own culture, politics, education system, etc.<sup>71</sup> Yidishkayt-centered cultural and national efforts were a secular endeavor, run mostly by progressive cultural-nationalists, who criticized traditional Orthodoxy and were far removed from notions of tradition and religion. Although the imagined secular-progressive yidishkayt was not equivalent to Yiddishism (which focused on the advancement of Yiddish as a language of high and popular culture and scholarship), both terms shared the high importance

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<sup>69</sup> Tatjana Soldat-Jaffe, *Twenty-first Century Yiddishism* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2012), 14.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*, 39.

<sup>71</sup> For a comparison to my approach, see Irving Howe's definition of *yidishkayt* in *The World of Our Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 16. Howe sees *yidishkayt* as Jewish-shared experiences and a way of life in the 19th and 20th<sup>th</sup> centuries, when Yiddish prevailed as a language of the Jews in Eastern Europe and was the source of Jewish a culture in this language. He emphasized its rootedness in Judaism even when it adopted a secularist character.



given to language and its link with nationality. Whereas Zionism came to be understood as “the” Jewish national movement, the efforts of proponents of secular yidishkayt and Yiddishism were also balanced on the same national platform as the Zionists. Importantly, some of the early Zionist leaders, like Nathan Birnbaum, saw Yiddish as the language of the Jewish nation and of the Zionist movement.<sup>72</sup>

Following World War I the Yiddishists engaged in a debate over the future of the “homeland” of Yiddish culture. Congress Poland and the Pale of Settlement were now divided between new nation-states and the revolutionary Soviet Russia. Debates about the future of Yiddish culture developed in this context. The Yiddish press in interwar Poland and elsewhere across the globe popularized the concept of Yiddishland, a linguistic embodiment of the Eastern European diaspora. The Yiddishland was imagined not only as the historic home of the Yiddish language, but also included territories, or colonies, in the Americas, South Africa and Palestine.<sup>73</sup> The Yiddishism was never a Jewish-Polish project. Yiddishists always approached Yiddish culture with its multiple centers in Poland, Lithuania, Soviet Russia, Romania, the USA. Some intellectuals, like Shmuel Niger, engaged in discussions about the centers or capitals of the Yiddishland. For some years Berlin was a key center of Yiddishism and Yiddish publishing, whereas the likes of Dovid Bergelson, Der Nister, Perets Markish or Leyb Kvitko argued that only in progressive Soviet Russia with Kiev and Moscow, did Yiddish culture have the possibility of autonomous development. Some saw Vilna as the most “Yiddish city” with YIVO (Yiddish Scientific Institute), a continuous Jewish presence since the sixteenth century and a special status of not being simply Polish, Lithuanian or Russian (for others, its contested status was a problem). Warsaw, in the eyes of many Vilna-centered intellectuals, like Max Weinreich, was too Polish, endangering the Yiddishist ethno-cultural enterprise with the lure of acculturation, too worldly and cosmopolitan and too focused on political struggle. Yet it was Warsaw that was home to the biggest Jewish population in Europe (including many immigrant litvaks) and which contained the Yiddish literary tradition of Yitskhok Leybush Peretz and younger Yiddish modernists. As Kalman Weiser concluded, the popular contest for the center of Yiddishland drew up a cognitive map of Yiddishland with Poland as its leading constituent.<sup>74</sup>

To be sure, Yiddish and Yiddishism in the Argentine setting should not be perceived as harkening back to a primordial language and culture. Although, as in the case of other ethnic groups, the immigrant generation of Jews preferred consuming cultural goods in

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<sup>72</sup> See Joshua A. Fishman, *Ideology, Society, Language: The Odyssey of Nathan Birnbaum* (Ann Arbor: Karoma, 1989).

<sup>73</sup> Kalman (Keith) Weiser, “The Capital of the ‘Yiddishland’?” in *Warsaw: The Jewish Metropolis*, 298-322.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem*.

Yiddish, the discourse about progressive *yidishkayt* was a future-oriented, ethnicity-stimulating project. This is how it was seen by the travel writers Peretz Hirschbein and Hersh Dovid Nomberg. Their exploration visits in Argentina in a way “normalized” the country and symbolically recognized this Latin American republic as a new branch of the Yiddishland. Argentina, which came to represent “the second best emigration option,” allows us to better understand the complex relations within the Yiddishland and the nexus between the diasporic and the national. Argentina did not carry the same weight as the United States and was less important, sometimes even ridiculed and marginalized in Jewish Poland. The peripherality of Jewish Argentina resulted in attempts by Argentine Jews to claim the right to participate in transnational diasporic networks. The struggle for ethnic Jewish-Argentine prestige and reputation was carried out on both internal and international fronts. Jews, as other ethnic communities, wanted to be seen as an economically strong and ethnically proud community. In order to do this, they built ethnic institutions in Argentina and engaged in fundraising and help initiatives in the Old Country. The transnational engagement in Europe was marked as Argentine help and regarded as *in statu nascendi* Jewish-Argentineness. The same was true for representing Argentina on the global Jewish arena, for instance at the *Yidisher Kultur-Kongres* in Paris in 1937.

By demanding admission to and recognition within the Yiddishland diaspora, Argentina's Jews built on their growing sense of belonging to Argentina. Whereas *argentinidad* was clearly pronounced among acculturated second-generation Jewish-Argentines, also the Yiddish-speaking *argentine yidn* developed a stark sense of belonging to their adopted country. The position of a migrant generation in Argentine was not as firm as that of its children. Consequently, they constantly balanced between Spanish and Yiddish, between the demands and limitations of diasporism and nationalism. When discussing Argentina's belonging to Yiddishland, local Yiddishist Pinie Katz wrote that it was precisely the liberal laws of Argentina that allowed Yiddish culture to flourish. Katz believed in the complementarity of being Jewish and Argentine and, as a communist, he stressed the shared goals of the Argentine and Jewish struggle for a better and more just world.<sup>75</sup> In his 1940 essay, Katz gave voice to Jewish rootedness in Argentina, which he defined as a Jewish home. At the same time, he described Jews as a nation and Argentine Jews as part of a diasporic Jewish nation.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Pinie Katz, “Di yidish-argentine yugent un ir kultur,” in *Geklibene shriftn*, vol. IV (Buenos Aires: Gezelshaftlekhen komitet baym farlag “IKUF,” 1946), 23. First presented at the Congress of Jewish Youth in Argentina in Rosario, February 24, 1940.

<sup>76</sup> Pinie Katz, “Argentine yidn,” in *ibidem*, 11-13. First printed in a journal of the Jewish Youth Federation in Argentina.

## Jewish Emigration from Eastern Europe to Argentina

Between 1870 and 1930, 4 million immigrants arrived in Argentina, totally changing a country of only 1.81 million inhabitants in 1870. In 1930, Argentina's population reached 11.9 million.<sup>77</sup> Eastern European Jewish immigrants began arriving in Argentina since the 1880s largely thanks to the resettlement project sponsored by Baron Maurice de Hirsch. Inspired by the ideas of Jewish productivization and redemption by manual work, Hirsch's enterprise brought around 10,000 Jewish colonists to Argentina. For Argentina's part, the colonization was part of a wider concept of attracting European migrants and "whitening" Argentina, and was embedded in the assimilationist project that was supposed to make immigrants part of Argentine nation. The agricultural settlement in Argentina sponsored by Baron Maurice de Hirsch became a cornerstone of Jewish Argentina, even though the urban population quickly outnumbered those living in the colonies. In 1925 a mere 12.9% of the Jewish population inhabited the agricultural settlements.<sup>78</sup>

Immigration brought about a dramatic social reconstitution of Argentine society. Between 1820 and 1932, Argentina was the second receiving country after the United States and took in 6.5 million people (11.6% of the total number of migrants).<sup>79</sup> In 1914 around half of Buenos Aires residents were foreign-born and 34% in the surrounding province.<sup>80</sup> The population kept growing, doubling in the interwar years from around 8 million in 1914 to 14 million in 1939.<sup>81</sup> Throughout the entire period between 1870-1930, immigration was responsible for around 30% of population growth.<sup>82</sup> Argentina was home to more than 130,000 Jews in 1920, whereas around 1930 the community already numbered 280,000.<sup>83</sup> The famous Jewish sociologist Jacob Shatzky estimated that around 210,000 Jews permanently settled in the country between 1901 and 1945.<sup>84</sup> Jewish immigration kept growing and Jews

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<sup>77</sup> Zulma Recchini de Lattes and Alfredo E. Lattes (eds.), *La población de Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones C.I.C.R.E.D., 1974), 30-33.

<sup>78</sup> Haim Avni and Sibila Seibert, "La agricultura judía en Argentina ¿éxito o fracaso?" *Desarrollo Economico* 22, no. 88 (1983): 537. In 1935, it was 11%, compared to 22% in 1920. See Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina*, 70.

<sup>79</sup> José Moya, "Spanish Emigration to Cuba and Argentina" in *Mass Migration to Modern Latin America* ed. Samuel L. Baily, Eduardo José Míguez (Wilmington, DE: Jaguar Books, 2003), 14.

<sup>80</sup> Avni, *Migraciones judías*, 194

<sup>81</sup> Vicente Vazquez-Presedo, *Estadísticas históricas argentinas II (Comparadas). Segunda Parte 1914-1939* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Macchi, 1976), 29.

<sup>82</sup> In three five-year cycles, immigration contributed to around 50% of the population growth: 1895-1900, 1905-1910, 1910-1915. In the 1920s, it was respectively 34.6% in 1920-1925 and 31.2% in 1925-1930. Recchini de Lattes and Lattes, *La población de Argentina*, 33.

<sup>83</sup> Ricardo Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ameghino, 1999), 141.

<sup>84</sup> Jacob Shatzky, *Comunidades judías en Latinoamérica* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del American Jewish Committee, 1952), 10. Another Jewish demographer, Jakob Lestschinsky, estimated that between 1840 and 1947 225,000 Jews immigrated to Argentina, Jakob Lestschinsky, *Di lage fun yidn in latayn-amerikaner lender* (New York: World Jewish Congress, 1948), 3-4.

reached a status of the third largest immigrant community after Spaniards and Italians.<sup>85</sup> Following the closure of immigration opportunities to the USA in 1924, the total Jewish immigration to Latin America was equal to 43% of all Jewish immigration in the immediately following period (1926-1930).<sup>86</sup> The precise statistics for countries of origin regarding Jews are mostly unavailable in Argentina prior to 1918. Immigrants were segregated according to nationality, but many of those who emigrated from the Russian and Austrian empires, and were labeled as Russians and Austrians, were in fact Jews originating from Polish lands. Yet some available hints suggest a preponderance of Polish Jews in patterns of emigration from Russia. The Jewish-Polish sociologist, Arie Tartakower, estimated that 2/3 of all emigrants leaving Russian Poland before 1914 were Jews.<sup>87</sup> N. Reif believed that 44% of Jews emigrating from Russia to the USA were coming from Polish lands, while a similar share could probably be attributed to immigration to Argentina.<sup>88</sup> This high proportion was obviously related to the geographical concentration of Jews in the western part of the Pale of Settlement that encompassed Polish lands.

**Table 1. Immigration to Argentina, 1915-1939**

<i>Years</i>	<i>Italians</i>	<i>Spaniards</i>	<i>Poles</i>	<i>Germans</i>	<i>Russians</i>
1915-1920	73,071	147,840	685	9,087	3,064
1921-1930	534,794	399,473	128,452	60,130	11,597
1931-1935	64,193	63,963	18,724	13,650	2,832
1936	6,426	9,453	7,631	2,981	1,869
1937	10,926	5,150	13,828	2,857	122
1938	17,976	13,170	14,356	10,179	1,863
1939	14,372	14,446	4,216	8,744	1,903
<b>Total</b>	<b>721,758</b>	<b>652,495</b>	<b>187,892</b>	<b>107,658</b>	<b>23,520</b>

Table 1. Registered immigration to Argentina according to citizenship (based on Vicente Vazquez-Preledo, *Estadísticas históricas argentinas II (Comparadas). Segunda Parte 1914-1939* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Macchi, 1976)). Data from *Dirección Nacional de Migraciones*.

Statistics become more clear in the post-World War I period. Altogether, between 1920 and 1937, 1,820,000 people left Poland, including 395,000 Jews (22%).<sup>89</sup> Poland was one of

<sup>85</sup> Vazquez-Preledo, *Estadísticas históricas argentinas II*, 31.

<sup>86</sup> Lestschinsky, *Di lage fun yidn in latayn-amerikaner lender*, 3.

<sup>87</sup> Arie Tartakower, *Emigracja żydowska z Polski* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Narodowościowych, 1939), 11.

<sup>88</sup> N. Reif, "Rozwój emigracji żydowskiej z Polski." Referat na posiedzeniu Komitetu Emigracyjnego, 20.5.1936, quoted in Stanisław Pawłowski, *O emigracji żydów z Polski i ich kolonizacji* (Warsaw: Liga Morska i Kolonialna, 1937), 15.

<sup>89</sup> Jakob Lestschinsky, *National Groups in Polish Emigration* (New York: Conference on Jewish Relations, 1943), 109. Reprinted from *Jewish Social Studies* V, no. 2.

the most important sending countries to Argentina in the late 1920s and through 1930s. In the decade of 1920, Poland was often the third sending country after Spain and Italy, and altogether represented 13% of immigration to Argentina.<sup>90</sup> On average, Jews formed around 35% of Polish immigration to Argentina in interwar period, but in a number of years (1923, 1924, 1933, 1934) it was more than 70%. Apart from Jews, numerous Christian Polish citizens (including many Ukrainian and Belorussian peasants) relocated to Argentina.<sup>91</sup> In terms of the total number of Jewish emigrants, in the interwar years Argentina was the third receiving country after the USA and Palestine: between 1919-1939, it received 110,000 Eastern European Jews.<sup>92</sup> The Jews who immigrated to Latin America were to a great extent Polish and in the 1920s they represented around 55% of all Jews settling in Argentina.<sup>93</sup> As estimated by Victor A. Mirelman (who based himself on data from migration organizations *HIAS* and *EMIGDIRECT*), during the years of the highest Jewish-Polish immigration to Argentina (1924-1930), the Jews of Poland formed around 70% of all Jewish immigration to Argentina.<sup>94</sup>

**Table 2. Jewish Emigration from Poland to Argentina, 1919-1938**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of Jewish immigrants to Argentina</i>	<i>Percent (%) of Jews in overall emigration from Poland to Argentina</i>
1919-1922	2553	31
1923	7455	75
1924	4871	73.4
1925	4810	54.5
1926	4750	32.9
1927	4113	20.4
1928	4808	21.8
1929	3842	18.2
1930	4882	35.4
1931	2476	55.9
1932	1335	64.9

<sup>90</sup> Emigracja polska w Argentynie, sprawozdanie za rok 1931, AAN MSZ 9618-B26028, 2-27, following the data of Dirección General de Migraciones.

<sup>91</sup> See the recent study by Katarzyna Porada, *Procesos de formación de la identidad étnica de un grupo de origen migratorio: los descendientes de polacos en Buenos Aires y Misiones* (Madrid: Ediciones Polifermo, 2016).

<sup>92</sup> Arie Tartakower, *In Search of Home Freedom* (London: World Jewish Congress, 1958), 44.

<sup>93</sup> Marta Kowalska, "La emigración judía de Polonia a la Argentina en los años 1918-1939," *Estudios Latinoamericanos* 12 (1989): 258-259.

<sup>94</sup> Mirelman, *En búsqueda*, 14.

1933	1313	76.2
1934	1472	71.6
1935	2022	55.9
1936	2750	46.4
1937	2433	28.7
1938	2175	28.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>55,627</b>	<b>35.2</b>

Table 2. Jewish emigration from Poland to Argentina, 1919-1939 (based on Marta Kowalska, “La emigración judía de Polonia a la Argentina en los años 1918-1939,” *Estudios Latinoamericanos*, vol. 12 (1989), 259).

My study focuses specifically on the experience of Polish Jews. Although some would justifiably argue that it was not only Polish Jews who left Europe (thousands also left contemporary Lithuania, Ukraine, Romania, Hungary and Germany), I believe it is worth thinking about Polish Jews in particular, while not forgetting the larger Eastern European and Argentine context.<sup>95</sup> The re-emergence of an independent Poland influenced the way Polish Jews perceived themselves and were perceived by others. I argue that for migrating Jews their subethnic identity was of key importance and was created vis-a-vis Jews from other regions. This was also true back in Eastern Europe, but in the Americas these subethnic identities needed “to be remapped on a transnational terrain.”<sup>96</sup> In its 1918-1939 borders, Poland was home to more than three millions Jews and to great extent was the epicenter of Jewish life on the continent. It held the highest share of Jewish citizens in the world (roughly 10% of the overall population) and despite growing anti-Semitism, it radiated politically, socially and culturally on smaller and younger diasporas, including Argentina.

As Scott Ury aptly noted, it is hard to give a clear description of who was/is a Polish Jew.<sup>97</sup> Those Jews who lived in interwar Poland were a complex amalgam of identities and cultural choices. For the purpose of my study, I understand as Polish Jews those who were born on territories that were included in the Second Polish Republic after 1918. Most of them were religious Yiddish-speakers, but *Haskalah*, acculturation, Jewish nationalisms and proletarian struggles were redefining individual and collective identities. In Galicia, Polonization made profound advances already before the Great War and in 1921 around 42% of Jews declared their nationality as Polish, which did contradict the fact that many were

<sup>95</sup> Compare Jeffrey Lesser’s study on post-1918 Jewish-Polish immigration to Brazil. Jeffrey Lesser, “The Immigration and Integration of Polish Jews in Brazil, 1924-1934,” *The Americas* 51, no. 2 (1994): 173-191.

<sup>96</sup> Rebecca Kobrin, “Conflicting Diasporas, Shifting Centers,” 5-6.

<sup>97</sup> Scott Ury, “Who, What, When, Where, and Why Is Polish Jewry? Envisioning, Constructing, and Possessing Polish Jewry,” *Jewish Social Studies* 6, no. 3 (2000): 205-228.

*hasidim* and later turned to Zionism. In the former Kingdom of Poland, the Polonization of the elite was outweighed by the Yiddish-speaking *hasidic* orthodoxy. In the multinational *Kresy* in northeastern Poland, the Jewish elite was to a great extent acculturated in Russian culture, but following the *Haskalah* later became involved in Jewish national and political life. The popular masses were to a great extent Orthodox and in time became a reservoir of souls enlisted for Jewish socialist and national politics.<sup>98</sup> The interwar years to some extent defined these diverse groups as Polish Jews, but their different individual trajectories and experiences were still poignant. Importantly, as Kenneth Moss noted, interwar Poland experienced a process of acculturation without assimilation.<sup>99</sup> Whereas Polish nationalism often excluded Jews from the national community, Polishness as a cultural territory did not have very strict entrance criteria. At the same time, in the 1930s Zionism ceased to be limited to Zionist partisan circles, but a larger section of acculturated or Orthodox Jews turned to so-called “palestinism,” which applauded Jewish settlement and society-building in the Land of Israel.<sup>100</sup>

Obviously, those Jews who migrated to Argentina as adults shortly after World War I were born as citizens of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Prussian empires, and were to a diverse degree influenced by contact with the surrounding Polishness and Poles. Some of those who in Argentina identified as Polish Jews had never lived in independent Poland, and those who left in the 1920s or 1930s experienced it only briefly. I argue in this dissertation that it was their experience of emigration to Argentina that defined them as diasporic Polish Jews. The Jews from Poland (or from what came to be defined as Poland in 1918) were transformed into Polish Jews. By settling in Argentina the immigrants needed to conceptualize their (sub)ethnic identities. Although many Jews still saw themselves as *litvaks* or Russians or *galitsianers*, the independence of Poland and there-centered Zionism and Yiddishist nationalism demanded that they conceptualize their self-identifications according to the new political entity. This was both true in Eastern Europe, as well as for immigrants in Argentina. Further, the process of becoming Argentine and forming Jewish-Argentine identities demanded a redefinition of their relation to the place of origin and subethnic identifications. Even those Jewish immigrants who might not have defined themselves as Polish before World War I, in post-1918 Argentina began to imagine Jewish Poland (not

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<sup>98</sup> Ezra Mendelsohn, *Żydzi Europy środkowo-wschodniej w okresie międzywojennym* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1992), 31-57.

<sup>99</sup> Moss, “Negotiating Jewish Nationalism in Interwar Warsaw,” 407. See also Celia Stopnicka-Heller, “Poles of Jewish Background – the Case of Assimilation without Integration in Interwar Poland,” in *Studies on Polish Jewry 1919-1939* ed. Joshua A. Fishman (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1974), 266-270.

<sup>100</sup> Moss, “Negotiating Jewish Nationalism in Interwar Warsaw,” 432-434.

Russia or Austro-Hungary) as an embodiment of the Jewish homeland, where Yiddish ethn-national life unfolded.

**Table 3. Jewish Immigration to the Principal Immigration Countries, 1921-1939**

Years	USA		Canada		Argentina		Brazil		Palestine	
1921-1925	65.6 %	280,283	3.4. %	14,400	9.3 %	39,713	1.7%	7,139	14.0 %	60,765
1926-1930	31.7%	54,998	8.9 %	15,300	19.5 %	33,721	12.9 %	22,296	5.9 %	10,179
1931-1935	7.6%	17,986	1.8 %	4,200	5.4 %	12,700	5.5 %	13,075	61.7 %	147,502
1936-1939	29.7 %	79,819	0.3 %	900	5.4 %	14,789	3.9 %	10,600	28.1 %	75,510
<b>Total</b>	<b>42.8 %</b>	<b>433,086</b>	<b>3.1 %</b>	<b>34,800</b>	<b>9.0 %</b>	<b>100,323</b>	<b>5.2 %</b>	<b>53,100</b>	<b>26.5 %</b>	<b>293,956</b>

Table 3. Jewish Immigration to the Principal Immigration Countries, 1921-1939. Relative numbers show each country's respective share in world Jewish migration in the given period (absolute numbers of migrants in brackets). Source: Jakob Lestschinsky, "Jewish Migrations, 1840-1946," in *The Jews: Their History, Culture, and Religion*, ed. Louis Finkelstein, vol. II (New York: Harper Brothers, 1955), 1216-1217. The table excludes other countries, which explains why the percentages do not equal 100%.

## Latin American Jewish Studies

Latin American Jewish Studies belong to the relatively new subfields of Jewish Studies. They started to develop only at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, when the first monographs were published and when the Latin American Jewish Studies Association (LAJSA) was established.<sup>101</sup> Earlier, a generation of Latin American Jewish ethnic activists had laid the foundations for "community scholarship." In Argentina, Pinie Katz, Lazaro Zhitnitsky and Yankev Botoshansky, among others, were active in "on the spot" documentation of Argentinian Jewish life.<sup>102</sup> However, the relevance and importance of their detailed works is somewhat questionable due to their emotional, personal involvement and at times visible lack of scientific distance. When discussing the earliest attempts at developing Latin American Jewish Studies, especially concerning the history of Eastern European Jewry, it is worth mentioning *Argentiner IWO Shriftn*, a Yiddish-language periodical published by

<sup>101</sup> Haim Avni, *Argentina y la historia de la inmigración judía* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, AMIA, 1983); Eugene F. Sofer, *From Pale to Pampa: Eastern European Jewish Social Mobility in Gran Buenos Aires, 1890-1945* (New York: Homes & Meier, 1982); Leonardo Senkman, *La colonización judía. Gente y sociedad* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1984); Leonardo Senkman, *El periodismo judéo-argentino* (Buenos Aires: Centro J.N. Bialik, 1984); Laikin Elkin, *Jews of the Latin American Republics*.

<sup>102</sup> Pinie Katz, *Tsu der geshikhte fun der yidisher zhurnalistik in argentine* (Buenos Aires, 1929); Lazaro Zhitnitsky, "Di landsmanschaftn in argentine," *Argentiner IWO Shriftn* 3 (1945): 155-161; Lazaro Zhitnitsky, "Yidn in buenos aires loyt der munitsipaler tsaylung fun 1936," *Argentiner IWO Shriftn* 3 (1945): 5-22; Mordechai Alpersohn, *Draysig yor in argentine. Memuarn fun a yidishn kolonist*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Jüdischer Literarischer Verlag, 1923); Mordechai Alpersohn, *Draysig yor in argentine. Memuarn fun a yidishn kolonist*, vol. 2 (Buenos Aires: Asilo Israelita Argentino, 1926); Mordechai Alpersohn, *Draysig yor in argentine. Memuarn fun a yidishn kolonist*, vol. 3 (Buenos Aires: Asilo Israelita Argentino, 1928).



the Buenos Aires-based Jewish Scientific Institute (IWO, established in 1928), which functioned as a space for sociological and historical discussion on Latin American Jewry in a period when Jewish experiences in that part of the world were conspicuously absent in European or North American scholarly debates. As the Argentine Jewish community grew bigger, it earned more scholarly attention from European and North American scientists. For instance, in 1952 sociologist Jacob Shatzky studied communities across Latin America.<sup>103</sup> More recent advancements and developments led to the institutionalization of Latin American Jewish Studies as an important component of contemporary Jewish Studies. However, Latin American Jewish Studies scholars are still struggling with the Euro-North-American-centrism that prevents the “normalization” of Latin American Jewish Studies as a subfield of Jewish history.<sup>104</sup>

Early classic studies usually focused on immigration history, demography or anti-Semitism.<sup>105</sup> Scholars also investigated several economic and social aspects of Argentinian Jewry and stressed the importance of the Jewish agricultural settlements in the Argentine interior.<sup>106</sup> Their focus on institutional history created a slanted perspective and reflected a historiography in a way that Jewish institutions saw Jewish Argentines, rather than the way they saw themselves.<sup>107</sup> As the majority of Argentine Jews was not affiliated with Jewish institutions, a research focus on the Jewish Colonization Association (and mythologized colonization itself) or the AMIA (*Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina*, the *kehilla* of Buenos Aires), distorts the historiography and overshadows the experience of Jews in Argentina. Later, the research preference shifted to examining experiences of Jewish Argentines in urban centers, mostly in the federal capital. Simultaneously, scholars decided to rethink well-established opinions and phenomena related to the agricultural settlements in Argentinian interior and reinterpret it with new tools and approaches.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Jacob Shatzky, *Yidishe yishevim in latayn-amerike* (Buenos Aires: American Jewish Committee, 1952).

<sup>104</sup> Raanan Rein, “Jewish Latin American Historiography: The Challenges Ahead,” in *Returning to Babel. Jewish Latin American Experiences, Representations, and Identity*, ed. Amalia Ran and Jean Axelrad Cahan (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012), 20.

<sup>105</sup> Lewin, *Cómo fué la inmigración judía*; Avni, *Argentina y la historia*.

<sup>106</sup> José Itzikson, Haim Avni, Matan Lerner, *Gishot ba-milhama ba-hitbolelut ba-amerika ha-latinit be-yameynu* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1979); Sergio Della Pergola, “Demographic Trends of Latin American Jewry,” in *The Jewish Presence in Latin America* ed. Judith Laikin Elkin, Gilbert W. Merkx (Winchester, MA: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 85–133; Robert M. Levine, “Adaptive Strategies of Jews in Latin America,” in *ibidem*, 71–84; David Schers and Hadassa Singer, “The Jewish Communities of Latin America: External and Internal Factors in Their Development,” *Jewish Social Studies* 39, no. 3 (1977): 241–258.

<sup>107</sup> Ariel Svarch, “Four Jews, Five Identities: Representation, Popular Culture, and Language Politics in the Making of Jewish-Argentines (Buenos Aires, 1930–1945)” (PhD diss., Emory University, 2016), 30–31.

<sup>108</sup> Marcelo Dimenstein, “En busca de un pogrom perdido: memoria en torno de la Semana Trágica de 1919 (1919–1999),” in Kahan et. al. *Marginados y consagrados*, ed. Kahan et. al., 121–142; Judith Noemi Freidenberg, *The Invention of the Jewish Gaucho* (Austin, TX: Austin University Press, 2009); Mollie Lewis Nouwen, *Oy, My Buenos Aires: Jewish Immigrants and the Creation of Argentine National Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013).

Following calls for novel approaches in Latin American Jewish Studies, researchers began to explore earlier overlooked aspects of Latin American Jewish history. For instance, minority discourses, such as female and Sephardi voices, are becoming more and more visible in the scholarship. As far as the gender aspect of Latin American studies is concerned, the feminine voices are heard mostly in literary studies. For instance, Marjorie Agosín, a novelist herself, focused on the feminine Jewish experience in Latin American Jewish literature.<sup>109</sup> Important socio-historical studies that incorporated gender aspects of Jewish experiences in Argentina were published by Sandra McGee Deutsch, while works of Donna Guy's and Mir Yarfitz's helped to re-read the well-known problem of Jewish prostitution in Argentina.<sup>110</sup> Thanks to the works of Adriana Brodsky and Margalit Bejarano, marginalized social histories of non-Ashkenazi Jewish Argentinians found their way into the historiography.<sup>111</sup> Similarly, other specific ethnic or social groups within Latin American Jewry are attracting scholarly interest.<sup>112</sup>

An important research shift in recent years is the increased focus on the daily lives of Jewish Argentinians, including especially those unaffiliated with Jewish institutions. A recent book by Molly Lewis Nouwen covers this topic well.<sup>113</sup> Describing the lives of ordinary people, she manages to show the plurality of the Jewish experience in early twentieth century Buenos Aires: the lives of Jewish women, Yiddishists, Zionists, middle-class Jews and peddlers. Her research embraced areas that were previously overlooked by scholars: foodways, leisure, crime or generational differences. The research approach of Alejandro Dujovne takes Nouwen's "daily life focus" further. His studies focusing on the circulation of

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<sup>109</sup> Marjorie Agosín, *Taking Root: Narratives of Jewish Women in Latin America* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2002); Marjorie Agosín, *Memory, Oblivion, and Jewish Culture in Latin America* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2005); Marjorie Agosín, Elizabeth Horan and Roberta Gordonstein, *The House of Memory: Stories by Jewish Women Writers of Latin America* (New York: Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1999). For good studies on Latin American Jewish literature, see for example Edna Aizenberg, *Books and Bombs in Buenos Aires. Borges, Gerchunoff, and Argentine-Jewish Writing* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2002), Robert diAntonio and Nora Glickman (eds.) *Tradition and Innovation. Reflections on Latin American Jewish Writing* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012) or the chapter about literary representations of Jewishness included in Ran, Cahan, *Returning to Babel*.

<sup>110</sup> Donna Guy, *Sex & Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991); Sandra McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880-1955* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2010); Mir Yarfitz, "Polacos, White Slaves, and Stille Chuppahs: Organized Prostitution and the Jews of Buenos Aires, 1890-1939" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2012).

<sup>111</sup> Adriana M. Brodsky, "Electing 'Miss Sefaradi' and 'Queen Esther': Sephardim, Zionism and Ethnic and National Identities in Argentina 1933-1971," in *The New Jewish Argentina*, ed. Brodsky and Rein, 179–212; Brodsky, *Sephardi, Jewish, Argentine*; Margalit Bejarano and Edna Aizenberg, *Contemporary Sephardic Identity in the Americas: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 2012).

<sup>112</sup> German C. Friedmann, "Las identidades judeoalemanas. Alemanes antinazis y judíos de habla alemana en Buenos Aires durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial," in *Marginados y consagrados*, ed. Kahan et. al., 191-212; Daniel Bargman, "Construcciones identitarias y asociacionismo étnico hasta la segundo posguerra," in *ibidem*, 165-190; Susana Brauner, *Ortodoxia religiosa y pragmatismo político: Los judíos de origen sirio* (Buenos Aires: Lumière, 2009).

<sup>113</sup> Lewis Neuwen, *Oy, my Buenos Aires*.

Yiddish books, translations and the role of Jewish libraries and bookshops, uncovers and reconstructs an important sphere of the daily life of Jewish Argentines.<sup>114</sup> We notice also an increased interest in Argentine Jewish popular culture, especially in theater, music and sport.<sup>115</sup>

In recent years, scholars contributed an increasing number of publications examining the evolving and fluctuating identities of Latin American Jews. Researchers often adopted a comparative perspective, analyzing Jewish experiences in the context of other minority groups inhabiting Latin American countries. Scholars who contributed to the volumes edited by Jeffrey Lesser, Ignacio Klich or Raanan Rein, placed Jewish and Arab Argentines next to each. They examined not only the mutual relations between these two minority groups, but also offered a comparative study on migration, ethnicity and diasporism.<sup>116</sup> Despite increasing efforts to analyze Latin American Jewry in the context of growing multiculturalism or including the experiences of Latin American Jews living in Israel, only recently have scholars started to question the singularity and uniqueness of Jewish experiences on the continent.<sup>117</sup> Thus, the calls of Rein and others to devote more emphasis on interactions, similarities and contact zones between Latin American Jews and other immigrant groups (such as Italians, Poles, Chinese, etc.) still remain highly relevant.<sup>118</sup> As Rein writes, Jewish historiography is often essentialist, parochial and introspective, missing the potential of looking at Jewish experiences in the context of other communities.<sup>119</sup> Following Homi Bhabha Rein criticized the “presupposed timeless continuity,” “organic unity” and “taken for granted bonds” characteristic of essentialist approaches to the nation and ethnicity.<sup>120</sup> Rein emphasized the need to perceive the Jewish experience in Argentina as pluralistic, changing and unparticular,

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<sup>114</sup> Alejandro Dujovne, “‘The Books That Should Not Be Missing in Any Jewish Home’: Translation as a Cultural Policy in Argentina, 1919–1938,” in *Returning to Babel*, ed. Ran and Cahan, 159–178; Alejandro Dujovne, “Print Culture and Urban Geography: Jewish Bookstores, Libraries, and Printers in Buenos Aires, 1910–1960,” in *The New Jewish Argentina*, ed. Brodsky and Rein, 81–108.

<sup>115</sup> Debra Leah Caplan, “Staging Jewish Modernism: The Vilna Troupe and the Rise of a Transnational Yiddish Art Theater Movement” (unpublished PhD. diss., Harvard University, 2013); Ricardo Feierstein, *Vida cotidiana de los judíos argentinos: del gueto al country* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2007); Silvia Hansman, Susana Skura, Gabriela Kogan, *Oysfarkoyft, localidades agotadas. Afiches del teatro ídich en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Del Nuevo Extremo Fundación IWO, 2006); Raanan Rein, *Fútbol, Jews, and the Making of Argentina* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014); Svarch, “Four Jews, Five Identities.”

<sup>116</sup> Klich and Lesser, *Arab and Jewish Immigrants*; Rein, *Árabes y judíos*; Raanan Rein, María José Cano Pérez, Beatriz Molina Rueda (eds.), *Más allá del Medio Oriente. Las diásporas judía y árabe en América Latina* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2012).

<sup>117</sup> Louis Roniger and Debby Babis, “Latin American Israelis: The Collective Identity of an Invisible Community,” in *Jewish Identities in an Era of Globalization and Multiculturalism: Latin America in the Jewish World*, ed. Judit Bokser de Liwerant et al. (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008), 297–320

<sup>118</sup> Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein, “New Approaches to Ethnicity and Diaspora in Twentieth Century Latin America,” in *Rethinking Jewish-Latin Americans*, ed. Lesser and Rein, 23–30

<sup>119</sup> Rein, “Historiografía judeo-latinoamericana: desafíos y propuestas,” 27–46.

<sup>120</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, introduction to *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 1–7. Quoted in Raanan Rein, *Argentine Jews or Jewish Argentines: Essays on Ethnicity, Identity and Diaspora* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), xiii.

far from the false dichotomy of: “to become Argentinian or to keep being Jewish.”<sup>121</sup>

Following the transnational turn in historical studies, scholars of Latin American Jewish Studies adopted a transnational lens for the examination of contemporary and past phenomena among Latin American Jews. Among others, Judith Bokser de Liwerant has been calling for the application of tools and methods of a transnational approach for the study of Latin American history in general and migration history in particular.<sup>122</sup> Scholars of other fields have explored transnational links within Latin America, or those connecting the continent with other geographic areas.<sup>123</sup> Benefiting from developments in diaspora studies conducted on other ethnic or religious communities, Jewish studies scholars are also rethinking Jewish diasporism.<sup>124</sup> This tendency is visible in studies focusing on the dispersion of Latin American Jews around the world, mostly in Israel, the United States and Spain.<sup>125</sup>

Embedding my dissertation in recent research developments in Latin American Jewish Studies, I go beyond debating the process of acculturation in Argentine society versus efforts at staying Jewish. By focusing on Polish Jews, rather than on all Jewish immigrants from Europe, I suggest analyzing the importance of subethnic identifications. My research shows that Jewish-Polish identification developed largely as a result of emigration and political changes in Eastern Europe. At the same time, it had a pronounced function for the lives of the Argentine migrants. I portray 1920s and 1930s Argentina as a space inhabited by both Jewish Argentines and Argentine Jews. I see the former as a generation of those who grew up and were socialized in Argentina, were comfortable in Spanish, were rooted in Argentine cultural codes and perceived themselves as an ethnic minority. The latter were a transitory form between Polish Jew and Jewish Argentine, an immigrant community, often embedded in

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<sup>121</sup> Raanan Rein and Jeffrey Lesser, “Nuevas aproximaciones a los conceptos de etnicidad y diáspora en América Latina: la perspectiva judía,” *Estudios Sociales* 32 (2007): 11–30.

<sup>122</sup> Judit Bokser de Liwerant, “Latin American Jews: A Transnational Diaspora,” in *Identities in an Era of Globalization and Multiculturalism: Latin America in the Jewish World*, ed. Bokser de Liwerant et al. (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008), *Jewish Identities in an Era* Bokser de Liwerant et al., 351–374.

<sup>123</sup> Edward L. Jackiewicz and Fernando J. Bosco (eds.), *Placing Latin America. Contemporary Themes in Geography* (Lanham, M.D.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012); Robert N. Gwynne and Cristóbal Kay, *Latin America Transformed: Globalization and Modernity* (London: Arnold, 2004); David F. García, *Arsenio Rodríguez and the Transnational Flows of Latin Popular Music* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006.)

<sup>124</sup> Caryn Aviv and David Shneer, *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Caryn Aviv and David Shneer, “Traveling Jews, Creating Memory: Eastern Europe, Israel, and the Diaspora Business,” in *Sociology Confronts the Holocaust: Memories and Identities in Jewish Diasporas*, ed. Judith M. Gerson and Diane L. Wolf (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2007), 67–83; William Safran, “The Jewish Diaspora in a Comparative and Theoretical Perspective,” *Israel Studies* 10, no. 1 (2005): 36–60; John Stratton, “(Dis)placing the Jews: Historicizing the Idea of Diaspora,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 6, no. 3 (1997): 301–329; Boyarin and Boyarin, “Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity.”

<sup>125</sup> Roniger and Babis, “Latin American Israelis”; Ruth Behar, *Traveling Heavy: A Memoir in Between Journeys* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Judith Bokser de Liwerant, “Transnational Expansion of Latin American Jewish Life in Times of Migration,” in *Research in Jewish Demography and Identity*, ed. Eli Lederhendler and Uzi Rebhun (Brighton: Academic Studies Press, 2015), 198-240.

Yiddish culture and imagining Argentina as a branch of a diasporic Yiddishland. The transition from Argentine Jews to Jewish Argentines was a process of ethnicization that eroded subethnic categories among succeeding generations.<sup>126</sup> My study tackles the tensions between both groups, but also suggests uncovering shared interests and numerous cases of cooperation and cross-group activism aimed at the same goals. By analyzing the emergence of Jewish-Polish subethnicity in Argentina, I present it as a process simultaneous and parallel with becoming Argentine. Following Stuart Hall, I believe that identities “come from somewhere, have histories,” are “a matter of becoming, as well as of being,” “belong to the future as much as to the past” and “are subject of continuous 'play' of history, culture and power.”<sup>127</sup> Using the case of Jewish-Polish *landmanshaftn* (ethnic Jewish associations of immigrants), I suggest that these institutions served both as a space of immigrant ethnic empowerment, as well as a threshold to claiming an equal status in Argentine society. The ethnic and national identities of an immigrant generation and of their children were often contested and polyphonic.

## Migrations and Latin America in Polish Jewish Studies

Polish Jewish Studies are often set apart within Jewish Studies, but sometimes they are incorporated in the broader history of Eastern European Jewry.<sup>128</sup> Topics related to Jewish migration history are still hardly analyzed (with the exception of the postwar immigration to Israel).<sup>129</sup> Within the research on immigration to Latin America from Poland, the Jewish aspect is still hardly included.<sup>130</sup> Although there were some attempts at including a broader

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<sup>126</sup> Sarna, “Ethnicity and Beyond,” 109.

<sup>127</sup> Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Contemporary Sociological Thought: Themes and Theories*, ed. Sear P. Hier (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2005), 445.

<sup>128</sup> Among the journals that focus exclusively on Polish Jewry, particularly worth mentioning are: *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, edited by Antony Polonsky since 1986; *Gal-Ed* published by the Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Center of Tel Aviv University.

<sup>129</sup> Jerzy Eisler, *Marzec 1968. Geneza, przebieg, konsekwencje* (Warsaw: PWN, 1991); Dariusz Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna w Polsce 1967-1968* (Warsaw: ISP PAN, 2000); Ewa Węgrzyn, “Wyjeżdżamy? Wyjeżdżamy?! Alija gomulowska 1956-1959” (Kraków: Austeria, 2016). For a recent study that refers to the prewar period while engaging with the *Grabski aliyah* to Palestine: Magdalena M. Wróbel-Bloom, *Social Networks and the Jewish Migration between Poland and Palestine, 1924–1928* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2016).

<sup>130</sup> Agnieszka Mocyk, *Piekło czy raj? Obraz Brazylii w piśmiennictwie polskim w latach 1864–1939* (Kraków: Universitas, 2005); Ryszard Stemplowski (ed.), *Polacy, Rusini i Ukraińcy, Argentyniacy. Osadnictwo w Misiones 1892–2009* (Warsaw: Muzeum Historii Ruchu Ludowego, 2011). The epistemological studies of correspondence from Polish emigrants did not include Jewish emigrants: Witold Kula, Nina Assorodobraj-Kula, Marcin Kula (eds.), *Listy emigrantów z Brazylii i Stanów Zjednoczonych. 1890-1891* (Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1973); Andrzej Pasternak (ed.), *Listy emigrantów do „Przyjaciela Ludu”, „Wieńca i pszczołki”, „Zarania”, „Piasta”, „Wyzwolenia” w latach 1899 – 1938* (Rzeszów: Rzeszowski Oddział Stowarzyszenia Wspólnota Polska, 1994).

ethnic spectrum of emigration from Polish lands, Jews largely remain outside of it.<sup>131</sup> Ewa Morawska's contribution in the 1990s was one of the first attempts at a comparative study of Christian and Jewish emigration from Poland.<sup>132</sup> Michał Starczewski's article shed light on the role of Jews as emigration agents.<sup>133</sup> The focus on migration from Poland was more present when millions of Jews still lived in Poland and elsewhere in the region (that is, before 1939). In the pre-World War II context, studies on Jewish emigration were in a way policy papers, merging scholarly and political aspects. Modern (that is, from mid-nineteenth century onward) Jewish migrations from Europe were studied by a number of (especially Jewish-German) theoreticians.<sup>134</sup> Their studies followed in the footsteps of a scientific approach to Jewishness and Jewish history, as suggested by Zacharias Frankel, Heinrich Graetz or others associated with the circle of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. At the beginning of the twentieth century, an important migration scholar was Leopold Caro from the Habsburg empire. Caro saw emigration as a negative phenomenon that harmed the social and economic situation in Galicia and elsewhere in the Habsburg empire. He complained that Austria lost its workforce and supported laws limiting migration propaganda.<sup>135</sup> In interwar Poland, both Jewish and Christian scholars approached and co-shaped migration policies, with Arie Tartakower and Jakob Lestschinsky as some of the most prominent.<sup>136</sup>

The depictions of Poland and Eastern Europe in earlier scholarship on Jewish migration was mainly associated with various push-factors: poverty, pogroms and other forms of anti-Jewish discrimination and violence that forced Eastern European Jews to search for a better life wherever possible.<sup>137</sup> Consequently, most of the post-migration relations that Jewish emigrants formed with Poland were considered unimportant and therefore largely silenced in scholarship. Although our knowledge about the situation of Jews in interwar Poland is immense, their pre-migration lives, realities and dilemmas were not properly

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<sup>131</sup> Dorota Praszalowicz, Krzysztof A. Makowski, Andrzej A. Zięba (eds.), *Mechanizmy zamorskich migracji łańcuchowych w XIX wieku: Polacy, Niemcy, Żydzi, Rusin: Zarys problemu* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2004).

<sup>132</sup> Ewa Morawska, "Changing Images of the Old Country in the Development of Ethnic Identity among East European Immigrants, 1888s–1930s: A Comparison of Jewish and Slavic Representations," *YIVO Annual of the Social Science* 21 (1993): 283.

<sup>133</sup> Michał Starczewski, "Z dziejów emigracji zarobkowej: agenci emigracyjni na ziemiach polskich przed 1914 r.," *Przegląd Historyczny* CIII, no. 1 (2012): 47-80.

<sup>134</sup> Including Władimir Wolf Kaplun-Kogan, Zwi Avraami, Davis Trietsch, Michael Traub.

<sup>135</sup> See for instance: Leopold Caro, *Emigracja i polityka emigracyjna ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem ziem polskich* (Poznań, 1914).

<sup>136</sup> Lestschinsky published his studies on migration and economic life in Warsaw, Berlin and New York. See for instance *Di onhoybn fun der emigratsye un kolonizatsye bay yidn: in 19-tn yorhundert* (Berlin: Emigdirect, 1929).

<sup>137</sup> Avni, *Argentina y las migraciones judías*; Mirelman, *En búsqueda*, 21–24.

examined in the context of immigration to Argentina.<sup>138</sup> In other words, the emigration itself and what happened afterwards in Argentina overshadowed the Polish background of their decisions. Jonathan D. Sarna, referring to Jewish immigration to the United States, clearly pointed out that the universal success of Jewish immigrants in the Americas and their lack of interest in the problems of the home country became a popular, but untrue, myth.<sup>139</sup> My research does not question the impact of the brutal anti-Jewish pogroms on the personal emigration decisions of Eastern European Jews, but rather sets out to identify much more complex motivations and backgrounds of migrating Jews. This dissertation explores and sheds light on the stories and phenomena hidden behind the dramatic, but incomplete narration that describes Poland and Eastern Europe solely as the *bloodlands* and as a gloomy space of Jewish suffering.<sup>140</sup> Following Bartal and Ury, I frame my study as an alternative to a historiography centered around passivity, powerlessness, victimhood and Zionist redemption. As Bartal and Ury wrote, East European Jewry remains trapped in a historical *telos* that passes directly from the Khmelnytsky massacres to the gates of Auschwitz.<sup>141</sup> Focusing on Argentine emigration, I portray the ways that Polish Jews claimed their agency and mediated their status as Jews, nation-state nationals and transnational figures. Thus, I offer a novel approach to Jewish migration history that uncovers an interesting space of Polish-Argentinian-Jewish encounters revealed in press reports, travel memoirs and activities of landsmanshaftn. My engagement with transnational migration, with the prospect of national belonging to Argentina and Yiddishist visions suggests additional readings of Jewish-Polish history.

Researchers working on Jewish-Polish topics still too rarely approach problems of transnational links during the interwar years, and the ties linking Argentine Jews with their home countries are not addressed properly. As Moshe Rosman noted, although the focus on Jews in specific political state borders contributed to many well-researched monographs, the geopolitically localized studies not only neglected the transgeographical aspect of Jewish history, but they have “abandoned it altogether.”<sup>142</sup> One of the first pioneering studies

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<sup>138</sup> Literature on Jewish-Polish history includes both classic studies, such as: Israel Gutman, *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars* (Hannover, N.H: Brandeis University Press, 1989), but also newer studies: Iris Parush, *Reading Jewish Women. Marginality and Modernization in Nineteenth-Century Eastern European Jewish Society* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2004); Steven T. Katz (ed.), *The Shtetl: New Evaluations* (New York: New York University Press, 2007); Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: A Short History* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2013).

<sup>139</sup> Jonathan D. Sarna, “The Myth of No Return: Jewish Return Migration to Eastern Europe, 1881-1914,” *American Jewish History* 2 (1981): 169-182.

<sup>140</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).

<sup>141</sup> Bartal and Ury, “Between Jews and Their Neighbours,” 23. See also David Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History: The Jewish Tradition and the Myth of Passivity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986).

<sup>142</sup> Moshe Rosman, *How Jewish is Jewish History?* (Portland, OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007), 28

concerning transnational spaces created and used by Polish Jews was a study by Rebecca Kobrin.<sup>143</sup> Focusing on the Polish city of Białystok, she traced the multilayered links between various centers of the Bialystoker diaspora, including the Argentinian one. Her study proved how a common ethnic origin remained relevant after migration and how meaningful were the needs of a constant remembering of the shared past. Kobrin draws a picture of interconnected communities of Bialystoker Jews, which were bound mostly by the imagined or memorial connection with the remote hometown in Eastern Europe. These kinds of ties are still largely unexplored in a wider context. Bialystoker Jews were not an exception from the broader trends present among migrating Jews. Researchers tended to explain the historical phenomena related to Jewish lives in specific geographical areas without putting much emphasis on the connections between different Jewish centers. Jewish experiences were often studied not only as separate from the non-Jewish setting, but also without taking into account the links that connected Jews dispersed on different continents. In fact, Jewish mass migrations that commenced in the late nineteenth century have permanently reshaped not only the lives of the migrants, but also the situation in their home countries. A more balanced approach to the history of emigration, less rooted in American exceptionalism, is visible, yet, it hardly ever refers to Jews and Latin America.<sup>144</sup> There is a need to examine the history of Argentine Jews in relation to the conditions and changes in Eastern Europe, which served as their ancestral homeland and an important point of reference after the emigration.

By responding to the deficiencies of a transnational approach in Jewish-Polish history, my study focuses on the links, ties and interactions that, as a result of this migration, were developed between the Jewish communities of both countries. It approaches the social and cultural consequences of this process. Without questioning the importance of traditional demographic, economic or sociological studies of Jewish emigration from Eastern Europe to the Americas, this dissertation explores less known and almost unrevealed facets of the experiences of migrating Jews: the images and representations of Argentina transmitted to the readers of Poland's Jewish press, activities and social functions of landsman organizations formed by Polish Jews, or travel reports and memoirs written by Polish Jewish intellectuals visiting Argentina. Although seemingly unrelated, these sources share and emphasize an important common characteristic: a unique Jewish Polish-Argentine space that emerged as a consequence of mass Jewish migration to Argentina.

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<sup>143</sup> Kobrin, *Jewish Bialystok*.

<sup>144</sup> Dino Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco: The Immigrant Experience* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982); Ewa Morawska, *For Bread with Butter: The Life-Worlds of East Central Europeans in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, 1890-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).



## Timespan

My study encompasses the period of intensive interwar immigration from Poland to Argentina, when individuals, ideas, popular beliefs and social issues transcended geographical borders, marking the establishment of a transnational Jewish world. The year 1914 was chosen as the point of departure, as the beginning of the Great War and suspension of trans-Atlantic passenger traffic between Europe and the Americas marked an end of the first era in Jewish immigration to Argentina. The fall of the Austrian, German and Russian empires after the war led to a reconstruction of an independent Polish state, which challenged and reshaped the ethnic identifications of Jewish migrants. World War I also marked the establishment in 1916 of *Agudas Ahim* (later known as *Poylisher Farband* or Union of Polish Jews in Argentina), a central body uniting the Jewish residents of Argentina who shared a strong attachment to Poland, their place of origin. I perceive the Jewish-Polish landsman movement as a platform for discussing the Jewish place within Argentine society and within the diasporic Yiddishland. Poylisher Farband emerged as a space for discussing subethnic identifications as Polish Jews contributed to the cross-border discourse on nationalism and transnational belonging. In 1914, Peretz Hirschbein, a Yiddish writer who embodied the growing entanglements between Jewish Poland and Argentina, arrived in Argentina. This Poland-born author, journalist and globetrotter was one of the few Polish Jews who decided to visit Argentina and write a travelogue describing the Jewish life emerging in this country. I treat Hirschbein's memoirs as an excellent source for revealing how Polish Jews perceived Argentina, emigration, geographic expansion and the transnationalization of Eastern European Jewish lives. The year 1939 is the closing caesura of this research project. The Holocaust and the almost complete annihilation of Polish Jewry redefined the geographies of the Jewish world. Poland ceased to be a major center of Jewish life and its links with multiple diasporic communities of Eastern European Jews became limited or, as in the case of Argentina, structurally redefined in a direction of commemoration policies. The establishment of the State of Israel and the victory of Zionism challenged the diasporic ethno-national project related to Yiddish and Yiddishism. As Judith Butler put it, "Zionism exercises a hegemonic control over the concept of Jewishness" and consequently dismantled the notion of diasporic Jewishness.<sup>145</sup> A Yiddish cultural-link that connected Jews in Poland and Argentina was largely cut off and in the late 1940s and 1950s gradually replaced by growing popular support for Zionism and Israeli statehood. My dissertation explores the transnational policies, commitments and relations that the post-1939 events largely erased from the way we look at

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<sup>145</sup> Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 3-6.

Jewish-Argentine history.

The timespan of this research encompasses two periods in Argentine history. In 1916 Hipólito Yrigoyen of the *Unión Cívica Radical* rose to power, which marked the beginning of a decade and a half of radical governments in Argentina. The radicals took power following the introduction of universal male suffrage in 1912 and received their support from the new middle class, including thousands of immigrant children. Two governments of Yrigoyen (1916-1922, 1928-1930) and of Marcelo Torcuato de Alvear (1922-1928) allowed social progress for second-generation immigrants by opening up university education (*Reforma universitaria* in 1918) and by the continuous development of employment in the public sector. Benefiting from the evolving social structure, the growing population and the rise of popular party politics, the radicals succeeded in recruiting the support of working-class masses. These radical governments were in fact the first democratic governments in Argentine history.

In the 1930s, José Félix Uriburu came to power in Argentina, which was the beginning of the so-called Infamous Decade defined by a conservative and oligarchic backlash. The conservatives questioned the principle of universal suffrage and limited some constitutional freedoms. Argentine politics of the 1930s resembled the fascist governments in Europe, especially of Mussolini in Italy.<sup>146</sup> Numerous political opponents were sent to concentration camps in Ushuaia, an alliance with the Catholic Church was strengthened, a paramilitary *Unión Cívica Argentina* was established and the state began to carry out interventionist economic policies. The governments of Uriburu (1930-1932) and Augustin P. Justo (1932-1938) suggested a new model of the Argentine economy, with industrialization acting as a substitute for the export economy that was dominant in the previous decade. Nevertheless, the early 1930s were a period of economic crisis that resulted in growing poverty, criminality and hopelessness. In 1930 Uriburu raised the price of immigration visas from three to thirty peso and in 1931 immigration was limited to agricultural workers. Two years later, only those with a secured job or other financial support in Argentina were allowed to enter the country.<sup>147</sup> Although immigration was halted in 1930, the decade as such was a period of integration of immigrants and their children into the Argentine national culture. The nationalist spirit of the era reinforced immigrant identification with their new homeland. The economic recuperation visible from 1936 allowed immigrants to participate in Argentine entertainment and leisure,

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<sup>146</sup> See David Aliano, "Identity in Transatlantic Play: Il Duce's National Project in Argentina" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2008), 249-255.

<sup>147</sup> See Ronald C. Newton, *German Buenos Aires 1900-1933: Social Change and Cultural Crisis* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977).

such as cinema, dance or beaches.<sup>148</sup> For Argentine Jews in the 1930s, the liberal integrationist ideals of the previous two decades were seen as outdated. Many Jews who earlier acculturated, now searched for ways of rapprochement with their Jewishness, be it via Zionism, ethnic activism or transnational solidarity.



Illustration. no. 1. Spatial dispersion of the Jewish population in Buenos Aires, gray for 1895, bordered area for 1947, *Historia de los judíos en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ameghino, 1999), 169.

## Sources and Methodology

This dissertation is a cultural historical study, encompassing elements of historical discourse analysis and social history. Cultural history, as many other terms in the humanities, has blurry definitions and methodologies. Cultural history has a long tradition with the classic works of Jacob Burckhardt (1862), Johan Huizinga (1919) and G. M. Young (1936). The discipline of *Geistesgeschichte* was developed in nineteenth century Germany, which could be translated both as a “history of spirit,” but may also be rendered as cultural history. The historians belonging to this historical approach relied on the interpretation of texts, but also included the interpretation of practices and actions.<sup>149</sup> Yet in the 1980s and 1990s, it was common to find assertions of cultural history as a novel approach. A repeated scholarly

<sup>148</sup> Oscar A. Troncoso, *Buenos Aires se divierte* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina SA, 1971), 83-84.

<sup>149</sup> Peter Burke, *What Is Cultural History?* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2008), 7-8.

misconception omitted the nineteenth century studies, especially those written by popular historians and not academics.<sup>150</sup> In recent years, cultural history is used for the study of diverse phenomena: states, concepts, practices or artifacts.

Following Peter Burke, I believe that the task of a cultural historian is to “reach the parts other historians cannot reach.” In so doing, I ground my research on both Polish and Argentine sources and merge the discourses of the intellectuals and activists with the actual practices of the migrating Jews. I heavily rely on the representations of concepts, symbols and ideas (Yiddishland, homeland, ethnic belonging). I observe how migrant Jews defined their identities both in discursive form (press, memoirs, literature), as well as via social practices (participation in ethnic Jewish or Argentine national events, establishing ethnic associations, forging transnational solidarity networks). My dissertation incorporates social history as it focuses on social practices of migrating Jews. I look for instance on the way that Jews adopted Argentine patterns of ethnic expression, pastimes or leisure forms. Following the early call of Huizinga, I also study “themes” and “sentiments.” Drawing on social developments (migration, nationalism, acculturation), I look how they were transformed into a transnational Jewish culture.

An important methodological approach that I adopt is historical discourse analysis. As James Paul Gee and Michael Handford put it, discourse analysis allows the scholar to see how people (individually and collectively) shape, produce and reproduce the world surrounding them through speaking and writing.<sup>151</sup> The notion of “discourse” was developed by Michel Foucault and “refers not only to particular uses of language in context but also to the world views and ideologies that are implicit or explicit in such uses”.<sup>152</sup> By focusing on the transnational Jewish discourses spanning Poland and Argentina (and other centers), I analyze the way that Yiddishist ethno-cultural nationalism found its way into Argentina and how it interacted with local nationalizing powers. In looking at the way Jewish immigrants became Jewish-Argentines, I follow their conceptualizations of notions of homeland, heritage, identity and belonging. The first chapter is a discursive study of how Jews in interwar Poland constructed and imagined Argentina. My study covers the history of Jewish Argentina and the history of Jewish-Polish immigration to Argentina, as a field where numerous actors were active, interweaving the discourse with their interests and narratives. Thus, I incorporate both histories of the intellectual elite (men of letters, cultural journalists, public intellectuals), as

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<sup>150</sup> Alison Moore, “Historicizing Historical Theory’s History of Cultural Historiography,” *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 12, no. 1 (2016): 261.

<sup>151</sup> James Paul Gee and Michael Handford, “Introduction,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, ed. James Paul Gee and Michael Handford (London, New York: Routledge, 2012), 6.

<sup>152</sup> Caroline Coffin, *Historical Discourse* (London: Continuum, 2006), 11.

well as reach into popular culture, as sources of social history. I analyze, for instance, popular theater plays with themes of Jewish-Argentine prostitution or news in yellow journalism, along with socio-cultural essays in the high-brow Yiddish periodical *Literarische Bleter*.

This study is based on a variety of sources. While acknowledging the subjectivity of historical representations, I believe I have gathered a heterogeneous selection of historical materials. The first chapter relies on the Yiddish press published in interwar Poland (1918-1939), chiefly on *Haynt* and *Moment*. In order to offer a broader spectrum of how Jewish-Polish visions of Argentina were formed, I examine various emigration pamphlets and brochures, placing them in the context of Poland's Argentine emigration policy (using the archives of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs). The second chapter is based on a close reading of Argentine travelogues by Peretz Hirschbein and Hersh Dovid Nomberg. With the aim of providing a broader context to their visits in Argentina, I use archival materials from the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York and Fundación IWO in Buenos Aires, as well as press reports about their impact on the situation in Argentina. The third chapter, which analyzes the process of negotiating Jewish-Argentine identity, is based on communal, literary and journalistic discussions of the Jewish place in Argentina and the complementarity of belonging to Yiddishland and to Argentina. I analyzed here both the discourse in Yiddish-Argentine press (*Di Yidische Zaitung*, *Di Presse*), Jewish titles in Spanish (*Judaica*, *Mundo Israelita*, *Semanario Hebreo*) and public speeches and memoirs of Jewish ethnic leaders. The fourth chapter, which examines the role of Jewish-Polish landsmanshaftn, relies on a variety of landsman materials: almanacs, invitations to events and landsman periodicals.

## **Dissertation Structure**

The first part, "Conceptualizing Argentina: The Jews of Poland and the Land of Silver," engages with debates on Argentina in Poland and covers the ways in which various actors imagined the emigration. I use the Argentine case to portray the ruptures within Polish Jewry and to present the Argentine debates as a lens for looking at the transformation it was undergoing. The conflicting images of Argentina that were created and recreated in Jewish Poland show the tensions between the interests of the often hopeless younger generation of *luftmenshen* and the interests of an integrationist elite, religious leadership and the agenda of Polish authorities. During the interwar years, Polish Jewry was extremely heterogeneous, and various plans for improving the situation of Jews in Poland were implemented. The Bundists wanted to focus on local problems and act in the "here and now," the Orthodox were interested in preserving the status quo, whereas in the long run the Zionists saw the Jewish

future in Palestine. Emigration was an additional popular option. Immigration to Argentina was the result of the social and economic transformation of Jewish Poland: industrialization, the decline of the *shtetl* and ongoing secularization and Polonization of the younger generation.<sup>153</sup> These changes allowed other non-traditional life choices to seem possible and relevant. Immigration to Argentina, which in the 1890s was usually depicted negatively, was largely “normalized” in the 1920s. I suggest that efforts to portray Argentina in negative terms were aimed at stabilizing the old hierarchies and to slow down the ongoing social and economic changes. A key role was played by the Yiddish press, which created the images of Argentina in Jewish Poland. Argentina was often exoticized in over-emphasizing its role in international Jewish prostitution. At the same time, the inclusion of texts on Argentina and emigration marked a geographic expansion of the Yiddishland. Next to Yiddish press, numerous pamphlets and brochures on emigration discussed the relevance or irrelevance of Argentina. State-run and Jewish emigration societies assisted the emigrants, yet emigration was clearly an individual grassroots process. The Argentine discourse that developed in Poland was not detached from the realities of Christian Poles and Slavic minorities inhabiting the country. Thousands of peasants emigrated on the same ships as the Jews. Yet their histories are hardly ever analyzed together, usually due to the distinct patterns of settlement in Argentina. This chapter, by focusing on the impact of migration on the home country, emphasizes the shared experiences of Jews and non-Jews in Poland. Although I do focus on Jews, I include non-Jewish voices that co-shaped the way that Argentina was perceived in Poland: emigration advocates, government officials and fiction writers. Taken as whole, the first part offers a panoramic picture of how Argentina was being approached in pre-1939 Poland and how conflicting interests collided in a process of including Argentina in the structures of the Eastern European Jewish worldview.

The second part, “The Discoverers: Travel Writing, Narrating Argentina and Expanding the Yiddishland,” focuses on Yiddish travel literature on Argentina. *Fun vayte lender* by Peretz Hirschbein (1916) and *Di argentinishe rayze* by Hersh Dovid Nomberg (1924) serve sources for observing the geographic expansion of the Yiddishland to Latin America. Both authors shared a Yiddishist ideology and during their visits carefully observed the successes and shortcoming of the Yiddishist agenda in Argentina. The travelogues and travel articles of Hirschbein and Nomberg were principally geared toward Eastern European Jews, both those considering emigration and those who never thought about Argentina as a relevant option. At the same time, the Latin American visits of the well-known Yiddish

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<sup>153</sup> Gershon Bacon, “National Revival, Ongoing Acculturation: Jewish Education in Interwar Poland,” *Simon Dubnow Institut Jahrbuch*, 1 (2002): 71-92.

writers reinforced Yiddish culture in Argentina. Hirschbein and Nomberg were received in Buenos Aires as ethnic cultural heroes. This part of the dissertation thus deals with *travelling Yiddishism*, with a transnationalization of an ethno-national and cultural movement that bridged the emigrants and the reading public in Poland. At the same time, by receiving the emissaries of the Old World, Argentine Jews marked the emergence of Jewish-Argentine identities. Local activists saw themselves as representatives of Argentina and wished to present Jewish-Argentine culture as following the progressive Yiddish cultural trends arriving from Poland. Hirschbein and Nomberg observed the process of forming diasporic Jewish identities and the way they dovetailed with becoming Argentine. This part underlines the meaning of the legacy of Yiddishism in migratory movements and underscores how travel-writing elucidates the tension between the national and the diasporic.

The third part, titled “*Israelita Argentino or Argentinischer Yid? Cultural Choices, National Belonging and the Weight of European Baggage,*” engages with Jewish-Argentine discussions on Argentineness, Jewishness and the place of Jews in Argentina. The chapter is based on my research on Argentine policies and debates concerning the Jews, Argentine Jewish essay-writing and immigrant literature. I argue here that the postwar Jewish-Polish immigration wave challenged and complicated the ongoing processes of cultural integration. The influx of Jews who experienced the Yiddish socio-cultural renaissance in Poland helped to once again anchor Yiddish culture in Argentina and temporarily *re-yidishize* it. This part portrays the process of becoming Argentine and playing the diasporic Yiddish agenda as parts of the same process of negotiating Jewish *argentinidad*. I start by introducing the immigration ideologies that developed in Argentina since the mid-nineteenth century, underscoring how Argentine leaders imagined the place of Jews within the national project. I move on to portray the circles of *israelitas argentinos*, the argentinized generation of children of the first agricultural colonists. Analyzing the cultural circle of *Sociedad Hebraica Argentina* with its charismatic leader Salomón Resnick, I portray them as agents of hybridization that managed to merge the Argentine and the Yiddish. Although they saw Argentina as their physical and spiritual homeland, with Spanish as the language of choice in the public sphere, argentinized Jews did not relinquish their commitment to Eastern Europe. Although firmly rooted in Argentina, they also looked back to Jewish Poland. Resnick translated Sholem Aleichem and other Jewish-Polish authors, and anti-Semitism in Poland was regularly met with an outcry in the Spanish-language Jewish press. Simultaneously, the Yiddish cultural sphere in Argentina was not an insular space, but an arena of hybridization where the diasporic and the local mixed. A key Argentine Yiddishist, Pinie Katz demanded that Yiddish culture must acquire a specific Argentine character and include local themes and motives. The lines between Yiddish and

Jewish-Argentine cultural spheres were blurred and the division hardly had a clear-cut character. Similar patterns appeared concerning immigrant literature. Some texts were ecstatic manifestos calling for an embrace of Argentina, while the same author could later be found describing the pain of being uprooted and the difficulty of cultural displacement in Argentina. Uncovering the latter, I question the obviousness of Argentine “redemption” and ask about the emotional and cultural price of emigration.

The fourth and last part, “Being a ‘Good Polish Jew’ in Buenos Aires: Landsmanshaftn, Ethnicity and Transnational Solidarity,” is a re-reading of Argentine landsman history. Landsmanshaftn, associations that united Jews coming from the same town or region, were often marginalized in the historiography and portrayed as nostalgic, backward-looking gatherings. This part challenges these simplifications and offers a panoramic and complex picture that underscores the role of landsmanshaftn in ethnic empowerment. Although often posing as quite formal, landsmanshaftn were in fact a space of intimacy and tightly knit relations. I analyze here the role of the landsman movement for the development of a diasporic Jewish-Polish subethnicity and address their transnational involvement on behalf of the cause of Jews in Poland. I argue that Poylisher Farband constructed a framework of belonging that demanded from Polish Jews in Argentina to be committed to their native country. Argentine landsmanshaftn helped to shape transnational solidarity networks centered around both real and imagined shared goals between dispersed Polish Jews. The 1920s and 1930s saw a whole array of fundraising aimed at various goals (secular Yiddishist schools, YIVO Institute, helping the poor), which often included not only the *landslayt* but reached out to the broader Jewish community. At the same time, the *poylishe* did not see their engagement with Poland as an obstacle for becoming Argentine. Quite the opposite. Ethnic engagement was a mechanism for claiming their belonging to Argentina and marking the success, responsibility and vitality of the ethnic community. Landsmanshaftn were a play between uprooting and enrooting and a space of negotiating and demarcating the Jewish *argentinidad*. Their transnational commitments and engagement show the interaction between a *dependence* within diasporic networks and claims for *independence*, let alone recognition for their status as Argentine Jews. My take on landsmanshaftn approaches their histories as a source for historical research. I move outside a narrow focus on memorial books published by the landsmanshaftn after 1945 by emphasizing their role in engendering sub(ethnic) identities, seeing them as a path for inclusion in a multiethnic society.



## Chapter One

### ***Conceptualizing Argentina: The Jews of Poland and the Land of Silver***

[...] די אידישע ארגענטינא וויל איך זאגען, איז נאך אלץ – און וועט אפשר אויף פיל יאהרען נאך פערבלייבען - א אומבעקאנטע לאנד, א *terra ignota* פאר דעם ברייטען אידישען פובליקום אין רוסלאנד און אין אמעריקא; ארגענטינא איז נאך אלץ איינע פון יענע "ווייטע לענדער", פון וועלכע די ברייטע אידישע וועלט האט ניט, אדער כמעט ווי ניט, קיין שום בעגריף.

ווייט איז ארגענטינא, ווייט פון דער גרויסער אידישער וועלט, ווייט פון די גרויסע אידישע צענטרעס פון אייראפא און צפון אמעריקא און עס שפירט זיך די דאזיגע ווייטקייט אינ'ם בעגריף, וואס מען האט דארט וועגען אונז, און מיר שפירן די דאזיגע ווייטקייט אין זיך זעלבסט.

[...] *The Jewish Argentina, I want to say, still is – and probably will still be for many years – an unknown land, a terra ignota for the broad Jewish public in Russia and America; Argentina is still one of those “distant lands,” which the broad Jewish world does not comprehend, or almost does not comprehend.*

*Argentina is distant, distant from the great Jewish world, from the grand Jewish centers of Europe and North America. This is a distance that can be felt in a way how they imagine us, and in the way how we think about ourselves.*

— Yosef Mendelson, “Unzer svive un unzer geshtalt,” *Oyf di bregn fun plata*, Buenos Aires, 1919

The voices that announced the many opportunities awaiting Jews in Argentina, combined with the real emigration of thousands of Polish Jews, led to the development of unique Jewish-Polish-Argentine debates. In the interwar years (1918-1939), the discussions that evolved around prospects offered in South America quickly transformed into a complex discourse that included multiple actors, topics and inputs. Hope for a better future was mixed with fear, as press reports about the success of Jewish farmers were challenged by the critical voices of the religious conservative or integrationist elite. Real or anticipated public interest collided and coincided with individual desires, as did Jewish and non-Jewish attitudes towards Argentina and emigration. The Polish state, together with Jewish and gentile public intellectuals, influenced the way Argentina was perceived and approached. Yiddish literature and theater had to react to the emergence of Argentina in the worldview of Polish Jews. Finally, the notorious trans-Atlantic female trafficking left its mark on the way Polish Jews conceptualized Argentina.

The Yiddish press that exploded on the scene in the second decade of the twentieth century became a major medium for producing, disseminating and criticizing diverse images of Argentina. Emigration expanded the Jewish world, while external influences began making inroads into the daily reality of Jews in Poland. Between 1918 and 1939, the Yiddish press reflected the globalization of the Yiddishland and included increasingly more texts on Argentina. In this way, Argentina was drawn closer and became more available for Eastern European Jews. The interwar years were a golden period of the Jewish printed press. Both in Poland and in Argentina, dailies, weeklies, monthlies and afternoon papers were sold in impressive numbers. Newspapers were the main source of information, entertainment, low and high culture, business reviews and the like. Polish Jews took an active part in shaping the press market. The ideological, class, linguistic and religious divisions within Polish Jewry resulted in the emergence of a plethora of long and short-lived papers. Yiddish, the *lingua franca* of Eastern European Jews, allowed Polish Jews dispersed throughout the world to enter into discussion and to negotiate their Jewish-Polish identity, both in the country and within the diaspora. In the interbellum, Jewish Poland “fed” the Argentine Yiddish scene by exporting its writers and journalists, and several Buenos Aires authors contributed regularly to Poland's Yiddish newspapers. The high-brow Warsaw literary journal *Literarische Bleter* was one of the few instances in which the often essentialist and simplistic Jewish-Polish imageries of Argentina as a vicious and dangerous “Jewish hell” was challenged. *Literarische Bleter* understood its role as a platform for bridging the new and old centers of Yiddish culture, and welcomed rather

positively Argentina as a branch of the Yiddishland. Next to Yiddish, a number of Polish-language Jewish journals took part in debates about Argentina.

The geographic expansion of Eastern European Jewish civilization was mirrored in Yiddish literature and theater. Topics such as immigration to Argentina or its infamous Jewish sex underworld were discussed not only in Buenos Aires, but also by writers based in Poland. This chapter examines the literary representations of Argentina in Poland's Jewish works, which includes the so-called *shund* (low-class books and plays), as well as several texts written by acclaimed authors. The presence of Argentina in Poland's Jewish literature speaks of the influence that migration exercised on the Jews of Eastern Europe. Although it is problematic to perceive literature as an exact reflection of social phenomena, it nonetheless serves as a major source for analyzing the conceptual evolution and image of Argentina in the intellectual and popular discussions of Polish Jews. As Argentina became more and more present in the lives of Polish Jews, Yiddish literature likewise needed to find ways of approaching this new situation. Literature that was increasingly rooted in social problems and touched upon the burning issues of the day – such as poverty, secularization and migration – did not leave the question of Argentina aside.

Debates surrounding Argentina also included government officials and their agendas. Throughout the interbellum, Argentina became part of Poland's social and foreign policies, both concerning Christians and Jews. Immigration to South America was often regarded as a tool for “balancing” Poland’s ethnic and economic structures.<sup>1</sup> Even if plans for resettling Jews and other minorities to Argentina were barely put into practice, they became an important part of the concept of emigration that circulated among gentile and Jewish emigration policy-makers and theoreticians. In order to understand it better, this chapter looks at the correspondence between the Polish Embassy in Buenos Aires and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, as well as the working papers of advocates for colonization and migration. I situate discussions about Jewish immigration to Argentina within broader discussions regarding the place of Jews in Poland, ethnic and national tensions in the interwar Second Republic and Poland's discourse on colonization.

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<sup>1</sup> As Arie Tartakower argued, plans for solving the “Jewish question” by emigration appeared both in Jewish and gentile spheres and crystallized as early as the mid-nineteenth century. It was believed that emigration would ease the dire economic situation of the Jews in Poland and included multiple potential destinations: Siberia, Algeria, etc. See Arie Tartakower, *Emigracja żydowska z Polski* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Narodowościowych, 1939), 8-9.

The Argentine discourse in interwar Poland was polyphonic, diverse and multi-layered. Looking at the public and individual, the popular and elitist imageries of Argentina, this chapter explores the complexities raised by transnationalizing the Jewish-Polish world, expressed in the development of Argentine debates. In order to embrace the nuances of this discourse, I review the key role played by the press and include other actors that took part in shaping Jewish-Polish discussions on Argentina. Literature, theater, governmental policies and personal accounts of the emigrants all contributed to the process of imagining Argentina in Jewish Poland. I argue in this chapter that the development of Jewish-Polish discourse on Argentina was an answer to the trans-Atlantic migrations that redefined the geographies of the Jewish world. First, Argentina emerged as a country of emigration, offering hope at a time of economic and political crisis. Yet this aspect of Argentine debates, chiefly in its exoticized variant, simultaneously allowed the Jews of Poland to stabilize their often precarious presence in Poland by imagining Argentina as an impossibly false hope. Second, the development of Argentine discourse was an attempt to come to terms with the geographic expansion of Ashkenazi Jewry and rapidly changing Jewish realities. The answers were multiple and included both an embrace of Argentina as a new center of Jewish diaspora and an important part of an ethno-national project of Yiddishist revival, but also a symbolic rejection of Argentina's Jewishness (and its relevance for Eastern European Jews). Between these two radical positions could be found a broad gray zone, which is the subject of the present chapter.

## **1. Project Argentina: Emigration Guidebooks, the Jewish Press and Argentine Confusion**

### **1.1. Writing for the Jews: The Trilingual Jewish Press in Poland**

In the interwar years (1918-1939), the Jewish press, both in Yiddish and in Polish, was a key social and cultural institution. After the Haskalah and subsequent developments in Jewish secular movements, newspapers helped to explain the changing world to Jewish readers. The diversity of the press reflected the multiplicity of answers available to the Jews of Poland as they approached modernity. Although the interwar press market was dominated by Yiddish titles, Hebrew and Polish journals also played a significant role. The Jewish press began to appear in Poland in the first half of the nineteenth century when the bilingual Polish-Yiddish *Dostrzegacz Nadwiślański / Der Beobachter an der vayksel* began to be published (1823). This

short-lived journal was a predecessor of *Jutrzenka* (1861-1863) and *Izraelita*, the latter a veteran Jewish weekly that served as the main tribune of the Polonized Jewish elite.<sup>2</sup> Published between 1866 and 1915, *Izraelita* was an outcome of Eastern European Haskalah and traditionally supported Jewish modernization and integration into Polish society. Yet the journal's attitudes varied through time and its chief editors had immense influence on published content. When Nahum Sokolow held this post in 1895, the weekly adopted a modest Zionist stand and opened discussion on Jewish national questions.<sup>3</sup> Both *Dostrzegacz* and *Izraelita* were read by a narrow circle of intellectuals, their circulation never exceeding 1,500 copies.<sup>4</sup> At the end of the nineteenth century, with the rise of Jewish nationalism and socialism, *Izraelita* lost its leading position.

The same period in which Polish-language Jewish dailies were first published in Warsaw also saw the appearance of the Hebrew journal *Hazefirah*.<sup>5</sup> The title was edited for more than sixty years (1866-1931) and attracted authors as renowned as Sholem Aleichem, Mosheh Leib Lilienblum, Yehudah Leib Gordon, Mikhah Yosef Berdyczewski, Yitshhok Leybush Peretz and Shemuel Yosef Agnon. At the beginning, the weekly took a maskilic stand similar to Odessa's/St. Petersburg's *Hamelitz*. In the 1880s, when Nahum Sokolow was appointed its chief editor, *Hazefirah* became a Zionist tribune. Unable to attract readers among the Yiddish-speaking masses, the journal did not play a major role in the 1920s, appearing very irregularly. In the interwar years, the Hebrew press played a minor role, rather a reminder of a maskilic linguistic experiment and a political project than a source of information for the Jewish population or a reflection of public moods. Both *Izraelita* and *Hazefirah* continued to take an active stand in the first Jewish discussions on Argentina and its agricultural colonization (prior to the Great War).

Although there was no formal ban on the Yiddish press in Russian-controlled Poland (until 1918), tsarist authorities routinely refused to grant concessions to found a Yiddish

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<sup>2</sup> For the best and most recent source of information on *Izraelita*, see Zuzanna Kołodziejska, „*Izraelita*” (1866-1915). *Znaczenie kulturowe i literackie czasopisma* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Nahum Sokolow was born in Wyszogród, Poland in 1859 and grew up in integrationist circles before moving closer to Zionism later in life. He served as Secretary General of the World Zionist Organization and negotiated the Balfour Declaration. Sokolow died in London in 1936.

<sup>4</sup> In 1896, *Izraelita* had 1,280 subscribers (half of them in Warsaw). This number does not include copies sold in bookstores or by newspaper sellers. See Marcin Wodziński and Agnieszka Jagodzińska, „*Izraelita*” 1866-1915. *Wybór źródeł* (Kraków: Austeria, 2015), 24.

<sup>5</sup> Also spelled as *Hasfira* or *Hacefira*.

newspaper.<sup>6</sup> As the Russian censors had little, if any, knowledge of Yiddish, they preferred not to deal with Yiddish periodicals at all. Although Jewish periodicals in Russian, Polish or Hebrew were allowed, Yiddish was considered a revolutionary language, raising the suspicion of Russia's Ministry of the Interior. It was only after the 1905 revolution that the Yiddish press began to be published relatively freely.<sup>7</sup> Prior to that point, two Yiddish newspapers, edited in Russian Congress Poland, were printed in Kraków (censorship was much less stringent in Habsburg Galicia) and mailed back and sold in Poland. The Kraków-printed *Der Yud* (1899-1903) and *Yidishe Folks-Tsaytung* (1902-1903) were followed by *Der Veg* (1905), the first legal daily Yiddish newspaper ever published in Warsaw. A few years later, benefiting from relaxed censorship, *Haynt* (1908) and *Der Moment* (1910) began to appear. Both dailies were published until September 1939 and became the main voices of Polish Yiddish-speaking Jewry of the interwar years. In the absence of an all-embracing organization or parliamentary platform for the entire Jewish community, the interwar Yiddish press played a unique role as a mouthpiece for all Jewish interests and desires. It was not merely a source of information or amusement; it also meant, as Yehuda Gotthelf put it, "a defense, a consolation and a guiding path for the future."<sup>8</sup> Yitshak Grünbaum added that *Haynt* made Polish Jews realize that they were part of a global Jewish nation and taught them how to fight for justice.<sup>9</sup> The first decade of the twentieth century was a time of radicalization, as many intellectuals and activists were prompted to consider Yiddish as the basis for a secularized national identity.<sup>10</sup> The establishment of *Haynt* and *Moment* was witness to this process.

A special role was played by literary and artistic journals. Whereas YIVO (*Yidisher Visenshaftlekher Insitut*, Yiddish Scientific Institute) in Vilna was aptly described by Cecille Esther Kuznitz as a substitute for a "government for dispersed Jewish people," the Warsaw literary weekly *Literarische Bleter* could be described as its Ministry of Culture.<sup>11</sup> In its 1927

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<sup>6</sup> An exception was *Varshoyer Yidishe Tsaytung*, published between 1867 and 1868

<sup>7</sup> Kalman (Keith) Weiser, *Jewish People, Yiddish Nation: Noah Prylucki and the Folkists in Poland* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 43.

<sup>8</sup> Yehuda Gotthelf, "The Silenced Voice of the People," in *The Jewish Press That Was: Accounts, Evaluations and Memories of Jewish Papers in Pre-Holocaust Europe*, ed. Arie Bar (Tel Aviv: World Federation of Jewish Journalists, 1980), 10.

<sup>9</sup> Yitshak Grünbaum, "Haint: Memoirs and Evaluations," in *The Jewish Press That Was*, 17-33. Grünbaum (Warsaw 1879 – Gan Shmuel, Israel 1970) was a Zionist politician and an editor of *Haynt*.

<sup>10</sup> Barry Trachtenberg, *The Revolutionary Roots of Modern Yiddish, 1903-1917* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Cecile Esther Kuznitz, *YIVO and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture: Scholarship for the Yiddish Nation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 2.

editorial, the daily proclaimed with satisfaction that it was a leading source of Jewish literature, theater and art. “Everything that goes on in the cultural world of Warsaw, Buenos Aires, Moscow, Vilna, Kiev, etc. finds its reflection in the *Literarische Bleter*,” wrote the weekly.<sup>12</sup> Throughout the fifteen years of its existence, *Literarische Bleter* continued its struggle for a high quality Yiddish culture. Far from limiting itself to Jewish-Polish life, the weekly was aware of a transnational turn brought on by the migrations. *Literarische Bleter* consciously drew the new borders of the Yiddishland that expanded well beyond Eastern Europe and came to include Argentina.

Due to the highest concentration of Jews in the Russian Empire at the very beginning of the twentieth century, Warsaw became the main center of Jewish journalism, both in Yiddish and Polish. The development of the Jewish press continued in independent Poland after 1918. According to the estimates of Marian Fuks, at the turn of 1938 and 1939 around 790,000 copies of Jewish papers were sold daily in Poland, including 600,000 in Yiddish, 180,000 in Polish and a mere 10,000 in Hebrew.<sup>13</sup> As a YIVO report specified, in the last years before the outbreak of World War II, 270 Yiddish periodicals were published in Poland, out of which 27 were dailies, 100 weeklies, 24 fortnights and 58 monthlies.<sup>14</sup>

Growing knowledge of Polish allowed a rising number of Jews to participate in Poland’s national culture and to articulate their claims in a language understandable by their often hostile gentile co-citizens. The press in Polish (both Jewish and non-Jewish) was read by the Jewish intelligentsia, those working in the free professions and a new generation of young Polish Jews educated in state schools. Reading the Polish press marked an extension of cultural circles in which Polish Jews lived.<sup>15</sup> As Chone Shmeruk argued, the Jews of Poland lived in a trilingual space, encompassing Yiddish, Polish and Hebrew.<sup>16</sup> Language and social and political views did not always overlap and the status of each language was different. For instance, with only a rudimentary knowledge of Hebrew, most Polish Jews who supported Zionism read about Zionism in Polish or Yiddish. In terms of the Polish-language press, a key title was *Jakub*

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<sup>12</sup> “Tsu unzere lezer!” *Literarische Bleter*, no. 37, September 16, 1927, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Marian Fuks, *Prasa żydowska w Warszawie 1823-1939* (Warsaw: PWN, 1979), 165.

<sup>14</sup> Gotthelf, “The Silenced Voice of the People,” 13.

<sup>15</sup> See the studies of Anna Landau-Czajka, *Polska to nie oni: Polska i Polacy w polskojęzycznej prasie żydowskiej II Rzeczypospolitej* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2015); *Syn będzie Lech ...: asymilacja Żydów w Polsce międzywojennej* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Neriton 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Chone Shmeruk, “Hebrew-Yiddish-Polish: A Trilingual Jewish Culture,” in *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars*, ed. Yisrael Gutman et al. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1989), 285-311.

Appenzlak's *Nasz Przegląd* (1923-1939), despite its being published in Polish, its fervent defense of Jewish national rights and its status as a stronghold of moderate Zionism.<sup>17</sup> A similar political stance was shared by Kraków's *Nowy Dziennik* (1918-1939). In Lwów, Dawid Schreiber, Henryk Rosmarin and Henryk Hescheles edited another Jewish-Polish daily *Chwila* (1919-1939). The interwar Jewish press in Polish never was an assimilationist channel, and often functioned as a tribune for Jewish national claims.<sup>18</sup>

**Table no. 4. The readership of Jewish press in Poland in the late 1930s.**

Title	Circulation
<i>Hayntige Naves</i> (daily)	70,000
<i>Unzer Express</i> (daily)	60,000
<i>Haynt</i> (daily)	40,000
<i>Nasz Przegląd</i> (daily)	40,000 – 50,000
<i>Der Moment</i> (daily)	40,000
<i>Opinja</i> (Polish, weekly)	25,000

Table 4. The average circulation of Jewish periodicals in the late 1930s (my compilation based on Fuks, *Prasa żydowska w Warszawie*)

## 1.2. Helping the Folk: The Jewish-Polish Elite and the Question of *Erets Hakesef*

Emigration was a key problem to appear in Jewish-Polish Argentine debates. The possibility of immigration to Argentina that opened up in the last decade of the nineteenth century, following the establishment of Baron Maurice Hirsch's Jewish Colonization Association (JCA), engendered a need for comprehensive emigration advice. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, the regular Yiddish press was still unheard of in the Russian Empire. Only a few somewhat elitist Hebrew or Polish Jewish journals appeared. The Argentine rush at the end of the century was felt not only among the impoverished, but also among the acculturated elite. It was probably with the latter in mind that Wilhelm Kreuth's book *Voyage en Argentina* (Hebrew title: *Masa be-argentina*) was translated into Hebrew and published in

<sup>17</sup> Anna Landau-Czajka, "Polacy w oczach 'Naszego Przeglądu,'" *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 240 (2011): 491–506.

<sup>18</sup> Landau-Czajka, *Polska to nie oni*, 317.



Warsaw in 1897.<sup>19</sup> The book by Kreuth, an Austrian officer and a member of the Imperial Geographic Society in Vienna, was subsequently available only for the maskilic elite and did not reach the Yiddish-speaking masses. Tsarist censorship, often suspicious of Yiddish, might have influenced the choice of Hebrew. Kreuth's book did not specifically refer to emigration, but gave an overview of Argentine regions, from Buenos Aires to Entre Rios. The fact that Kreuth's book appeared in Hebrew, rather than the more commonly spoken Yiddish, shows that in the 1890s immigration to Argentina was a subject of discussion for Eastern European elites, inscribed into positivist discussions regarding the future of the ordinary Jewish *folk* masses. The Argentine fever of the 1890s was an answer to the same pressing social and political problems that Zionism and Jewish socialism began to address at the end of the nineteenth century. In the exact same way that Zionism was initially limited to the narrow circles of *Hovevey Tsiyon*, Argentine debates did not start among ordinary people, but among the educated and cultured classes. Simultaneously, discussions concerning Argentina within the Jewish elite mirrored parallel debates within gentile society concerning the question of peasant colonization of Argentina and Brazil.

The tendency to approach Argentina as a site of hope for impoverished countrymen can be traced in the Jewish elite's Hebrew and Jewish-Polish press. Both the contributors and the readers of these newspapers did not think of themselves when they talked about Argentina. The subject of their discussions was the disenfranchised, the poor and the hopeless. At the end of the nineteenth century, around 40% of Russian Jews relied on communal help. The May Laws of 1882 limited the number of professions available to Jews, forbade relocation, work in agriculture, the production and sale of alcohol, consequently bringing ruin to many Jewish families in Tsarist Russia.<sup>20</sup> In the context of the economic crisis, some Eastern European maskilim and integrationists saw colonization in Argentina as a chance to improve the plight of the Jewish poor. The agricultural project of Baron Hirsch, who planned to relocate thousands of Jews to Argentina, was met with both hope and suspicion in Jewish Poland. The ongoing industrialization of the Kingdom of Poland cast visions of pastoral agricultural settlements in Argentina in an unrealistic light, as untimely efforts that went against the modernizing

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<sup>19</sup> An earlier Hebrew translation by Boaz Finkel in 1891 was also likely in circulation, see Victor A. Mirelman, *En búsqueda de una identidad 1988. Los inmigrantes judíos en Buenos Aires 1890-1930* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Milá, 1988), 27. The German version appeared in 1891 in Vienna.

<sup>20</sup> Roberta Strauss Feuerlicht, *The Fate of the Jews: A People Torn Between Israeli Power and Jewish Ethnicity* (New York: Times Books, 1983), 61, quoted in Konrad Zieliński, "Emigracja żydowska z Rosji i Królestwa Polskiego (1881-1918)," *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów*, no. 201 (2002): 18.

economic trends of Europe. Yet the growing economic crisis and rising level of poverty demanded the search for a solution. In some cases, pogroms functioned as the final decisive push.

Argentina was featured in Poland's Jewish journals as early as 1888, when the Hebrew-language *Hazefirah* wrote about a group of Jews who settled in Buenos Aires.<sup>21</sup> In the next few years, regular reports about groups or families departing to Argentina from various corners of the Russian Empire began to appear in the newspaper. In June 1889, *Hazefirah* reported a visit by the Argentine consul to Warsaw, who encouraged emigration with promises of equal civil rights and a warm welcome in Argentina.<sup>22</sup> The paper published reports about the agents of Baron Hirsch in Paris, at times publishing their letters in *Hazefirah*.<sup>23</sup> The debate about Argentina continued into the 1890s and 1900s. Readers and editors took a position on the Argentine question, with some arguing that *Erets Hakesef* was rich, abundant and free, while others, including some Zionists, emphasized the threat that emigration posed to Jewish unity and tradition.<sup>24</sup> Nahum Slouschz, a Zionist author, wrote that Argentina was made “for people, not for the spirit,” rejecting claims that viewed Argentine emigration as a danger to Zionist ideology.<sup>25</sup> Personal letters from Argentina also appeared in *Hazefirah*.<sup>26</sup> Abraham Rozenfeld wrote from Colonia Mauricio, Abraham Horovitz from Moises Ville and Israel Fingerman from Colonia Clara.<sup>27</sup> Another Hebrew newspaper, *Hamagid* from Kraków, received regular correspondence from Argentina-based Yankev Shimon Liachovitzky.<sup>28</sup> Newspapers served as the contact point between emigrants and the community in Poland. For instance, a certain Perets Faygenboym made a request in his letter to have a number of religious objects sent to Moises

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<sup>21</sup> “Mikhtavey sofreyneu,” *Hazefirah*, no. 141, July 6, 1888, 2-3.

<sup>22</sup> *Hazefirah*, no. 412, June 3, 1889, page unknown, quoted in Iaacov Rubel, “Di opklangen vegn der yidisher emigratsye fun rusland un yidisher kolonizatsye in argentine,” *Argentiner IWO Shriftn* 15 (1989): 16.

<sup>23</sup> *Hazefirah* in 1900 had a circulation of around 5,000 copies. Since 1888, it appeared as a daily. See, Wodziński and Jagodzińska, „*Izraelita*” 1866-1915, 26-29.

<sup>24</sup> The Hebrew phrase *Erets Hakesef* could be translated as “A Land of Silver”, from the La Plata River, a “Silver River” that passes through Argentina.

<sup>25</sup> Nahum Slouschz, “Tsiyon ve-argentina,” *Hazefirah*, July 23, 1894, no. 155, 2 (666).

<sup>26</sup> Yosef Halevy, “Be-argentina. ha-limudim ha-ivri'im,” *Hazefirah*, no. 276, December 20, 1912, 4.

<sup>27</sup> Mirelman, *En búsqueda da una identidad*, 27.

<sup>28</sup> *Antologye fun der yidisher literatur in argentine* (Buenos Aires: a gezeshaflekhen komitet lekoyved dem 25-yorikn yubiley fun der teglekher tsaytung Di Prese, 1944), 416. Liachovitzky also wrote for *Der Yud* from Kraków, *Hameltiz* from St. Petersburg and the Viennese *Di Velt*. For instance, in 1901 he provided updates on Jewish education in Argentina. Yankev Shimon Liachovitzky, “Brif fun argentine. Unzere kinder-ertsiyung,” *Der Yud*, no. 5, January 31, 1901, 7-9.

Ville: *mezuzot, sidurim, tsit-tsit*, etc.<sup>29</sup> At the same time that Argentina became a field of general Polish emigration, the gentile press also picked up the subject of Jewish immigration to South America.<sup>30</sup>

The issue of Jewish immigration to Argentina remained a controversial subject during the entire pre-1914 period, functioning as an arena where diverse interests collided. Emigration represented hope for the poor, but at the same time, according to others, it endangered the traditional Jewish family, community structures and norms. Orthodox circles, which shaped communal life in many towns and cities, approached immigration to Argentina or the USA critically and with suspicion.<sup>31</sup> Yet even the maskills often viewed Argentina in the darkest hues. In 1891, the newspaper lamented the plight of Jews from Yelizavetgrad (now Kropyvnytskiy in Ukraine) who, on their way to Argentina, were refused entry to Austrian Lemberg and were sent back to Russia.<sup>32</sup> A few years later, *Hazefirah* reported on the situation of immigrants leaving Argentine Jewish colonies due to financial problems and conflicts with the JCA administration. In one article, Nahum Sokolow offered a scathing commentary: “To the wild creatures, to the fanatics, who come from the Spaniards. Do we want to send our poor folk to them?”<sup>33</sup> In 1890, as letters often describing the precarious situation in Argentina were flowing in, an editor came out in a fury, accusing the emigrants of not following the paper's advice:

Again Argentina! Even after witnesses, hundreds of confirmed witnesses, [reported] the hardship and pain that await [arrivals] in the remote country, and after we warned the unfortunate not to go to Argentina, but [now] we are helpless. Just yesterday our correspondent from Berlin reported another hundred families on their way to Argentina. It is with pain and sadness that we look on the division of the nation into those who read and those who do not, and lament the small number of newspaper readers among the *folksmenshn*.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Rubel, “Di opklangen vegn der yidisher emigratsye,” 32.

<sup>30</sup> “Żydzi w Argentynie,” *Kurjer Warszawski*, no. 19, January 31, 1892, 2. Between 1891-1893 *Kurjer Warszawski* (and other Warsaw newspapers) received reports from South America via traveler and journalist Stefan Barszczewski. Jerzy Mazurek, *Kraj a emigracja. Ruch ludowy wobec wychodźstwa polskiego do krajów Ameryki Łacińskiej (do 1939r.)* (Warsaw: Biblioteka Iberyjska, 2006), 122.

<sup>31</sup> Some rabbis even forbade emigration. Zieliński, “Emigracja żydowska,” 21.

<sup>32</sup> “Ba-israel,” *Hazefirah*, no. 185, August 30, 1891, 2 (748).

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Rubel, “Di opklangen vegn der yidisher emigratsye,” 33.

<sup>34</sup> “Inyaney duma,” *Hazefirah*, no. 135, July 2, 1889, 2 (552), quoted in Rubel, “Di opklangen vegn der yidisher emigratsye,” 24.

The Polish-language *Izraelita* often cited the presumably marvelous statistics of JCA colonies, pointing to the large Jewish farms and religious freedoms offered by Argentina.<sup>35</sup> *Izraelita* approached the prospect of building a Jewish settlement in Argentina rather positively. It reported the growing number of colonists (13,000 in 1907 and 24,000 in 1912)<sup>36</sup> or the exceptionally magnificent harvest of 1912.<sup>37</sup> Its chief editor, Samuel Peltyn, wrote that the idea of Jewish immigration to Argentina was laudable and would improve the fate of the Jewish masses, even “refine them.”<sup>38</sup> Ten years later, Adolf Jakub Cohn debated how to emigration should react those “allowed by luck to be above the crowd and who could allow themselves to lead a lovely, thornless life in the homeland [Poland].” Some regarded the acceptance of emigration as a form of “defeatism” and an implicit acknowledgment that integrationist circles had nothing to offer the poor. Cohn did not share this view and applauded Jewish colonization in Argentina. He believed that those who “suffocate” in poverty would do anything to leave Russian Poland. The task of the Jewish intelligentsia was to assist fellow coreligionists whom “circumstances had brought to the verge of an abyss.” Cohn called on the Jewish intelligentsia and bourgeoisie to facilitate immigration to Argentina.<sup>39</sup>

The weekly had a rather one-sided approach to the conflicts between the immigrant colonists and the JCA administration. *Izraelita* relied on information provided by English newspapers and, as an acculturationist paper, took the side of the German-Jewish and English-Jewish JCA functionaries, rather than the ordinary Eastern European settlers.<sup>40</sup> While acknowledging some initial difficulties, the weekly concluded that complaints were often exaggerated and untrue. Answering a letter from a Moisés Ville colonist, who complained about

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<sup>35</sup> *Izraelita* was founded in 1861 by Samuel Peltyn and reached the circles of Warsaw’s progressive Jewish intelligentsia (lawyers, doctors, teachers, etc.). *Izraelita* held a Polonocentric integrationist position, rooted in the concept of a “Jewish-Polish brotherhood” that appeared in the 1860s. *Izraelita*’s circles saw themselves as “Polacy-Żydzi,” or “Poles-Jews,” rather than simply Jews or Polish Jews. Following Peltyn’s death in 1896, the weekly was directed by his wife and son. Its editorship was later assumed by Nahum Sokolow, but his neophyte Zionism was criticized by other editors and he was ultimately ousted. In the final period, its pro-Polish attitude was sharply criticized by the Yiddish dailies. The new social and political reality on the verge of the Great War led to the dissolution of the journal.

<sup>36</sup> “Sprawozdanie Towarzystwa JCA,” *Izraelita*, no. 1, January 3, 1913, 5.

<sup>37</sup> “Wychoźstwo do Argentyny,” *Izraelita*, no. 11, March 15, 1912, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Samuel Peltyn, “Co z kolonizacji żydów sobie rokujemy?” *Izraelita*, no. 36, 1891, 241-242, quoted in Wodziński and Jagodzińska, *„Izraelita” 1866-1915*, 329.

<sup>39</sup> Adolf Jakub Cohn, “Argentyna,” *Izraelita*, no. 15, 1901, 173-174.

<sup>40</sup> This was rooted in *Izraelita*’s approach towards the Jewish masses. The journal regarded them as “dark” and the circles of *Izraelita* as the illustrious leaders, who should “save the poor fanatics” and show them how to love Poland and live in unity with the Poles. See “Od Redakcji,” *Izraelita*, no. 1, 1909, 1, quoted in Wodziński and Jagodzińska, *„Izraelita” 1866-1915*, 42.

the JCA restrictions, the weekly wrote: “[...] these kinds of careerists and know-it-alls [...] for whom it is hard to carry the yoke of order, are a destructive force and should be deported as soon as possible. There [in Argentina] one needs simple and honest people; there you need honest minds and strong hands... delicate minds with experience in commerce would only produce intrigue, gossip and internal conflict.”<sup>41</sup> Nahum Sokolow, referring to the colonists' rebellion against the JCA administration, wrote that the “colonies are inhabited by the riffraff, by emigrant scumbags from Volhynia, Bessarabia and God knows where else. This is a dark and insolent crowd, easy to manipulate by any gossip, people without goals and endurance.”<sup>42</sup> *Izraelita's* editors were perfectly aware of the difficulties and conflicts in Argentina, but saw colonization as an endeavor worth the price of the initial pain. Nahum Sokolow wrote that constructing the “new Jew,” a hard-working colonist devoted to the land was a top priority, and in this light “any Argentine or Palestinian scandals” were of no importance.<sup>43</sup> On other occasions, Sokolow explicitly wrote that emigration could not be a solution for the entire Jewish folk, even not the poor *luftmenshn*. Sokolow believed that Polish maskillim knew their people better than Western European men of charity, and saw more room for social work in Poland, rather than rushing to emigration.

The drastic positions quoted above did not appear in every issue, but they offer a good sample of the weekly's ambivalent approach towards colonization. *Izraelita* did not encourage emigration, but often saw it as a relevant option for the impoverished Jewish masses. At the beginning of the 1880s, the journal debated whether to emigrate, but by the beginning of the twentieth century it was busy describing the ongoing emigration process.<sup>44</sup> Then, almost every issue published articles on Jewish colonization in Argentina, usually only dry statistical data, both concerning the benefits received by settlers and data related to agricultural production. In the early twentieth century, emigration had become a Jewish reality, rather than a matter of debate. Taken as a whole, *Izraelita* approached Argentina with hope and came to view emigration as part of the broader positivist agenda by which the acculturated Jewish elite attempted to ease the situation of the poor Jewish masses in Poland. Yet, as the integrationists stressed, Jewish life needed to be improved in Poland, as emigration was a solution available only to a small fraction of the population.

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<sup>41</sup> “Ze świata. Z Argentyny,” *Izraelita*, no. 11, November 3, 1892, 81.

<sup>42</sup> Nahum [probably Nahum Sokolow], “Trudne początki,” *Izraelita*, no. 27, April 29, 1892, 136-136.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>44</sup> Wodziński and Jagodzińska, “*Izraelita*” 1866-1915, 329.

The pro-Argentine voices appeared among the early Yiddishist intelligentsia. In the pre-World War I era, the star Yiddish writer Yitskhok Leybush Peretz was one of the first public figures in Jewish Poland to approach Argentina in a nuanced way. He was opposed to the essentialization and exoticization of Jewish life in Argentina and stood up against those slandering the enterprise of emigration. For the Argentine Yiddishist Samuel Rollansky, Peretz was “a defender of Argentina” within the heated debates during the “Argentine fever” of the 1890s and 1900s.<sup>45</sup> Peretz was far from idealizing emigration and colonization and referred to problems from a practical perspective. He called for a well-organized emigration of the “farming suitable” population, rather than a “tumult-like fleeing to Argentine.” Peretz had no doubt that Jews could learn to farm, describing it as only a matter of time.<sup>46</sup>

Other Yiddish sources from the pre-1914 era were less optimistic and explicitly pointed to the difficulties faced by settlers. In 1910, in Galician Stanislau / Stanisławów (now Ivano-Frankovsk in Ukraine) a book was published by Leon Chasanovitch, a writer and Labor Zionist, who traveled to the Argentine Jewish colonies.<sup>47</sup> His book, *Die Krise der jüdischen Kolonisation in Argentinien und der moralische Bankerott der J.C.A.-Administration* (The Crisis of Jewish Colonization in Argentina and the Moral Bankruptcy of the JCA Administration), was published in German and Yiddish, suggesting that it was targeted at both the popular and acculturated readership. Chasanovitch fiercely criticized the colonization enterprise. He knew it from personal experience by living briefly in Argentina, before being deported after standing accused of anarchism. Chasanovitch accused the organization of fraud, misunderstanding the original concepts of Baron Hirsch and “moral bankruptcy.” Chasanovitch prodded the JCA by emphasizing that fewer Jews lived in all Jewish colonies in Argentina than on a single street in Vilna.<sup>48</sup> Following the publication of his book, *Izraelita* took up the subject. The weekly was not sure if the information provided by Chasanovitch about the JCA was accurate and placed a question mark at the end of article's title. In 1892, a Russian language booklet *Russko-yevreyskaya zemedlicheskaya kolonia v palestinu, c. ameriku i*

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<sup>45</sup> Samuel Rollansky was born in Warsaw in 1902 where he received both a traditional and secular education. Upon immigrating to Argentina in 1922, he worked as a journalist in *Yidische Zeitung* (from 1934 until 1972). Later, Rollansky directed the Argentine branch of the YIVO Yiddish Scientific Institute (IWO). He was a prolific literary and theater critic, often composing his own short stories and essays. He edited the monumental publishing series, *Musterverk fun der yidisher literatur*. Rollansky died in Buenos Aires in 1995.

<sup>46</sup> Samuel Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte vort un teater in argentine* (Buenos Aires, 1941), 130.

<sup>47</sup> Leon Chasanovitch, *Die Krise der jüdischen Kolonisation in Argentinien und der moralische Bankerott der J.C.A.-Administration* (Stanisławów: Verlag Bildung, 1910).

<sup>48</sup> Astro, *Yiddish South of the Border*, 46.

*argentinu* (The Russian-Jewish Agricultural Colony in Palestine, North America and Argentina) was published in Odessa. The booklet concluded with a final chapter entitled “At home is better,” disavowing the colonizing enterprise not only in Argentina, but also in Palestine and the USA.<sup>49</sup>

Similar critical opinions were voiced in the gentile press concerning the Polish peasant immigration to Latin America, mostly to Brazil.<sup>50</sup> In 1891, Antoni Potocki compiled a book of letters sent by emigrants from Brazil and Argentina. The letters depicted Brazil as hell on earth, emphasizing the striking poverty of the emigrants, their hopelessness and disillusionment. In addition, gentile Polish authors, similarly to some Jewish figures, explained the difficulties of colonization by placing the blame on the “inadequate human capital.”<sup>51</sup> In the Peruvian context, Franciszek Sokół, a priest writing in 1931 for *Gazeta Świąteczna*, claimed: “From all over Poland, they sent the admirers of fresh air, who search for quick enrichment, to unexplored jungles, where only the strength of muscles means anything. All liberal and illiberal professions were here, but no farmers! Almost 90 out of every 100 never held an ax in their hand. The ships arriving to Iquitos spat out veterinarians, half-engineers, quasi-journalists [...] and other momma's boys, who made a mess in Poland and [now] needed [somewhere] to hide. What a gathering of clumsiness, mean-spiritedness and shamelessness!”<sup>52</sup> From the perspective of Polish landowners, including the nobility and the Catholic Church, the peasant emigration was a purely negative development. It was seen as devastating to the national economy and Poland's human resources, depriving landowners of cheap and always available labor. During the emigration fever of the 1890s and 1900s, popular Polish press titles, such as *Kurjer Warszawski*, *Gazeta Lwowska* or *Kurier Poznański*, warned readers not to immigrate to Latin America. Both readers and press editors, largely alienated from the life of the peasantry, regarded emigration

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<sup>49</sup> The booklet compiled by S. Penn, was edited by G.M. Price, a Russian-Jewish intellectual who immigrated to the USA in 1882 and established a center of Russian-Jewish culture. Price wrote numerous articles on the experience of immigrants in America for the Russian Jewish press. See Steven Cassedy, *The Other Shore: The Russian Jewish Intellectuals Who Came to America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2014), 70-71.

<sup>50</sup> Maria Paradowska identified three stages of peasant immigration to Brazil and Argentina: First (1890-1891, usually from German Greater Poland; second (1896-1898), when mostly landless peasants from Galicia emigrated; and third, at the very beginning of the century when peasants, mostly from the Lublin and Białystok region, settled in Brazil. See Maria Paradowska, *Podróżnicy i emigranci. Szkice z dziejów polskiego wychodźstwa w Ameryce Południowej* (Warsaw: Interpress, 1984), 18-19.

<sup>51</sup> Krzysztof Groniowski, “Emigracja z ziem zaboru rosyjskiego (1864-1918),” in *Emigracja z ziem polskich w czasach nowożytnych i najnowszych (XVIII-XX w.)*, ed. Andrzej Pilch (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1984), 230-240.

<sup>52</sup> Franciszek Sokół, “Prawda o Peru,” *Gazeta Świąteczna*, no. 2647, October 25, 1931, 6. Quoted in Stanisław Warchałowski, *I poleciał w świat daleki... Wspomnienia z Brazylii, Polski i Peru* (Warsaw: Biblioteka Iberyjska, 2009), 30.

as a threat to a Polishness losing its human reservoir.<sup>53</sup> Among the critical voices, some understood the precarious situation of the peasant and advocated organized and channeled emigration.<sup>54</sup>

### **1.3. Ready for a Journey? Advocating, Advising, Informing: Yiddish Emigration Guidebooks before 1914**

The integrationist and maskilic periodicals that discussed Argentina at the turn of the 1890s and 1900s were largely unavailable to poorer Jews, who were supposed to become the colonists of Argentina. That changed with the appearance of a regular Yiddish language press, geared specifically to ordinary Jews. The figure that combined the Argentine debates of the Jewish elite with the attitudes of the Jewish masses was Yitskhok Leybush Peretz. He belonged to the cultural echelons of Jewish society, but wrote in Yiddish for a broader Jewish public, often taking inspiration from the life of simple *shtetl* Jews. Peretz's literary debut came at the very same time when Argentina appeared on the map of the Jewish world.<sup>55</sup> In 1889, the first ship with Jewish immigrants docked in Buenos Aires, in 1888 Y. L. Peretz debuted in Yiddish and, in 1896, Theodor Herzl published his pamphlet *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State), in which he debated between Palestine and Argentina as potential destinations for a future Jewish settlement.<sup>56</sup> According to Samuel Rollansky, Peretz planned to travel to Argentina together with his friend Yankev Dinezon and considered founding a Yiddish newspaper there. In a letter to Dovid Falk, Peretz wrote about a separate book that he planned to devote to Argentina.<sup>57</sup> In 1902, Peretz entered into a debate about the Jewish Colonization Association with literary critic Israel Isidor Elyashev (Bal Mahshoves), who described Argentine colonization as “creating an open wound on the body of the Jewish folk,” arguing the negative consequences that the

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<sup>53</sup> One of the critics of peasant emigration was the nationalist politician Roman Dmowski. Dmowski visited Polish colonies in Brazil in 1899 as a correspondent for *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, see Paradowska, *Podróznicy i emigranci*, 171. See also Roman Dmowski, *Wychodźstwo i osadnictwo* (Lwów: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze, 1900); Michał Starzewski, “Mrzonki racjonalnej kolonizacji w duchu narodowym: Roman Dmowski i polska emigracja do Brazylji,” *Przegląd Historyczny* 52 no. 2 (2015): 63-74. In his account, Dmowski wrote that “we need to look on the eruptions of the emigration movement with the greatest caution,” *ibidem*, 1.

<sup>54</sup> Paradowska, *Podróznicy i emigranci*, 159-162.

<sup>55</sup> Samuel Rollansky, “Y.L. Peretzes batsiyung tsu argentine,” *Argentiner IWO Shriftn* 1 (1941): 117-136.

<sup>56</sup> Theodor Herzl, *Der Judenstaat* (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1920), 40-45. For attempts by the proto-Zionist Hovevey Tsiyon to attract the attention and funding of Baron Maurice Hirsch, see Israel Klausner, *Me-kattowitz ad basel. Moreshet shel gal ha-aliya ha-sheni ad ha kongres ha-tsiyoni ba-basel* (Jerusalem: Ha-sifirya ha tsiyonit, 1964), 126-148, quoted in Rubel, “Di opklangen vegn der yidisher emigratsye,” 41.

<sup>57</sup> Nakhmen Mayzel, ed., Y.L. Peretz briv un redes gezamelt un ibergezetst mit araynfir un bemerkungen fun nakhmen mayzel (Vilna, 1930), 55; quoted in Rollansky, “Y.L. Peretzes,” 120.



Palestine-Argentina dichotomy might have on the Zionist project.<sup>58</sup> Peretz dismissed this accusation and argued that JCA was the only existing transnational Jewish body, “a sign of Jewish unity,” and could only be beneficial to Jewish folk.<sup>59</sup> Although in Poland Peretz’s opinions were of great importance, his numerous articles supporting agricultural colonization went almost unnoticed in Argentina, which in that period was almost devoid of a Jewish journalistic or literary scene. Peretz’s interest in Argentina should not be seen as a sign of his special preference for South America. His articles and polemics were part of the ongoing discussions of that era, when, as Rollansky concluded, “Palestine and Argentina appeared as two twins.”

Peretz’s interest in Argentina in the early twentieth century was fueled by the beginning of the Jewish immigration to Argentina and the subsequent debates among the Jewish elite. At the same time, Argentina entered the lives of ordinary Polish Jews. Israel Makranski of the *Poylisher Farband* recalled that Jewish colonization in Argentina “shined in the dark night of Jewish life in Europe.”<sup>60</sup> This is clearly visible in the memories of Yiddish authors who grew up in the traditional *shtetls*, but later became secularized and embraced progressive cultural Yidishism. Peretz Hirschbein recalled that at the beginning of the twentieth century Argentina was “seducing” the poorest of the poor with its presumed richness and liberties. Jews in Poland allegedly began to dream about Argentina. Hirschbein paraphrased the contemporary atmosphere in the following way:

Come here [to Argentina], come here, it will be your country... Here flows milk and honey... You can eat bread and meat until being satiated. Sun and happiness rule here. Come here, with sons and daughters, settle down in a country of happiness, everything will be provided upon your arrival.... Come quick, come quick!<sup>61</sup>

Another Yiddish author, Hersh Dovid Nomberg recalled the days of the early Argentine fever in the following way:

Argentina! Once it was a word that was heard in all Jewish cities and shtetls, as a call of redemption, a word that made Jewish hearts tremble with happiness, expectation and hope. As a lovely spring wind, the message traveled around all Jewish places: a country for

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<sup>58</sup> Baal Machshoves, “Ver iz JCA?” *Der Jud*, no. 8, February 21, 1901, quoted in Rollansky, “Y.L. Peretzes,” 126.

<sup>59</sup> *Shtet un shtetlekh* in *Ale verk fun Y.L. Peretz* (Vilna: Vilner Ferlag fun Kletzkin, 1925), vol. 17, 243, quoted in Rollansky, “Y.L. Peretzes,” 126.

<sup>60</sup> Israel Makranski, “Poylisher yidn in der argentiner yidisher kolonizatsye,” in *Poylisher yidn in doyrem amerike. 25 yor gezelschaftlekhe tetikayt* (Buenos Aires: Tsentral farband fun poylisher yidn in argentine, 1941), 129.

<sup>61</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, *Fun wayte lender. Argentine, brazil, yuni, november 1914* (New York: Farlag Tog, 1916), 35.

Jews, for Jewish agricultural workers, the Redeemer arose, Baron Hirsch! [...] The newspapers were agitating, this one for, the other against. [...] The intelligentsia had debated: is Argentina a competition for Zion or not? In short, for some years Argentina occupied a very prominent place for the Jewish public.<sup>62</sup>

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, a broad spectrum of Yiddish speakers was not yet served by modern Yiddish dailies and weeklies, which would only become commonplace in the second decade of the twentieth century. To reach the emigrants, the Jewish Colonization Association established a network of information centers and traveling emigration agents. In time, the JCA activities developed and in 1909 it had representatives in 433 towns and cities throughout the Russian Empire, including 50 in the Kingdom of Poland, which in those years was the source of approximately 25% of all Russian-Jewish emigrants.<sup>63</sup> The organization published regular reports, Spanish-Yiddish dictionaries and brochures explaining how to receive an emigration passport. From 1907 onwards, the JCA published a Yiddish biweekly *Yidisher Emigrant* (The Jewish Emigrant), distributing around 70,000 copies in 1910. Similar counseling institutions could be found in Warsaw, run mostly by wealthier Jews, who regarded emigration advising and advocacy as a type of charity work. Warsaw saw to the establishment of the Warsaw Information Bureau for Emigrant Jews, and from 1912 the Jewish Emigration Society.<sup>64</sup> The former organization was in permanent contact with the JCA, and immigrants planning to go to Argentina made up 26% of those seeking the organization's advice. Historian Konrad Zieliński estimated that prior to 1914, approximately 11.5% of Jewish emigrants from the Kingdom of Poland had immigrated to Argentina.<sup>65</sup>

Jewish emigration agencies were coordinating the recruitment of both Christian and Jewish emigrants. They belonged to a hierarchical structure, with branches in European ports, big cities in Poland and individual representatives in smaller towns. In Galicia, only 15% of agents were Poles in 1910, while the rest were Jews or Germans. Quite often emigration agencies were a family business or were run by women. In Husiatyń, Pinkas Kapeller worked with his son David, while in Rawa Ruska Moses Gelber cooperated with his son-in-law. In

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<sup>62</sup> Hersh Dovid Nomberg, introduction to Mordechai Alpersohn, *Kolonye Mauricio: draysik yerike JCA kolonizatsye in argentine: a historishe shilderung* (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1923), 7.

<sup>63</sup> "Emigracja żydów z Rosji," *Izraelita*, unknown issue from 1911, 9.

<sup>64</sup> Warszawskie Biuro Emigrantów Żydów (The Warsaw Information Bureau for Emigrant Jews) was directed by Leon Lichtenstein, a lawyer and co-editor of *Izraelita* in the late 1900s. See Wodziński and Jagodzińska, "*Izraelita*" 1866-1915, 40.

<sup>65</sup> Zieliński, "Emigracja żydowska," 32.

Rohatyń, Josef and Ruchla Doller jointly represented the *Austro-Americana* shipline. When in 1907 Russian police discovered the illegal emigration bureau of Salomon Rozenberg, all his family (wife Estera-Fejga and parents David and Sura) were deported from Russian Poland for two years.<sup>66</sup>

Emigration from Russia was restricted or treated as a delict, until the end of the tsarist rule. Obtaining a passport was difficult and expensive. Consequently, many Jews fled the Empire illegally, bribing the border police or using someone else's passport. Police documents reveal that emigration agents were often involved in the smuggling of goods and people. Russian emigrants usually crossed the Austrian border around the town of Brody and continued their journey by train to Hamburg, Bremen, etc. The way via Russian Lipava or Odessa was more expensive and required the possession of a valid passport.<sup>67</sup> Those immigrating to Argentina under the auspices of the Jewish Colonization Association received exceptional emigration permits. The JCA had its office in St. Petersburg and coordinated the issue with the Russian government. In Galicia, the emigration laws of 1897 permitted emigration for anyone except those obligated to serve in the army. Consequently, most of the people leaving Russian Poland in 1905 were deserters (around 80%), whereas in Galician Husiatyń it was about 40% in 1913.<sup>68</sup> The deserters who could not obtain official passports relied on the help of smugglers and document forgers. In this case, many turned out to be Jewish. In 1912, the Russian police arrested a gang of 17 Jewish smugglers from Myszyniec, who were transporting Jews across the Prussian border. In 1913, the Austrian police found 45 false passports in the emigration agency run in Stary Sambor by Salomon Weiniger.<sup>69</sup>

To satisfy the need for information about what was then the almost completely unknown country of Argentina, a plethora of short books describing the conditions of life in Argentina appeared throughout Eastern Europe. One of the first emigration guidebooks published in

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<sup>66</sup> Michał Starzewski, "Z dziejów emigracji zarobkowej: agenci emigracyjni na ziemiach polskich przed 1914 r." *Przegląd Historyczny* CIII, no. 1 (2012): 47-80. See also Gur Alroey, "Bureaucracy, Agents, and Swindlers: The Hardships of Jewish Emigration From the Pale of Settlement in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century," in *Jews and the State: Dangerous Alliances and the Perils of Privilege. Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, vol. XIX, ed. Ezra Mendelsohn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 214-231.

<sup>67</sup> See Irving Howe, *The World of Our Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 28-29, and Hans Rogger, *Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia* (Hampshire-London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1986), 183-184, quoted in Zieliński, "Emigracja żydowska," 20.

<sup>68</sup> Starzewski, "Z dziejów emigracji zarobkowej," 48.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

Yiddish was *Argentina. Leyent un veyst vohin ir fort* (Argentina: Read and Know Where You Are Going) published in Berdichev in 1892, originally in Russian and compiled by Bargash Shakhbar (a nickname). It is unclear who published the Russian original. Although the book was published in Ukrainian Berdichev, it catered principally to Polish Jews. The first pages advertised the possibility of purchasing the book in a well-known Warsaw publishing house of the Orgelbrand family, in the headquarters of *Yudishe Biblyotek* on Niecała Street or the Dinezon's bookstore on Nalewki Street (both in Warsaw).

Shakhbar's *Argentina* was a very realistic and down-to-earth depiction of immigration conditions. It was far from over-optimistic and described in detail the numerous problems, obstacles and forms of harassment that emigrants faced during their journey. It informed its readers that in the "Argentine paradise, no one waited for the emigrants with open hands."<sup>70</sup> The author pointed out that promises of plots of land, farm animals and money for starting a new life in Argentina were fulfilled only in rare cases. As Shakhbar argued, due to passport or other legal difficulties, many immigrants were forced to return home already from European port cities. The book described the agents that sold false tickets to Argentina or robbers who attacked those waiting for the ship.<sup>71</sup> The author summarized the situation in the following way: "They do to you all the bad things that are possible." The book continued by informing readers about the terrible travel conditions: "You will have money only for a third-class ticket. There you [will] hardly have any air to breathe, receive small portions of food and have barely anything to drink [...] In a space for three hundred people, they [will] squeeze in five hundred or more, so that it is not uncommon for someone to suffocate."<sup>72</sup> The guidebook informed travelers that the salty sea water was undrinkable, that the fresh water supply was very limited and the little that was available "was covered with a green mold and stank unbearably." Sea sickness, which "spared only maybe one in a hundred," was described in an equally terrifying

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<sup>70</sup> Bargash Shakhbar, *Argentina. Leyent un veyst vohin ir fort* (Berdichev, 1892), 4–5.

<sup>71</sup> For studies dealing with emigration agents in Poland see: Grzegorz Maria Kowalski, "Instytucje organizujące wychodźstwo z Galicji w latach 1901-1914. Organizacja, działalność, propaganda emigracyjna," in *Wielokulturowość polskiego pogranicza. Ludzie – idee – prawo. Materiały ze Zjazdu Katedr Historycznoprawnych, Augustów, 15-18 września 2002 roku*, ed. A. Lityński et al. (Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, 2003), 381-395; Grzegorz Maria Kowalski, *Przestępstwa emigracyjne w Galicji 1897-1918: z badań nad dziejami polskiego wychodźstwa* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2003); for emigration agents in Germany, see Agnes Bretting, *Funktion und Bedeutung der Auswanderungsagenturen in Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert*, in *Auswanderungsagenturen und Auswanderungsvereine im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Agnes Bretting et al. (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1991).

<sup>72</sup> Shakhbar, *Argentina*, 6–8.

way. Hundreds of sick passengers allegedly lay in the *tsvishndek* (storage area) without any help, weak from disease.



Illustration. no. 2. Bargash Shakhbar, *Argentina. Leyent un veyst vohin ir fort*, Berdichev 1892.

The next chapters featured specific aspects of life in Argentina: its geography, the local population, Spanish colonization and European immigration. The author touched upon Argentine *gauchos*, whose “whole life was to ride a horse around the steppe.”<sup>73</sup> Shakhbar also described Argentina’s economic development. Commerce was supposed to “increase day by day” and familiar potatoes and wheat, as well as less known varieties of corn and melons, were said to have been grown in Argentina. Special attention was paid to cattle, described as Argentina’s main export good. In addition, Argentine imports were portrayed in detail, giving the future immigrant a perspective on which trades could be practiced with success. Nevertheless, Shakhbar warned that only “those with professions or with money” would be

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 12–13.

lucky enough to have a relatively easy start. Most immigrants needed to work very hard to earn the most basic livelihood. Many faced difficulties with adapting to the new climate, while the professionals were far from rich, as flats and food were allegedly very expensive. In other place, the author explained clearly that one needed to work very hard for bread and that nothing “here was given for free.” As Shakhbar warned, after realizing that life in Argentina was no heaven, many immigrants started to miss their home. Yet many lacked the necessary financial means to return, others “died from worrying,” yet others were forbidden to go back.<sup>74</sup>

As Shakhbar believed, the possibilities of becoming a farmer were scarce. The Argentine government was described as a group of liars, who fooled immigrants. The situation with buying land from private owners was presumably similar: “First, you don’t know the language, second, you don’t know the laws, third, the officials are thieves,” Shakhbar summarized.<sup>75</sup> However, the ending of his book was more optimistic. In referring to the experiences of Eastern European Jews, he summed the matter up in the following way: “You know well what is hunger and suffering [...] and you know that the way to the Garden of Eden is a way through troubles [...]. But Argentina can become that kind of *Gan Eden*.” The last paragraph of the book advised high caution, as Argentina could become a paradise only for the “proper, prepared emigrants.” For others, it would rather be a “graveyard.” The author advised against emigrating in the given moment and waiting for the assistance of the government and the fulfillment of a future Baron Hirsch project.<sup>76</sup> As it is impossible to identify Shakhbar’s background, I cannot speculate about his exact motivations. On the one hand, he published his book in Yiddish, catering to the future emigrants, yet gave a rather cold assessment of the opportunities in Argentina, on the other. His negative attitude might have been based on the earliest voices that spoke about the difficulties in Argentina, formulated by a Jewish elite fearing the loss of control and authority or by the negative attitude of Russian authorities, who generally forbade emigration.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>76</sup> Compare with Peretz Hirschbein’s and Hersh Dovid Nomberg’s accounts on the Jewish colonies in Argentina: section 4.3 in the second chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>77</sup> For an analysis of emigration regulations in the lands of partitioned Poland, see the works of Grzegorz Maria Kowalski. For the Austro-Hungarian Empire, see “Prawna regulacja wychodźstwa na ziemiach polskich pod panowaniem austriackim w latach 1832–1914,” *Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne* LIV, no. 1 (2002): 171–191; for Russian Poland, “Prawna regulacja wychodźstwa w Królestwie Polskim w latach 1815–1914,” *Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne* LV, no. 2 (2003): 231–254; for the Prussian partition, “Prawna regulacja wychodźstwa na ziemiach polskich pod panowaniem pruskim w latach 1794–1914,” *Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne* LVIII, no. 2 (2006): 199–224.

A number of similar brochures were in circulation in Eastern Europe. The following year (1893), an analogous guidebook edited by Yankev Yedvabnik *Di beshraybung fon argentina un ire kolonyen* (The Description of Argentina and Its Colonies) was published in Warsaw. It was already in its fifth edition (the first was probably issued in 1889), which suggests a high interest and demand for these kinds of guidebooks. The book was much more detailed than the Shakhbar's brochure and focused specifically on the agricultural colonies founded by Baron Maurice de Hirsch. In the space of more than a hundred pages, Yedvabnik gave a general overview of Argentina and presented the main personalities involved in Jewish colonization. The prologue was a description of the unusual commotion that the possibility of immigration to Argentina evoked in Eastern Europe. As Yedvabnik argued, the word Argentina "was repeated and echoed by everyone, by the intelligentsia and by blue-collar workers. It became a kind of magic spell that was supposed to solve all Jewish problems. It was on the lips of everyone." The turn of the 1880s and 1890s was described as a unique momentum when Argentina literally crashed into the lives of Polish Jews.<sup>78</sup>

As Yedvabnik stated, there were only a few people who had any reliable information about Argentina and the chances it offered. Here and there Jewish newspapers, such as Warsaw's *Izraelita*, published an article about the possibilities of emigration, but all in all information was hardly available. This lack of information compelled Yedvabnik to write a guidebook for his "Jewish brothers." In order to create the impression of a traveler, he decided to describe as a form of "travel" the process of analyzing the sources. Yedvabnik's book was supposed to be up-to-date, with the "hottest news and observations." He had never been to Argentina, and his information was taken from encyclopedias, books and journals. Yedvabnik decided to write his book in a Yiddish: in a "simple, everyday language, understandable to everyone." In fact, Yedvabnik's book was written in a Germanized Yiddish, suggesting that the author felt more confident in German than in Yiddish. Yedvabnik claimed that he was well informed about the lives of ordinary Jews, as he himself "travelled from a *beit midrash* to a *beit midrash*" (religious schools) until the age of fifteen. Afterwards he probably turned to Haskalah and became involved with acculturating German-speaking Jews, which influenced his Yiddish orthography.

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<sup>78</sup> Yankev Yedvabnik, *Di beshraybung fon argentina un ire kolonyen* (Warsaw, 1893).

The structure of Yedvabnik's book was similar to other books of this genre. The author departed from describing the history of European colonization of the future Argentina, underlining the conflicts between the "civilized Europeans" and indigenous groups that he saw as "wild peoples." Later, Yedvabnik described the geography of Argentina, its climate, trade and industry. In a chapter entitled "Religion and civilization," Yedvabnik informed readers that although the dominant religion of the land was Catholicism, the government allowed everyone to practice their faith freely. Argentine governments supported the development of secular science and public education was free.<sup>79</sup> Those who had fears about living conditions were informed that Buenos Aires was a fully European city, with electric lamps and horse-trams on most streets.



Illustration no. 3. Yankev Yedvabnik, *Di beshraybung fun argentina un ire kolonyen*, Warsaw, 1893.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 39-41.



Yedvabnik's book was a mixture of practical information relevant to the workers and descriptions of the magnificence and grandeur of Buenos Aires. Yedvabnik wrote that an average worker earned between 80 to 100 rubles a month, an artisan around 30 more and an accountant around 800. In the same paragraph, he wrote that "for the most basic food" one needed to spend between 70 to 120 rubles (which would mean that working-class families could barely make ends meet). Writing about the travel costs, he mentioned third-class tickets and advised negotiating discounts for bigger groups of emigrants.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, he provided information only about food for third-class passengers. In other passages, Yedvabnik wrote about the Flores district inhabited by the aristocracy, Palermo park and the beautiful avenues lined with palm trees that "were hard to see even in Paris." Paying little attention to the financial burden that purchasing a ship ticket meant for the majority of immigrants, when writing about travel conditions Yedvabnik recommended taking the most comfortable French ships. He gave his personal selection of the city's most beautiful streets (Rivadavia, Maipú) and squares (Plaza Victoria-now Plaza de Mayo, Plaza San Martín).<sup>81</sup> His book was dotted with a few photos, maps and drawings that served as additional proof to his remark that "civilization was well-rooted there."<sup>82</sup>

Yedvabnik devoted the second part of his book (more than forty pages) specifically to Jewish colonization. He presented the figure of Baron de Hirsch, quoted the contract between Hirsch and the Argentine government and a selection of news reports about colonization. Yedvabnik did not have the necessary tools to verify them, yet he clearly disavowed the critical voices appearing in Jewish Poland. He wrote that it was a shame that letters describing the situation in Argentina in negative terms were printed in the European Jewish press. He accused newspapers of spreading unverified information and besmirching the Argentine enterprise. Yedvabnik himself was convinced that immigration to Argentina was a good option for many Polish Jews and his book clearly encouraged readers to try their luck in Argentina. He praised the Russian government for issuing emigration permits and explicitly wrote "the way is open, open for everyone."<sup>83</sup> Yedvabnik hoped that emigration "would flow with a strong stream" and

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 104.

saw his book as a timely guide for “rayze-kandidaten” (trip candidates), as he labeled the emigrants. Yedvabnik hoped that emigration to Argentina would produce a new Jew, who “will leave his rugs at home,” together with “ugly traditions” and a preference for “handel-shmandel.” A Jew who knew what order, systematization and cleanness meant. He held a negative opinion of ordinary Jews, who made up the majority of future immigrants. His book revealed his prejudice concerning the traditional Jewry, so characteristic of the acculturated elite to which he probably belonged. The agricultural colonies in Argentina were inscribed by him into the positivist discourse of Eastern European Haskalah that insisted on “elevating the cultural level” of the Jewish masses. In his vision, Argentina was a laboratory of change and progress.

#### **1.4. On the Same Ship: The Trajectories of Immigration to Argentina**

Publications concerning immigration to Argentina featured not only Polish Jews, but also Polish and Ukrainian peasants. Between 1869 and 1939, around 150,000 Polish peasants permanently immigrated to Argentina and Brazil, with a large majority in the 1890s and 1900s.<sup>84</sup> “Argentine fever” in the Kingdom of Poland hit Jews and peasants precisely in the same years. The agrarian crisis (from 1884 onward), a ban on crop exports to the UK, a ban on working in Prussia, an industrial crisis in the Łódź area, growing overpopulation in rural areas of central and eastern Poland and the introduction of the May Laws the case of Jews – all led to searching for other options to make a living.<sup>85</sup> In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Argentina emerged as an emigration destination for both Jews and non-Jews. Both Jews and peasants were targeted by emigration agents, who circulated through towns and villages. In those years, a number of studies appeared examining the possibilities and influences of gentile emigration to Latin America, usually situated within a quasi-colonial discourse. Stefan Nestorowicz examined the chances of settlements in Patagonia, while in 1891 Józef Siemiradzki, Antoni Hemperl and Witold Łaźniewski traveled to Argentina.<sup>86</sup> In the 1890s, a few journals were in existence that published reports from expeditions and discussed immigration to South America: *Wszechświat* (Universe), *Wędrowiec* (Globetrotter), *Ziemia* (Earth), *Przegląd Emigracyjny* (Emigration Review). During the Argentine *hype* preceding World War I, The Polish Emigration Society (Polskie Towarzystwo Emigracyjne) published a

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<sup>84</sup> Mazurek, *Kraj a emigracja*, 9.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>86</sup> Paradowska, *Podróźnicy i emigranci*, 90-91

number of books featuring Argentina. In 1912, Roman Jordan's *Argentyna jako teren dla polskiego wychodźstwa. Sprawozdanie z podróży informacyjnej* (Argentina as a Terrain for Polish Emigration: A Report from a Study Trip) came out in Kraków. Another leader of the Polish Emigration Society, Józef Okołowicz, published *O widokach dla robotników sezonowych w Argentynie* (Concerning the Prospects of Seasonal Workers in Argentina) in Kraków in 1911.

After the First World War, the discourse of colonization and emigration continued in independent Poland. A Polish honorary consul in Argentina, Józef Włodek, edited *Argentyna i emigracja ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem emigracji polskiej* (Argentina and Emigration with a Special Focus on Polish Emigration), published in Warsaw in 1923. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, a number of Polish-Spanish phrasebooks was also published in Warsaw (some by governmental institutions, some by steamship carriers).<sup>87</sup> In 1937, the Emigration Syndicate issued a brochure on immigration to Argentina that, although directed mostly at Polish peasants, applauded Jewish achievements in Argentina.<sup>88</sup> In the same year, the Polish consul in Buenos Aires, Waclaw Dostal, edited another updated volume on Argentina.<sup>89</sup> In 1936, the Institute of Social Economy (Instytut Gospodarstwa Społecznego) announced a memoir contest for Polish emigrants in South America. The following year, the Institute published a volume that included selected testimonies.<sup>90</sup> They featured the difficulties of immigrant life, but also a conviction that their hard work would help them to improve their life. The testimonies were written by ordinary people and bore witness to the challenges of everyday life. Although these publications primarily featured Polish gentile emigrants of peasant background, they drew on the general presence of Argentina in the discourse of emigration in interwar Poland.

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<sup>87</sup> *Rozmówki polsko-hiszpańskie oraz najważniejsze zasady wymowy i gramatyki języka hiszpańskiego. Dla użytku emigrantów* (Warsaw: Urząd Emigracyjny, 1931); *Rozmówki polsko-hiszpańskie* (Warsaw: Nelson Line, 1929); *Rozmówki polsko-hiszpańskie* (Warsaw: Towarzystwo Okrętowe Królewsko-Holenderski Lloyd, 1928).

<sup>88</sup> *Wiadomości o Argentynie do użytków wychodźców wraz z samouczkiem języka hiszpańskiego*, Biblioteczka Syndykatu Emigracyjnego, vol. II (Warsaw: Syndykat Emigracyjny, 1937). The brochure thoroughly described the emigration process, the scams that emigrants might face and even referred to what clothes to take.

<sup>89</sup> Waclaw Dostal, *Argentyna*, Monografie Geograficzno-Handlowe Informatora Eksportowego, vol. IV (Warsaw, 1937). The book focused on economic and political aspects. The book was directed at Polish companies that wanted to enter the Argentine market. Metal, wood products and coal constituted the core of Polish exports

<sup>90</sup> *Pamiętniki Emigrantów z Ameryki Południowej* (Warsaw: Instytut Gospodarstwa Społecznego, 1937).

**Żydowskie Centralne T-wo Emigracyjne w Polsce („J E A S“)**

**Emigranci**, zamierzający jechać do krajów Centralnej i Południowej Ameryki: Argentyny, Urugwaju, Chile, Peru, Paragwaju oraz **Meksyku i Kuby** powinni posiadać chociaż minimalną znajomość

**Języka HISPANSKIEGO**  
Dla emigrantów, jadących do Stanów Zjednoczonych, Kanady, Australji i Południowej Afryki.  
jest wskazana znajomość

**Języka ANGLIJSKIEGO**  
Bez znajomości języka, po przybyciu do danego kraju emigrant staje się niemową a przeżyć niemowle trudno jest odszukać swego krewnego, adres Komitetu, znaleźć pracę i utrzymanie. Łatwiej też wtedy emigrant wpada w ręce rozmaitych oszustów.

**„HIAS - ICA - EMIGDIREKT“**  
organizuje obecnie we wszystkich krajach kursy nauczania tych języków dla emigrantów.

→ ZAPISZ SIĘ NA NASZE ←

**KRÓTKOTERMINOWE WIECZOROWE KURSY JĘZYKÓW HISPANSKIEGO I ANGLIJSKIEGO. PRZEZNACZONE DLA EMIGRANTÓW.**

**ZAPIS** słuchaczy odbywa się codziennie z wyjątkiem sobót i świąt od godz. 9 rano do 3 po poł. i od 7½ do 9 wieczorem

w biurze Towarzystwa Muranowska 34.

Drukarnia „Rekord” Warszawa, ul.ka Nika

**יידישע צענטראלע עמיגראציע - געזעל-שאפט אין פוילן („J E A S“)**

**עמיגראנטן**, וואס ווילן פארן אין די צענטראל-און דרום-אמעריקאנישע לענדער: ארגענטינע, אורוגוויי, טשילי, פערו, פאראגוויי ווי אויך אין מעקסיקע און קובא

מון נאכט א ביסל קענען

**די שפאנישע שפראך.**  
פאר די עמיגראנטן וואס פארן אין די פאריניסטע שטאטן, אויסטראליע און דרום-אפריקע אין נוצליך

**די ענגרישע שפראך.**  
און ווען אריבער שפראך אין די עמיגראנטן א שטארקע מונסט אין שווערע צו געשטען זיין קיוב. אריבער דעם קאמיטעט. צו באקומען אריבער און געשטען א פירנס. ער קען אויך נישט אריבער און די הענט פון פאריניסטע שווערע.

דורך „היאס” יקא = עמיגדירעקט”  
ווערן אויס געברענגט און אלע לעבעדיגע שפראך-קורסן פאר עמיגראנטן.  
פארשרייבט זיך אויך אונזערע

קורצטערמיניקע אונטערסון פאר עמיגראנטן פון דער שפאנישער און ענגלישער שפראך.

**א י י נ ש ר י י ב ו נ ג ע נ**  
פון 9 פרי ביז 3 נ.מ. און פון 7½ ביז 9 אונט  
אין ביורא פון דער געזעלשאפט מוראנאווסקע 34

Illustration no 4. HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), advertisements of Spanish courses in Warsaw, 1920s, DZS IK 2f, National Library in Warsaw.

In the twenties and thirties, steamer companies took part in publishing guidebooks for emigrants. In 1923, the Royal Steam Packet Mail Co. (RSPM), one of the steamer companies offering passage to Buenos Aires, published a thirty-page brochure in Yiddish about Argentina and the emigration process.<sup>91</sup> The company publications guided readers on how to receive a passport, what goods were allowed to be brought to Argentina and what to expect upon arrival in Buenos Aires. Similarly to earlier publications, the brochure commissioned by RSPM also wrote about the Argentine population, trade and climate. A separate chapter was devoted to the Jewish presence in Argentina. By mentioning the existence of the already well-established community, the company assured the emigrants about the Jewish social, cultural and economic infrastructure. Although the 1920s witnessed the peak of the Jewish white slave trade, the brochure did not say a word about it. By deciding to conceal this aspect of Argentine reality, the liner undoubtedly wanted to maintain a perception of the country as safe and promising.

<sup>91</sup> *Argentina* (Warsaw: Farlag "Royal Mail Line," 1923).



Illustration no. 5. “K.H.L. do Argentyny, Brazyliji, Urugwaju,” Królewsko Holenderski Lloyd, Warsaw 1928, DŹS XIII A 5, National Library Warsaw.

Within the plethora of books and brochures about Argentina to appear in Eastern Europe, Mordechai (Marcos) Alpersohn's memoirs *Draysik yor in argentine. Memuarn fun a yidishn kolonist* (Thirty Years in Argentina. Memoirs of a Jewish Colonist) held a special place.<sup>92</sup> The first part of the book was initially published in Buenos Aires in 1922 as *Kolonye Mauricio: draysik yerike JCA kolonizatsye in argentine: a historishe shilderung* (Colonia Mauricio: Thirty Years of JCA Colonization in Argentina: A Historical Picture), but was quickly republished the following year in Berlin with a foreword by Warsaw author Hersh Dovid Nomberg. In the early 1920s, the German capital served as a center of Yiddish literature and a thriving transit point of Eastern European Jewish culture.<sup>93</sup> Nomberg, who visited Argentina in 1922 and returned to

<sup>92</sup> The book had three parts published between 1922 and 1928. In 1930, the first part of the memoirs was published in Hebrew translation in Tel Aviv, which included a foreword by Hersh Dovid Nomberg. The Spanish translation appeared only in 1986.

<sup>93</sup> Gennady Estraiikh and Mikhail Krutikov, *Yiddish in Weimar Berlin: At the Crossroads of Diaspora Politics and Culture* (Oxford: Legenda, 2010).

Poland via Berlin, managed to find a publisher there for Alpersohn's book, which could then easily find its way from Berlin to Poland.

Alpersohn's book, written in Argentina by an emigrant from Poland (Lanckorona), was a first-hand account and memoir.<sup>94</sup> Published during the post-World War I emigration hype, it came to represent an important position for emigrants. Alpersohn wrote that the book was written “in a simple language that his mom taught him,” inviting readers not to anticipate an intimidating and overly scientific study. Nomberg, who edited the text, decided not to adjust its style and keep it as close to the original manuscript as possible. In the foreword, Alpersohn presented himself as one of the *folk*, someone who wanted to help future emigrants. His memoirs “were written with his tears and the blood of his friends,” instead of ink. He promised to tell a “true story” that “they” [Jewish Colonization Association] presumably kept hidden from the public abroad. Painting a heroic endeavor of colonization and alluding to the exotic imageries of Argentina in Europe, Alpersohn mentioned “wild Indians,” who inhabited the region of *Colonia Mauricio* barely 12 years before the founding of the Jewish settlement. It is hard to measure the influence of Alpersohn’s book in Eastern Europe, but we have a handful of testimonies on the subject. An immigrant, Zalman Orensztein, born in 1902 in Sokołów Podlaski, recalled that reading Alpersohn's account made Argentina familiar to him. Even though he was a Zionist, he decided to go to Argentina, rather than to Palestine.<sup>95</sup> A Buenos Aires journalist, Yosef Horn, wrote that Alpersohn’s memoirs were available in hundreds of Jewish libraries in Poland.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> *Der leksikon der nayer yidisher literatur* stated that Alpersohn was born in Lanckorona (Lantskron), Podolia. This might be a mistake as the only a locality named Lanckorona is located in Lesser Poland, see *Der leksikon der nayer yidisher literatur*, ed. Samuel Niger and Jacob Shatzky (New York: Altveltlekher yidisher kultur-kongres, 1956), 117-118.

<sup>95</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, *Archivo de Palabra*, no. 47, Zalman Orensztein.

<sup>96</sup> Yosef Horn, “Poylishe yidn – di sefer fun unzer kultur-svive un boyer fun on oygen yidish lebn in argentine,” in *Poylishe yidn in doyrem amerike*, 152.



Illustration no. 6. Cover of Mordechai Alpersohn's book, *30 yor in argentine. Memuarn fun a yidishn kolonist*, Berlin 1923.

## 2. The Polish Government, Gentile Opinions and Argentina as a Solution to the Jewish Question

The Polish government was a key actor to participate in the shaping of Poland's Jewish discourse about Argentina.<sup>97</sup> Its Argentine policies and agenda influenced the way Jewish immigration to Argentina was conceptualized. In the interbellum, Poland was interested in

<sup>97</sup> For a study of Poland's interwar emigration policy, see Anna Kiciger, "Polityka Migracyjna II Rzeczypospolitej," *CEFMR Working Papers*, 4/2005.

strengthening its economic ties with Argentina, but it was emigration that stood at the focal point. Throughout most of the interwar period, the Jewish minority was considered a challenge to the project of a “national state for the Poles” that some leaders (especially those with ties to the National Democrat party, or *Endecja*) preferred over the multiethnic republic that was in existence until 1939. Although the 1921 Constitution proclaimed equality between Jews and Christians, the reality was a far cry from it. Many Jews wanted to leave Poland and the Polish government was not opposed to this decision. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs considered promoting emigration from Poland as part of its long-term agenda, and the State Emigration Office (Państwowy Urząd Emigracyjny) and Emigration Council (Rada Emigracyjna) supervised the emigration of Jews and non-Jews alike.<sup>98</sup> Although the governing parties changed, Polish authorities regarded emigration as a solution to the country's economic problems and social tensions throughout the entire interbellum. Taking into account the problem of overpopulation in villages, and the thousands of the so-called “unneeded” – or “luftmensch,” to use the Yiddish term – Poland saw emigration as a reasonable mechanism of population control. The parliamentarian Michał Bojanowski from the nationalist party Związek Ludowo-Narodowy argued that emigration “[...] is an economic and social release and [...] security event.” This view was shared by politicians and emigration scholars, such as Stanisław Głąbiński and Mieczysław Szawleski.<sup>99</sup> Between 1916 and 1938, the unemployed, or “professionally passive,” to use the official Polish terminology of the day, represented 73.5% of all emigrants (279,000).<sup>100</sup> Although Józef Okołowicz, the first director of the Emigration Office, proclaimed in 1920 that emigration should be utilized in the smallest degree possible, in fact the government, through direct and indirect channels, facilitated leaving the country for those who were interested.<sup>101</sup> During the 1920s, the emigration of ethnic Poles was considered by some as a form of compensation for the absence of Polish colonies. The overseas export of Polish peasants, especially to South America, was seen by the government not only as a solution to poverty and overpopulation, but as a tool of quasi-colonial expansion. In the early 1920s, the

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<sup>98</sup> Until 1932, when both bodies were liquidated and their competencies handed over to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. See Poland's law gazette, Dz.U. RP, nr 52 from 25.6.1932, pos. 492.

<sup>99</sup> Stanisław Głąbiński, *Emigracja i jej rola w gospodarstwie narodowym* (Warsaw, 1931); Mieczysław Szawleski, *Kwestia emigracji w Polsce* (Warsaw, 1927).

<sup>100</sup> Halina Janowska, “Emigracja z Polski w latach 1918-1939,” in *Emigracja z ziem polskich w czasach nowożytnych (XVIII-XX w.)*, ed. Andrzej Pilch (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1984, 409-411).

<sup>101</sup> Józef Okołowicz, *Wychodźstwo i osadnictwo polskie przed wojną światową* (Warsaw: Urząd Emigracyjny, 1920), 402, quoted in Wojciech Wrzesiński, “Polacy zagranicą w polityce II Rzeczypospolitej (1918-1939),” in *Problemy dziejów Polonii*, ed. Marian M. Drozdowski (Warsaw: PWN, 1979), 22.



Minister of Labor and Social Care, Franciszek Sokal, argued that emigration was unavoidable and Poland should search for places where Polish peasants could find better economic prospects. Sokal saw peasant emigration as a chance to build ethnic enclaves of Polishness outside of Poland.<sup>102</sup> The revived pre-1918 calls for founding a “New Poland,” along with Polish colonial claims, could still be heard in the 1930s.<sup>103</sup> A 1937 immigration guide to Argentina advised that “it is the obligation of every emigrant to keep the national language and use it whenever possible.”<sup>104</sup> Emigrants were regarded as “representatives of Poland abroad,” who should behave with dignity and respect on a daily basis, which, as was imagined, would influence the way Poland was perceived in Argentina.

Following the world economic crisis, the political discourse of 1930s Poland saw a growing trend of “encouraging” minorities to leave the country.<sup>105</sup> Poland's policy supported homogenizing the national structure both through promoting Polonization and advocating for the emigration of minorities. Yet, these trends were visible already in the first years of independent Poland. As early as 1920, a program of minister Grabski stipulated that the state would support the “emigration of economically weak, and re-emigration of economically strong individuals.”<sup>106</sup> In 1921, the government established Emigration Council, which was supposed to be responsible for policy-planning. However, the Jewish deputy to the Sejm, Ignacy Schiper, expressed the critical observation that the Council “was more like an academic club that had insufficient insight into actual practices.”<sup>107</sup> Calls for promoting Jewish emigration increased during the nationalist upheaval in the second part of the 1930s. In 1936 the problem of Jewish emigration was several times discussed in Polish Sejm, often under the pressure of international Jewish organizations.<sup>108</sup> In 1937, the Ministry of the Interior (MSW) complained to the

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<sup>102</sup> “Polska emigracja zarobkowa,” *Wychodźca*, no. 6 (1925), 3-5.

<sup>103</sup> In 1889, Stanisław Kłobukowski called for the establishment of a network of Polish colonies, located in the same geographical region, which would form a strong, monoethnic Polish settlement. Kłobukowski debated between Curitiba in Brazil and southern Argentina. In 1892, he cofounded the Lwów-based journal *Przegląd Emigracyjny*, in which he and other emigration advocates debated the changing possibilities of emigration. See Paradowska, *Podróżnicy i emigranci*, 159-162.

<sup>104</sup> *Wiadomości o Argentynie do użytków wychodźców wraz z samouczkiem języka hiszpańskiego*, Biblioteczka Syndykatu Emigracyjnego, vol. II (Warsaw: Syndykat Emigracyjny, 1937), 39.

<sup>104</sup> Władysław Grabski, *Projekt programu polityki ekonomicznej i finansowej Polski po wojnie* (Warsaw, 1920), 13.

<sup>105</sup> See Emanuel Melzer, “Ha-diplomatijah ha-polanit u-ve'ayat ha-hagirah ha-yehudit ba-shanim 1935–1939,” *Gal-Ed* 1 (1973): 211-249.

<sup>106</sup> Grabski, *Projekt programu polityki ekonomicznej*, 13.

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Mazurek, *Kraj a emigracja*, 145.

<sup>108</sup> Yfaat Weiss, *Deutsche und polnische Juden von dem Holocaust. Jüdische Identität zwischen Staatsbürgerschaft und Ethnizität 1933-1940* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2000), 138.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MSZ) that emigration assistance was being wrongly focused on ethnic Poles.<sup>109</sup> In its view, the state should focus on facilitating the emigration of national minorities and introducing mechanisms to expedite it. The MSW demanded that MSZ negotiate higher entry quotas for Polish Jews with other countries. In 1938, the inter-ministerial commission issued directives that supported precisely this “fast-track” for the emigration of minorities.<sup>110</sup> In 1939, Polish authorities were even positively disposed toward illegal, so-called “tourist emigration.”<sup>111</sup> Yet in the late 1930s, any form of emigration was becoming more and more difficult, both in the case of Argentina and other countries.

Discussions about emigration were fostered by semi-academic and semi-policy-oriented institutions, such as Polish Emigration Society (Polskie Towarzystwo-Emigracyjne, PTE), Scientific Emigration Institute (Naukowy Instytut Emigracyjny), Naval and Colonial League (Liga Morska i Kolonialna). These bodies, rooted in prewar colonization debates, saw emigration as a solution to Poland’s economic problems, as well as a mechanism of colonial expansion. They organized research expeditions to Argentina, Peru, Brazil and Canada, published policy papers, held conferences and edited academic periodicals and monographs. The PTE, established as early as 1924, sought primarily to offer protection to Polish emigrants. The Scientific Emigration Institute, headed by a nationalist Stanisław Gąbecki, operated between the mid-1920s and 1932, and focused on exploring new areas for Polish colonial settlement, chiefly in Latin America. In the same geographic context, Institute’s Gustaw Załęcki talked about “national imperialism.”<sup>112</sup> When Latin American countries began to limit their pro-immigration policies at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s, Mieczysław Fularski of Naval and Colonial League debated the possibilities of colonization that remained open to Poland.<sup>113</sup>

For these societies, Jewish emigration was but a section of the broader Polish landscape of emigration. Stanisław Pawłowski published *O emigracji żydów z Polski i ich kolonizacji* (On the Emigration of Jews from Poland and Their Colonization). The 68-page publication,

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<sup>109</sup> J. Sawicki, director of MSW, letter to MSZ, 29.10.1937, Międzyministerialna Komisja Emigracyjna (MKE), 120-121, AAN MSZ 9898, quoted in Mazurek, *Kraj a emigracja*, 157.

<sup>110</sup> Protokół z posiedzenia MKE from 24.2.1938 (a report from the Interministerial Emigration Commission), AAN MSZ, 9898 B26308 Międzyministerialna Komisja Emigracyjna, 35.

<sup>111</sup> Problem emigracji żydowskiej, Secret note to the Head of the Emigration Division of MFA concerning tourist emigration, 44-48, AAN MSZ 9907 B26318.

<sup>112</sup> Gustaw Załęcki, *Kilka słów o nowoczesnym imperializmie narodowym* (Warsaw: Naukowy Instytut Emigracyjny, 1928).

<sup>113</sup> Mieczysław Fularski, *Kryzys emigracyjny a polska polityka kolonialna* (Warsaw, Instytut Wydawniczy Ligi Morskiej i Kolonialnej, 1927).

published by the Naval and Colonial League, focused on the various destinations for Jewish emigration from Poland and described it as an “obvious need.” Pawłowski referred to the then-popular discourse of *Lebensraum* (living space) and pointed to Poland’s high population growth, which made it “too tiny” for an ever-increasing population. Pawłowski pointed out that, in any case, Jews were a diasporic nation, full of national awareness, therefore emigration would not harm them as a community. He advised that Palestine would make the best option for Jewish emigration (“Palestine can be in Jewish hands in just a few years”), but at the same time suggested Argentina, “where Jews showed a lot of organizational abilities.” Pawłowski called on Polish emigration societies to intensify their propaganda among the Jewish public. According to Pawłowski, the Polish state should take an active role in promoting Jewish emigration, in place of what he saw as “a passive policy.” He argued that Poland’s foreign policy should include providing Jews with reasonable emigration possibilities, yet remain linked to internal emigration plans that included non-Jews.<sup>114</sup>

Jewish emigration from Poland also had its Jewish advocates, who lobbied to advance their cause. A key political figure was Ignacy Schiper, who served as deputy in the Polish parliament (Sejm) from 1919 to 1927. Schiper worked in the Warsaw Institute of Judaic Studies and contributed to the innovative socio-historical studies on Polish Jewry, including aspects of migration. Despite being a Zionist, Schiper never planned to go to Palestine himself, yet he understood the importance of migration for the pauperized Polish Jews. In 1925, he inquired in the Sejm about the Emigration Law that was to regulate emigration policies.<sup>115</sup> In 1939, his academic colleague from the Institute of Judaic Studies, Arie Tartakower, wrote important studies on Jewish migration: *Yidishe emigratsye un yidishe emigratsye-politik* (Jewish Emigration and Jewish Emigration Policy), published in Vilna, and *Di yidishe vanderungen* (The Jewish Migrations), published in Warsaw.<sup>116</sup> Government-funded emigration think-tanks, like the Emigration Society or Scientific Emigration Institute, also attracted Jewish demographers and politicians. Leon Alter and Mieczysław Goldsztejn published articles on

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<sup>114</sup> Stanisław Pawłowski, *O emigracji żydów z Polski i ich kolonizacji* (Warsaw: Liga Morska i Kolonialna, 1937).

<sup>115</sup> “Monitor Polski,” no. 43, February 21, 1925, pos. 168.

<sup>116</sup> However, Tartakower was not merely a scholar of Jewish emigration. He also took an active stand, for example, in 1937 when he pressed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw to cooperate with him and Jewish institutions in the matter of Jewish colonization in Ecuador. See *Możliwości emigracji Żydów do Ekwadoru*, 103-107, AAN MSZ 9928 B2618.

Jewish emigration in the journal of the Scientific Emigration Institute.<sup>117</sup> Alter was among a group of gentiles and Jews, who strongly advocated for the emigration of Jews from Poland and wished to see it included in a broader policy of the Polish state. He served as director of the Warsaw HIAS Office and Head of the Emigration Department in the Ministry of Work and Social Care. In 1931, Alter traveled to Argentina in order to examine the local situation and promote emigration.<sup>118</sup> As the economic and political situation worsened, Alter saw the growing importance of Jewish emigration from Poland. In 1926, he argued that industrialization, the development of cooperatives and closure of the Russian market for Polish goods endangered Jewish livelihood in the artisan economy.<sup>119</sup> In 1937, the situation was so dire that he wrote that “a particularly intense demand for emigration is taking on the character of a psychosis.”<sup>120</sup> When emigration was limited in more and more countries, Alter lamented that Polish Jews found themselves facing problems of exceptional severity, yet he advised resisting any attempts at a chaotic massive emigration.<sup>121</sup> Conversely, he tried to exercise pressure via government channels. Similarly, a number of Jewish leaders cooperated closely with the Polish government as members of a delegation in the 1939 Evian Conference on Jewish refugees and migrants.<sup>122</sup>

However, for the most part, the policies discussed by the parliamentarians and emigration advocates were not carried out in practice. Poland remained barely engaged in promoting emigration (both of Jews and Christians). The numerous research expeditions and initial agreements with Brazil and Bolivia did not lead to any organized mass settlement. Most of the emigrants left Poland independently, without any government assistance. It was partly facilitated by the Polish legal framework of emigration of the interbellum, which was fairly

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<sup>117</sup> Leon Alter, “Wychodźstwo żydowskie”, *Kwartalnik Instytutu Naukowego do Badań Emigracji i Kolonizacji* 1 (1926): 80-91; Mieczysław Goldsztejn, “Wychodźstwo żydowskie z ziem polskich,” *Kwartalnik Naukowego Instytutu Emigracyjnego i Kolonialnego* 1 (1931): 388-425.

<sup>118</sup> “A zitsung mitn delegat fun HIAS h. alter,” *Dos Naye Vort*, no. 124, July 1931, 13.

<sup>119</sup> Alter, “Wychodźstwo żydowskie,” 81.

<sup>120</sup> In the late 1930s, emigration from Poland was barely possible. Argentina was closed since 1931 and Palestine, which received huge emigrant contingents in 1935 and 1936, was sealed by the British in the following years. Whereas 18,000 Polish Jews emigrated to Palestine in 1934 and 25,000-27,000 in 1935, the numbers dropped drastically to 3,636 in 1937. See *American Jewish Yearbook* 40, 1938/1939, 574.

<sup>121</sup> Rapport sur l'état actuel du probleme de l'emigration juive de Pologne, November 23, 1937, Reel 487, 1967; Memo from Leon Alter, November 19, 1937, Reel 485; RG 11.001M94, HIAS-Paris, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. All quoted in Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of a Free World* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company), 158.

<sup>122</sup> Problem emigracji żydowskiej, 39-68, AAN MSZ 9914 B26324. The delegation included members of the Jewish Colonization Committee: Henryk Rosmarin or Moshe Schorr.

progressive. Poland's constitution of 1921 proclaimed the right of every citizen to emigrate.<sup>123</sup> The 1927 Emigration Law confirmed the “freedom to emigrate” and included several pro-migration paragraphs (such as free passports for the poor).<sup>124</sup> The Law established the responsibility of the Polish state for its emigrant citizens in regulating colonization and emigration propaganda.<sup>125</sup>

Yet most Polish Jews could not emigrate or were far from considering emigration as a reasonable solution. This was especially true for the Orthodox supporters of Agudas Israel, folkists, and part of the Bundists. Some opposed not the emigration as such, but “emigratsionism”, the ideology that suggested emigration as the only solution for Polish Jews, that implied that leaving Poland as surrendering to anti-Semitism.<sup>126</sup> In the 1920s, even among Zionists, the levels of *aliyah* to Palestine were insignificant in proportion to the size of the Polish Jewish community, let alone the size of the Zionist camp.<sup>127</sup> In terms of immigration to Argentina, the numbers were also not impressive. In the interwar years, around 157,000-167,000 Polish citizens immigrated to Argentina, including 55,000-60,000 Jews.<sup>128</sup> Polish peasants who emigrated to Argentina after 1918 worked mostly as blue-collar workers, especially in railroad construction, the meat industry, the leather industry, or in ports. The peak of emigration to Argentina was reached between 1926-1930, when 91,000 people left Poland, including 22,500 Jews (25%).<sup>129</sup> Only when Argentina limited its immigration quotas did Palestine begin to dominate. The year 1932 represented the first time when more Jews emigrated from Poland to Palestine (39.8%) than to Argentina (18.4%). Yet throughout the

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<sup>123</sup> Poland's “March Constitution” of 1921, art. 101, stated: “Every citizen has the liberty of selecting on the territory of the state his place of residence and abode, to move about and to emigrate, as well as to choose his occupation and profession, and to transport his property. These rights may be restricted only by statute.”

<sup>124</sup> Rozporządzenie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej z dnia 11 października 1927 r. o emigracji., Dz.U. 127, nr 89, poz. 799.

<sup>125</sup> To some extent, this was realized. Since the mid-1930s, ships transporting emigrants were required to employ a free Polish translator and a Polish-speaking nurse. The Ministry of Social Care approved emigration brochures issued by emigration societies and steamer lines.

<sup>126</sup> Weiss, *Deutsche und polnische Juden*, 134-136.

<sup>127</sup> Emigration was limited by the quota system and the requirement to receive an immigrant permit.

<sup>128</sup> A total of 161,000, according to Dirección de Migraciones, quoted by Kowalska: Marta Kowalska, “La emigración judía de Polonia a la Argentina an los años 1918-1939,” *Estudios Latinoamericanos*, no. 12 (1989): 259. Halina Janowska gave higher figures. According to her estimates, 167,000 Polish citizens (40,000 Jews) left Poland between 1926-1938, Janowska, “Emigracja z Polski w latach 1918-1939,” 422-423.

<sup>129</sup> Lestschinsky, *National Groups in Polish Emigration* (New York Conference on Jewish Relations, 1943), 110-111.

1930s, Argentina was still second in terms of overseas emigration destinations for Polish Jews.<sup>130</sup>

The theme of immigration to Argentina also became a part of the anti-Semitic discourse in interwar Poland. Within the growing anti-Semitic debates, Jewish immigration to Argentina (or elsewhere) was considered the perfect solution to the “Jewish problem.”<sup>131</sup> This view corresponded with the discourse of Poland's presumed overpopulation and the government-backed emigration of minorities. For instance, National Peasant Union (Narodowy Związek Chłopski, NZCh), an organization that defined the raising of national awareness among peasants as its goal, saw Jewish domination in commerce as a threat to the national rights of the Poles and called for a boycott. In the words of one representative:

[...] without enough customers, the Jewish shopkeepers will close their businesses; the Jewish industrialists, without enough clients, will withdraw the funds earned in better times and will leave for Argentina. There they will conduct their business, where the people are hardly enlightened or smart.<sup>132</sup>

Elsewhere, Stanisław Gierat, one of the leaders of the peasant youth movement, argued that Jewish and peasant youth shared little in common. He understood Poland's economic structure as unhealthy and suggested Jewish emigration as a possible solution. For Gierat, both Argentina and Palestine seemed equally reasonable options. However, the peasant leader opposed any violence and oppression against the Jews, articulating a need “to awake a love of commerce among peasant youth.”<sup>133</sup> In this way, Gierat's views were the reverse of the Jewish discourse of productivization, which encouraged them to devote themselves to physical, agricultural professions.

Poland's government policies concerning Argentina and Jewish immigration to Argentina were also shaped by reports and correspondence arriving directly from Buenos Aires. The Polish Embassy in Argentina was opened in 1922, with Władysław Mazurkiewicz as its

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<sup>130</sup> Arie Tartakower, *Emigracja żydowska*, 48. Between 1929 and 1937, 43.7% of Polish Jews immigrated to Palestine and 18.8% to Argentina.

<sup>131</sup> Compare a study on German and Polish plans around Jewish emigration to Madagascar: Magnus Brechtken, *“Madagaskar für die Juden.” Antisemitische Idee und politische Praxis 1885-1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2009).

<sup>132</sup> A. I. Piątkowski, “Jak pozbyć się Żydów,” *Lud Polski*, no. 5, January 29, 1914, 1-2, quoted in Mazurek, *Kraj a emigracja*, 267.

<sup>133</sup> Stanisław Gierat, *Podstawy ruchu młodowiejskiego* (Warsaw: Centralny Związek Młodej Wsi, 1935), 60-61, quoted in Mazurek, *Kraj a emigracja*, 414.

head for more than fourteen years.<sup>134</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MSZ) in Warsaw kept regular diplomatic correspondence with the Embassy's officials. In the 1930s, MSZ published yearly reports about emigration from Poland to Argentina and Argentina's economic situation. The reports were well-researched, lengthy publications (more than 120 pages), based on Argentine sources and probably written by the staff of Buenos Aires Embassy. At times, the reports criticized the emigration of Jews from Poland and defined it as a policy mistake. For instance, the 1938 Embassy report underscored the positive impact of Jews on the Polish and Argentine economy. This also reflected the general change in attitudes towards emigration in Poland. Following the visible collapse of ethnic Polish colonization projects, some began to perceive emigration as dangerous and a drain on human and economic capital. The report emphasized the fact that many Jews in Poland "had a positive social and pro-state influence." Another point of emphasis was the loyalty of Jewish residents, especially the Orthodox segment of Polish Jewry. The report pointed out how "beneficial" Jewish artisans and farmers were to the Argentine economy. The report underlined that Jewish immigration helped Argentina to develop, as Polish Jews were "good entrepreneurs and up-and-coming."<sup>135</sup> Similarly, in its brochure *Wiadomości o Argentynie* (Information on Argentina), the Emigration Syndicate stressed the attributes of "work, solidarity, perseverance and intelligence" of Jewish emigrants from Poland as playing a crucial role in Argentina.<sup>136</sup> Strikingly, these pro-Jewish observations were able to co-exist with the anti-Semitic tendencies of late 1930s Poland.

In the 1930s, following the world economic crisis, Argentina largely closed its doors to Jewish emigration from Poland. In fact, only those already in Argentina could use the so-called *llamadas* system to invite family members to Argentina. The nationalist governments of 1930s Argentina approached Jewish immigration with growing suspicion, reflecting anti-Semitic prejudices. This did not go unnoticed in Poland. The anti-migration policies of Argentine authorities, often combined with anti-Semitic resentment of the government, were visible in diplomatic contacts with Poland and went hand-in-hand with the same tendencies in Europe. When the new Argentine ambassador, Rodolfo Freyre, arrived in Warsaw in 1937, he was quick to inform Polish President Ignacy Mościcki about Argentina's anti-Jewish fears. Freyre argued

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<sup>134</sup> Previously, Poland only had an honorary consulate in Argentina.

<sup>135</sup> A note from the Polish Embassy in Buenos Aires concerning Polish Jewish immigrants in Argentina, *Emigracja polska do Argentyny*, 96-102, AAN MSZ 9620 B2630.

<sup>136</sup> *Wiadomości o Argentynie do użytków wychodźców wraz z samouczkiem języka hiszpańskiego*, Biblioteczka Syndykatu Emigracyjnego, vol. II (Warsaw: Syndykat Emigracyjny, 1937), 39.

that the image of a Polish immigrant had begun to worsen in the last 10-15 years, when the “hard-working Polish peasant was exchanged by the Jew.” Returning to early twentieth century accusations, the new ambassador added that Argentine government feared that Jews would disseminate communist ideology in Argentina.<sup>137</sup> Mościcki expressed his understanding for Freyre’s anxiety and informed him that, according to him, Polish emigration should only consist of “healthy village elements” and that “Argentine consuls could refuse Jews to board ships departing from Poland.”<sup>138</sup>

Further, the internal correspondence between Argentine diplomats in Poland and the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs was filled with clearly anti-Semitic contents. Freyre wrote to Carlos Saavedra Lamas, Argentina's Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, stating that Argentina should use Mościcki advice, as Jews “had an aversion to agricultural work” and “had dishonest commercial habits.”<sup>139</sup> In the late 1930s, Argentine and Polish policies concerning the “Jewish problem” were contradictory. Poland wanted Jews out, while Argentina refused to let them in. Marcos A. Savon, the Argentine consul in the Polish port city of Gdynia, wrote to Saavedra Lamas in 1937 that Argentina should introduce higher hindrances for Jewish immigrants from Poland, explaining that the Jews “had resentment against Christianity” and “were willing to commit the greatest crimes” and spread communism.<sup>140</sup> Savon argued that, in fact, Polish authorities had put Jews on a fast-track and facilitated their immigration to Argentina and elsewhere. A conflict emerged the following year. In 1938, Argentina suddenly stopped issuing visas to Polish citizens. The Polish MFA was surprised and outraged by the move, which singled out Poland. In dealing with the issue, the MFA suggested that the consul in Buenos Aires not elaborate on the ethnic background of the emigrants from Poland and even lie that all incoming emigrants were farmers.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Eastern European Jews were popularly associated with communism and anarchism. This raised fears among Argentine conservatives and nationalists, who pushed for laws allowing the deportation of left-wing activists (Ley de Residencia, 1902, Ley de Defensa Social, 1910). Between 1902 and 1910, the government maintained martial law. See José Moya, “What's in a Stereotype? The Case of Jewish Anarchists in Argentina,” in *The New Jewish Argentina: Facets of Jewish Experiences in the Southern Cone*, ed. Adriana M. Brodsky et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 55-88; Yaacov Oved, “The Uniqueness of Anarchism in Argentina,” *E.I.A.L. Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe*, vol. VIII, no. 1 (1997): unpaginated.

<sup>138</sup> Argentyna. Przyjęcie posła argentyńskiego przez prezydenta RP, sprawy emigracji polskiej, Freyre, AAN MSZ 3412 B19632, 5-7.

<sup>139</sup> Rodolfo Freyere to Carlos Saavedra Lamas, AMREC (Archivo General del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto), nota no. 28, Warsaw, 13.11.937.

<sup>140</sup> Marcos Savon to Carlos Saavedra Lamas, Gdynia, 14.7.1937, AMREC, D.P. Polonia, 1937, Exp. 1, Nota no. 1.

<sup>141</sup> Utrudnienia wizowe dla emigrantów polskich do Argentyny 1938, 1-30, AAN MSZ, 9621 B26031. Polish MFA quickly did its research to find out whether restrictions were only applied to Polish citizens or were part of a



On the other hand, to some extent, the Polish Embassy in Buenos Aires and the Polish government used Jews as a propaganda tool for improving the Polish image in Argentina. The warm welcome offered by the Buenos Aires Embassy to Maurycy Urstein, a Jewish-Polish psychiatrist who visited Argentina in 1929, could serve as a fitting example.<sup>142</sup> The Embassy proudly reported that the psychiatrist was invited to run three-month-long experiments in Argentina and that he was greeted as a star of contemporary medicine. The Embassy took upon itself the introduction of Urstein to the medical circles of Buenos Aires. An even more cordial welcome was given to Jewish-born Wanda Landowska, a harpsichordist and pianist, who toured Latin America in the same year. The Embassy organized a festive gala to her honor, proudly emphasizing that her concerts in Teatro Odeon received enthusiastic reviews.<sup>143</sup> Although Polish authorities might have been interested in “exporting” its Jews to Argentina in order to solve social tensions, when it came to prestige, recognition and improving Poland’s image abroad, the government gladly underlined the Polishness of its Jewish personalities.

### **3. Between Hope and Fear: The Imageries of Argentina in Poland’s Yiddish Daily Press during the Interbellum**

The emigration of Polish Jews to Argentina extended the Yiddishland’s borders and Argentine-Jewish problems began to be discussed in other centers of the Ashkenazi diaspora. The massive Jewish relocation to Argentina also had an impact on the reality that the emigrants left behind. As poverty and anti-Semitism in Poland were on the rise, emigration became a very attractive prospect for a relatively high number of Polish Jews. Following the end of the Great War, which brought chaos, poverty and discrimination in its wake, trans-Atlantic ships again began to fill with Jewish immigrants. Personal letters arriving from Argentina further increased interest in what was still for many a psychologically distant country. Following a short interruption caused by the war in Europe, Argentina once again appeared in the columns of Yiddish newspapers in the 1920s. However, the tone was now much less ecstatic than during

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broader anti-immigration policy. It turned out that nationals of other countries could emigrate without difficulty as previously.

<sup>142</sup> Urstein was sent to Argentina as an envoy of Poland’s Emigration Office. He was supposed to examine the sanitary conditions of the colonists. See Paradowska, *Podróżnicy i emigranci*, 91; Filip Marcinkowski, “Maurycy Urstein: A Forgotten Polish Contributor to German Psychiatry,” *Psychiatria Polska* 48, no. 1 (2014): 195-204

<sup>143</sup> Raporty Prasowe Poselstwa RP w Buenos Aires (1929), 16, AAN MSZ 7373 B23710.

the Argentine fever at the turn of the century and Argentina largely lost the charm of being an absolute novelty. Jewish life in the country began to stabilize and the population grew, as the first Argentine-born Jewish generation entered its adulthood.

In now independent Poland, the usual push-factors forced Jews to search for new-old safe havens. The postwar economic situation was dire and equal treatment of the Jewish minority was still rejected by large sectors of Polish society. Sociologist Arie Tartakower wrote in 1935 that “Emigration is the dream of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, and even Jewish cultural life is strongly connected with this main problem of contemporary Jewish social life.”<sup>144</sup> Tartakower estimated that around 1,200,000 Jews without a stable income lived in Poland, who constituted a reservoir of potential emigrants.<sup>145</sup> Answering the increased interest in emigration, Poland’s Yiddish press began to publish articles that unveiled the Argentine reality not only to those who planned to emigrate, but also to the general reading public. Articles dealing with Argentina appeared in nearly all Jewish journals, independently of their ideological and linguistic profile.

This subchapter addresses the context in which Argentina appeared in the discourse of Poland’s interwar Jewish press. It analyzes the process of imagining and conceptualizing Argentina, emigration and the globalizing Jewish life of the 1920s and 1930s. In Jewish Poland, I argue, Argentina was to a great extent imagined: it was usually an outcome of gossip circulating around Europe and sensational news from Jewish newspapers. Well aware that press reports did not mirror the exact mood of Jewish-Polish society, I am nonetheless convinced that an analysis of press discourse does shed light on a broad section of popular visions, hopes and fears. Knowing how Argentina was imagined in Jewish Poland can allow us to better understand the Argentinian trajectories of the migrants. An analysis of press debates centered around immigration to Argentina introduces nuance to the simplified narrative of Jews fleeing Poland wherever it was possible. Most Polish Jews did stay in the country, but experienced Argentina’s growing social impact indirectly. This section looks at their experiences and examines the reasons and ways in which Argentina was conceptualized in pre-1939 Jewish Poland.

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<sup>144</sup> Arie Tartakower, *Dos yidishe emigratsye-problem un der yidisher velt-kongres* (Paris: Ekzekutiv-komitet forn yidishn velt-kongres, 1935), 3.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibidem*, 8. Tartakower claimed that the professional structure of the Jewish population did not reflect the needs of Poland, nor did it allow Jews to earn a living. For each 100 Jews, only 32.5% were professionally active, see Tartakower, *Emigracja żydowska*, 18.



Illustration no. 7. An invitation to a lecture, “To Where Can the Jews Immigrate to,” given by *Yidisher Emigrant* editor, M. Krymski, DŹS IK 2f, National Library Warsaw.

In Yiddish periodicals, Argentina emerges as far from homogenous. It was described in various textual forms, as diverse subjects attracted the attention of its editors and readers of Warsaw's Yiddish newspapers. However, two aspects occupied the attention of journal editors and readers: Argentina as a potential emigration destination and a risky country known for its Jewish criminality and prostitution. In order to offer a relatively broad sample, I examine the leading Yiddish-language newspapers published in Warsaw in the interwar period.<sup>146</sup> I focus on the dailies *Haynt* and *Der Moment*, as well as the evening tabloid paper *Hayntige Nayeres*. Their dominant position on the press market and the diverse political stands allow us to track information about Argentina that was accessible for the majority of Jews in Warsaw and in Poland (at the time, *Haynt* was closely related to the Zionist movement, whereas *Der Moment*

<sup>146</sup> Further research examining, for example, the Bundist *Folkstsaytung* or the Polish-language daily *Nasz Przegląd*, would probably reveal additional facets of Argentine discourse in Poland's Jewish press. It would also be worthwhile to analyze periodicals published in other Polish cities, as well as the local press in smaller towns. See, for instance, Adam Kopciowski, *Lubliner Tugblat: Was hert zich in der prowinc? Prasa żydowska na Lubelszczyźnie i jej największy dziennik „Lubliner Tugblat,”* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2015).

initially stood for folkism, later becoming a national non-partisan title).<sup>147</sup> Moreover, I analyze the high-brow weekly *Literarische Bleter*, which featured mostly Yiddish culture and literature.<sup>148</sup>

I focus on representations of Argentine problems in Poland's Yiddish press during the most intensive years of interwar Jewish immigration to Argentina. Altogether, 55,000-60,000 Polish Jews immigrated to Argentina in the interbellum, which formed around 13% of the overall Jewish emigration from Poland (421,000 between 1922-1938). Whereas elitist Hebrew and Polish Jewish titles from the turn of the centuries had an extremely limited readership, Yiddish newspapers published in the interwar years were the most popular source of information for the poorer and less privileged Jews. At the beginning of the century, the Yiddish press in Polish lands was largely ephemeral, as the big dailies were still emerging: *Haynt* in 1908 and *Der Moment* in 1910. They reached certain level of stability only around 1912, when their daily circulation exceeded 100,000 copies.

The development of the Yiddish press in Poland coincided with the second wave of immigration to Argentina. Between 1918 and 1939, around 55,000 Polish Jews immigrated to Argentina. In the mid-1920s, Jewish immigration to Argentina intensified mostly because of the introduction of an immigration quota in the United States. The post-World War I Jewish immigration to Argentina was to a great extent Jewish-Polish emigration. In the second half of the 1920s, Polish Jews made up around 70% of all Jews immigrating to that country. In the early 1930s, immigration to Argentina decreased significantly, but a share of immigrant Polish Jews was still high – on average, 60%.<sup>149</sup> The anti-immigrant policy following the coup d'etat

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<sup>147</sup> For more information on *Haynt* and *Der Moment*, see Joanna Nalewajko-Kulikova (ed.), *Studia z dziejów trójjęzycznej prasy żydowskiej na ziemiach polskich* (Warsaw: Neriton, 2012); Joanna Nalewajko-Kulikova, *Mówić we własnym języku: prasa jidyszowa a tworzenie żydowskiej tożsamości narodowej (do 1918 roku)* (Warsaw: Neriton 2016). For details regarding *Moment*, see Abraham Zack, “Ups and Downs of a Daily,” in *The Jewish Press That Was: Accounts, Evaluations, and Memories of Jewish Papers in Pre-Holocaust Europe*, ed. Arie Bar (Tel Aviv: World Federation of Jewish Journalists, 1980), 65. Zack described *Moment* as a paper for “an ordinary, everyday Jew, for the middle classes.”

<sup>148</sup> For the specific cultural character of *Literarische Bleter*, as well as its role in the Yiddishist ethno-cultural revival, I examine it in a separate section.

<sup>149</sup> Judith Laikin Elkin, following Jacob Lestschinsky, estimated that between 1931 and 1939 around 26,500 Jews arrived in Argentina. The data from the Polish Interministerial Emigration Commission gathered by E. Kołodziej and J. Zakrzewska state that 16,000 Jews left Poland for Argentina between 1931 and 1938. See Judith Laikin Elkin, *Jews of the Latin American Republics* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1998), 52; E. Kołodziej, J. Zakrzewska, “Ostatnie posiedzenie Międzyministerialnej Komisji Emigracyjnej [25. lutego 1939],” *Teki Archiwalne*, no. 16, 1977, 231. According to Arie Tartakower, in 1934 Polish Jews represented 66.4% of all Jewish immigrants to Argentina, 76.4% in 1935 and 58.2% in 1936, Tartakower, *Emigracja*, 38.

of 1930 stopped the flow of Jewish emigrants from Eastern Europe.<sup>150</sup> In 1932, the general emigration from Poland was twice as small as that of 1930. In 1935, when almost all emigration countries closed their doors to Polish Jews, Palestine received an impressive number of almost 25,000 immigrants. In that year, barely 2,000 arrived from Poland to Argentina, thought it was still the second emigration destination.<sup>151</sup> In the period under examination, most of the emigrants leaving Poland were artisans or had no professions.<sup>152</sup> Only a fraction belonged to the free professions or were industrialists.

Although historians and scholars of media studies have widely analyzed the social and political role of Poland's interwar Yiddish press, its function as a source of information in the study of Jewish migration remains rather subsidiary. Haim Avni, who had written extensively on Jews in Latin America, did not include representations of Argentina in the Eastern European Yiddish press, limiting himself to the Western European or elite Hebrew titles.<sup>153</sup> Similarly, historians of the Jewish press tended to prioritize the political engagement of the interwar partisan press, and consequently did not embed their research within various discourses (such as the one on Argentine emigration).<sup>154</sup> One of the few exceptions was Iaacov Rubel, who offered an interesting study of the Eastern European Hebrew press concerning immigration to Argentina in the 1890s.<sup>155</sup> In Argentina, the history of the Jewish press was initially written by individuals who founded and contributed to the Jewish journals or in the form of anniversary publications.<sup>156</sup> Consequently, these works were far from critical and scientific studies. Most recent scholarship on Jewish Latin America has to some extent embraced the Jewish press as a valuable source of information on the Jewish experience in Argentina. Alejandro Dujovne

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<sup>150</sup> "Argentine shlist ire toyern," *Unzer Expres*, 11.5.1933, 10. In the early 1930s, Argentina introduced a strict policy for receiving immigration visas. Similar quota-system existed in other countries, including South Africa, Brazil and Canada.

<sup>151</sup> Tartakower, *Emigracja żydowska*, 8.

<sup>152</sup> The HIAS Office in Poland estimated that among the emigrants who registered at their office in 1929, around 30% (or 7,500) were artisans, 30% without a profession and the remaining were divided between merchants, workers and others. See Tartakower, *Emigracja żydowska*, 16.

<sup>153</sup> Haim Avni, *Argentina y la historia de inmigración judía 1810-1950* (Jerusalem, Buenos Aires: Editorial de Universidad Hebrea de Jerusalem and AMIA, 1983).

<sup>154</sup> Marian Fuks, *Prasa żydowska w Warszawie 1823-1939* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1979); Andrzej Paczkowski, "The Jewish Press in the Political Life of the Second Republic," in *Polin Studies in Polish Jewry. Volume 8, 1994. Jews in Independent Poland*, ed. Antony Polonsky, Ezra Mendelsohn and Jerzy Tomaszewski (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1994), 176-193.

<sup>155</sup> Iaacov Rubel, "Di opklangen vegn der yidisher emigratsye," 15-42.

<sup>156</sup> Pinie Katz, *Tsu der geshichte yudisher zhurnalistik in argentine* (Buenos Aires, 1929); *Fuftsik yor yidisher yishev, tsvantsig yor 'Di Presse'* (Buenos Aires, 1938); Hirsch Triwaks (ed.), *Yovl bukh: a sakhakl fun 50 yor yidishen lebn in argentine, lekoved 'Di Ydische Zaitung' tsu iren 25-yorigen yubileum* (Buenos Aires, 1940), Samuel Rollansky, *Dos yidische gedrukte vort*.

offered an important study of Argentine Jewish leftist papers and Ariel Svarch contributed an article on the social changes among Argentine Jewry reflected in a comic strip published in the daily *Crítica*.<sup>157</sup> Kerstin Schirp offered an insightful work on *Semanario Hebreo* and its meaning for Argentina's German-Jewish community.<sup>158</sup> Nevertheless, the representations and images of Argentina present in Poland have not yet been properly examined. Despite the growing number of studies devoted to the specific newspapers or to the press of particular cities, historians in the field of Polish Jewish studies have only recently linked the discourses present in the Jewish press with broader problems of migration.<sup>159</sup>

In an attempt to address these gaps, I claim that interwar Yiddish newspapers created a transnational discursive space, encompassing a wide array of topics including migration. In the 1920s and 1930s, Argentina was permanently present in Jewish-Polish debates. Although the first discussions on Argentina from the turn of the centuries were largely limited to the maskilic or acculturated minority, it became a truly universal subject in the interwar years. The Argentine lives of Jewish-Polish immigrants were covered by Poland-based papers and read by Polish Jews who became recipients of various Argentine contents. For the first time, Jewish Argentina became a close subject for ordinary Polish Jews. The interest that the newspapers and their readers took in Argentine Jewish problems was a clear result of the trans-nationalization and expansion of the Yiddishland that the migration engendered. The press was both a factor and a beneficiary of these changes. On the one hand, by advising about migration possibilities, the press helped to prepare emigrants for their new life in Argentina. On the other hand, migration reshaped newspaper columns, which now needed to present life in the new centers of Ashkenazi Diaspora. The following sections take a closer look at these developments.

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<sup>157</sup> Alejandro Dujovne, "Cartografías de las publicaciones periódicas judías de izquierda en Argentina, 1900-1953" *Revista del Museo de Antropología* 1 (2008): 121-138; Ariel Svarch, "'Don Jacobo en la Argentina' Battles the Nacionalistas: Crítica, the Funny Pages, and Jews as a Liberal Discourse (1929-1932)," in *The New Jewish Argentina*, ed. Brodsky, Rein (Leiden, Brill: 2012), 109-131.

<sup>158</sup> Kerstin E. Schirp, *Die Wochenzeitung "Semanario Israelita": Sprachrohr der deutsch-jüdischen Emigranten in Argentinien* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2001).

<sup>159</sup> Katrin Steffen, *Jüdische Polonität. Ethnizität und Nation im Spiegel der polnischsprachigen jüdischen Presse 1918-1939* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 2004); Kalman (Keith) Weiser, *Jewish People, Yiddish Nation: Noah Prylucki and the Folkists in Poland* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Nalewajko-Kulikow, *Mówić we własnym imieniu*.

### 3.1. A Place for Big Jewish Things? Narrating Emigration, Argentina and Social Challenge

The possibilities of emigration, or their lack, were abundantly mirrored in Poland's Yiddish press. I claim that by publishing various articles on immigration to Argentina, Yiddish dailies fulfilled a role of *emigration advisor*, especially for those who could not or did not know how to find relevant information elsewhere. They offered almost free, relatively up-to-date and competent advice from the sources, validated by the power of print. This function of the Jewish press was highly important due to the massive readership of Yiddish journals. In the early 1930s, *Hayntige Naves* sold more than 75,000 copies daily, and the affordable price made it accessible practically to everyone. Importantly, Warsaw's Yiddish press was read not only in the capital, but also in other provinces and even worldwide.<sup>160</sup> As the economic and political situation in Poland worsened, the problem of emigration was one of the key issues discussed by the press. When the USA closed its doors in 1924, the importance of Argentina reached its peak.<sup>161</sup> For a half decade, it was the principal country of emigration for Jews leaving Poland. Some, as Argentine Yiddishist Samuel Rollansky, who left Poland at this time, believed that Argentina was a place "for big Jewish things."<sup>162</sup>

In answering readers' interest in Argentina-related texts, Poland's Jewish newspapers published numerous articles about immigration to Argentina, usually in the form of short messages no more than a few sentences in length.<sup>163</sup> Numerous articles described the conditions, possibilities and requirements of immigration. Sometimes they took the form of longer analytical texts, but usually the Yiddish press contained various short practical pieces of information about immigration procedures and advertisements of trans-Atlantic steamship companies offering voyages to Buenos Aires. We find them mainly in columns devoted to migration matters or in those covering international news (less often). Among the dailies that I analyzed, Argentine issues appeared relatively frequently in the reports of *Der Moment* about Jewish emigration from Poland, mainly in the issues from 1924. In late 1924, *Der Moment* published a column entitled "Yedies un anvayzungen far emigranten" (Information and tips for

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<sup>160</sup> Marian Fuks, "Dwudziestolecie międzywojenne: od '5 rano' do popołudnia," *Rzeczpospolita*, 27.10.2008, <http://www.rp.pl/artykul/210885.html> [accessed on 26.7.2013].

<sup>161</sup> Haim Avni, *Argentina y las migraciones judías. De la Inquisición al Holocausto y después* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Mila, 2005), 236.

<sup>162</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, *Archivo de Palabra*, no. 366 Ester Rollansky, daughter of Yiddishist Samuel Rollansky.

<sup>163</sup> Next to the general dailies in postwar Poland, an array of Yiddish emigration journals was published: *Der Yidisher Emigrant*, *Der Emigrant* (Warsaw), as well as a number of provincial papers with similar titles and focus.

the emigrants), where immigration to Argentina was regularly mentioned. Fulfilling its informative role of “emigration advisor,” *Der Moment* informed potential emigrants about what documents needed be provided when applying for an Argentine visa.<sup>164</sup> It mentioned, among others, a certificate of morality, a work ability certificate and a health certificate. Potential immigrants could also find information about officials who could use these documents with competence.

*Moment* quite often published information on immigration provided by various organizations coordinating immigration and colonization in Argentina. For instance, reports of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), usually describing current immigration possibilities or immigration statistics, appeared quite regularly. *Moment* was clearly interested in transmitting to their readers competent, valuable and first-hand information. Aware that for a number of Polish Jews immigration to Argentina was a difficult and risky endeavor, requiring not only financial resources, but knowledge of current immigration procedures, *Moment* tried to facilitate this process by providing reliable data and information. By publishing statistical information on Jewish immigration to Argentina, the daily provided direct and official evidence that Jews did settle in that remote country. Knowing that a steamship ticket was a significant financial burden for working-class Jews, Yiddish newspapers provided information on current prices of tickets and other financial issues related to immigration. For example, in May 1930, *Hayntige Naves* notified readers about the approximate costs of settling in Argentina: “The cost of a steamship ticket to Buenos Aires is around \$107. Those who do not have the required documents need to prove that they possess an additional \$150 (single immigrant) or \$300 (family).”<sup>165</sup> Apart from statistical and financial information, the Jewish Colonization Association, HIAS and other organizations also reported on recent changes in immigration procedures. In a January 1924 report printed in *Der Moment*, HIAS noted that immigrants could stay up to five days in free *aynvanderungs-heymer*, or immigrant houses.<sup>166</sup> A similar message appeared in a January 1924 issue of *Haynt*, where we read about reduced residence time offered in these facilities, due to the large number of needy immigrants.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> “Vosere dokumentn muzn hobn di emigrantrn kdey tsu bakumen di amerikaner, argentinier oder brazilianer vize?” *Der Moment*, 17.9.1924, no. 219, 4.

<sup>165</sup> “Ver ken forn keyn argentine?” *Hayntige Naves*, 16.5.1930, no. 113, 3.

<sup>166</sup> “HIAS komunikat tsu der lage in argentine,” *Der Moment*, 13.1.1924, no. 11, 6.

<sup>167</sup> “Tsu der lage in argentine,” *Haynt*, 13.1.1924, no. 11, 3.



For readers personally interested in emigration, articles describing the details of life and work in Argentina were especially valuable. News about wages, costs and the standard of living or attitudes of non-Jews had a powerful influence on allowing them to envision their life in a new country. For example, in September 1924 *Der Moment* reported about excellent opportunities for bakers in the province of Buenos Aires.<sup>168</sup> Seeking to encourage potential migrants, the journal wrote that the trained bakers could expect a simpler immigration process due to their importance for Argentine economy. Six years later, in May 1930 (during the world economic crisis), less favorable information was provided by *Hayntige Naves*.<sup>169</sup> Thanks to “well-informed” sources, the newspaper reported that the possibility of immigration to Argentina was scarce and noted that the Argentine government had recently limited the number of immigrants allowed into the country. The daily, attempting to facilitate the complicated emigration process, described an obligatory and newly introduced “llamada” procedure which allowed immigration only of those whose relatives in Argentina were obliged to support him/her upon arrival.

In the 1920s and early 1930s, immigration to agricultural colonies in Argentina did not have the same scale and publicity as a few decades earlier. After 1918, most of the press information dealt with the urban migration to Buenos Aires and targeted especially Jewish workers and artisans. Although we do find a few articles about the possibility of agricultural migration,<sup>170</sup> the problem of Jewish colonies in Argentina was rather invisible or exoticized by being portrayed as strange and untypical.<sup>171</sup> Following Arjun Appadurai, I understand exoticization as a process of constantly emphasizing the difference between “us” and “they” and adopting it as the only criterion of comparison. For example, in December 1924, *Moment*, which was usually published without any photos, included in that special issue two photographs depicting Jewish farmers in Argentina.<sup>172</sup> We could interpret the fact that *Der Moment* decided to publish these photographs as an expression of support towards Jewish colonization and a manifestation of diversity of Argentine Jewish life or as an exotic curiosity for the reader. Due to the sporadic and laconic character of other information about Argentina published by the

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<sup>168</sup> “Argentine zukt bakers,” *Der Moment*, 17.9.1924, no. 219, 6.

<sup>169</sup> “Ver ken forn keyn argentine?” *Hayntige Naves*, 16.5.1930, no. 113, 3.

<sup>170</sup> “Ver ken oysforen un zikh bezetsn in di JCA kolonyes in argentina un brazilyen”, *Hayntige Naves*, 5.3.1930, no. 55, 2.

<sup>171</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

<sup>172</sup> *Ilustrirter Moment*, supplement to *Der Moment*, 5.12.1924, no. 280, 5.

daily, the second suggestion seems more justified. Despite an overall great interest in immigrating to Argentina, in the postwar period Jewish colonies became an object of exoticization in Poland's Yiddish press. Jewish agricultural settlements were perceived as an atypical and unusual phenomenon, something suspiciously different from Polish reality, in which Jews hardly ever worked as farmers. This exotic impression was largely intensified by weaker personal connections. Polish Jews had fewer relatives or friends living in Argentina and consequently knew less about this country than they did, for instance, about the USA. Press reports informed Jews in Poland about the changing situation of the colonies. In the 1920s, the colonization project already lost its impetus: many immigrants were leaving the colonies for bigger urban centers, and a dream of Jews becoming farmers in Argentina was increasingly seen as an illusion.

Poland's Yiddish press needed to carefully balance between a tone of warning and encouragement in presenting its message. An editorial criticizing emigration published in *Haynt* or *Der Moment* was a powerful tool influencing personal migration decisions, especially of those who did not have family or friends in Argentina or could not find information elsewhere. When making readers aware of the problematic situation in Argentina, and simultaneously conveying a message of *don't go to Argentina now*, Yiddish newspapers usually depicted stories of Polish Jews who decided to return from Argentina.<sup>173</sup> For instance, in 1924 *Der Moment* warned against emigration, describing the story of seventeen working-class families, who came back to Poland after only one year in Argentina.<sup>174</sup> The daily underlined the enormous level of unemployment among Jewish workers in Argentine cities, which in the late 1920s was well above 10%.<sup>175</sup> The text mentioned jobless Jews from the capital, who moved to the larger agricultural colonies, but once there they also had difficulties finding any work.<sup>176</sup> Warning against leaving Poland, *Der Moment* emphasized the low wages in Argentina and the

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<sup>173</sup> For a study of Polish gentile re-emigration from South America, see Tadeusz Paleczny, *Idea powrotu wśród emigrantów polskich w Brazylii i Argentynie* (Warsaw: Polska Akademia Nauk: Komitet Badania Polonii, 1992).

<sup>174</sup> "Fort nit dervayl keyn argentine," *Der Moment*, 3.11.1924, no. 252, 3.

<sup>175</sup> Despite ongoing industrial development and growth of exports, the unemployment level in Argentina was always around a 10% margin between 1914-1939. In some years, it was close to 20% (1915-17.7%, 1916-19.4%). In the early 1920s, Patagonia witnessed a bloody labor unrest (*Patagonia Trágica*) that followed *Semana Trágica* in Buenos Aires in 1919. In 1924, 77 strikes took place in Buenos Aires, which involved around 277,000 strikers (an increase from 19,000 in 1923). See Diego Rubinzal, *Historia económica argentina (1880-2009). Desde los tiempos de Julio Argentino Roca hasta Cristina Fernández de Kirchner* (Buenos Aires: Centro Cultural de la Cooperación Floreal Gorini, 2010), 114-122.

<sup>176</sup> For background information on the economic situation in 1920s Argentina, see Collin M. Lewis, "Economic Restructuring and Labour Scarcity: Labour in the 1920s," in *Essays in Argentine Labour History, 1870-1930*, ed. Jeremy Adelman (London: The Macmillan Press, 1992), 177-198.

insufficient number of available flats. In October 1924, the daily covered a return of Jews unsatisfied with their lives in Argentina, describing a group of native Varsovians who, unhappy with their situation in South America, decided to return to Poland.<sup>177</sup> The *Haynt* issue from January 1924 also stressed the problematic economic situation in Argentina, especially the high rate of unemployment that was on the rise due to the big number of new immigrants.<sup>178</sup> Similarly, the daily pointed out that relatively few immigrants – mostly skilled workers – were able to find jobs in Argentine cities. *Haynt* reported accurately that there were no jobs for carpenters or metal workers in Argentina, and those with experience in the free professions were forced to earn their living as doormen or servants.<sup>179</sup> Consequently, Jewish-Polish immigration dropped by approximately 50% in 1924 compared with the 1923 level.

Warning messages were also embedded in the political conflicts between various groups within Polish Jewry. They, too, revived the ambiguous discourse on migration characteristic of the turn of the century. Excessive warning tones shouting from the pages of the press were criticized by the writer and traveler Hersh Dovid Nomberg. He wrote in 1926 that, like never before, emigration was a factual need of numerous pauperized Polish Jews, who could barely make ends meet. According to him, it was the most “burning problem” in Poland, as anti-Semitism was on the rise and traditional Jewish professions were disappearing in modern times. “Entire shtetls would emigrate if they could, but now only one in a hundred is lucky enough. Hundreds of others look at the emigrant with jealous eyes, like someone who managed to survive,” the author wrote. Nomberg criticized Jewish leaders for not engaging enough in preparing Jews for emigration, by not teaching them agricultural professions, which was preferred by many potential emigration countries.<sup>180</sup> He condemned the Yiddish press for transmitting overly critical voices and challenging emigration as such.

Through its critical articles, the Yiddish press challenged the popular image of the Americas (including Argentina) as a *goldene medine*, a country where success awaited everyone. Yet by publishing both encouraging and warning articles made the advice of the newspapers even more credible in the eyes of their readers. Diverse approaches towards migration allowed Polish Jews to realize that Argentina did not offer jobs for everyone and could not be treated as a solution to their economic problems. Nevertheless, when conditions

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<sup>177</sup> “Emigranten tsurikgekumen,” *Der Moment*, 16.10.1924, no. 239, 5.

<sup>178</sup> “Tsu der lage in argentine,” *Haynt*, 13.1.1924, no. 11, 3.

<sup>179</sup> Economic difficulties also resulted in an increased Jewish-Polish immigration to Palestine between 1924-1926.

<sup>180</sup> Hersh Dovid Nomberg, “Vohin yo forn?” *Der Moment*, 26.7.1926, no. 172, 3.

were attractive, many Polish Jews followed the advice of Yiddish dailies and boarded steamships departing for Buenos Aires from Danzig (Gdańsk), Hamburg, Trieste, Antwerp or other European port cities.

### 3.2. How to Reach Argentina? The Iconographies of Emigration

The advertisements produced by passenger steamship companies operating between Europe and Buenos Aires offered another way for Polish Jews to conceptualize Argentina. *Der Moment* and other Yiddish and Polish-language Jewish newspapers regularly published advertisements of various ship companies. Argentina appeared as one of the main destinations of trans-Atlantic cruises. In the mid-1920s, some of the most frequently advertised liners included the Italian *Cosulich Line* and the British *Royal Mail Steam Packet Line* (RMSP) and *White Star Line*. In the late 1930s, the Polish *Linia Południowo-Amerykańska* (South American Line) entered into a competition with foreign carriers. The liner invited the passengers with shorter travel time, the possibility of paying in Polish currency and no need of making a stopover in Germany, Italy or France. *Linia Południowo-Amerykańska* began publishing colorful and attractive timetables. The number of cruises was also increasing. Whereas in 1938 SS *Pułaski* left Gdynia for Buenos Aires every two months, in 1939 two ships, *Chrobry* and *Sobieski*, were connecting the two cities every month.

The ads were generally similar in their structure. They contained the name of the carrier, offered destinations, the Warsaw address of the company and the addresses of its branches in other provinces (including Lwów, Grodno, Stanisławów and Kowel). Quite often, they included information about upcoming departures, ticket prices and all kinds of additional information for immigrants. Some ads contained black-and-white drawings – usually depicting a steamer or immigrants themselves, as in the case of ads of the Royal Mail Steam Packet Line published in *Haynt* in 1923 (Ill. no. 8).<sup>181</sup> We see here a poor immigrant couple, burdened with bundles, probably just before heading out across the ocean, which is contrasted with a depiction of a well-dressed man and woman, who probably have already succeeded in the New World. These pictures reflected common image of easy success allegedly awaiting every Jew in the Americas. We can interpret the motif as that of a *hope-giver* – an image that visualizes stories about the wealth of America that many Polish Jews used to hear on a daily basis. The sharp contrast

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<sup>181</sup> *Haynt*, 7.6.1923, no. 130, 1.

between departing immigrants and a couple on the American shore created an illusion that the steamship ticket for the Royal Mail Line was a simple key to wealth and success in America. This ad advertised cruises both to New York and to various Latin American destinations. The image, however, did not differentiate between these places. Success seemed possible not only in New York, but also in lesser known Argentina, Brazil or Cuba.



Illustration no. 8. Advertisement of RMSL, *Haynt*, 4.1.1923, 1.

Let's take a closer look at a few other steamer advertisements. The Cosulich Line ad reproduced below (Ill. no. 9) advertised a ship headed to Buenos Aires and to Santos – the Brazilian port city of São Paulo.<sup>182</sup> Like other ads of international liners, it was published on the front page of a Yiddish daily newspaper. There was a clear trend of placing ads of the trans-Atlantic steamship carriers on the front pages. Only rarely do we find these types of ads on the second or third page. Visible placement of the advertisement was of course supposed to attract the attention of readers who were seen as potential emigrants or as relatives of someone who has already left Poland. The placement of steamer ads also reflected the prosperity of transoceanic lines by showing that they could afford the most expensive advertising space.

<sup>182</sup> *Der Moment*, 10.1.1924, no. 9, 1.



In their advertisements, steamship companies usually emphasized regular and quick cruises, at other times the convenience and luxury of their steamers. For instance, in February 1923 *Haynt* published a Cosulich Line ad with text in bold: “Di rayze doyert nur 19 teg!” (The trip takes just 19 days!).<sup>184</sup> The 1928 flyer of the Dutch Royal Lines printed the menu offered in a transit hotel in Amsterdam and informed readers in thick print which tram line to take to the headquarters of the Poylisher Farband in Buenos Aires.<sup>185</sup> Sometimes the ads included additional information that was supposed to ensure voyagers about the security and comfort of their cruise. For example, in February 1924 *Der Moment* ran an advertisement commissioned by a French company Chargeurs Reunis.<sup>186</sup> We read about a special envoy of the company, responsible for controlling the travel conditions of the emigrants in order to analyze the desired improvements. Moreover, probably as a special offer, Chargeurs Reunis invited the relatives of Polish Jews already living in Argentina to send their letters and greetings to their families through them. The announcement highlighted the low cost of ship travel from Bordeaux to Buenos Aires, though the price was not specified. In order to purchase a ticket, customers were invited to personally visit the office of Chargeurs Reunis at Królewska Street in Warsaw. The invitation for personal ticket purchase, not through a private agent, was probably an additional measure that presented the line as credible and honest.

Steamship companies’ announcements differed significantly from other ads published in Yiddish newspapers. The advertisement on the first page of *Haynt* in January 1923 (Ill. no. 10) was much larger than the other ads and obituaries printed in the daily.<sup>187</sup> It was the only one to include graphic elements – depicting a steamer proudly floating on the waves. Interestingly, this advertising by the Royal Mail Steam Packet Line, which presented ships departing for New York, Brazil and Argentina, divided its space evenly between North and South American

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Jews. See Mazurek, *Kraj a emigracja*, 9; Lestschinsky, *National Groups*, 107. For more information about non-Jewish emigration from Poland to Latin America, see Stanisław Paweł Pyzik and Anna Nowakowska, *Polacy w Argentynie i w innych krajach Ameryki Południowej* (Warsaw: Fundacja Semper Polonia, 2004); Estanislao P. Pyzik, *Los polacos en la Republica Argentina y América del Sur: desde el año 1812* (Buenos Aires: Comité de Homenaje al Milenio de Polonia, 1966); Maria Teresa Dittler, *De sol a sol: inmigrantes polacos en la Patagonia* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2007) and Leopoldo J. Bartolome, *Los colonos de Apóstoles. Estrategias adaptativas y etnicidad en una colonia eslava en Misiones* (Posadas: Editorial Universitaria Universidad Nacional de Misiones, 2000); Katarzyna Porada, *Procesos de formación de la identidad étnica de un grupo de origen migratorio: los descendientes de polacos en Buenos Aires y Misiones* (Madrid: Ediciones Polifermo, 2016).

<sup>184</sup> *Haynt*, 22.2.1923, no. 46, 1.

<sup>185</sup> “K.H.L. do Argentyny, Brazylji, Urugwaju,” Królewski Holenderski Lloyd, Warsaw 1928, DŹS XIII 5, Polona Library.

<sup>186</sup> *Der Moment*, 17.2.1924, no. 41, 1.

<sup>187</sup> *Haynt*, 4.1.1923, no. 4, 1.

destinations. Unlike many other ads, where emigration to Argentina was often depicted as less important or marginal (for example by reducing the font size), in this ad the structure equalled the scale and meaning of immigration to the United States and Argentina.

The advertisement is for the Royal Mail Steam Packet Co. (RMSP) and features a central illustration of a steamship. The text is primarily in Hebrew, with the company name 'The Royal Mail Steam Packet Co. London' in English. The Hebrew text includes the company name 'רמספ' and 'רמספ' (RMSP), the destination 'ניו יארק' (New York), and lists several ship names: 'Andes', 'Darro', 'Avon', 'Deseado', 'Arianza', 'Desna', 'Almanzora', 'Demerara', and 'Araguaya'. It also lists other ship names: 'Ordone', 'Oropesa', 'Orbita', 'Vauban', 'Vestris', and 'Vandyck'. The advertisement mentions 'אין 3-סען קלאס' (3rd class) and 'אין 4-סען קלאס' (4th class) and provides contact information for the company in London.

Illustration no. 10. Advertisement of RMSP. *Haynt*, 17.6.1923, 1

1938/39 — ROZKŁAD JAZDY Nr 13 — 1938/39

s/s „PULASKI”

DO AMERYKI POŁUDNIOWEJ	Przyj./Odj.	Nr 27		Nr 28		Nr 29	
		„PULASKI” 16		„PULASKI” 17		„PULASKI” 18	
GDYNIA	Odj.	piątek	16/12	piątek	17/2	piątek	21/4
KIEL-HOLTENAU	Przyj./Odj.	sobota	17/12	sobota	18/2	sobota	22/4
DAKAR	" "	poniedziałek	26/12	poniedziałek	27/2	poniedziałek	1/5
RIO DE JANEIRO	" "	środa	4/1	środa	8/3	środa	10/5
SANTOS	" "	czwartek	5/1	czwartek	9/3	czwartek	11/5
MONTEVIDEO	" "	niedziela	8/1	niedziela	12/3	niedziela	14/5
BUENOS AIRES	Przyj.	poniedziałek	9/1	poniedziałek	13/3	poniedziałek	15/5
Z AMERYKI POŁUDNIOWEJ							
BUENOS AIRES	Odj.	sobota	14/1	sobota	18/3	sobota	20/5
SANTOS	Przyj./Odj.	środa	18/1	środa	22/3	środa	24/5
RIO DE JANEIRO	" "	czwartek	19/1	czwartek	23/3	czwartek	25/5
VICTORIA *)	" "	piątek	20/1	piątek	24/3	piątek	26/5
DAKAR	" "	sobota	28/1	sobota	1/4	sobota	3/6
BOULOGNE SUR MER	" "	niedziela	5/2	niedziela	9/4	niedziela	11/6
KIEL-HOLTENAU	" "	wtorek	7/2	wtorek	11/4	wtorek	13/6
GDYNIA	Przyj.	środa	8/2	środa	12/4	środa	14/6

\*) Postój warunkowy

Odjazdy z Gdyni o godz. 15.

Podlega zmianie bez uprzedniego zawiadomienia.

Illustration. no. 11. The exact travel schedule of S/S “Pułaski” operated by Linia Południowo-Amerykańska in 1938/1939. National Library in Warsaw, DŹS XIIA 5.



Steamship carriers' advertisements offer an additional perspective on Jewish-Polish conceptualization of Argentina, different from the texts about immigration published by Yiddish dailies. In this case, Argentina became a form of quasi "merchandise" sold to Jewish customers. Its qualities were not defined by factual information, but referred rather to an imagined country on the other side of the Atlantic, a place that was supposed to be better, freer and offering possibilities of quick enrichment. Advertisements portrayed Argentina from the perspective of the steamship carriers interested in increasing their sales. Advertising was the main tool of attracting potential passengers. It seems that market-conscious vessel companies adjusted the quantity of their commercials according to the rise and fall of demand. When immigration to Argentina was relatively limited (since the early 1930s), they appeared much less frequently. However, in 1923, the year when Jewish immigration to Argentina peaked at more than 13,000 people, we can observe a significant increase in the number of ads.<sup>188</sup>

Advertisements of steamship companies appeared precisely in the same newspapers where various articles about Jewish immigration to Argentina were published. Thus, the Yiddish dailies constituted an unusual combination of commercial and quasi-public media representations of the country. On the one hand, the newspapers included articles containing specific and helpful information about immigration laws, wages etc. (quite often negatively assessing the possibility of a Jewish settlement). On the other hand, the first pages of *Haynt* and *Der Moment* were occupied by clearly commercial and attractive advertisements of international liners that offered a service of transporting Jews from Europe to Argentina, without paying much attention to their lives after disembarking. The readers of Warsaw's Yiddish dailies were influenced by both forms of portraying Argentina. Thus, the media discourse and the process of shaping the readers' views on Argentine matters, especially the possibility of emigration, was highly complex and included diverse sources of information. Regardless if we focus on the commercial advertisements or the letters from Polish Jews living in Buenos Aires reprinted in the Yiddish dailies, we notice the essential role of Yiddish journals in preparing Polish Jews for emigration. By informing, encouraging and warning against Argentina, *Haynt* and *Der Moment* had a powerful influence on individual decisions of migrating Jews.

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<sup>188</sup> Arie Tartakower, *Yidishe emigratsye*, 1939, 89.

## 4. Degeneration and Crime: The Argentine White Slave Trade and Its Jewish-Polish Imaginaries

Jewish prostitution and sex-related criminality represented some of the main areas of Argentine Jewish life present in the columns of interwar Warsaw's Yiddish press. Sensational, quite often criminal or sexual news, constituted the core of information about Argentina appearing in Poland's Yiddish dailies. We find it not only in the "lighter" *Hayntige Naves*, but also in the influential socio-political dailies like *Haynt* and *Der Moment*. Reports about the sex underground in Argentina were based on existing phenomena, but its scale was rather exaggerated. During the interwar years and before, international criminal groups were responsible for the widespread trafficking of women (young Jewish females from Eastern Europe were one of the largest victim groups). In the first decades of the twentieth century, Jewish prostitution was a burning social problem and Argentina became its symbol both in Jewish and gentile imagery. In the 1920s, Russian and Polish women made up 46.8% of prostitutes in Buenos Aires.<sup>189</sup> Donna Guy wrote that the atmosphere in Europe was then so tense that women were discouraged from travelling alone to the cities in search of work, as they could be captured and end up in an Argentina bordello. These fears were prevalent even when women did not plan to emigrate.<sup>190</sup> Information about abductions of young Polish Jewesses, about *shtile khupes* ("quiet wedding," a term used to describe weddings quickly arranged by sex traffickers) and the sad plight of girls and women forced into prostitution in Buenos Aires became a part and parcel of Warsaw's police chronicles published in the Yiddish newspapers.

Abductions of Eastern European Jewish women should be discussed in light of the general emigration from Poland. The ease with which the procurers managed to convince women or their parents was a result of the desperate economic situation of many Jews in Eastern Europe. Each child was an economic burden and there was a tendency to encourage girls to marry young. Among the traditional population, marriage was the only available option for Jewish women. In that context, the promise of marriage to a respectable American, made by traffickers, was often seen as the perfect solution. Simultaneously, sometimes those women who decided to emigrate alone were regarded as transgressors. However, the portrayal of emigration lands as dangerous for women was not characteristic only for Argentina. Already a

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<sup>189</sup> Donna Guy, *Sex & Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 6.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibidem*, 5.

few decades earlier in the 1880-1900s, various actors employed propaganda material to discourage emigration. In the interwar years, the Polish nobility and the new industrial tycoons still feared losing their pool of cheap and always available labor. At the same time, religious leaders, both Jewish and Christian, linked emigration with danger to the traditional family structure and secularization. Female immigration to Argentina was considered a danger to the good reputation of Polish Jews.<sup>191</sup> In 1923, the Polish-language Jewish journal *Nasz Przegląd* wrote that “one heard Polish in the bordellos of Buenos Aires” and complained about the ruined reputation of the entire ethnic group.<sup>192</sup> I suggest that press reports about coerced Jewish prostitution in Argentina served as a tool of preserving traditional family structure, limiting women's independence and were an attempt at maintaining communal bonds and checks and balances.

The publication of criminal news from Argentina occurred on two main levels. First, these articles served as a warning for those considering emigration. Criminal news from Buenos Aires, usually related to sexuality, formed a picture of Argentina as a filthy, degenerate land, polluted with the worst elements of Jewish society. Numerous articles describing the tragedy of young girls, who fell in love with rich Argentine men of East European origin served as a warning for women and their families. Second, news about prostitution in Argentina attracted readers interested in “juicy” news from the distant country in South America. In this context, the publication of articles on this subject was embedded in the process of the exoticization of Argentina in Poland's Yiddish press. In the articles found in *Haynt* or *Hayntige Naves*, Argentina was often reduced to a place of disproportionate levels of Jewish prostitution. Female trafficking became a symbol of Argentina and its Jewry, determining its image among many Polish Jews. The interest that the Yiddish dailies took in Argentine Jewish prostitution could be explained by the fact that the tragic fate of one's sisters, female friends or unknown Jewish women in a distant country was probably more interesting than the familiar street prostitution of Warsaw. Although some articles primarily aimed to shock readers with detailed descriptions of abductions or with the fact that both pimps and prostitutes were Jewish, they also fulfilled a warning role, discouraging Polish Jews from immigrating to supposedly violent and

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<sup>191</sup> These voices against Jewish prostitution and female trafficking had already been heard earlier in Poland. In May 1905, a so-called “prostitute pogrom” took place in Warsaw and other places in Poland, where numerous bordellos were attacked and prostitutes and pimps were beaten up or killed by Jewish proletarian militias (probably Bundist). The events were recalled in fictionalized form by Sz. Sznicer, *Pogrom oyf der untermvelt in 1905* (Warsaw: Farlag “Groshn-bibliotek,” 1935).

<sup>192</sup> “Walka z handlem żywym towarem,” *Nasz Przegląd*, 16.5.1923, 4.

promiscuous Argentina. Even though the scale of the phenomena was blown out of proportions by the press, the excessive warning tones influenced the Jewish public, both in terms of migration choices and everyday discussions on Argentina.

The editors of Warsaw's Yiddish dailies presented warnings about the white slave trade in a variety of textual forms. Extremely powerful were personal testimonies given by the victims of traffickers. A longer text of this kind, included in 1924 issue of *Der Moment*, quoted an article published originally in the Buenos Aires-based *Yidische Zaitung*.<sup>193</sup> This popular newspaper reported on the tragedy of a young Jewish woman from Poland, who visited the paper's office one evening. The newspaper described her story in detail and empathy in approaching the pain and humiliation she suffered. The woman was identified as 28-year-old Dala, who had met a young man by the name of Leybl twelve years earlier in Lwów (Lviv). He told her about the wonderful and easy life in Argentina and quickly offered to marry her. Her blind love to Leybl deceived the girl, who decided to leave her parents and run away with the groom to Argentina. As soon as they had come ashore, the "husband" brought her to a house filled with other young women. After a few minutes, Dala understood where she was. In the brothel, she was stripped of her freedom. The *balebos* (manager) threatened to beat her up with a whip, whenever she tried to escape or show any sign of dissatisfaction. After some time, she managed to contact her family, after which her parents and brother decided to travel to Argentina and were able to rescue her.

Although the story had a happy ending, the general message of the article was rather sad. A naive young woman experienced extreme humiliation, was enslaved and left alone in a foreign country. The article thus served as a direct warning for young Polish Jewish women, as it precisely described the methods of the traffickers (promises of marriage, the wish to marry as soon as possible, wealth in a foreign country, etc.) and showcased the potential consequences of getting acquainted with seemingly single foreigners. As the daily noted, Dala felt in some way responsible for the well-being of Eastern European Jewish girls; she made her story public in order to warn potential victims of the white slave trade. The fact that *Der Moment* provided the readers with the exact name of the victim and the trafficker made the story even more personal and powerful. It reminded the readers that even living among fellow Jews, one was

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<sup>193</sup> "A tragedye fun a yidishe tokhter fun poyln in argentina," *Der Moment*, 31.12.1924, no. 302, 6.

hardly protected from the presumed evils of Argentine prostitution and international Jewish criminality.

It seems that the *froyen handel* was a problem for the whole of Poland, both in big cities and in small towns. In Warsaw's Yiddish newspapers, we find reports about female victims originating from various Polish regions. Falling victim to the traffickers could happen both in a small town like Wieluń,<sup>194</sup> where a group of traffickers abducted the local beauty, tempting her with a promise of marriage to an American, but also in big cities, such as Vilna.<sup>195</sup> In the latter case, a girl named Sara presumably fell in love with a handsome foreigner she met in a dance hall and decided to marry him against the will of her parents. After the wedding, the couple set off abroad. On the ship to Rio de Janeiro, her husband "sold" the Vilna woman to a group of traffickers who brought her to Buenos Aires and forced her to work in a brothel. *Hayntige Naves* from January 1931 described an analogous story of two female residents of Łódź, who were seduced by an elegant Argentine Jew, left Poland and immigrated to Argentina where they were forced into prostitution.<sup>196</sup>

All the stories mentioned above emphasized the dramatic situation of young women who, fooled by the traffickers, were forced into prostitution in Buenos Aires. Despite their suffering, the abducted girls were doubly victimized in the press reports, as journalists tended to ascribe part of the guilt to the victims. They described the women as stupid, naive, disobedient and materialistic. Beauty and naiveté were, for the male editors of Yiddish journals, a reasonable explanation for abductions and forced prostitution. A picture of binary guilt emerges from their reports on prostitution in Argentina: that of traffickers and foolish women. Interestingly, prostitution was one of the few areas of social life where Jewish women were allowed to speak out. Yiddish newspapers hardly ever published articles written by women; journalism was a space reserved almost exclusively for men. By quoting the victims of prostitution, the editors of *Der Moment*, *Haynt* and *Hayntige Naves* provided women with an exceptional opportunity to express their humiliation and suffering. This should be seen in the context of some contemporary interpretations that see Jewish prostitutes as independent actors, consciously deciding to earn money by selling their bodies.<sup>197</sup> Press reports about sex-related criminality

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<sup>194</sup> "A yidishe meyd in gefangenschaft bay froyen handler," *Hayntige Naves*, 23.3.1931, no. 70, 1.

<sup>195</sup> "Avekgeroybt durkh froyen handler yidishe meyd vert geratevet durkh a biznesmen," *Hayntige Naves*, 27.4.1931, no. 96, 1.

<sup>196</sup> "Farnart tsvey lodzer yidishe froyen in a shand hoyz in argentine," *Hayntige Naves*, 5.1.1931, no. 4, 1.

<sup>197</sup> Guy, *Sex & Danger in Buenos Aires*; Sandra McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880-1955* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2010).

were part of a large flashback campaign against independent women. The conservative social milieu disapproved of migration – and the emigration of single women in particular. In that light, the earlier discussed warning messages discouraging emigration as such, were part of the same phenomenon as press reports about the supposedly degenerate Buenos Aires.

In addition to news stories about female trafficking, Poland's Yiddish press often covered general information about how the criminality of Buenos Aires affected its Jewish residents. The Warsaw press regularly reported on frauds and murders committed on and by Polish Jews in Argentina. For example, in September 1924 *Der Moment* published a report about twenty-four Jewish immigrants with false passports who were arrested in Buenos Aires.<sup>198</sup> The daily explained that the immigrants were victims of a document forger, who had fooled the ignorant Jews, assuring them that their passports were even valid for entry to the United States. Similar information appeared in *Der Moment* in April 1924.<sup>199</sup> The newspaper, quoting a message by the Jewish Colonization Association office in Warsaw, reported that the U.S. State Department informed the Argentine government about many European immigrants heading to Argentina, where they acquired forged passports (using falsified naturalization documents), and subsequently tried to enter North America. Articles that presented emigrants as victims misled by Argentine criminals further stabilized the image of Argentina as a “dangerous” country – where not only women, but Jewish men could become objects of deception.

Argentina appeared in the Yiddish press as a place where new, formerly uncommon problems intruded into the lives of Polish Jews. Jewish immigration to Argentina tremendously influenced the Eastern European family structure and the emigration of young men quite often led to conflict between husbands and wives. It is clearly visible in an article from January 1930, published in *Hayntige Naves*.<sup>200</sup> The journal addressed the problematic issue of marriages that fall apart because of emigration to Argentina or other countries. The evening paper noted that the Warsaw rabbinate had received a letter from one of the Buenos Aires rabbis, describing his meeting with Alexander Perkal, a Warsaw-born hatter who decided to divorce his wife, still residing in Poland. This short article seems to portray the complications connected with emigration that intruded into the lives of Eastern European Jews. Although its author never

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<sup>198</sup> “Arestirt 24 yidishe imigrantn in argentine,” *Der Moment*, 24.9.1924, no. 225, 4

<sup>199</sup> “Falshe argentiner peser keyn tsfon amerike,” *Der Moment*, 24.4.1924, no. 98, 2.

<sup>200</sup> “A get fun buenos aires,” *Hayntige Naves*, 15 January 1930, no.13, 1.

expressed it clearly, the article sounds like an accusation against the unfaithful husband, who, liberated from the obligations of the Old World, decided to start a new life in Argentina. Yet the fact that he made an effort to contact a local rabbi proves that his connection to religious and traditional customs remained strong. Migration appeared in this article as a family-breaking factor, a hitherto unknown phenomenon that destroyed traditional family relations. The newspaper article depicted the couple's problems as part of the unusual and strange "Argentine issues," discouraging readers from emigration by describing Argentina as a seductive and dangerous space that tore families apart. Contrary voices, as that of Yiddish writer Y.L. Peretz, who had criticized this moral panic in Jewish Poland prior to 1914, were rare. In a proto-feminist call, Peretz emphasized that Jewish prostitution was linked to the poverty of Jewish women, their lack of independence and chances to earn a living. Peretz noted the hypocrisy of Argentina's critics by pointing out that prostitution blossomed in every big Jewish city.<sup>201</sup>

Articles describing crime, prostitution and female trafficking served as a mechanism for limiting emigration. They portrayed Argentina as a country where innocent Eastern European Jews were misled by their argentinized coreligionists, who were only interested in making a profit at the expense of poor and uninformed immigrants. *Haynt* and *Der Moment* seemed determined to convince Polish Jews that Argentina was not only a land of vice and prostitution, but a place where criminality was part of daily life. By stressing the vulnerability of Jewish immigrants to fraud by the local Jewish population of Argentina, the dailies drew a picture of a land where Jewish social networks seemed not to exist and where immigrants needed to face various obstacles and hardships alone. While it could be understandable in the context of religiously conservative circles who feared losing control over the religious community, it is less clear why this type of article appeared in secular and liberal papers, such as *Haynt* and *Moment*. It may have been the result of a simple snowball effect and the difficulty of breaking through with a counter-narrative on Argentina. It was much easier to reproduce a narrative of degenerate and criminal Argentina, rather than offer a nuanced picture of local Jewish life.

The simplifications that reduced Jewish Argentina to prostitution were at times challenged by Argentine Jews visiting Poland. The journalist and author Yankev Botoshansky visiting Grodno in 1931 complained that Poland's Yiddish newspapers were blowing sex crimes in Buenos Aires out of proportion:

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<sup>201</sup> Y. L. Peretz, "Yudishe shtot un shtetlekh," *Der Yid*, 20.11.1902, 9-11., quoted in Rollansky, "Y.L. Peretz," 128.

Just yesterday your newspapers wrote that some Zisa Zaydman murdered some Aba Zonschein, who wanted to snatch a girl to Argentina. I'm not saying you should not describe these events in the newspapers. But do it with proportion: for every thousand Jewish immigrants who go to Argentina to work hard and in bitterness [...] maybe five are female traffickers. The remaining 995 do not murder and do not cause scandals, but the newspapers do not write about them. Yet about those five who do murder, the newspapers do write about them. The result is: no one knows here anything about our honest and hard life and people believe that all of [Argentine Jewish] life consists of female traffickers!<sup>202</sup>

It bothered Botoshansky that Poland's journalists started their interviews by asking about female trafficking, despite the fact that “there were so many interesting things to talk about, about building, living, creating.”<sup>203</sup> For Botoshansky, who was spoke in Grodno about idealistic colonists who had to cut through the jungle in order to work the land, it was important to push a heroic perception of Argentine Jewry in Poland. Botoshansky confirmed that colonization did not have much of a future, but even in this aspect he criticized the Jewish-Polish exoticization of Argentina, saying that it was “formed by the spicy stories of Mordechai Alpersohn” and had little to do with reality.<sup>204</sup> Botoshansky proclaimed that he came to Poland “to fight against the lack of local interest in a meaningful Jewish life in Argentina.” As an Argentine Yiddishist, he saw himself responsible for combating the simplistic portrayals of Jewish Argentina at the heart of the Yiddishland. The problematic reputation of Argentina in Eastern Europe challenged Yiddishists' desire to see Argentina as an equal part of the Yiddishland.

The problem of Jewish prostitution and the image of Polish Jews in Argentina did not go unnoticed by the gentile press in Poland.<sup>205</sup> Various personalities, such as the traveler Mieczysław Fularski,<sup>206</sup> the first Polish honorary consul in Argentina Józef Włodek<sup>207</sup> and the agronomist Roman Jordan<sup>208</sup> touched on this subject. Likewise, the Polish government did not

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<sup>202</sup> “A lebediger grus fun yudish lebn un yudisher kultur in argentina. Vos derzelt der bekanter yudisher shriftshteler fun argentina, yankev botoshansky,” *Grodner Moment Express*, no. 62, 13.3.1931, 7.

<sup>203</sup> Yankev Botoshansky was born in 1895 in Bessarabia and immigrated to Buenos Aires in 1926. He was a journalist of the local daily *Di Presse* and was engaged in progressive cultural Yiddishism throughout his life. In the 1930s, he was a secretary of the *Gezelshaft far di veltkhe yidishe shuln in argentine*.

<sup>204</sup> “A lebediger grus fun yudish lebn un yudisher kultur in argentina. Vos derzelt der bekanter yudisher shriftshteler fun argentina, yankev botoshansky,” *Grodner Moment Express*, no. 62, 13.3.1931, 7.

<sup>205</sup> The problem was already discussed in Europe in the 1890s. International congresses were established to find a solution to the problem. Guy, *Sex & Danger in Buenos Aires*, 25.

<sup>206</sup> Mieczysław Fularski, *Argentyna, Paragwaj, Boliwja: wrażenia z podróży* (Warsaw: M. Arct, 1929).

<sup>207</sup> Józef Włodek, *Argentyna i emigracja ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem emigracji polskiej* (Warsaw: M. Arct, 1923).

<sup>208</sup> Roman Jordan, *Argentyna jako teren dla polskiego wychodźstwa: Sprawozdanie z podróży informacyjnej* (Kraków: Polskie Towarzystwo Emigracyjne, 1912).



let the problem of Jewish prostitution in Argentina to go unnoticed. Regarding female trafficking, Władysław Kicki, the head of the Consular Section in the Buenos Aires Embassy, noted that “we are dealing here with Polish citizens and this makes this problem relevant for the Embassy.” Kicki stressed that he was in permanent contact with *Ezras Noshim*, a Jewish organization combating the sex-trade and helping single immigrant women.<sup>209</sup>

#### 4.1. Vicious Argentina and Poland's Yiddish Writing

There is no doubt the big influx of Polish Jews to Argentina helped to develop a literary exchange between Poland and the Jewish-Polish diaspora in Argentina. As Eliahu Toker and Ana E. Weinstein estimated, around 60% of all Argentine Yiddish authors arrived in interwar period, including more than 50% from Poland.<sup>210</sup> The growing relevance of Argentina and its intersecting with other parts of the Yiddishland inspired Poland's Yiddish writers. They peppered their work with descriptions of immigration to Argentina, though they mostly focused on widespread fears concerning female trafficking. Alan Astro aptly wrote that the involvement of Jewish men and women in the white slave trade “has been attached to Argentina in the Yiddish imagination.”<sup>211</sup> As Ilan Stavans put it, “the journey to Argentina was described as an expedition to hell” and Argentine prostitution overshadowed any other imaginaries of Argentina in Eastern European Yiddish literature.<sup>212</sup> Even a brief mention of the Buenos Aires sex underworld helped to construct a simplistic vision of Argentina as a Jewish bordello. As Amy K. Kaminsky rightfully pointed out, Yiddish authors outside of Argentina did not feel obliged to prove themselves worthy of Argentine society (as was sometimes the case with Argentina-based writers), and felt free to depict the shady stories of Argentine life.<sup>213</sup> In this respect, Eastern European authors had more freedom than their Argentine counterparts, who were more confined by the local Argentine setting. At the same time, Poland's Jews had less to contribute in relation to Argentine Jewish life beyond the sex underground. It was consequently

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<sup>209</sup> Organizacje polskich Żydów, raport Ezras Noshim, Argentyna Urugwaj. Organizacje i stowarzyszenia polskie – sprawy organizacyjne, programowe, działalność. Raporty, korespondencja, notatki, statut, 5-16, AAN MSZ 10785 – B27197.

<sup>210</sup> Ana E. Weinstein and Eliahu Toker, *La letra idish en tierra argentina: Bio-bibliografía de sus autores literarios* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Milá; AMIA, Comunidad Judía, 2004), XI.

<sup>211</sup> Alan Astro, “Alperohn's Galut of the Yiddish Gauchos,” *Yiddish-Modern Jewish Studies* 17, 1-2 (2011): 115–28.

<sup>212</sup> Ilan Stavans, *Singer's Typewriter and Mine: Reflections on Jewish Culture, Texts and Contexts* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 144.

<sup>213</sup> Amy K. Kaminsky, *Argentina: Stories for a Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 138.

barely possible for them to find motifs that could be transformed into a nuanced and complex literary narrative that would not simplify the Argentinian diaspora.

The anti-prostitution panic that reappeared in interwar Eastern Europe was featured in the texts of the Yiddish classics. This was the case in a 1911 short story by Sholem Aleichem entitled “Der Mensch fun Buenos Aires” (The Man from Buenos Aires).<sup>214</sup> The protagonist of the story, Mottke, a Jewish pimp and trafficker living in Buenos Aires, was an Eastern European Jew who became rich and came back home to find a wife. He described women as goods to be bought and sold, and the white slave trade was depicted as a legitimate business activity. Sholem Aleichem portrayed him as a wolf in sheep's clothing, far from an image of a cruel and unscrupulous trafficker.<sup>215</sup> Sholem Aleichem's story was based on common Eastern European fears and panic of the era, but at the same time itself powerfully reinforced and spread the image of a dangerous and promiscuous Argentina. A former president of Poylisher Farband, Aharon Leyb Schussheim, argued that this story by a popular Jewish national author “spread false opinions about Buenos Aires throughout the world” and “attached a bad name to Argentine Jews.”<sup>216</sup> Schussheim did confirm that “Der Mensch fun Buenos Aires was not a fantasy [...] he lived in Buenos Aires, and conducted business there.” What bothered Schussheim was projecting a bad reputation on Argentine Jewry as a whole, both among Jews in Poland, and among gentile Argentines. It is hard to speculate what motivated Sholem Aleichem to use the motif of female trafficking in Argentina, but it seems that such was the general social atmosphere surrounding Argentina at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The motifs of “being sold” to become a prostitute in Argentina and the transnational world of the Jewish sex business also made its appearance in Sholem Asch's novels. In 1916, he published *Motke Ganef* (Motke the Thief), in which he depicted the sex underworld spanning from Warsaw to Buenos Aires. Written in the form of a criminal novel, Asch told the story of an impoverished Jewish cellar-boy, who after numerous struggles, humiliations and misadventures, turned into a well-known persona of the Warsaw sex underground. Just like his Buenos Aires counterparts, Motke strolled around the prestigious Saxon Garden with a group of his prostitutes, visited Jewish theatres and indulged his girls in cafes. For the young women, the time spent with Motke seemed like preparation for work as prostitutes in Argentina or its

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<sup>214</sup> Sholem Aleichem, *Ksovim fun a komivoyzsher* (Warsaw: Progress, 1911), 65–79.

<sup>215</sup> Nora Glickman, *The Jewish White Slave Trade and the Untold Story of Raquel Libermann* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc. 2000) 19-20.

<sup>216</sup> Aharon Leib Schussheim, *Tsu der geshikhte yidisher yishev in Argentine* (Buenos Aires, 1954), 10, 19.

parallels. We read about poor girls sold to Warsaw or Łódź bordellos by their own husbands.<sup>217</sup> Yet at least some of the young Jewish women pictured in Asch's novel seemed to be perfectly aware of their future in Buenos Aires. "No one is misleading anyone here," Asch wrote. For young females with almost no prospects in both the big city and the shtetl, leaving a family house full of poverty and oppression, was a liberating act. Asch portrayed Jewish women as self-aware agents, who consciously decided about their future. Yet, their vision of a successful future in Argentina was based on false evidence and the stuff of legends:

Girls are fed up with life in their homes, where they are literally locked up. They long for something new, for a way to leave their claustrophobic circles for the broader world. Legends about Buenos Aires in Argentina circulate all around them. There - as the legend goes - they will regain their freedom, will have lots of money [...] and will quickly find a husband. Girls who went there, write that they have golden teeth, that they brush [their teeth] with golden toothbrushes. There are legends about black princes, who fall in love with Jewish girls and marry them. That's why they are all asking to be sold. That's why it's a holiday for them when merchants arrive from Argentina. Then all the girls dye their hair blond and put on bright dresses. The blondes sell the best. The blacks [in Latin America] like them the most.<sup>218</sup>

The presumed "blackness" of Argentina was for Asch a synonym for danger and promiscuity, which allegedly reigned in Argentina. Writing about "black princes" or a "black kingdom," the author made a direct reference to the sex underworld of Buenos Aires. "Black" represented everything that awaited Jewish females in Argentina. Although Argentina hardly had any black population, in Asch's novel the land was symbolically blackened and redefined as a black kingdom of richness and happiness.<sup>219</sup> By referring to "selling" women to Jewish-Argentine pimps, Asch drew on the same topos of women as a "merchandise," visible in Sholem Aleichem's *Der mensh fun Buenos Aires*. In Asch's take on the subject, the meaning of female trafficking was complicated by reference to women's misery as a factor pushing them into the international sex trade. Whereas Sholem Aleichem referred to Jewish prostitution in Argentina using a stylistic curtain of vague hints, Asch was much more straightforward. In that sense, *Motke Ganef* was a critique of the underprivileged situation of Jewish women in Poland, rather than a simple reflection of Argentina-related anti-prostitution panic.

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<sup>217</sup> Shalom Asch, *Motke ganef: (Motke złodziej)* (Warsaw: Safrus, 1925), 223.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 256–57.

<sup>219</sup> References to the color black could also mean the hair color of many Spaniards and Italians living in Argentina.

*Motke Ganef* was first published in its entirety in New York during Asch's first American period (from 1910 to the end of World War I) by the publishing house of New York's *Forverts*. Yet, it was simultaneously serialized by Warsaw's *Haynt*. The entire drama was first published in Poland only in 1923 by Kultur-Lige, a publishing house related to the famous Jewish Writers' Union from Tlomackie Street. Soon afterwards, Jakub Apenszlak translated *Motke Ganef* into Polish, making it accessible to Polonized Jewish youth and Catholic Poles. Asch also touched upon the problem of transnational sex trade a decade earlier in his drama *Got fun nekome* (God of Vengeance), first published in Vilna's Tsukunft Farlag in 1907. Although it did not make specific reference to Argentina, its focus on prostitution made it so controversial that Polish authorities forbade its staging.<sup>220</sup> Yet, *Got fun nekome* was successful in New York, Berlin, Sankt Petersburg and in Argentina and brought Asch international acclaim.<sup>221</sup> In 1929, Buenos Aires welcomed Warsaw's Ayzik Samberg, who acted and directed both *Motke Ganef* and *Got fun nekome*, met with wild success.<sup>222</sup> Yiddish novels and dramas featuring international prostitution connected Jewish Poland and Argentina in a twisted way. The subject was at once relevant, feared and combated in both countries, bringing both diasporas into a key zone of cultural contact.

Argentine prostitution was also featured in sensational books, such as *Der veg keyn buenos aires. Di soydes fun froyenhandel* (The Road to Buenos Aires. The Secrets of Women Trafficking), published in Warsaw in Yiddish in 1928. The book was originally written in French by Albert Londres and translated into Yiddish by Yoel Shvayger for the Jewish-Polish market.<sup>223</sup> The book was so popular that it was quickly translated into other languages: Polish (1928), German (1928), Spanish (1927), English (1928) and Swedish (1928). Although the book was sensational and fit perfectly into the anti-prostitution moral panic prevalent in Europe, the high-brow *Literarische Bleter* also reported on its Yiddish edition.<sup>224</sup> Londres was a

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<sup>220</sup> "Polish Government Prohibits Asch's 'God of Vengeance,'" Jewish Telegraphic Agency, January 1, 1924.

<sup>221</sup> Glickman, *The Jewish White Slave Trade*, 17-18. *Got fun nekome* features a couple that runs a brothel located underneath of their apartment. Their daughter enters into a lesbian relationship with one of her parents' prostitutes.

<sup>222</sup> Samuel Rollansky, "Sambergs debyut in sholem aschns motke ganef," *Di Yidische Zaitung*, 7.5.1929, page number unknown; Nehamias Zucker, "A. Samberg in motke ganef," *Argentiner Tog*, 7.7.1929, page unknown.

<sup>223</sup> Londres was an envoy of the League of Nations tasked with exploring female trafficking between Europe and South America. The French original of his book was published in 1923. See Glickman, *The Jewish White Slave Trade*, 10. Londres, who is often regarded as a critic of colonialism, recently experienced a certain rediscovery. His numerous books about East Asia and the Middle East were republished, including the *The Road to Buenos Aires* (2010 in France and 2008 in Italy). To this day, the Albert Londres Prize is awarded every year in the field of Francophone journalism.

<sup>224</sup> *Literarische Bleter*, no. 9, 28.2.1930, 17.

Frenchman, whose work primarily focused on the situation of French pimps and prostitutes. Yet his book contained numerous references to the Jewish victims of trafficking in women. Londres even set out on a trip to Eastern Europe in order to examine the white slave trade. He became acquainted with pimps and prostitutes, arguing for a quasi-scientific agenda behind his research trip:

[...] do you understand what I want? I want to live among them. I want to study their obscure habits as if they were insects and I was a some kind of a scientist. I want to go down into their haunts, as if I might visit a moon, so as to be able to relate what goes on in those depths [...].<sup>225</sup>

[...] I wanted to go to the pits, where society deposits what it fears or rejects; to look at what the world refuses to see, to pass my own judgment on what the world has condemned. I thought it a better thing to let those, who have no longer the right to speak, say what they could for themselves [...].<sup>226</sup>

In *The Road to Buenos Aires*, Londres criticized the superficial morality of the League of Nations and other bodies that fought against women trafficking. He identified poverty and discrimination against women as the main factors behind the development of international prostitution. Londres argued that instead of debating about vice and public morality, societies and authorities should work to improve the tragic situation of impoverished young women:

It is always easy to be content with the appearances. When people talk of the White Slave Traffic, they always cry out against the men who carry off the women; nobody talks about the poverty that makes them willing to be carried off.<sup>227</sup>

Later, in a very feminist statement, he opposed the suppression of brothels and pimps and the closing of “red light districts.” All these efforts were for Londres pointless:

As long as women cannot get work. As long as girls are cold and hungry. As long as they do not know where to go to bed. As long as women do not earn enough to allow themselves to be ill, or enough (if that is not asking too much) to buy themselves a warm coat in winter, enough to buy food, sometimes, for their families and children. As long as we allow the bully to take our place and offer a bowl of soup. [...] The responsibility is ours, we cannot get rid of it.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Albert Londres, *The Road to Buenos Aires* (London: Constable & Co, 1928).

<sup>226</sup> Ibidem, 170.

<sup>227</sup> Ibidem, 173.

<sup>228</sup> Ibidem, 174-175.

In presenting Jewish-Polish prostitution, Londres departed from the tendency to describe the hollow misery of Polish shtetls that he saw during his recent trip around Europe. Londres saw a direct link between the high birth rate, the lack of education, anti-Semitism and the development of a transnational white slave trade. When he saw the cheap bordellos full of *polacas* in Buenos Aires, he immediately recalled what he saw in the shtetl:

I can see once more the Jewish villages of Poland, and at the same time I walked down the quays of Rio de la Plata, Polack after Polack, brushes above my elbow [...] It is to this village and others like it where the Polish *caftens*, the Polacks go for “remounts.”<sup>229</sup>

The Jewish-Polish houses of disrepute were painted in an equally miserable way as the *shtetl*. They were dark, smelly and small. The men waiting in the queue did not have a place to sit, they stood in silence as “a group of poor waiting in front of the relief shelter in winter.”<sup>230</sup> These establishments were much different than those occupied by the *franchuchas*, the French prostitutes, which attracted a more elegant and affluent clientele. La Boca, one of the poorest corners in Buenos Aires, was the kingdom of the *polacas*.

The book by Albert Londres attracted readers with its new model of investigative journalism. By personally going to Argentina and going inside the State of the Outlaw (how he described the networks of pimps and prostitutes), he offered a first-hand account of a burning problem of 1920s Europe. Although it did not focus specifically on the Jewish white slave trade, its Yiddish and Polish translation allowed readers to link the problems they knew from Polish reality with the global problem of trafficking in women.

## **5. The Polish Center and its South American Colony: Argentina in *Literarische Bleter***

Throughout the interwar years, the presence of Argentina grew in Jewish Poland, which increasingly found its expression in high culture. The high-brow *Literarische Bleter* approached Argentina with a much greater and detailed interest than the popular or yellow dailies. *Haynt* and *Der Moment* sporadically published articles that could neither be categorized as anti-immigration and female-trafficking-linked warnings nor as calls for emigration. For many,

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<sup>229</sup> Ibidem, 115-117.

<sup>230</sup> Ibidem, 125.

emigration was so urgent and obvious that there was no space for an in-depth analysis of the situation in Argentina. I was barely able to locate a few longer articles that dealt with Argentine cultural life. The 1924 text “Literary attempts in Argentina” by Hersh Dovid Nomberg evaluated *Zeglen* (Sails), one of the first literary journals edited by Jewish authors active in Buenos Aires.<sup>231</sup> In 1931, *Haynt* also published an article on Argentine Yiddish literature, mentioning the already relatively well-known authors in Poland Guiser, Botoshansky or Zhitnitsky, but also a number of lesser known writers.<sup>232</sup> The almost complete absence of texts dealing with Jewish social and cultural life in Argentina was based on the fact that culture was neither immediately relevant for potential immigrants nor exciting on the “Jewish street.” More important was the information about wages, immigration laws and the usual rumors and sexual scandals.

More complex imageries of Argentina were to be found among the outlets of high Yiddish culture. The prestigious Warsaw literary journal *Literarische Bleter* took upon itself the task of presenting Argentine Yiddish literary creativity to Eastern European readers and critics. It was one of the few journals that presented Argentina in a more complex and sophisticated way. The weekly found a place for discussing Argentine-Jewish culture, its social problems, and invited Argentine-Jews to publish regular pieces. Attempting to reach not only Polish Jews, but a broader public of the citizens of Yiddishland, *Literarische Bleter* reported about Jewish life in Argentina no less than it did concerning other new diasporas. The weekly’s regular section “Naye bikher” (New Books) informed readers about Argentine book novelties: *Ibergus* by Leib Malach (1926), *Groteskn un bilder fun yidishn aktiorn lebn* by Yankev Botoshansky (1926), *Tsu der geshikhthe yidisher zhurnalistik in argentine* (1929) by Pinie Katz or a new volume by a Warsaw-born Argentine poet Moises David Guiser (1933). *Literarische Bleter* also mentioned and reviewed books written originally in Spanish, though a Yiddish translation became available for the Yiddish reading public.<sup>233</sup> In addition, non-Jewish aspects were sometimes featured.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Hersh Dovid Nomberg, “Literarische pruvn in argentine,” *Der Moment*, 7.11.1924, no. 256, 4.

<sup>232</sup> “Der funandervuks fun der yidisher literatur in argentine,” *Haynt*, no. 38, 13.2.1931, 7.

<sup>233</sup> In 1933, *Literarische Bleter* (no. 14, 1.4.1933, 221) wrote about a book by Federico Ulases, translated by Pinie Katz under the title *Fraye shul* or about *Enrique Molotesto. Zayn lebn un sotsiale ideaelen* in a translation of I. Birnbaum (no. 12, 17.3.1933, 193).

<sup>234</sup> Yankev Botoshansky wrote a travel text from the *Tierra del Fuego*, see Yankev Botoshansky, “Fayerland,” *Literarische Bleter*, no. 16, 21.4.1933, 262, 264.

In February 1933, *Literarische Bleter* published an entirely Argentine issue.<sup>235</sup> Dr. H. Gold wrote about Yiddish literature, N. Kriczmer about Jewish colonization, Yankev Botoshansky about Yiddish theater, Yosef (Jose) Mendelson about the Jewish contribution to Argentine science and literature.<sup>236</sup> In April of the same year, *Literarische Bleter* offered its readers a panoramic and detailed overview of the Yiddish book scene in Argentina.<sup>237</sup> The Argentine issue was both a presentation of recent accomplishments of Argentine Jewry and a sign of welcome to the expansion of the Yiddishland's literature. *Literarische Bleter*, although edited in Warsaw, had a clearly transnational character. Its columnist lived in numerous countries of the new diaspora, including Argentina. Both readers and editors belonged rather to the higher strata of the Yiddishland citizens, and were probably aware of the dominant exoticizing narrative of Argentina to be found in Poland's daily press. *Literarische Bleter* challenged this simplistic and reductive approach. The Argentina represented in the weekly was portrayed as one of the many branches of the Yiddish-speaking world – a place with a bustling cultural and social life and of a steadily growing importance within Yiddishland's microcosm.

The editors of *Literarische Bleter* considered Argentina a quickly developing branch of the Ashkenazi diaspora and saw the chances it offered for the global Yiddish culture. The well-travelled writers and journalists editing the weekly were perfectly aware of the “new diasporization” of Eastern European Jewry. In the late 1920s, the Jewish community in the United States was larger than the Polish one by more than half a million and its influence on global Jewish culture, politics and social life was tremendous.<sup>238</sup> The situation in Argentina was similar. At the turn of the 1920s and 1930s, for the Yiddishist elite Argentina was already normalized as a Jewish center. The country's Jewry successfully claimed recognition as a well-based and creative part of world Jewry. *Literarische Bleter* gladly gave it this recognition. First of all, the weekly welcomed the fact that Yiddish culture thrived in Argentina, with regular daily newspapers, Yiddish schools, theaters and other institutions. For instance, when the

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<sup>235</sup> *Literarische Bleter*, 3.2.1933, no. 6.

<sup>236</sup> Botoshansky's contributions to Poland's Yiddish press were at times controversial in Argentina. Botoshansky's novel *Buenos Aires*, which featured the theme of Argentine prostitution, appeared serialized in New York's *Der Tog* and in the yellow press in Poland. Samuel Rollansky criticized Botoshansky for publishing this text abroad, claiming that it gave a bad name to Argentina in other centers of the Yiddishland. Additionally, Rollansky accused Botoshansky of attacking his personal enemies from Argentina in the foreign titles, chiefly in Poland's *Literarische Bleter*. See Rollansky, *Dos gedrukte yidishe vort*, 158-160

<sup>237</sup> Y.B (probably Yankev Botoshansky), “Yidishe bukh produktsye in argentine,” *Literarische Bleter*, 1.4.1933, no. 14, 221-223.

<sup>238</sup> According to data of the AJC, 3,602,000 Jews lived in the United States and 2,845,000 in Poland in 1927, *American Jewish Committee Yearbook*, vol. 29, 1927-1928, 231.



Buenos Aires Kaplanski Publishing House celebrated its tenth anniversary, *Literarische Bleter* published a warm article in appreciation of Kaplanski's role in popularizing Yiddish literature in Argentina.<sup>239</sup> Moreover, a number of projects backed by the weekly, such as the TSYSHO schools or the YIVO Institute in Vilna, relied heavily on foreign aid, including from Argentina.<sup>240</sup> In that sense, writing about Argentina was a way of expressing gratitude for this support – a sign of appreciation from the “Jewish center” in Eastern Europe.



Illustration no. 12. The cover of an issue of *Literarische Bleter* dedicated to the subject of Argentina, 6.2.1933, no. 6, with an opening article by Mordechai Alpersohn, 6.2.1933, no. 6.

<sup>239</sup> “Kronik,” *Literarische Bleter*, no. 26, 29.6.1929, 512.

<sup>240</sup> TSYSHO (Tsentrale Yidische Shul Organizatsye, Central Jewish School Organization) was a network of Yiddishist schools in Poland, co-run by the Bund and Poaley Tsiyon.

When exploring the Jewish-Polish debates on Argentina, it is crucial to understand the dynamics of center-periphery relations between both countries. Despite devoting some interest to Argentine developments, from the perspective of *Literarische Bleter* Argentine Jewry never ceased to be peripheral. What is more, Argentine cultural leaders acknowledged these inequalities and lack of parallelism. In 1932, Lazaro Zhitnitsky, an Argentine Yiddishist and YIVO activist, wrote that Poland was a “metropolis” and Argentina its “colony.”<sup>241</sup> In another article (for *Literarische Bleter*), Zhitnitsky described Argentina as “a younger brother” of Jewish Poland:

In the European Jewish literature, it has already become a tradition to give very little attention to the young Argentine-Jewish kibbutz. Only rarely does the local press mention their work and life. Very little attention is being paid to Argentine-Yiddish literature. Yet, this is a big mistake towards a younger brother, who struggles to achieve something that would also be useful for the older brothers.<sup>242</sup>

At the same time, by describing it as a “younger brother,” Zhitnitsky stressed the immaturity of Argentine Jewry, though first and foremost he criticized the low attention that Europe gave to Argentine Yiddish authors. For Zhitnitsky it was clear that in Argentina “grows a new, powerful Yiddish *yishev* [settlement] [...] that with time will have a lot of influence on the Jewish communities around the world.”<sup>243</sup> He appreciated the proletarian background of many Argentine Jewish literati, their quality of “self-madness.” Zhitnitsky advised his Jewish-Polish readers to carefully observe their creativity. As the journalist argued, Argentine authors promised to be citizens of the Yiddishland, who would immediately react to everything that happens in Jewish Europe. For Zhitnitsky, Polish and Argentine Jewish worlds should and would come closer and closer.

The geographical distance between Poland and Argentina was perceived as a key obstacle of an intensified cultural exchange, which was later interpreted as a source of cultural discrepancies. The remoteness of Argentina was not sensed only from an Eastern European point of view. Jewish-Argentines themselves underlined their distance, peripherality and mother-child relation with the Eastern European center of the Yiddish world. Even after many

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<sup>241</sup> Lazaro (also Pinkhas Elozer) Zhitnitsky was a left-wing Yiddishist activist and journalist. Zhitnitsky was born in 1894 in Ukraine, served in the tsarist army, studied law in Vienna, Berlin and Königsberg and immigrated to Argentina in 1928. He worked for the daily *Di Presse*. In the 1930s, he headed the educational *Tsentrale veltlekh yidish shul organizatsye in argentine* and chaired the Argentine branch of the IWO Institute.

<sup>242</sup> Lazaro Zhitnitsky, “Funm zaydens kval,” *Literarische Bleter*, no. 25, 22.6.1928, 484, 489.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibidem*.

years in Argentina some authors perceived themselves, and Argentine Jewry at large, as distant (from the Eastern European centers). The poet Jacobo Straijer, who arrived to Argentina in 1908, still sensed it in 1944 when he titled his poetry volume *Fun vaytn land* (From a distant country).<sup>244</sup> A few decades earlier, in the first anthology of Argentine-Yiddish literature *Oyf di bregn fun plata* (On the Shores of La Plata River), Yosef (Jose) Mendelson wrote:

Argentina is distant, distant from the great Jewish world, from the grand Jewish centers of Europe and North America. This is a distance that can be felt in a way that they imagine us, and in the way that we think about ourselves.<sup>245</sup>

*Literarische Bleter* attempted to reduce the presumed distance between Jewish Poland and Jewish Argentina. The weekly played the role of a showcase, in which well-known persona of the Yiddishist scene presented young and promising authors. These articles introduced not only the emerging authors, but by including writers from less known centers, it also broadened the borders of the Yiddishland. When in 1938 Melech Ravitch visited Argentina, he wrote a series of articles on local life to the Polish Jewish press. In *Literarische Bleter*, he presented Berl Grinberg, who “thanks to his Argentine experiences brought new content to Yiddish fiction.” Ravitch praised his “new motives, styles, landscapes, unusual people and original approach.”<sup>246</sup> Already a few years earlier Grinberg himself contributed to *Literarische Bleter*. In 1934, his short story “30 zaydene tikhlekh” (30 Silk Handkerchiefs) was printed by the weekly.<sup>247</sup>

When visiting Poland, Jewish-Argentine ethnic leaders attempted to push their pro-Argentina agenda. They were aware that the hierarchies within the Yiddishland were far from flat, yet attempted to reshape the way in which Jewish Argentina was discussed in Poland. In 1929, when the Argentine Yiddishist Pinie Katz was on his way back from Soviet Union, he gave an interview about the Argentine Yiddish cultural scene to *Literarische Bleter*. Katz described the scene as bustling, dropped references to dozens of names of authors and journalists and presented Argentina as a prominent center of Jewish life, with a steadily improving cultural level and cognizant of international developments.<sup>248</sup> Another Argentine

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<sup>244</sup> Weinstein and Toker, *La letra idish en tierra argentina*, XXX.

<sup>245</sup> *Oyf di bregn fun plata: Zamelbukh* (Buenos Aires: Ferlag Ydische Zaitung, 1919), 23

<sup>246</sup> Melech Ravitch, “Berl Grinberg - a nayer, ekhter prozaiker fun argentine,” *Literarische Bleter*, 9.12.1938, no. 44, 726-727

<sup>247</sup> Berl Grinberg, “30 zaydene tikhlekh,” *Literarische Bleter*, no. 25, 22.7.1934, 397-398 and no. 26, 29.7.1934, 415-416.

<sup>248</sup> “Di yidishe literatur un prese in argentine (a shmues mit pinye katz),” *Literarische Bleter*, no. 43, 25.10.1929, 286.

Yiddishist leader, Yankev Botoshansky, was straightforward in arguing in *Literarische Bleter* that Argentine Yiddish journalism and literature needed recognition outside of Argentina. Botoshansky, who travelled to Poland a few times, considered informing the European public about the situation in Argentina, as part of his task as an Argentine Jew. He believed that the Jews of Poland should be familiar with the works of Pinie Wald, Pinie Katz and Israel Helfman.<sup>249</sup> In 1935, Botoshansky represented Argentina at the YIVO congress in Vilna, and his visit marked the global scope of the Yiddishist worldview and Argentine-Jewish claims for visibility and influence.<sup>250</sup> In Vilna, he met with the students of the local Yiddish gymnasiums and held a lecture on Argentina for them.<sup>251</sup> During his stay in Poland, Botoshansky preferred to engage in discussions about Yiddish literature in general, and did not want to limit his interview to Argentine anecdotes. In his talk at the Jewish Writers and Journalists Union at Tłomackie, he discussed the “diverse cultural territories” of Yiddish culture.<sup>252</sup> As a citizen of the Yiddishland, Botoshansky believed that he could and should be involved in Poland's Yiddish life.<sup>253</sup> Following his visit in Poland, he became a regular Argentine correspondent of *Literarische Bleter*.

The cultural links between the Polish center and the Argentine colony of the Yiddishland were personified by the emissaries who travelled to Argentina. Their travels offered the Argentine community a sense of being relevant and important from the Eastern European perspective. As the Argentine Jewish leaders correctly expected, the traveling writers and emissaries reported about their trips in Poland's Jewish press. When Poaley Tsiyon-Left activist and publisher Yaacov Zerubavel returned from his trip to Argentina in 1927 (he traveled to raise funds for the secular Yiddishist schools in Poland), *Literarische Bleter* did not hesitate to ask him about Jewish life in Argentina.<sup>254</sup> Zerubavel told about the success of his campaign at length, mentioning numerous localities he visited and the Argentine press titles that wrote about

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<sup>249</sup> Yankev Botoshansky, “A yubiley fun drey,” *Literarische Bleter*, 23.3.1928, 247-248.

<sup>250</sup> “Buenos-aireser zhurnalists yaakov botoshansky in varshe,” *Unzer Express*, no. 192, 13.8.1935, 10. Together with Botoshansky, he travelled with his wife Miriam Lerer, a star of the Argentine-Yiddish theater.

<sup>251</sup> Aaron Mark, “Portretn fun yidishe shrayber,” *Literarische Bleter*, no. 34, 25.8.1933, 548-549.

<sup>252</sup> The talk on 13.5.1931 titled, “Di vershidene teritories fun yidisher literatur un kultur,” was attended by the stars of the Warsaw Yiddish scene: Alter Kacyzne, Aharon Zeitlin, “Haynt gezegunsovent far yankev botoshansky,” *Haynt*, no. 210, 13.5.1931, 5.

<sup>253</sup> “A lebediger grus fun yudish lebn un yudisher kultur in argentina. Vos derzelt der bekanter yudisher shriftsteler fun argentina, yankev botoshansky,” *Grodner Moment Express*, no. 62, 13.3.1931, 7.

<sup>254</sup> “Zerubavel vegn dem yidishn kultur-lebn in argentine,” *Literarische Bleter*, 30.9.1927, 767.

his campaign. He presented his Argentine impressions not only in the high-brow *Literarische Bleter*, but also during a lecture in the provincial town of Łuków (Ill. no. 13).

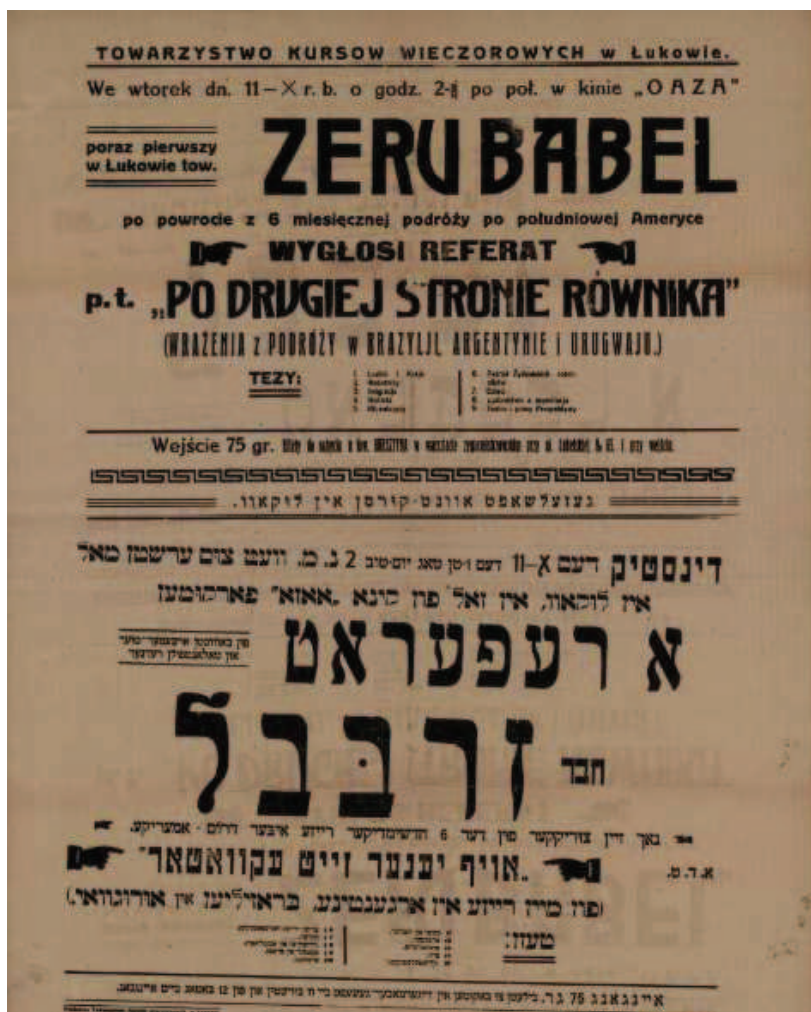


Illustration no. 13. Invitation to a lecture by Yaacov Zerubavel on Argentina and Brazil in Łuków, 1927, DŹS IK 2f, Polona, National Library in Warsaw.

Zerubavel's comments about Zionists protesting against his school campaign assured the readers of *Literarische Bleter* that political and social problems in Poland and Argentina were largely the same. Here and there Zionists and Jewish socialists struggled for rule over the “Jewish street,” both here and there problems of language, schooling and acculturation stood at the center of debates on Jewish identity and ethnicity. Zerubavel noted that his visit had also invigorated local discussions concerning secular Yiddish schooling. “Our campaign became a center of Argentine Jewish life,” the activist said. Underlining the warm welcome in Argentina,

Zerubavel portrayed Jewish Argentina as very welcoming, responsibly and permanently connected with the Old Home.

The contributions by Argentine authors to *Literarische Bleter* transnationalized Jewish-Argentine problems. They presented Argentine Jewry as very involved in global Jewish debates and as universal in their approach to the questions that Jewish people faced. For instance, H. Gold wrote about Argentine debates concerning Yiddish orthography.<sup>255</sup> The issue was a source of heated debates among the Yiddishists, as some argued for the need to “naturalize” Yiddish and redefine the orthography of Hebraisms. Others opposed this move. Gold wrote that the issue resulted in a heated debate in Buenos Aires, and one of the leading dailies *Di Presse*, decided to simplify the orthography. Moreover, a number of Argentine Yiddish schools adopted the “naturalized” spelling of Hebrew words. Consequently, as Gold argued, the children were supposed to learn Yiddish quicker and with greater pleasure. Gold, referring to his Polish readers, summarized his view: “Everyone can learn from the Argentine case that naturalization is needed.”<sup>256</sup> A year later the challenges ahead of Jewish-Argentina schooling were further transnationalized by continuing the discussion in Warsaw’s *Literarische Bleter*. Yosef Mendelson criticized the Jewish Colonization Association that closed more than thirty Jewish afternoon schools in the colonies. Mendelson complained angrily that “the world Jewish community needs to know what is going on in Argentina.” By writing to the *Literarische Bleter*, Mendelson referred to the center-periphery relations, believing that criticism from Poland might influence the situation in Argentina.<sup>257</sup>

A shared sense of plight and interests of Jews in Poland and Argentina was visible in the way that politics influenced Jewish socio-cultural projects. Gentile right-wingers posed a threat to Jewish stability on both sides of the Atlantic and approached Jewish non-Zionist ethnonational movements with suspicion or hostility. When in 1930 José Félix Uriburu rose to power in Argentina, H. Gold wrote a pessimistic article “In likhtiker argentine is tunkel gevorn” (It Became Dark in Bright Argentina) to *Literarische Bleter*.<sup>258</sup> Gold wrote about the limited liberties and the military dictatorship that targeted left-wingers.<sup>259</sup> He was alarmed that Yiddish

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<sup>255</sup> H. Gold, “In argentine yidishn kultur-lebn,” *Literarische Bleter*, no. 8, 19.2.1932, 117-118.

<sup>256</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>257</sup> Yosef Mendelson, “Dos yidische dertsiyungs-vezn in argentine,” *Literarische Bleter*, no. 20, 19.5.1933, 320, 322.

<sup>258</sup> H. Gold, “In likhtiker argentine iz tunkl gevorn,” no. 52, 25.12.1931, 957.

<sup>259</sup> For details regarding Uriburu's era see: Federico Finchelstein, *Fascismo, liturgia e imaginario: el mito del general Uriburu y la Argentina nacionalista* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de la Cultura Economica, 2002); Gustavo

libraries and cultural clubs lost a significant portion of their patrons: “[...] Pessimism, apathy and fear dominated Argentine cultural life. The writers and poems became silent; for months, the dailies did not publish any poems by the local writers [...].”<sup>260</sup>

The transnational cultural involvement of Argentine Jews in global Jewish problems was also visible during the 1936 PEN-Club Congress that took place in Buenos Aires.<sup>261</sup> Both the Argentine Jewish press and *Literarische Bleter*, broadly discussed the talk given by Harper Leivick in Buenos Aires. The weekly commissioned their regular Argentine correspondent Yankev Botoshansky for a panoramic, three-page article. The PEN-Club meeting was considered a major opportunity for raising not only a literary, but broader social and cultural demands and complaints. Leivick arrived there as a representative of the homeless, but vital Yiddish literature. Botoshansky ensured its Polish readers that Leivick was warmly and festively welcomed in South America. Whereas other writers were officially greeted by the embassy delegations, Leivick was cherished by hundreds of Jews who “expressed their love for Yiddish culture.” The arrival of the author was celebrated with a performance of his newest play “Der poet iz blind gevorn,” directed by Ben Ami and Jacob Mestel. Public meetings with Leivick were attended by thousands of fans.<sup>262</sup> Leivick's Congress speech was printed in *Literarische Bleter* in its entirety and Botoshansky reported about the ovations that the writer received from the public in detail. Leivick's talk fitted the general atmosphere of the congress that positioned itself against fascism, war and discrimination. Further, Spanish dailies printed the translation of Leivick's talk, which, in the words of the *Haynt* reporter, “made a great impression.”<sup>263</sup>

The fact that Argentina was chosen to host the prestigious meeting, as well as the powerful speech by the representative of the Yiddishland, informed Jewish-Polish readers about the growing importance of Argentina in the global politics of culture.<sup>264</sup> The speech of Leivick

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Dalmazzo, *El primer dictador: Uriburu y su época* (Buenos Aires: Vergara Grupo Zeta, 2010); Dario Macor, *Nación y la provincia en la crisis de los años treinta* (Santa Fe: Universidad Nacional del Litoral, 2005).

<sup>260</sup> Gold, “In likhtiker.”

<sup>261</sup> The PEN Club is an international organization of writers. It was established in 1921 and regards literature as a tool of international cooperation. A broad discussion of the 1936 Buenos Aires debates can be found in: Celina Manzoni, “Vacilaciones de un rol: los intelectuales en 1936,” in *Historia crítica de la literatura argentina*, vol. VII Rupturas, ed. Celina Manzoni (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2009), 541-569.

<sup>262</sup> Yankev Botoshansky, “H. leivick in argentine,” *Literarische Bleter*, no. 41, 9.10.1936, 645-647.

<sup>263</sup> B. Walter, “Shaul tchernichovsky un h. leivick oyfn internatsyonaler PEN-kongres in buenos aires,” *Haynt*, no. 218, 21.9.1936, 4.

<sup>264</sup> Yankev Botoshansky, “Der 14-ter pen-kongres in buenos aires,” *Literarische Bleter*, no. 42, 16.10.1936, 662-669.

was a representation of the broad Jewish world of Yiddish-speaking Jews. The invitation of Leivick (next to Shaul Tchernichovsky, who spoke for Hebrew literature) was a symbolic recognition of the transnational community of the Yiddishland. The literary meeting turned into a space that marked Argentina as a focal point of discussions about the future of Yiddish civilization. Botoshansky's reports in *Literarische Bleter* lifted provincial Argentina to a key place for discussing general and Yiddish culture. The talk by the Yiddish writer about the role of literature called for a defense of the "repressed minority languages." Leivick proclaimed the diasporism of Yiddish literature and described the Yiddish language as a symbol of universalism. He criticized the lack of the world's interest in Jewish culture and its exoticizing gaze on Yiddish literature: "[...] the European novelists who look deep inside the human soul, searching there for a secret, the last secret of life, what do they see when they come closer to us? They see exotics in us. Nothing more." Leivick stood up against the objectification of literature in the service of violence, nationalism and discrimination. He referred specifically to Polish writers, who "kept silent concerning anti-Jewish incidents." For Leivick, all of European literature was "sick and dying," as it did not answer the true problems of humanity: injustice, the suffering of the innocent and exploitation.<sup>265</sup>

## 6. Staging Diasporism: Yiddish Theater Between Poland and Argentina

Theater was an important field of exchange between the Jewish cultural worlds of Poland and Argentina.<sup>266</sup> The interwar period saw an unprecedented development of Poland's low-brow and high-brow Yiddish theater groups, including many America vaudevilles.<sup>267</sup> The Vilner Trupe was established in 1917. In 1924, Ida Kamińska and Zygmunt Turkow founded the *Varshever Yidisher Kunst-Teater*, Jonas Turkow, Zygmunt's brother, opened the *Varshever Nayer Yidisher Teater* in 1929 and Michał Weichert started the *Yung Teater* in 1932. Although these avant-garde stages are strongest encoded in the theater history and Jewish cultural memory, the Jewish public eagerly attended lighter pieces, such as revues and farces. These

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<sup>265</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>266</sup> Marta Meducka, "Z życia teatralnego Żydów w województwie kieleckim w latach 1918-1939," in *Kultura żydów polskich w XIX i XX wieku*, ed. Marta Meducka and Regina Renz (Kielce: Kieleckie Towarzystwo Naukowe, 1992), 165-170.

<sup>267</sup> Ibidem.



pieces were staged in smaller Warsaw venues, such as *Azazel Teater* or *Yidisher Folks-teater*. Jewish-Polish theaters often travelled around smaller cities and towns.

The burgeoning Jewish community of Buenos Aires was also more and more in need of theater performances. Yiddish cultural life was to some extent satisfied by local groups. Several famous venues functioned as outlets for the Yiddish scene: *Teatro Mitre*, *Teatro Lassalle*, *Teatro Excelsior*, *Teatro Ombu*. However, as the *Literarische Bleter* reported, Argentine Jewish cultural life still relied on “foreign imports.” According to the theater critic and journalist Nakhmen Mayzel, Yiddish theaters in Brussels, Vienna, Rio de Janeiro or Buenos Aires could not exist without commissioning artists from abroad.<sup>268</sup> A number of Jewish-Polish artists travelled to Buenos Aires for guest shows, whereas others decided to settle there permanently.<sup>269</sup> Jacob Mestel, a Galicia-born, but US-based actor and director who traveled several times to Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, praised Buenos Aires as the only city in the region that sported a developed theater scene. He described Buenos Aires as a “place of refuge for guest actors.” Numerous European actors searched the city for a new start, but only a few were successful. According to Mestel, among ethnic minority theaters in Argentina, only the Yiddish was more or less stable.<sup>270</sup> Samuel Rollansky noted that, unlike Yiddish writers, Yiddish actors did not have major legal problems with relocating to Argentina, even after the 1930s immigration restrictions.<sup>271</sup> For instance, a theater director Mordechai Hochberg decided to leave Polish Vilna after receiving an attractive job offer from Buenos Aires. As *Literarische Bleter* lamented, his departure spelled the end of the popular operetta scene in Vilna.<sup>272</sup> A Stanisławów-born Karl Gutentag, after initial successes in Europe, settled down in Buenos Aires between 1904 and 1922 and was considered a founder of a local Argentine Yiddish theater.<sup>273</sup>

Samuel Rollansky, referring to the lack of stability of the Argentine Yiddish theater, described it as “a hotel with a transit visa.” Actors came and went, as Argentina functioned

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<sup>268</sup> Nakhman Mayzel, “Oyfs gots barot,” *Literarische Bleter*, no. 4, 22.1.1932, 55.

<sup>269</sup> Samuel Rollansky believed that many Yiddish actors came to Argentina only in their old age for a kind of “artistic retirement.” Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte*, 241-245.

<sup>270</sup> Jacob Mestel, “Teater in drom amerike,” *Literarische Bleter*, 5.3.1937, no. 10, 164-165.

<sup>271</sup> Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte*, 245.

<sup>272</sup> *Literarische Bleter*, no. 98, 19.3.1926, 195. Hochberg did not achieve success in Argentina and was forced to leave for Brazil, where he died in an accident in 1931.

<sup>273</sup> Gutentag staged a number of plays by Argentine authors that he translated into Yiddish, including, for example, “Barranca abajo” by Florencio Sánchez. Rollansky, *Dos gedrukte*, 242-243.

more as a safe haven on a map of an increasingly unstable Yiddishland.<sup>274</sup> Shortly before the outbreak of World War II, a Yiddish actors couple Maks and Reyzl Bożyk settled in Argentina, but later moved on to the USA. Even when actors did not immigrate permanently to Argentina, their stay empowered the personal and professional connections between Poland and Argentina. The guest tours in Argentina at times served as an occasion for actors to meet colleagues from Eastern Europe. When the Warsaw-born and US-based Yiddish actor Pesach Burstein visited Argentina in 1934, he encountered a number of friends he knew from his days in Poland. When stopping in the smaller towns, many Jewish immigrants remembered him from his shows in Europe.<sup>275</sup>

In 1934, a famous actor and director from Poland, Zygmunt Turkow, came to Argentina with a 15-pieces theater tour, invited by the local actress Miriam Lerer.<sup>276</sup> Turkow, who was then associated with *Varshever Yidisher Kunst Teater* (VYKT), was warmly received in Buenos Aires. Local journalist Yankev Botoshansky commented that Turkow's plays "proved that high theater could exist in Buenos Aires, a theater that refers to something, that demands something."<sup>277</sup> Another Argentine correspondent H. Gold reported to *Literarische Bleter* that Zygmunt Turkow achieved not only mere financial success, but "a great moral success." In Buenos Aires, a debate took place whether to permanently employ Turkow in Argentina as head of a "better" Yiddish stage.<sup>278</sup> Ultimately, due to financial difficulties, the director returned to Poland. Zygmunt Turkow's brother, Marek (Mark) left to Argentina in 1939 and decided to stay there, assuming a number of community positions. Zygmunt managed to join Marek in Argentina in 1940, but soon left for Brazil and later Israel.

A different trajectory can be found in the case of Rudolf Zasławski, a Yiddish and Hebrew actor, who gained fame as a star of Kaminska Theater.<sup>279</sup> He spent most of his life

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<sup>274</sup> Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte*, 254.

<sup>275</sup> The dispersion of the Burstein family (he in the USA, his mother and aunt in Poland, his cousin in Uruguay and Argentina) is analogous to many family histories. See Pesach Burstein, Lilian Lux Burstein, Gershon Freidlin, *What a Life! The Autobiography of Pesach'ke Burstein, Yiddish Matinee Idol* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), Yiddish original 1983.

<sup>276</sup> For more information on Zygmunt Turkow, check Mirosława M. Bułat, "Cosmopolitan or Purely Jewish? Zygmunt Turkow and the Warsaw Yiddish Art Theater," in *Inventing the Modern Yiddish Stage: Essays in Drama, Performance, and Show Business*, ed. Joel Berkowitz et al. (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 2012), 116-135, and Turkow's autobiography, *Di ibergerisene tkufe: fragmentn fun mayn lebn* (Buenos Aires: Tsentral farband fun poylishe yidn in argentine, 1961).

<sup>277</sup> *Literarische Bleter*, 14.12.1934, no. 50, 836.

<sup>278</sup> H. Gold, "Fun dem argentiner yidishn kultur-front," *Literarische Bleter*, no. 6 (561), 8.2.1935, 89.

<sup>279</sup> Zasławski was born in Uman, Ukraine and, before associating with Kamińska and moving to Poland, he played in numerous Russian and Yiddish theaters in Russia.

performing in Poland's Yiddish theaters (in Warsaw, Vilna and Łódź), immigrated to Argentina probably during World War I, but continued his guest tours in North America, Brazil and Poland.<sup>280</sup> His appearance in 1925-1926 in Buenos Aires, starring in "Tevye der milkhiker" (Tevye the Milkman), brought him fame, with Zaslowski subsequently becoming an important figure in the struggle against the *tmeim* (female traffickers), which then exercised a big influence on Argentine theater life. Even as Zaslowski settled down in Argentina, *Literarische Bleter* continued to cover his shows abroad.<sup>281</sup> The weekly, the key tribune of Yiddish cultural transnationalism, believed in its responsibility about globalizing Yiddish culture. Writing about the Argentine successes of Zaslowski or about the Argentine tour of US-based artist Misha Shvartz, *Literarische Bleter* acknowledged the new diasporic era of Yiddish theater.<sup>282</sup> The actors and theater ceased to be place-bound and moved about the Yiddishland relatively freely.

In the interbellum, Argentina was featured as a motif of Yiddish theater plays. Argentine prostitution in particular became a catchy theme for both avant-garde (like *Ibergus* by Leib Malach) and popular (like *Oyfn veg keyn Buenos Aires*) theater. The presence of Argentine motifs both in low and high culture marked the impact of Argentina on Jewish lives in the Old World and informed about a new transnational Jewish cultural reality that developed on the other side of the Atlantic. A writer Leib Malach was a figure who greatly contributed to the development of Jewish theater and social debates involving Argentina. Unlike Peretz Hirschbein and Hersh Dovid Nomberg, who briefly visited Argentina, Malach did in fact spend around five years of his adult life in Buenos Aires. Born in Zwoleń in 1894, Malach moved to Warsaw as a teenager and lived in the city until 1922, after which he departed for Argentina. In South America, Malach quickly became a prominent figure of the local Jewish-Polish community. He wrote for the Yiddish press and edited the first almanac of the Poylisher Farband (Jewish Polish Union). Malach's oeuvre exposed social injustices and was used by him in the arena of propagating social reform.<sup>283</sup> Malach often reached out to the people of the underworld both in Poland and in Argentina. His *Opfal* (Waste) from 1922 featured people sick

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<sup>280</sup> Zaslowski lived in Argentina from 1916/1917 until 1926, at which point he went to New York. In 1928, he returned to Poland, but left it for another tour in Romania, France and Brazil. Shortly before his death on February 19, 1937, he returned to Buenos Aires.

<sup>281</sup> Nakhmen Mayzel, "Fun vokh tsu vokh," *Literarische Bleter*, 11.10.1929, no. 41, 812.

<sup>282</sup> Nakhmen Mayzel, "Fun vokh tsu vokh," *Literarische Bleter*, 9.6.1933, no. 23, 378; the same column on 7.7.1933, no. 27, 442 and 14.7.1933, no. 28, 458.

<sup>283</sup> Glickman, *The Jewish White Slave Trade*, 20.

with venereal diseases.<sup>284</sup> In 1923, Malach wrote a series of articles featuring Rosina, a prostitute seeking social rehabilitation.<sup>285</sup> In 1926, he published a popular drama *Ibergus* (literally “re-pouring”) that discussed the problem of the transnational white slave trade.

*Ibergus* was staged for the first time in 1926 in Teatro Politeama by the artistic group “Yung Argentine,” and was received in an atmosphere of scandal.<sup>286</sup> After numerous rehearsals, when the premiere was already planned, the director of the Yiddish theatre refused to stage the play. The performance was considered very controversial as it touched on the problem of female traffickers, who to a great extent still financed the Yiddish theatre in 1926. As the play’s director Yankev Botoshansky recalled, Malach’s play and the scandal about its cancelation led to an impressive change in Argentine Jewish theatre. The Yiddish press and social organizations began to work against the influences of pimps on the Jewish entertainment business, which led to the “purification” of the Yiddish theater.<sup>287</sup> Malach’s drama was read by contemporaries as a criticism and an impulse for combating the white slave trade (the script included a scene depicting public protest against the influence of pimps on Jewish theatre). The “theater scandal” of 1926 finally led to the establishment of *Folks-teater*, the first stage to be pimp-free, directed by Rudolf Zaslowski.<sup>288</sup>

*Ibergus* tells the story of a Jewish immigrant teacher (Der Blonder), who falls in love in with a prostitute named Reyzl. The play is set in Rio de Janeiro, but the allusion to the situation in Argentina is clear. Reyzl is torn between her Jewishness and a sense of moral “cleanness.” While in a relationship with a gentile Creole parliamentarian (Dr. Silva), she symbolically loses a part of her Jewishness; while working in a Jewish bordello, she loses her purity. To the surprise of her non-Jewish colleagues, Reyzl does not go to synagogue even on Yom Kippur and forgets how to read and write in Yiddish. The figure of the prostitute exemplifies the hard life of immigrant Jewish women, torn between love, dependence on men and loyalty towards

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<sup>284</sup> Leib Malach, *Opfal* (Warsaw: Sikora un Mylner, 1922).

<sup>285</sup> Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte*, 153-155.

<sup>286</sup> Leib Malach, *Ibergus* (Buenos Aires, 1926). *Yung Argentina* was an artistic group centered around a drama school run by L. Halpern, established in 1926 or 1927.

<sup>287</sup> Yankev Botoshansky, introduction to Malach’s *Ibergus*, unpaginated.

<sup>288</sup> The first Argentine “theater scandal” took place in 1908 when a performance of Peretz Hirschbein’s drama *Miriam* was preceded by the expelling of pimps by the Jewish audience. *Miriam* tells a story of a poor girl, who became a prostitute after becoming pregnant outside of marriage. *Miriam* was staged in Buenos Aires the same year that it was originally published in Vilna. Rollansky recalled that when *Miriam* was played, a part of the public began to publicly beat the pimps in the theater. However, the first “theater scandal” did not yet lead to major changes on the Argentine Yiddish scene and female traffickers continued to exercise their influence. Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte*, 209, and Samuel Rollansky (ed.), *Peretz Hirschbein, drames, veltrayzen, zikhroynes* (Buenos Aires: Yosef Lipszyc-fond fun der literatur gezelschaft baym IWO, 1968), 19.

religion and family. Reyzl realizes that she would not find any happiness in her life as all possible options seemed to be problematic. Her “regeneration” turns out to be impossible. In the play, Malach himself speaks in two alter egos (the Blonder and Da Silva).<sup>289</sup> Da Silva is the noble gentile, who speaks up for the decent Jewish population, and the Blonder is a platonic lover of Reyzl, who calls for an internal Jewish fight against prostitution. Malach's play narrates the tension between the *Blote* (mud in Polish, meaning those involved in the sex business) and the *Vitische* (the rest of the Jewish population). Reyzl is stuck in between, a victim of a society that does not allow her to “regenerate” and forces her back into prostitution.

Although Malach's play was published during his Buenos Aires period, it was soon staged in Warsaw in *Folks-teater* (directed by Rudolf Zaslowski). The play featured a number of Jewish-Polish contexts. Pesele, Reyzl's mother is portrayed as a traditional, Old World Jewish woman. She keeps kosher, covers her head and is very pious. Reyzl's brother, Leyzer, is portrayed as a classic young male immigrant coming to Argentina. He hopes to quickly find a job as a shoemaker and does not take returning to Poland into consideration. Whereas Reyzl's mother discovers only in Argentina that her daughter is a prostitute who left Judaism, Leyzer is perfectly aware of it, as were neighbors in their shtetl. Although the action of the drama takes place entirely in Argentina, the migration and the Old World contexts are very present.

Latin American Jewish prostitution was also featured in Malach's 1930 novel *Don Domingos Kreytzveg*, published for the first time in Vilna in 1930 and serialized in Polish translation.<sup>290</sup> The main character, Don Domingo, is a young Jewish immigrant living in South Brazil. The initially innocent Domingo, after experiencing the difficulties and cruelty of immigrant life in Latin America, becomes involved in the sex underworld of Rio de Janeiro and starts to exploit women. *Don Domingo Kroytzveg* was far from idealizing Jewish life in Latin America. It underscored the failure of Jewish farming projects and portrayed prostitution and female trafficking, which challenged the lives of the immigrants. The scandalous charm of the motif of female trafficking made the book popular within Polish-speaking readership as well.

Malach's expertise on Argentina was valued by his Jewish readers in Eastern Europe. In the 1930s, he visited Poland for a series of lectures in which he talked about his travels to Palestine, Western Europe, Asia and Argentina. A poster from 1933 announced an invitation to

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<sup>289</sup> Glickman, *The Jewish White Slave Trade*, 20-24.

<sup>290</sup> Leib Malach, *Don Domingo Kroytzveg* (Vilna: Kletzkin Farlag, 1930); republished in 1937 by Warsaw's Graphia. The novel was also translated into Polish (*Na bezdrożach*) by Maurycy Szymel and serialized in Lwów's Polish-language Jewish daily *Chwila*.

Malach's lecture in Chełm, where the author was supposed to talk about his travels and later read his own texts.<sup>291</sup> A similar event took place in Kalisz. Through his Argentine experiences, Malach was seen in Poland as one of the first developers of popular Yiddish culture in Argentina. *Literarische Bleter* saw Malach and his travels as the personification of the transnationalization of Yiddish culture. The weekly commented, "He was always on the move, from continent to continent, from country to country, through cities and shtetls. Always restless." Malach's *Don Domingo* was viewed by *Literarische Bleter* as a sneak peek into the "geographically and psychologically remote areas," and the author himself as a mediator between the Jewish worlds of Poland and Latin America.



Illustration no. 14. Invitation to Leib Malach's lecture in Chełm, Poland, 1933.

<sup>291</sup> Chełm. Announcement of a program to honor Leib Malach [Leib Salzman]. YIVO collection, RG 28P / RG 28/P/471

Argentina's infamous Jewish prostitution fit well as a theme for the popular "shund theater." Forbidden love, generational conflicts and mésalliances were the main problems discussed by the Sambation group that played in the Scala Theater in Warsaw or by the "Idishe Bande." An actor and director of Sambation Theater, Izaak Nożyk, wrote a play (together with Eyb (Ajb) Lang) that turned Argentina and its Jewish prostitution a key theme. *Oyfn veg keyn Buenos Aires: unter der loyter lamtern* (On the Way to Buenos Aires: Under the Red Street Lamps) was staged for the first time by Zisa Katz, Simcha Rozen and Nożyk himself in Warsaw's Yiddishn Folks-Teater in 1931.<sup>292</sup> In the same year, the play also appeared in Łódź and Vilna (by Morris Lampe). It was probably no accident that *Oyfn veg keyn Buenos Aires* shared its title with a documentary book by Albert Londres, which appeared in Yiddish translation in 1928. Several plays with a similar theme were also performed outside of Poland, but their echoes reached back to Warsaw. *Literarische Bleter* reported that New York's Odeon played *Dos maydl fun Buenos Aires* and in Paris *Opgrunt fun Buenos Aires* with Buenos Aires's Yiddish actress Miriam Lerer.

*Oyfn veg keyn Buenos Aires* tells the story of a group of Eastern European Jewish immigrants living in Argentina involved in international female trafficking. The play personified the hustlers and pimps. The characters were far from cold-hearted exploiters and promiscuous fallen women. As in many other *shund* plays, *Oyfn veg keyn Buenos Aires* featured unhappy loves, unfaithful lovers, intrigues and murders. As unusually tragic figure is the character of Adela: an ageing prostitute in a relationship with a pimp named Frank. She is seduced by Frank back in Eastern Europe, travels with him to Buenos Aires, where, as she says in a moment of anger, "she became his constantly humiliated slave." As the story develops, Adela pretends to be an aunt of a *grine* Bela, who just arrived to Argentina to join his father. However, Bela falls into the hands of Frank and becomes an underage prostitute. In the last act of the play, it turns out that Bela is Adela's daughter, whom she left back in Poland, and Abraham, the husband of Adela's fellow prostitute Rosi, is Adela's husband and Bela's father.

*Oyfn veg keyn Buenos Aires* encompassed a number of popular themes easily recognizable in Jewish-American immigrant literature. Abraham longs for the familiarity of the Eastern European landscape and believes that he is in Argentina "only for a while." We read about the wealth of the pimps and prostitutes, about the hustlers hunting for innocent

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<sup>292</sup> Eyb Lang, Izaak Lesz, Izaak Nożyk, *Oyfn veg keyn Buenos Aires* (Warsaw, 1931).

newcomers in the port of Buenos Aires and about prostitutes who come back to religion in later years. *Oyfn veg keyn Buenos Aires* defines Argentina as a hotbed of international prostitution, but the drama hardly differentiates between Argentina and the USA. Here and there, the characters throw around English words (“all right,” “yes, yes”) and talk about dollars. Consequently, Argentina and the USA are blended into one dangerous, promiscuous location, but one that still gives hope. The appearance of this play on theater stages of 1930s Warsaw shows how Argentina entered the popular culture and life of ordinary Jews in Poland. The theme of prostitution and the light character of the play made the Argentine debates open practically to everyone.



Illustration no. 15: Cover, *Oyfn veg keyn Buenos Aires*, Warsaw, 1931.



## Chapter Two

### **“The Discoverers”: Travel Writing, Narrating Argentina and Expanding the Yiddishland**

עס איז מיר ליב געווען ארויסצונעמען פון די פאליצעס אידישע ביכער און זיי באטראכטן. דורך די אידישע ביכער האב איך ארויסגעזען, אז ים'ען טיילן אונדז ניט פאנאדער, און עס איז פאראן דער גייסטיקער קשר, וואס בינדט אונדז צונויף וואו מיר זאלן ניט זיין. אויב אזויפיל אידישע ביכער שטייען אין די פאליצעס און אויף די טישן [אין באענאס איירעס], איז עס א סימן, אז די אידישע וועלט איז נאך אידישער וואו מען זאל ניט זיין. די ווייטע ארגענטינע האט אידישע ספרים וואס זיינען געדרוקט געווארן אין פוילן [...]

*It was a pleasure to take Yiddish books from the shelves and to look at them. I understood that thanks to Yiddish books the seas do not separate us anymore. That there is an intellectual connection that unites us anew wherever we are. If so many Yiddish books stand on the shelves and tables [in Buenos Aires], this is a sign that wherever you will go, the Yiddish world is still Yiddish. In distant Argentina, there are Yiddish books printed in Poland [...].*

— Peretz Hirschbein, “Ikh kum on keyn buenos aires, argentine (a bletl zikhroynes),” undated memoir, YIVO Archives, Peretz Hirschbein Papers.

The establishment of a new Jewish center in Argentina raised the interest of Jewish-Polish public intellectuals, writers and journalists who sought to discover Argentina for the curious reading public in Europe. Consequently, the first Jewish immigrants who arrived to Argentina in search for a better life were soon followed by Jewish travelers and travel writers. Their visits and their travelogues written in Yiddish had a profound impact on Jewish life in both Eastern Europe and Argentina. First, travel books were a tool for imagining Argentina in Jewish Poland. When in the early twentieth century Eastern Europe Argentina emerged as a desired destination of immigration, knowledge about the country was scarce. Migrant networks were still developing and the press transmitted mixed messages about opportunities in Argentina. At the same time, the end of the Great War brought ideological instability to the status of Jews in Europe, in Poland specifically. Both poverty and Polish nationalism that excluded Jews made them question their very place in the Polish Republic. This was the context in which several Yiddish travel writers investigated and narrated for readers the lives of immigrant Jews in Argentina. Responding to the information gap, the Argentine travel accounts of Peretz Hirschbein (*Fun vayte lender. Argentine, brazil yuni, november 1914*, 1916), Hersh Dovid Nomberg (*Di argentinishe rayze in Dos bukh felyetonen*, 1924) appeared as much-needed and well-researched books, anticipated by both those considering emigration and those for whom it was not a viable option.<sup>1</sup> Their works fueled discussions on Argentina and helped Polish Jews to formulate their own conceptions of that country.

Second, the Argentine travels of Peretz Hirschbein (in 1914 and 1925) and Hersh Dovid Nomberg (in 1922) expressed their individual exploration of the transnational evolution of Jewish life. Both personally experienced the ongoing demise of the shtetl and understood that Jewish life was entering a new period. Their travels to Argentina expressed their search for new options for Jews and for Jewish culture. Both Nomberg and Hirschbein, as well as an entire literary generation that had their debut before World War I, were rooted in the *folksmasn*, in the experience of ordinary Jews, but questioned the tradition and searched for ways to combine Jewishness with modernity.<sup>2</sup> Jewish culturists in the East and West grappled with the problem of “modern Jewish culture” and debated the relationship between Europeanness and Jewish tradition as a possible source on which “the new Jewish culture”

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<sup>1</sup> Hersh Dovid Nomberg, *Di argentinishe rayze in Dos bukh felyetonen* (Warsaw: Sz. Jaczkowski 1924); Peretz Hirschbein, *Fun vayte lender. Argentine, brazil yuni, november 1914* (New York: Farlag Tog, 1916). In 1922, Hirschbein's book was also serialized in *Der Moment* in Warsaw.

<sup>2</sup> Aharon Zeitlin, “Peretz Hirschbein,” in *Peretz Hirschbein. Tsu zayn zekhtsiksten geboyrntog* (New York: Hirschbein yovl komite, 1941), 28.

could be built. The culturists feared that Jewish culture would reach a point of collapse, if emerging new questions were not addressed properly.<sup>3</sup>

Following the World War, the ideals of assimilation expressed by the Polonized elite seemed outdated. For some Jews Zionism promised a reasonable alternative.<sup>4</sup> Some of Nomberg's and Hirschbein's literary colleagues, such as Yosef Opatoshu or Leib Malach, used travel writing as a space for discussing the chances and challenges offered by the Jewish settlement of Palestine.<sup>5</sup> The dominant discourse on the nation and the popular principle of national self-determination mobilized Hirschbein and Nomberg to search for a new Jewish ethno-identitarian model. In his twenties, Hirschbein decided to write in a widely spoken Yiddish (rather than in Hebrew, Polish or Russian) and felt compelled to build into his work a strong social consciousness. He saw literature as a tool for elevating the masses and giving them a sense of agency. He was dubbed by his colleagues as a "cellar poet", who wrote of the downtrodden, with a clear ethnonational statement of empowerment.<sup>6</sup> Nomberg's popular novella *Fliglmán* (1903), was a portrayal of the dilemmas of a *talush* (uprooted), a young Jewish intellectual caught between two worlds.<sup>7</sup> Fliglmán, similarly to Nomberg himself, leaves his shtetl for Warsaw, and suffers a deep identity crisis. He loses his connection to the world of religion, but is not yet rooted in the secular world and feels overwhelmed and disoriented.<sup>8</sup> For his part, Nomberg was unsettled by the post-1918 situation in Europe and questioned his own and Jewish place in Europe. A research visit to Argentina was supposed to evoke new ideas and options.<sup>9</sup> Nomberg and Hirschbein proposed Yiddishism-inspired ethnonational and cultural revival as a relevant option. Both debated the extent to which the Yiddishist cultural struggle coincided with the larger political goals. Hirschbein believed that given Jewish diasporism and statelessness, Jewish literature needed to fulfill the role of a defining feature of Jewishness.<sup>10</sup> Nomberg served shortly as a delegate to the Polish parliament (1919-1920), where he represented the Folkist Party that demanded Jewish

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<sup>3</sup> Kenneth B. Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 105.

<sup>4</sup> See Ezra Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland: Formative Years: 1915-1926* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1981); David Engel, "Citizenship in the Conceptual World of Polish Zionists," *Journal of Israeli History, Politics, Society, Culture* 27, no. 2 (2008): 191-199.

<sup>5</sup> François Guesnet, "Sensitive travelers: Jewish and non-Jewish Visitors from Eastern Europe to Palestine between the Two World Wars," *Journal of Israeli, Politics, Society, Culture* 27, no. 2 (2008): 171-189.

<sup>6</sup> Miriam Isaacs, "Language and Genre in the Works of Dramatist Peretz Hirschbein," in *Jewish Literature and History: An Interdisciplinary Conversation*, ed. Eliyana R. Adler and Sheila E. Jelen (Potomac, MD: University Press of Maryland, 2008), 99-112.

<sup>7</sup> Naomi Brenner, *Lingering Bilingualism: Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literatures in Contact* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2016), 150.

<sup>8</sup> Angelika Glau, *Jüdisches Selbstverständnis im Wandel: jiddische Literatur zu Beginn des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999), 331-333.

<sup>9</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinische rayze*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Nakhmen Mayzel, "Peretz Hirschbein tsu zayn 50-yorikn yubiley," *Literarische Bleter*, no. 15 (441), 8.4.1932, 230-231.

autonomous national and cultural rights. Referring to the motivations behind his Argentine visit, he said: “The Jewish question was with me and around me.”<sup>11</sup>

Nomberg and Hirschbein were formed by Eastern European visions of a new modern Jewish culture born out of anti-Jewish discrimination, surrounding nationalisms and Jewish linguistic alterity, which at the same time sought answers to the internal changes of Jewish life. Both authors wanted their writing and activism to offer an identitarian alternative that would fit the new times of postwar reality. The progressive Yiddishist ideology shared by Hirschbein and Nomberg suggested a similar direction for Jews living in Argentina. Travel accounts by the prominent personas of Yiddish letters included Argentina in the Yiddishland, defined it as a legitimate Latin American branch and reinvigorated Argentine-Jewish cultural policies in the direction of a progressive *yidishkayt*. Nomberg and Hirschbein saw Argentina as a laboratory where a new secular identitarian project centered around Yiddish and self-asserted Jewish ethnic life could grow strong roots. In many places, Hirschbein repeated that Argentina was a country of Jewish hope.<sup>12</sup> The travelers’ vision of Jewish future was both ethnonational and diasporic, as it suggested the possibility of a de-territorialized national Yiddish culture that could flourish both in Eastern Europe and in Argentina. Rather than a replica of the Old World, Argentina was supposed to become a place where the new ethno-national project would be employed. Visiting Argentina in 1925, Hirschbein reflected on the national Jewish contents that could be adopted in Argentina and other diasporas, yet he was skeptical whether any type of Jewish national values existed at all. He dismissed “digging in the fog of the past” and rejected the Zionist attachment to the Land of Israel. During his second visit to Argentina, Hirschbein was troubled with questions of Jewish ethnicity and diasporization, which compelled him to think if and how the new Yiddish culture could be grounded and stabilized.<sup>13</sup>

The progressive Yiddishist approach of the travelers was shared by some of their Jewish-Argentine hosts. Most of them were Polish, Russian or Bessarabian newcomers who settled in Argentina just a decade or two earlier and thus, to a great extent, were influenced by the Eastern European Jewish debates. Their ethno-national belonging was hardly static or fully formed, but largely shaped by Jewish diasporism. Both Eastern European Jewishness and newly emerging Jewish *argentinidad* were in the process of undergoing unprecedented social turmoil. Secularization, urbanization, changing family relations and, most of all, migration were shaping new Jewish ethno-national identities. At the same time in Argentina,

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<sup>11</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinische rayze*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, “Doyrem (briv fun veg),” 1926, YIVO Institute, Peretz Hirschbein Papers, folder 123, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, “In neblen fun der fargangenhayt,” 1926, YIVO Institute, Peretz Hirschbein Papers, folder 123, 2-3.

as in the case of other immigrant groups, Jews negotiated a desire to become an organic part of Argentine society with a desire to sustain their ethno-national Jewish character. The travel writers observed the development of Jewish-Argentine identities and the inclusion of Jews into the Argentine nation, all while they attempted to advance their progressive Yiddishist cultural agenda. Alluding to this process, Argentine Yiddishist Samuel Rollansky wrote that the literary visitors did not realize what an immense influence they exercised on Argentine cultural life.<sup>14</sup>

Jewish emigration from Poland to Argentina is a good lens for viewing ethnonational identitarian developments, as it allows us to see multiple factors and possibilities at play. In the 1920s and 1930s, some of the immigrants imagined themselves as citizens of a transnational Yiddishland and wanted to be defined as a vital branch of a diasporic Yiddish nation. The visits of the Old Homeland literati gave them an opportunity to imagine themselves as connected with the Eastern European center of Jewish life, with the Yiddish language and literature. Many of the fresh arrivals, facing exclusion, poverty and other challenges of immigrant life, longed for their homeland in Eastern Europe, which they nostalgically remembered as familiar and filled with emotions. At the same time, the Argentina-born generations in particular clearly became Jewish-Argentine. Welcoming famous Yiddish authors in Argentina was also a mechanism that marked the emergence of Jewish-Argentine identities. The guests were welcomed in the name of Argentina and the immigrant hosts saw themselves as representatives of their new country. It was Argentina that was responsible for both the successes and the deficiencies of local Jewish life. These approaches were far from exclusive and without clear boundaries. Appreciation for the freedoms of Argentina could be linked with a Yiddishist agenda, and nostalgias might in fact have signified growing rootedness in the new country, rather than an actual desire to come back to Europe. Jewish-Argentine identities were fluid, changing and hardly ever fixed. Independently of these diverse identifications, a visit by a well-known Yiddish author was a highlight for the entire ethnic community. It allowed the immigrants to symbolically reconnect with Eastern Europe, to claim Argentina as a place within the Yiddishland and to boast about their success and progress as Jewish-Argentines.

I argue that Jewish literary travels to Argentina, travel writing based on these experiences and its reception in Poland and Argentina, formed a space that connected Polish Jews across the Atlantic. The travelogues offer a chance to observe the trajectories of migrants in the new country, the emergence of a new diasporic community and a discussion

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<sup>14</sup> Samuel Rollansky, *Dos yidische gedrukte vort un teater in argentine* (Buenos Aires, 1941), 53-54.

of the generational change, while negotiating rootedness on both sides of the ocean.<sup>15</sup> As Peretz Hirschbein noted in his Argentine travelogue, the migrations paradoxically made the world seem smaller and more familiar. The Jewish presence in Latin America and elsewhere created a new sense of proximity between Jews scattered around the world:

When we were young, in our phantasy the world was much bigger [...] The farthest travel was to go to visit an uncle or an aunt [...] There every tree looked different, each stone seemed foreign [...] Now there is no this pleasure that the shortest trip evoked in childhood. [...] who knows maybe it is the fault of the Jewish people that the world has shrunk before my eyes? The Jewish people had dispersed around the wide world; wherever you go you meet your friends from the *kheyder*, the children of your shtetl. [...] You travel for weeks on the land and across the sea, you reach the shores of the remote country, and your people come to meet you and the weeks-long distance between you and them, shrinks suddenly. You start to think that the journey is not that long, that only the captain chose a wrong route, turning around in the same place all the time.<sup>16</sup>

For the Jews living in Poland these travel texts served as a basis for constructing their own image of Argentina, independently of whether they wished to emigrate to South America or not. Consequently, the Argentine travels and travel writing of Hirschbein and Nomberg bridged the Polish-Jewish community in Argentina and Poland, marking its new trans-Atlantic character. Both travelers seemed to be aware of the transformation of Eastern European Jewry that was entering a new dispersed and diasporic period. Following the mass Jewish migrations, Poland became a *sui generis* archetypical Jewish homeland and the new communities in the Americas modeled and positioned themselves in relation to it, rather than the mythical Zion. By the early twentieth century, “diaspora” was not a purely religious concept, but also a cultural and ethno-national one. Hirschbein and Nomberg not only studied new Jewish diasporization, but also partook in its development. Their travels and travel writing were a clear manifestation of a diasporic change experienced by Eastern European Jews. Although located in North and South America, a number of Polish Jews – especially those embedded in the progressive Yiddish culture prior to emigration – defined themselves by their relationship to the old European homeland in a Jewish ethno-national life of diaspora.<sup>17</sup> In time the hyphenated Jewish-Argentine identities became dominant, but for about two decades Jewish immigrant life in Argentina was influenced both by the local setting and the increasingly ideological, modernizing, socio-cultural *yidishkayt*, largely imported by

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<sup>15</sup> Tamar Lewinsky, “Eastern Europe in Argentina: Yiddish Travelogues and Exploration of Jewish Diaspora,” in *Writing Jewish Culture. Paradoxes in Ethnography*, ed. Andreas Kilcher and Gabriella Afran (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016), 257.

<sup>16</sup> Hirschbein, *Fun vayte lender*, 13. Translation from Lewinsky, “Eastern Europe in Argentina,” 252.

<sup>17</sup> I refer here to Yiddishist ethno-national vision, a Jewish national concept that was not equivalent to, but competed with Zionism).

the immigrants from Jewish Poland. This temporary stage (the experience of the immigrant generation) was perceived by travel writers as a transitory transnational form of Eastern European diasporism. This chapter is an account of those years. It is a story of migration, an expanding Yiddishland and becoming Jewish-Argentine. Peretz Hirschbein and Hersh Dovid Nomberg and their travelogues let us take a glimpse into the emerging Jewish-Argentine space inhabited by the migrating Polish Jews.

The first section of this chapter examines the biographies of Peretz Hirschbein and Hersh Dovid Nomberg and presents these personalities as the bridge-builders between diverse points on the map of Yiddishland. Next, I look at the contents transmitted through their books and articles, analyzing the imaginaries of Argentina that they constructed and subsequently disseminated among their readership. Both travelogues appeared shortly prior to or during the wave of Polish-Jewish immigration to Argentina in the 1920s. I then focus on the meanings derived from the Argentine travels of Nomberg and Hirschbein for the construction of Jewish-Argentine identities. I examine press reports about their visits, public appearances and lectures, which leads me to the conclusion that Eastern European literati in Argentina enjoyed the status of celebrities of that era. Their tours around Argentina were meticulously prepared by Argentine-Jewish cultural leaders, who desired to impress the visitors with a warm welcome and showcase the cultural, social and economic accomplishments of Jewish Argentina that they wished to see represent. Finally, I suggest interpreting Argentine literary travels and travel writing as a lens for observing the expansion of Yiddishland to Latin America and as case study for examining discussions about the relationship between travel writing, migration and identity building.

## **1. The Globetrotters: The Pioneers of Yiddish Travel Writing on Argentina**

A closer look at the biographies of Peretz Hirschbein, Hersh Dovid Nomberg and other Eastern European travelers sheds light on the contexts and meanings of their Argentine trips.<sup>18</sup> The writers examined in this chapter shared various common experiences, some also representative of the general Jewish experiences of the early twentieth century. First, Hirschbein and Nomberg were active as writers and journalists in various Polish, Hebrew and

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<sup>18</sup> Biographical information about Peretz Hirschbein and Hersh Dovid Nomberg included in this section is largely based on biographical notes found in the YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, as well as in the *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur*, ed. Samuel Niger and Jacob Shatzky (New York: Altveltlekhen yidishn kultur-kongres, 1956-1981).

Yiddish media.<sup>19</sup> In this field, they were fervent advocates of a high Jewish culture in Yiddish, a progressive ethno-national diasporic *yidishkayt* and a secular Jewish education.<sup>20</sup> Hirschbein and Nomberg saw Yiddish as “an expression of their national culture, a tool of national creativity.”<sup>21</sup> I prefer to use a notion “ethno-national *yidishkayt*” in order to describe the socio-cultural project that sought to raise an ethno-national awareness among Jews (imagined as a Yiddish nation by some) and defined Yiddish as a national language. The focus on language and ethnicity was characteristic of Jewish diaspora nationalism that claimed national and cultural autonomy for the Jews in Eastern Europe. Although we cannot talk about Hirschbein’s or Nomberg’s diaspora nationalist approach in the North American or Argentine context, this spirit is visible in their agenda of cultural Yiddishism, which saw *yidishkayt* as a factor uniting secular Yiddish-speaking Jews living in the diasporic Yiddishland.

Both travel writers originated from traditional religious families of east-central Poland, both experimented with Hebrew literature and both eventually committed their lives to Yiddish letters. They visited not only Argentina, but other continents. Their travels were not motivated by a special liking for Argentina, but rather curiosity about the new Jewish diasporas, the worsening situation of Jews in Poland and the popular *Argentine fever*. Both Nomberg and Hirschbein were globetrotters, who in their own lifeways reflected the new reality of the diasporic Yiddishland that was becoming increasingly present in the everyday experiences of Jews in Poland, Argentina, the USA and elsewhere. Finally, Peretz Hirschbein and Hersh Dovid Nomberg travelling to Argentina and describing the local Jewish life were among the first to help reinforce the cultural links between the Jews of Poland and Argentina.

### **1.1. A “True Friend” of Jewish Argentina: Peretz Hirschbein**

Peretz Hirschbein was born in 1880 in Kleszczele, a shtetl now located in northeastern Poland (Podlaskie Voivodship). Like almost everyone in his generation, Hirschbein initially received an exclusively religious education in a *kheyder*. Later he studied the Bible, Hebrew and Jewish history in various yeshivas, supporting himself in his teens by giving Hebrew and

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<sup>19</sup> Both professions were often closely linked. As writers frequently wrote their own columns for periodicals, the transition from a literary to a journalistic career was rather smooth.

<sup>20</sup> Diaspora nationalism shared the national element with Zionism, but these were two separate Jewish ethno-national projects. For more information on Diaspora nationalism and Yiddishism see: Joshua Shanes, *Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish Identity in Habsburg Galicia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Simon Rabinovitch (ed.), *Jews & Diaspora Nationalism: Writings on Jewish Peoplehood in Europe and the United States* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Marek Web described the founders of the YIVO Institute in Vilna in this way. However, I believe it was true for a broader category of interwar Yiddishists. Marek Web, “Operating on Faith: YIVO’s Eighty Years,” *Yedies: News from YIVO* (2005).



Russian classes.<sup>22</sup> Hirschbein spent a longer time in Vilna, where in 1901 he published his first poem *Ga'aguim* (Longings) in a Hebrew journal *Ha-dor*, edited by David Frishman. For the next few years Hirschbein continued writing in Hebrew, mostly working on naturalist dramas that included *Shevarim* (1903), *Miriam* (1905), *Nevelah* (1905) and *Olamot bodedim* (1906). He left Vilna in 1904, settling down in Warsaw for a few years. The Warsaw period of his career was extremely productive, with Hirschbein publishing two or three Hebrew dramas a year. The young author was taken under the wing of a prolific Yiddish author, Yitshok Leybush Peretz, who introduced him to the city's Jewish literary scene. In 1906 Hirschbein wrote his first Yiddish dramas *Kvorim-blumen* and *Demerung*, which were later followed by *Di erd*, *Tsvishn tog un nakht*, *In der finster* (all 1907) and *Der tkies-kaf* (1908). Later in life Hirschbein became a critic of Hebraism and a supporter of a diasporic Yiddish culture. He admitted that like many in his generation he “left the *beit midrash* (a religious study room) with Hebrew on his lips,” but soon understood that the real life of the *yidishn folk* was happening in Yiddish. Writing in 1927, he criticized the “violent disgust” towards Yiddish in Eretz Israel and the local attitude that negated Jewish diasporism. He condemned the Hebraists for “not understanding the folk” and “dividing the nation.”<sup>23</sup> He also approached Zionism itself in negative terms, describing it as devoid of any content.<sup>24</sup>



Illustration no. 16. Peretz Hirschbein (second from left) with his Warsaw colleagues from the literary group *Di Khaliyastre*: Uri Zvi Grinberg, Mendel Elkin, Perets Markish, Melech Ravitch, Y. Y. Singer, Warsaw (or Świdler near Warsaw), 1922, Territorial Photographic Collection Poland, YIVO Institute New York, RG 120, ID no. 470110.

<sup>22</sup> Biographic data from Samuel Rollansky (ed.), *Peretz Hirschbein. Drames, veltrayzen, zikhroynes* (Buenos Aires, 1967).

<sup>23</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, “Unzer tsheshpoltene tsung,” *Literarische Bleter*, no. 51, 23.7.1927, 1002-1003.

<sup>24</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, “In neblen fun der fargangenhayt,” 1.

In 1908 Peretz Hirschbein moved to Odessa (now in south Ukraine), where he was active in staging his plays. *Hirschbein Troupe* was considered one of the first artistic groups to contest the domination of popular Yiddish theater by staging avant-garde plays. In the following years Peretz Hirschbein visited various cities of Eastern and Western Europe, departing for New York at the end of 1911. He continued to write Yiddish dramas, such as *Farvorfener vinkl* (1912), *Puste kretshme* (1913), and to travel around the United States. In early 1914, believing that the USA was no place for “a revived Jewish life,” he returned to Europe, spending a few months in Vilna.<sup>25</sup> In the summer of 1914, frustrated by the tense situation he encountered in Russia just before the outbreak of the Great War, Hirschbein decided to visit Argentina. In his memoirs, Hirschbein wrote that he decided to go to Argentina to settle down in the Jewish agricultural colonies. This was later interpreted by his biographer as a return to the writer’s childhood in a pastoral shtetl.<sup>26</sup> Hirschbein noted that he did not see any future in Europe, as he was not allowed to give public talks and felt limited. His decision was also influenced by the ongoing Argentine debates developed by the Jewish press in Europe. The period from 1906-1913, proceeding Hirschbein's arrival to Argentina, were years of massive Jewish emigration from Eastern Europe and a time of heated discussions about Jewish agricultural colonization.<sup>27</sup> In Antwerpen Hirschbein boarded *Sierra Nevada*, which took him to Latin America in twenty-two days. His five-month trip began in Buenos Aires, but Hirschbein focused on the exploration of the Jewish agricultural settlements in the provinces of Entre Rios and Santa Fe. He travelled around numerous Jewish colonies, living for a while with local Jews, trying to formulate his opinions of an entire colonization enterprise. While in Argentina, Hirschbein began publishing his travel texts in installments in New York's *Der Tog*. In Poland his Argentine memoirs were serialized in *Moment* only in 1922.<sup>28</sup>

In 1925 Hirschbein visited Argentina for the second time, reporting on this journey in the Polish and North American Jewish press, as well as writing an unpublished memoir from the trip. Upon returning to Argentina, he noticed the growing progress of the country, though accompanied by new challenges concerning the Jewish place in Argentina and the local

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<sup>25</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, “Argentine (bletl zikhroynes),” 1; “Ikh kum on keyn buenos aires (a bletl zikhroynes),” 3, unpublished memoirs, both YIVO Institute, Peretz Hirschbein Papers, folder 123.

<sup>26</sup> Israel Osman, “Peretz Hirschbein (biografye),” in *Peretz Hirschbein. Tsu zayn zekhtsiksten geboyrintog* (New York: Hirschbein yovl komite, 1941), 20.

<sup>27</sup> Hirschbein was interested not only in Jewish colonization in Argentina, but also in other territorialist projects (the colonization of South Russia, Brazil, the USA). In 1928 Hirschbein wrote an open letter to Warsaw’s *Haynt* about the precarious situation of Jewish colonists in Crimea: Peretz Hirschbein, “Di shvere lage fun di yidishe kolonistn in krim,” *Haynt*, 18.9.1928, 2.

<sup>28</sup> For instance, Peretz Hirschbein, “Fun mayne rayzes keyn argentina. Tsum vayten goles-land,” *Der Moment*, no. 248, 27.10.1922, 5

situation of the Yiddishist enterprise.<sup>29</sup> Hirschbein pointed out that Jewish cultural life in Buenos Aires was developing, yet many people lived in poverty, especially those working as peddlers. He warned his readers in Europe not to increase the “army of Jewish peddlers” and to be prepared for relatively hard life.<sup>30</sup> Hirschbein noticed that the enthusiasm of the agricultural colonists was decreasing and many members of the second generation were leaving for Buenos Aires. In Colonia Mauricio many settlers presumably left and sold their parcels to non-Jews.<sup>31</sup> Hirschbein dismissed Jewish-Argentine accusations of portraying Argentina too pessimistically, arguing for a need of an authentic narrative. At the same time, he admired the bustling *yidishkayt* of Buenos Aires where he felt “as in a Jewish state.” He was happy that Jewish libraries served as centers of Jewish culture.<sup>32</sup> During his second visit to Argentina Hirschbein was angry about the growing influence of Zionism, mocking Zionists as those who give a hand to assimilation.<sup>33</sup>

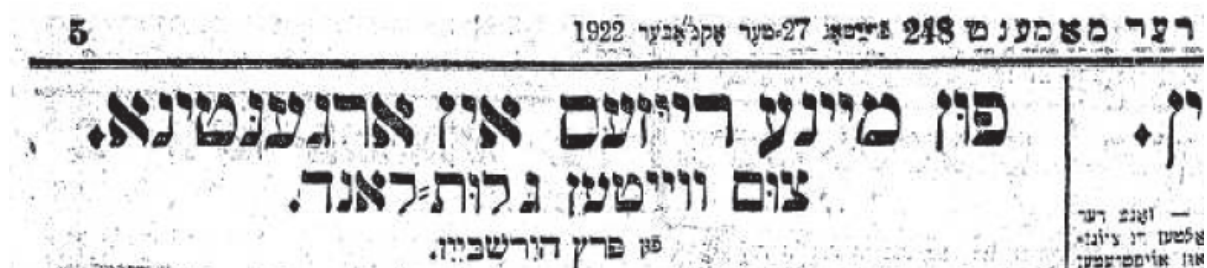


Illustration no. 17. The title of Hirschbein’s article, “Fun mayne rayzes in argentina. Tsum vayten goles-land,” *Moment* 27.10.1922. The article was part of *Fun vayte lender*, started in 1916.

Hirschbein’s dramas and travel texts were published in a number of cities where a significant Yiddish speaking population lived. His early texts were published in Vilna or Warsaw, where he lived till 1908. In 1914 Hirschbein published his first text in a Vilnius-based *Vilner Farlag fun B. Kletskin* (B. Kletskin Publishing in Vilna) that since then published most of his books for the Polish market. After 1914, the majority of Hirschbein’s new books were published both in New York and in Eastern Europe. In the United States, he cooperated with the *Literarisher Farlag* and the publishing house of the daily *Der Tog* to which he was regularly contributing. Importantly, the travelogues from his trips were published only in Vilna (not in the USA), indicating the target audience of these texts. The following appeared in Vilna, among others: an *Eretz Israel* travelogue (1929), an India travelogue *Indye. Fun mayne rayze iber indye* (1929) and a book on South Africa and

<sup>29</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, “Argentine (briv fun veg),” 1926, YIVO Institute, Peretz Hirschbein Papers, folder 123, 2.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, “In neblen fun der fargangenhayt,” 1.

<sup>32</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, “Doyrem (briv fun veg),” 1-2.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, 3.

Australia, *Felker un lender: rayze-ayndrukn fun nayzeland, avstralye, doyrem afrike 1920-1922* (1929). In addition, his dramas, initially published in the USA, were often republished by the Kletskin Farlag in Vilna.

Even though Peretz Hirschbein did not live permanently in independent Poland, he remained involved with its local literary scene and Jewish socio-cultural issues. In between his numerous journeys around the world, he regularly visited Poland. The reviews of his books often appeared in *Literarische Bleter*, to which he also contributed numerous travel articles. Thanks to his literary success in the USA, as well as his exceptional inclination for travelling, Peretz Hirschbein enjoyed an unusual following in Jewish Poland. When visiting Poland, Hirschbein was welcomed as a guest of honor and a successful ambassador of a global *yidishkayt*. In 1932 *Literarische Bleter* devoted a jubilee volume to him, which praised him as a key creator in Yiddish literature and theater.<sup>34</sup> A Jewish school in his hometown was already named after him during his lifetime.<sup>35</sup> Hirschbein visited Poland in 1922 before departing to Argentina and South Africa, stopping by his hometown of Kleszczele where his sister still lived.<sup>36</sup> In Warsaw Hirschbein was welcomed by the brightest stars of the Yiddish literary scene of the era: Sholem Asch, Melech Ravitch and Uri Zvi Grinberg. *Haynt* reported that Hirschbein was invited to return to Poland for good and lead the local theater.<sup>37</sup> During his 1922 visit to Poland, Hirschbein became an honorary member of the Polish Jewish Artists Union.<sup>38</sup> The author also returned to Poland in 1927 and the *Farayn in yidishe literatn un zhurnalistn* (The Association of Yiddish Writers and Journalists) organized a festive welcome party for him.<sup>39</sup> *Der Moment* proudly named Hirschbein as its “coworker” and the president of the *Literatn Farayn*, Zusman Segalovitch, welcomed the writer on the train station. In addition, the educational TSYSHO (Central Yiddish School Organization) that Hirschbein supported, sent an official welcome delegation.<sup>40</sup> Hirschbein and Shumiatcher stayed in Poland for four months, but returned to Warsaw half a year later, after returning from a journey from Russia in 1929.<sup>41</sup> Then again the *Literatn Farayn* and the Yiddish PEN-club organized a “zay gezunt ovent” (departure party) with lectures and talks about Hirschbein and

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<sup>34</sup> *Literarische Bleter*, no. 15, 8.4.1932

<sup>35</sup> “Kronik,” *Literarische Bleter*, no. 31 (274), 2.8.1929, 612.

<sup>36</sup> “Peretz Hirschbein arestirt un befrayt in varshe,” *Forverts*, 6.11.1922, 2. Hirschbein was presumably arrested for a short time under suspicion of being a spy, due to more than 200 visas in his passport.

<sup>37</sup> “Der kabalas-ponim far peretz hirschbein un froy,” *Haynt*, no. 28.6.1922, 3.

<sup>38</sup> “4ter tsuzamenfor fun yidishn artistn delegatn in poyln,” *Haynt*, 27.8.1922, 5.

<sup>39</sup> “Di forlezungn fun peretz hirschbein in poyln,” *Moment*, 15.12.1927, 5.

<sup>40</sup> “Peretz hirschbein un froy schumiatcher gekumen keyn varshe,” *Moment*, 18.12.1927, 6.

<sup>41</sup> “Haverisher banket far peretz hirschbein in literatn farayn,” *Moment*, 18.4.1928, 5.

his wife. Hirschbein now found himself surrounded by iconic figures of Yiddish letters: Zusman Segalovitch, Alter Kacyzne, Aharon Zeitlin and Kadia Molodowsky.<sup>42</sup>

## 1.2. Visiting the “Accursed Daughter” of Jewish Poland: Hersh Dovid Nomberg

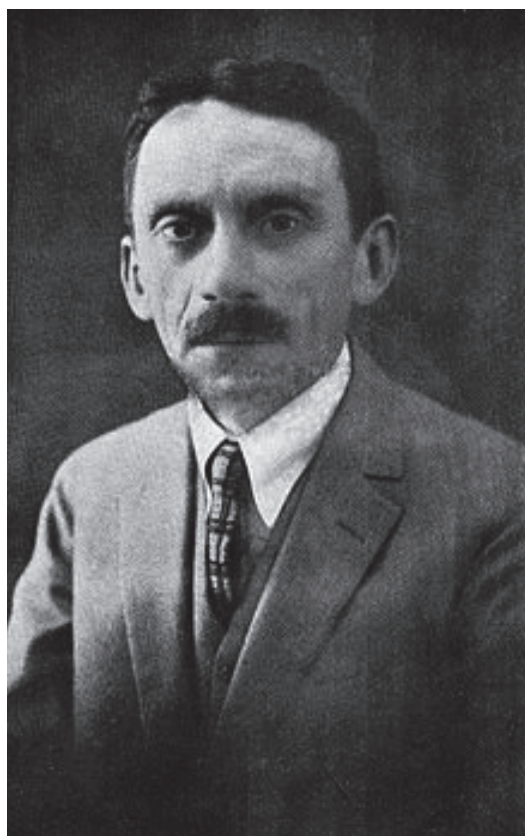


Illustration no. 18. Hersh Dovid Nomberg, date unknown, image from the cover of *Dos bukh felyetonen*, Warsaw, 1924.

Hersh Dovid Nomberg was born in 1876 in Mszczonów (60 kilometers southwest of Warsaw). As with Hirschbein and many other contemporary Polish-Jewish writers, Nomberg was born to a religious family. He received a traditional religious education, but was also exposed to secular writing as he communicated in Polish, Russian and German. Young Nomberg was influenced by the Eastern European Haskalah, which started to develop in the region at the turn of 1850s and 1860s.<sup>43</sup> He questioned the role of religion and tradition in Jewish life and supported Jewish secularization and emancipation. Following the maskilic pattern, Nomberg was publishing initially in Hebrew, writing for the Hebrew journal *Ha-tsofeh* (between 1903 and 1905). His first story “Layla al-pane hasadeh” appeared in 1901 in

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<sup>42</sup> “Fun vokh tsu vokh,” *Literarische Bleter*, 8.11.1929, no. 45 (288), 888.

<sup>43</sup> See Eli Lederhendler, *Jewish Responses to Modernity: New Voices in Modernity and Eastern Europe* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 23-103; Israel Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772-1881* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 90-101.

*Ha-dor*. Hersh Dovid Nomberg moved to Warsaw in 1897, where he became a disciple of a popular Yiddish writer Yitskhok Leybush Peretz, who persuaded him to write his texts in Yiddish. Probably on his advice and under the influence of his Warsaw flat-mates, Avrom Reyzen and Sholem Asch, themselves aspiring Yiddish authors at the time, Nomberg published his first Yiddish poem “Ha-novi” in Kraków's *Der Yud*. In subsequent years, he continued writing in Yiddish, including novellas, such as *In der poylisher yeshive* (1901), *Di Kursistke* (1908) or the psychoanalytical tale *Fliglmán*, depicting an alienated and pessimist Jewish individual, critical towards contemporary Jewish reality.<sup>44</sup>

After 1910 Hersh Dovid Nomberg focused on his journalistic and political activism and abandoned literature almost entirely, the 1913 drama *Di Mishpokhe* (Family) being one of the few exceptions. Reflecting Nomberg’s dilemmas regarding the evolution of Jewish culture, *Di Mishpokhe* featured a Jewish family at the crossroad of modernity, in the years 1906-1910. In the play, the young generation suffers an identity crisis that corresponded to Nomberg’s own dilemmas about the future of Jewishness. In the final act, the family experiences a catharsis when a young man arrives with an idea of solving the growing challenges by leading a cultural revolution centered around Yiddish. The new leader acts a bridge between tradition and modernity, resembling Nomberg himself. Nomberg was a proclaimed proponent of cultural Yiddishism and underlined the need for a Jewish national renaissance of this language in his *belles lettres* and journalism. According to Avrom Reyzen, it was Nomberg who coined the term “Yiddishism,” which started being used as a description of an entire movement and ideology.<sup>45</sup> Nomberg supported the development of Yiddish art theater, just as Peretz Hirschbein criticized the low quality of popular plays. In 1916 he co-founded the *Farayn fun yidishe literatn and zhurnalistn in varshe* (Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists in Warsaw), popularly known as *Tłomackie 13*, which served as the epicenter of Yiddishism and high Yiddish literature until 1939.

Nomberg was exemplary of the generation of young Eastern European Jews, who left behind their religion and tradition in search of freedom and universal subjects that exceeded the narrow Jewish world. Nomberg rejected both the promises of Zionism and assimilation and searched for other ways to combine Jewishness and modernity. The development of Yiddish culture was for him a basis for the future existence of East European Jewry.<sup>46</sup> He claimed for Yiddish culture a position of a central axis of modern Jewish identity. Jewish literature was for Nomberg a space for conceptualizing Jewish identities anew and a tool for

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<sup>44</sup> For a discussion of *Fliglmán*, see Janet Hadda, *Passionate Women, Passive Men: Suicide in Jewish Literature* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), 119-176.

<sup>45</sup> Avrom Reyzen, *Yidishe filologye*, vol. 1 (Warsaw: Kultur-Lige, 1924), 97.

<sup>46</sup> Glau, *Jüdisches Selbstverständnis im Wandel*, 133.

approaching the folk. The literary critic Nakhmen Mayzel wrote of him: “He was a child from an era that left one world, but was not fully rooted in the second world. He was disappointed with *Haskalah* (the Jewish Enlightenment), but was not yet fully convinced engaging in the national and social problems.”<sup>47</sup> Both Nomberg’s literature and his essay writing suggest a quest for new forms of Jewishness. His travels can also be interpreted as a search for new ways of Jewish existence.

Nomberg’s Yiddishism was powerfully visible in his participation at the Czernowitz language conference in 1908.<sup>48</sup> Together with Yitskhok Leybush Peretz, Ester Frumkin, Sholem Asch, Haim Zhitlowski, Avrom Reyzen, Nathan Birnbaum, Noah Prilutsky and other cultural activists, he debated the future of Yiddish as a Jewish national language. Nomberg, Asch and Reyzen belonged to the militant Yiddishist monolingualists, who wanted to define Yiddish as “the” (one and only) Jewish national language. Reyzen, as far back as 1905, argued in Kraków’s *Dos Yidishe Vort* that “Yiddish is the Jewish national language and literature in this language is a goal itself.”<sup>49</sup> Others, including Y. L. Peretz, defended the rights of Hebrew and supported the bilingualist stand (for Peretz, Hebrew was the language of the nation and Yiddish the language of the people).<sup>50</sup> Opening the conference, Nomberg stated that its objective was to bring a revolution to Jewish life and to Yiddish literature: “Our goal is to bring about a social development of the Yiddish language [...] The nation expects from us to deliver a clear message concerning our new national and cultural values.”<sup>51</sup> Nomberg supported declaring Yiddish *the* national language of the Jews, whereas the approach to Hebrew was supposed to be defined as a private matter. Already after the conference Nomberg wrote: “[...] we have finally articulated the brave words that for so long were waiting on our tongues and we believe that these words will find their repercussions among thousands and millions of our folk. We say: in the midst of the chaos of our life was laid a strong cornerstone on which will raise a beautiful and dignified edifice of our national life.”<sup>52</sup> The conference argued that the problems of Jewish culture and Yiddish language were immanently linked with Jewish national and social questions and demanded “political, social and cultural equality and recognition.”<sup>53</sup> After the conference Nomberg popularized the term “Yiddishism” and the Yiddishist social and cultural agenda. The Czernowitz conference in

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<sup>47</sup> Nakhmen Mayzel, *Noente un eygene* (New York, 1957), 123, quoted in Glau, *Jüdisches Selbstverständnis im Wandel*, 131.

<sup>48</sup> See Joshua A. Fogel and Keith Weiser (eds), *Czernowitz at 100: The First Yiddish Language Conference in Historical Perspective* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010).

<sup>49</sup> Yehiel Scheintuch, “Veidat tshernovitz ve-tarbut yidish,” *Huliot* 6 (2000): 259-260.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, 261.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, 258.

<sup>52</sup> Nomberg’s article from September 1908, quoted in Itsche Goldberg, “Di tshernovitzer shprakh konferents 80 yor shpeter,” *Yidishe kultur. Hodesh-zhurnal fun yidishn kultur farband*, 1988, 17.

<sup>53</sup> Scheintuch, “Veidat tshernovitz”, 277.

1908 gave an impulse for intensifying Yiddish cultural life. In the same year Warsaw's daily *Haynt* was established, Shmuel Nizer cofounded the first journal of Yiddish literary criticism *Literarische Monatsschrift* and Peretz Hirschbein launched his avant-garde theater group.

Throughout his entire journalistic and literary career, Nomberg grappled with the questions of Jewish identity, nationalism and the Jewish future in Eastern Europe. In 1916, during the convention establishing the Folkist Party in Poland, Nomberg said that unlike the Zionists who give “long-term exchange bills,” the folkists would focus on the Jewish situation in the short run, in countries where Jews lived. He saw Jewish political and cultural autonomy as his (and the folkists’) main objective.<sup>54</sup> In one of his essays, Nomberg developed a concept of a “nationalism of the weak,” in which he warned Jewish nationalists of falling into the same loopholes as the Russians, Germans or Poles. Even as he considered national feelings as natural and obvious, he feared the ways that nationalists built their capital on these values. He warned of a nationalism basing itself on animosities, superiority, exclusion and a return to the “aggressive psychology of wild animals.” The revisionist Zionism of Zeev Żabotyński was for Nomberg as ugly and dangerous as its German or Polish variants.<sup>55</sup> What he supported instead was a focus on Yiddish cultural work for the *folk*.



Illustration no. 19. The title of Nomberg's article on Argentina published in *Der Moment*. “Fun mayn rayze keyn argentina. Mayses fun patagonyen,” *Der Moment*, 30.3.1923, no. 77, 5.

Hersh Dovid Nomberg was a passionate traveler. His voyages began in 1897 when he left his native Mszczonów for Warsaw. Between 1905 and 1907, he visited Western Europe (France, Germany, Switzerland) and spent some time in Riga. In 1912 he travelled to the United States, visiting New York, observing Jewish life in the city and focusing on the Jewish working-class movement. In 1922 Nomberg travelled to Argentina, visiting Buenos Aires and Jewish farming colonies in other provinces. Already on his way to Latin America he was

<sup>54</sup> “Gründungs-farzamlung fun a yidisher folks-partay,” *Moment*, 17.3.1917, 2. Its cofounders also included Hillel Zeitlin and Noah Prilutsky.

<sup>55</sup> Hersh Dovid Nomberg, “Natsyonalism,” *Dos bukh felyetonen*, 310-314.



sending travel texts to be published in Warsaw's *Moment*.<sup>56</sup> News about his trip also reached the USA. *Foverts* informed readers that Nomberg visited Argentina as an envoy of the Workers' Emigration Committee and an investigator of local immigration possibilities.<sup>57</sup> A handful of his travel essays were also published in the Buenos Aires *Yidische Zaitung*.<sup>58</sup> Like Hirschbein, Nomberg also supported the TSYSHO Yiddishist-secular schooling project during his visit. Even though his trip was planned as a research trip, as Samuel Rollansky put it, "the writer won with an envoy."<sup>59</sup> Nomberg's travel memoirs were published in 1924 by the Farlag Kultur-Lige, together with other essays covering his travels around post-World War I Europe and texts about famous Jewish personalities.<sup>60</sup> In 1924 Nomberg travelled to Palestine, visiting Tel Aviv, the Galilee and the Negev desert.<sup>61</sup> In 1926 he travelled for the second time to the United States and visited Soviet Russia, including the agricultural colonies of Ukraine. The texts from his journey were presented to the public in a volume entitled *Mayne rayze iber rusland*, published only after his death.<sup>62</sup> After returning from his journeys, Nomberg often gave public lectures about the lands that he visited.

Hersh D. Nomberg died in Warsaw in 1927 and his funeral turned into a massive Jewish demonstration. The following year his collected works were published, including the Argentine texts published initially in 1924. As an expression of respect for the writer, the Argentine Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists (which he helped to organize during his 1922 trip) was named after him.

### 1.3. A Last Minute Visit: Marek Turkow

Marek Turkow was the third Jewish-Polish author to write Argentine travelogues. His *Oyf yidishe felder* (1939) was an important contribution to the Jewish-Polish Argentine travelogue genre and, due to its late publication, an account of the social changes in the Polish-Argentine Jewish space. A generation younger than Hirschbein and Nomberg (born in 1904 in Warsaw), he was socialized in the already robust Yiddish culture of interwar Poland. Turkow received both a secular and religious education, finishing a drama school in Warsaw. For years he worked as a journalist for the daily *Moment* (from 1922 to 1939). Marek Turkow was a prolific theater critic, and wrote for a number of Poland's theater journals: *Yidish Teater* and *Yidishe Bine*, as well as *Literarische Bleter*. Turkow translated a number of classic Yiddish

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<sup>56</sup> Hersh Dovid Nomberg, "Brif fun veg. A kleyn bisl vint," *Der Moment*, 19.5.1922, no. 115, 3, "Fun mayn rayze keyn argentine. Mayses fun patagonye," *Der Moment*, 30.3.1923, no. 77, 5.

<sup>57</sup> "Nomberg fort keyn argentine," *Forverts*, 12.3.1922, 1.

<sup>58</sup> Hersh Dovid Nomberg, "Yidn, eyrope," *Di Yidische Zaitung*, 5.4.1922, page unknown.

<sup>59</sup> Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte*, 1941, 53.

<sup>60</sup> Hersh Dovid Nomberg, *Dos bukh felyetonen* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sz. Jaczkowski, 1924).

<sup>61</sup> Hersh Dovid Nomberg, *Eretz yisroel* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Yacobson i Goldberg, 1925).

<sup>62</sup> Hersh Dovid Nomberg, *Mayne rayze iber rusland* (Warsaw: Ferlag "Kultur Lige," 1928).

writers into Polish (including Y.L. Peretz, Sholem Asch, Peretz Hirschbein) and wrote in Polish for a number of Jewish periodicals: *Nasz przegląd*, *Życie żydowskie*, *Tygodnik żydowski*. Turkow served as *Moment's* correspondent in the Polish parliament and at the League of Nations in Geneva. His political activism included being part of the negotiating team for a peace treaty between Poland and Lithuania in 1928, as well as secretary of Poland's Anti-Hitler Committee.

In the mid-1930s, Turkow visited the United States and wrote a travel memoir entitled *Roozvelts amerike (rayze-ayndruken fun di feraynikte shtotn fun tsofn amerike)* [Roosevelt's America (Travel Impressions from the United States of North America)], published in Warsaw in 1937. The same book appeared in Polish in 1938.<sup>63</sup> Earlier, Marek Turkow travelled to the Free City of Gdańsk and published his impressions from this Polish-German port town.<sup>64</sup> His interest in Argentina was probably evoked by his brother Zygmunt, a Yiddish actor who visited Argentina on show tours in the mid-1930s. Marek Turkow visited Argentina in 1937 and wrote two books on Jewish life in South America.<sup>65</sup> Already during his trip the travel reports were printed in *Dos Naye Vort* in Buenos Aires.<sup>66</sup> His Argentine travelogue *Oyf yidishe felder (a nesiye iber di yidishe kolonyes in argentine)* [On the Jewish Fields (a Journey Through the Jewish Colonies in Argentina)] was published by the Wójcikiewicz Brothers in 1939. The book was so popular that it was reprinted again the same year.<sup>67</sup> The second part of Turkow's travelogue, *Oyf di shlyaken fun yidishe vanderungen (a rayze iber drom amerike)* [On the Trail of Jewish Wanderings (A Journey through South America)], which dealt with the urban Jewish life of South America, was already advertised and in print, but ultimately was not published before the outbreak of World War II. In 1939, both of his Argentina books were already being prepared to appear in Polish translation, catering to the increasingly Polonized younger generation of Jews and the gentile public. *Oyf yidishe felder* was met with ambiguous reviews in *Literarische Bleter*. Bernard Mark appreciated Turkow's attention to detail, but criticized his overly negative tone about the prospects of land colonization in Argentina. Mark complained that in his "hyper-objectivity" Turkow "turns around at one point and does not answer the key question" – whether to emigrate or not.<sup>68</sup> In 1938, when the political atmosphere in Poland and in Europe was becoming increasingly

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<sup>63</sup> Marek Turkow, *Rewolucja amerykańska (szkice z podróży po Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki Półn.)* (Warsaw: Renaissance, 1937). The Yiddish original was published by Yidishe universal bibliotek.

<sup>64</sup> Marek Turkow, *Gdańsk na wulkanie* (Warsaw: Wiedza, 1932).

<sup>65</sup> "M. Turkow fort op keyn argentine," *Literarische Bleter*, no. 25, 18.7.1937, 405.

<sup>66</sup> For instance, Marek Turkow, "Heysherik (rayze-shtrikhn fun argentine)," *Dos Naye Vort*, November 1938, 7-8, 12.

<sup>67</sup> *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur*, vol. 4 (New York: Alveltlekher yidisher kultur-kongres, 1961), 61-62.

<sup>68</sup> Bernard Mark, "A bukh vegn yidishe kolonizatsye problemem. Mark Turkow 'Oyf yidishe felder (a nesiye iber di yidishe kolonyes in argentine)," *Literarische Bleter*, no. 43, 11.11.1938, 716-717.

harder for the Jews, Mark saw Argentine colonization as a “discursive weapon” against the anti-Semitic racial discourse prevalent in Europe. The colonies in Argentina proved that Jews were productive and served as an “important contribution in the Jewish struggle.” Mark interpreted Turkow to mean that emigration and territorial movement were bankrupt and did not offer any hope.<sup>69</sup>



Illustration no. 20. The cover of *Oyf yidische felder* by Marek Turkow (Warsaw, 1939)

From 1939 until his death in 1983, Marek Turkow lived in Buenos Aires. There he assumed a number of community positions. He was a director of the Argentine branch of HIAS – Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (1946-1954), from 1954 an Argentine representative of the World Jewish Congress. He also served as a leader of the Polish Jewish diaspora in Argentina: as president of the Federation of Polish Jews in South America, as well as vice-director of the World Union of Polish Jews. He is most known for publishing the monumental books series *Dos poylishe yidntum* (The Polish Jewry), commemorating the perished Jewish life of Poland.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibidem.

## 2. Jewish Travelers in Latin America and the European Context

### 2.1. Jews and the Framework of European Travel Writing

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a number of Europeans travelled to Latin America, Asia or Africa with a desire to examine local peoples and nature and to experience exotic countries. Many perceived their expeditions in a quasi-scientific way, believing that their travels could reveal what was previously hidden and unreachable, manifesting the power of a modern European science and the white man. Many of these explorers left written memoirs or published travel accounts. In that era, travelling was also a part of European elite formation. The so-called “grand tour” was characteristic especially for the eighteenth and nineteenth century, but the concept of horizon-broadening travel was also popular later.<sup>70</sup> Young upper-middle class Europeans and up-and-coming members of the intelligentsia traveled around major European cities, with a few visiting the United States. This was also true of more established European Jews. At the same time, travel and travel writing became part and parcel of Argentine elite formation. However, it was oriented in the opposite direction, to the European origins of Western civilization, and was limited mostly to traveling to Europe and writing about it. As Mónica Szurmuk wrote, in the nineteenth century the “Eurotrip” became the paramount experience of Argentine intellectuals.<sup>71</sup> In addition, in the 1930s both in Poland and in Argentina developed a new inland tourist movement that underscored the need to know the homeland as a duty of a good citizen.

In recent decades, the travel writing of the nineteenth and early twentieth century has become a popular topic of study. Inspired by the studies of Said and Foucault, through an analysis of travel narratives, scholars exposed the complexities of colonial discourse and criticized the Eurocentric understanding of world history.<sup>72</sup> By re-reading European travel writing, researchers focused largely on colonized Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The texts describing travel and exploration of Latin America (independent of Spain since the early nineteenth century) were less examined. Whereas Amazonian South America became to some extent a popular theme in travel writing, and later an important subject of literary criticism, Argentina was regarded as more European and thus allegedly less “exotic” and was therefore

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<sup>70</sup> See: Chloe Chard, *Pleasure and Guilt on the Grand Tour: Travel Writing and Imaginative Geography 1600-1830* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Edward Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour: Anglo-Italian Cultural Relations since the Renaissance* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1998).

<sup>71</sup> Mónica Szurmuk, *Women in Argentina: Early Travel Narratives* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 7.

<sup>72</sup> For a general study of travel writing and post-colonialism, see Stephen Clark, *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit* (London: Zed Press, 1999).

less frequently chosen as a travel destination and the future topic of research on travel literature.<sup>73</sup>

It is problematic to place the travel texts written by Jewish travelers visiting Argentina in the category of colonial travel writing. Using Edward Said's nomenclature, it might be tempting to perceive the Jews living in Argentina in a similar way to the indigenous people of the Orient. In this case, the European authors traveling to Argentina would fit into the shoes of Western explorers looking from above on the presumably exotic lives of Latin American Jews. If we use Marie Luise Pratt's term, the travelers would then be the *travelees*.<sup>74</sup> Jewish colonial discourse (including Zionism) indeed often saw Jews as a civilizing force for the local population.<sup>75</sup> However, the situation in Nombreg's and Hirschbein's Argentine travelogues was much more complex.<sup>76</sup> Both the descriptors and the described were much closer to each other than a British explorer and the indigenous populations in central Africa. They shared a common language, an Eastern European background and the experience of travel or migration. Some contemporaries even questioned the possibility of a real Yiddish travel literature. The Yiddish writer and traveler Melech Ravitch argued that Jewish migration was counterproductive for Yiddish travel literature.<sup>77</sup> Likewise, the Warsaw-based historian and journalist Bernard Mark noted that "adventurous travel literature was unthinkable in Yiddish."<sup>78</sup> In his view, Jewish diasporization forced travelers to focus on the real Jewish

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<sup>73</sup> Examples of Argentine travelogues include: José M. Salvería, *Paisajes argentinos* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gilli, 1918); James Bryce, *South America: Observations and Impressions* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1913); J. A. Hammerton, *The Real Argentina: Notes and Impressions from a Year in Uruguay and Argentina* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1918); Jules Huret, *En Argentine. De Buenos Aires au Gran chaco* (Paris: 1914); Javier Bueno, *Mi viaje a America* (Paris: Garnier Hermanos, 1911). Compare with Maria Sonia Cristoff (ed.), *Acento extranjero. Dieciocho relatos de viajeros en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2000). See also Kristine L. Jones, "Nineteenth Century British Travel Accounts on Argentina," *Ethnohistory* 33, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 95-211. Jones argued that Argentina became a popular destination for travel writers only in the 1820s, a decade after the country's declaration of independence in 1810. During the period of mass emigration in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Argentina became "too popular" and stopped being considered an important place for travel writers.

<sup>74</sup> Marie Louise Pratt coined a term "travelee" to denote the post-colonial relations between travelers and the people, who inhabit the lands they visit. Marie Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1992), 7.

<sup>75</sup> Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016), 73.

<sup>76</sup> With time Peretz Hirschbein's views evolved into proto-postcolonial. He was quick to notice the injustice, poverty and colonial oppression. In the Argentine case, he complained about the capitalist and cultural imperialism of British and German industry. Likewise, his India travelogue could be read as a direct criticism of British imperialism and a support for the colonized nation. He lamented the discrimination that the Indians suffered, the British "treating them as small children that need to know who rules." Hirschbein in a way predicted the independence of numerous colonized nations and wrote about the "fear that the Eastern nations will ascend and take revenge on the white man." Similar tones also appeared in his Chinese and Australian travelogues. Peretz Hirschbein, *Indye: Fun mayn rayze in indye* (Vilna: Vilner Farlag fun B. Kletskin, 1929), 11–12.

<sup>77</sup> Melech Ravitch, "Fun di masoes binyomin hashlishi biz di masoes peretz hirschbein," in *Peretz Hirschbein. Tsu zayn zekhtsiksten*, 106.

<sup>78</sup> Bernard Mark, "A bukh vegn yidishe kolonizatsye problemen," 716-717.

problems that appeared together with migration, rather than to write heroic stories of geographic exploration.

A romanticized exoticization mixed with the desire to search for Jewish authenticity and moral purity was visible in German-Jewish travelogues focused on Eastern European Jewry. Stefan Zweig or Alfred Döblin travelled to Poland/Lithuania in order to discover the lost cultural heritage that the Jews of Poland or Russia embodied, in their eyes. At the same time, the then-popular theories of race in a way questioned the Jewish-German emancipation and renewed the blood connection with the Jews of the East, the *Ostjuden*. The influx of *Ostjuden* to Germany following the end of the World War mobilized German Jews to rethink their own identity at a time when empires that accommodated diversity lay in ruins and nationalism was visible on the horizon in most of Europe. Zweig and Döblin arrived in Eastern Europe during World War I and in this way were situated in a framework of imperial colonial power of the German *Kaisereich*. Their travelogues underscored their embeddedness in Germanness, or German nationality, even when their access to it and Jewish belonging to Germany as such, was contested in Weimar Republic.<sup>79</sup> Their focus on questions of evolving Jewish identity, national and ethnic belonging reflected the same interests of Hirschbein and Nomberg. Whereas German-Jewish authors dreamt about the return of pan-Jewish, pan-European ideologies and romanticized Eastern European Jewish life, Yiddish travelers proposed an agenda of Yiddishist national identity. In that way Zweig and Döblin came to oppose the nationalism of “self-determination” that was all the rage in the Europe of the 1920s and 1930s, whereas Nomberg and Hirschbein presented a Jewish ethno-national and diasporic answer to the prevailing tendencies in Europe. Travel writing served all of them with a space to search for new answers concerning the Jewish place in Europe after the transformations of World War I.

The tours of Hirschbein, Nomberg and Turkow through Argentina resembled to some extent the journeys of Western European explorers, who traveled to South America, Africa or the Middle East at the turn of the nineteenth century. Both Jewish and non-Jewish travel writers had a desire to uncover the lives of peoples little known in Europe and to succeed as the ones to offer first-hand accounts of remote lands. However, the meaning of travel by Eastern European Jews and travel by Western European nationals of colonial empires were evidently different. As numerous studies have shown, Western European travelers served as an intellectual and scientific arm of colonization and conquest.<sup>80</sup> Mary Louise Pratt argued

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<sup>79</sup> Wesley Todd Jackson, Jr., “Where Do We Go from Here? Tortured Expressions of Solidarity in the German Jewish Travelogues of the Weimar Republic” (PhD diss., University of Cincinnati, 2015), 1-63.

<sup>80</sup> Kirsten Greer, “Geopolitics and the Avian Imperial Archive: The Zoogeography of Region-Making in the Nineteenth-Century British Mediterranean,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 103, no. 6

that travel writing served as a form of legitimization of the expansion of empire.<sup>81</sup> This view was shared by the Palestinian novelist Raya Shehadeh, who considered late nineteenth century cartographers, geographers and biologists to be the forerunners or supporters of a military takeover of non-European lands.<sup>82</sup> Whereas female travelers such as Isabella Bird or Jelena Dimitrijević might not have been personally involved in the subordination and control over the areas they studied, other geographers and explorers often partook or organized the state-commissioned expeditions.<sup>83</sup> This was the case with the Russian exploration of Siberia, where the state's financial support clearly suggests political, not scientific, motivations.<sup>84</sup>

Jewish travel writers were in a way similar to the female authors whose texts did not expose the same clear-cut qualities of colonial discourse as did male writing. As Sara Mills has stated, female travel writing is not straightforwardly Orientalist in the way described by Said.<sup>85</sup> She noticed that although colonialist statements might also be located in female travel writing, at the same time we find numerous passages that undermine it. The situation of Eastern European Jewish travelers in Argentina was largely analogous. They also did not fit precisely in the Saidian discourse on colonialism and were only partially located within the European male travel discourse. I believe that although Nomberg's and Hirschbein's approach to Argentina was not colonialist, it was Eurocentric. Eurocentrism, defined by Shohat and Stam as a discursive "residue" or "precipitate" of colonialism, exerts its powers even in the absence of colonialism, as it normalizes power-relations by taking them for granted and rendering them as inevitable or progressive.<sup>86</sup> The gaze of Nomberg and Hirschbein was Eurocentric as they looked on Argentina from the perspective of representatives of an Eastern European cultural tradition that was in their eyes natural and obvious. The Argentine reality that contradicted their approach, or did not fit within their worldview, was exoticized and imagined as disordered, unprogressive or inferior.

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(2016): 1317-1331; Joan M. Schwartz and James R. Ryan, *Picturing the Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Anne Godlewska and Neil Smith (eds.) *Geography and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Walter Mignolo, "Putting the America on the Map (Geography and Colonization of Space)," *Colonial Latin American Review* 1 (1992): 25-63; James E. McClellan III and François Regourd, "The Colonial Machine: French Science and Colonization in the Ancien Regime," in *Osiris, Volume 15: Nature and Empire: Science and the Colonial Enterprise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 31-50; see also other articles in this volume.

<sup>81</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 5.

<sup>82</sup> Charlotta Salmi, "Reflections on a National Cartography: The Freedom to Roam and the Right to Imagine in Raya Shehadeh's Travel Writing," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48, no. 4 (2012): 431-442.

<sup>83</sup> Isabella Bird (1831-1904) was a British explorer and travel writer. She traveled widely including China, Central Asia and Australia; Jelena Dimitrijević (1862-1945) was a Serbian feminist and traveler. Her writings include travel books from North America, Egypt and India.

<sup>84</sup> The Vladimir Rusanov expedition of 1912 to Svalbard, Siberia.

<sup>85</sup> Sara Mills, *Discourses on Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2003), 61-62.

<sup>86</sup> Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1-7.

To a great extent, Nomberg, Turkow and Hirschbein, traveling, researching and narrating Jewish Argentina did not share the gaze and approach of Western European explorers, who looked foremost at the non-European Other during their voyages. Jewish travelers concentrated rather on their own countrymen who immigrated to Argentina from Poland and other corners of Eastern Europe. Their approach was twofold autoethnographic or, as Tamar Lewinsky put it, “national ethnographic.”<sup>87</sup> They analyzed their own situation as traveling Jews among Jewish immigrants. This fits the definition of autoethnography that can be analyzed as either an approach that seeks to understand cultural phenomena through the examination of personal experiences of the ethnographer or as a methodology that pertains to the study of the researcher's own ethnic group.<sup>88</sup> Whereas in a number of travel accounts of that time the narrator excluded himself from the described reality by underlining differences between him/her and the examined people, in the case of Nomberg and Hirschbein we deal with the narrators belonging to the described ethnic group. It was marked by their frequent use of the pronouns “we” and “ours” when talking about “Jewish” or “Yiddish” aspects. As such, the travelogues of Hirschbein and Nomberg were not classic travel texts. Traditional travel writing relied on the existence of a group of readers who shared the traveler's worldview, language and values, and groups of “the others,” who were described as foreign, different and strange.<sup>89</sup> The travelogues of Nomberg and Hirschbein were not based on the typical construction of two dichotomous groups: “the readers” and “the analyzed.” In the case of Eastern European Jewish travelers, the difference between the readers and the described was vague. Both the reading public and the group being researched by the travel writers were Eastern European Jews. They shared the same language, customs and background. Further, the target readership was Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi Jews. Yet, whereas the interaction between Jewish travelers and Jewish immigrants was an intracommunal experience, their portrayal of non-Jewish Argentina served a different agenda. Nomberg and Hirschbein constructed a distinct type of “otherness” in their texts that pertained to non-Jewish Argentines and hardly Judaized spaces, such as the *pampa* and the mountains. Consequently, the Argentina they portrayed was a mixed space: both Jewish and gentile, both familiar and foreign.

The cultural, social and political contexts of Jewishness also placed Jewish travelers on the margins of the classic travelogues of the era. Hirschbein and Nomberg were white males and belonged to a cultural elite, but their Jewishness made them weaker and “abnormal”

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<sup>87</sup> Lewinsky, “Eastern Europe in Argentina,” 253.

<sup>88</sup> Carolyn Ellis, Tony Adams and Arthur Bochner, “Autoethnography: An Overview,” *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* [Online], vol. 12 (November 24, 2010), unnumbered.

<sup>89</sup> Szurmuk, *Women in Argentina*, 8.



when compared with the Western travelers.<sup>90</sup> Jewish voyagers did not have a symbolic or real support of a colonial power that could potentially benefit from their exploration or use their narration as a tool of domination. Furthermore, as numerous scholars have argued, Jews were not “entirely white.”<sup>91</sup> Although their skin might be pale white, Jews were not Christian and were not nationals of a powerful European nation-state but lived in dispersion, which often excluded them from the “white” category. Centuries of European discrimination and persecution against the Jews placed them in a position of weak subjects and victims, rather than powerful hegemony who narrated supremacy and conquest through travel writing. Hirschbein noted that other nations usually had one “national home,” whereas the “Jewish home” was scattered around the world. He envied the presumed stability of other nations, noticing that their nation-states represented the interests of their citizens. The Jewish diasporization following the Great Migrations evoked in him ambiguous feelings. He underscored a sense of being a “homeless Jew,” but also appreciated the opportunities that multiple-rootedness offered.<sup>92</sup>

When analyzing the European contexts of Yiddish travel writing on Argentina, it is worth looking at the broader European approach to Latin America at the turn of the nineteenth century. Given the growing presence of Argentina on the international markets (especially corn, wheat and frozen meat), as well as growing foreign investments in Argentine railways and the metal industry, Argentina seemed like a solution for European economic and social problems at the turn of the century.<sup>93</sup> At the same time, a number of European governments sought to solve their population problems or to compensate for their lack of colonies by more or less successful emigration projects in the Americas. In addition, the project of Jewish settlements in Argentina was preceded and followed by similar concepts among other national groups from Eastern and Southern Europe. As with the enterprise of Baron Hirsch in

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<sup>90</sup> Yet in relation to the indigenous population, they were considered white.

<sup>91</sup> Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (Abingdon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 1991); Sander Gilman, “The Jewish Nose: Are Jews White? Or, the History of the Nose Job,” in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity*, ed. Laurence J. Silberstein and Robert L. Cohn (New York: New York University, 1994), 364-402; Karin Brodtkin Sacks, “Jews Become White Folks?” in *Race*, ed. Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 78-102; Michael Paul Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Melanie Kaye/Kantorowitz, *The Colors of Jews: Racial Politics and Radical Diasporism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007); Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race and American Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>92</sup> Hirschbein, *Fun vayte lender*, 13-14, 38.

<sup>93</sup> See Pablo Gerchunoff, “Causas y azares... En más de un siglo de historia económica argentina,” in *Argentina 1910-2010. Balance de un siglo*, ed. Roberto Russell (Buenos Aires: Taurus, 2010); Diego Rubinzal, *Historia económica argentina (1880-2009). Desde los tiempos de Julio Argentino Roca hasta Cristina Fernández de Kirchner* (Buenos Aires: Centro Cultural de la Cooperación Floreal Gorini, 2010); Fernando Rocchi, *Chimney in the Desert: Industrialization in Argentina in Export Boom Years, 1870-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

Argentina, Italian, Polish, Czech and Hungarian settlements in Brazil or Argentina were supposed to become isolated colonies, tightly connected to the European homeland.<sup>94</sup>

The Jewish settlement in Argentina, especially the early JCA colonies, was born with a similar background. A Jewish migration reformer from the Habsburg Empire, Leopold Caro, saw the Jewish settlement in South America as “an instrument of national expansion, a means of peaceful extension of national frontiers.”<sup>95</sup> The Jewish territorialist movement sought to establish safe Jewish settlements in Africa, Asia, Australia and the Americas. Although conceived in Western Europe, territorialism was focused on Eastern European Jewry and thus shared the same socio-political arena as the ideologies of *yidishkayt*-centered ethno-national revival. The territorialist leader Haim Zhitlowski was a fervent defender of Yiddish, both as a Bundist and as a Labor Zionist in later years of his life. As with Polish authorities who wished that the emigrant settlements would function as enclaves of Polishness down South, some advocates of Yiddishism and territorialism saw the Argentine, Brazilian or Australian *yishevs* [settlements] as the colonies of the Yiddishland. In our case, the colonies were to have their own Jewish-Argentine character, yet they were to function within a broader Yiddishland cultural and ethnic framework.

## **2.2. Travel Writing, Jewish Mobility and Eastern European Social Change**

Yiddish travel writing on Argentina needs to be seen in the context of social and cultural transformations related to Jewish mobility in the early twentieth century. It is easy to fall into a trap by reducing Eastern European Jewish movement to forced emigration and displacement. Jewish mobility included frequent short distance business trips between neighboring towns and villages, permanent relocation between localities of the same region or educational migration to bigger urban centers. At the end of the nineteenth century, the industrializing cities of Łódź and Białystok in Poland attracted thousands of internal Jewish migrants.<sup>96</sup> Following the pogroms of 1881-1882, thousands of Jews from the Pale of Settlement moved to the Kingdom of Poland, where anti-Jewish incidents were less violent.<sup>97</sup> Whereas Jewish movement within the Russian Pale of Settlement was limited, the situation in Habsburg Galicia and initially in Congress Poland was different. Jews from Galician towns

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<sup>94</sup> Zahra, *The Great Departure*, 70-79.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>96</sup> The internal migration to industrial centers also had an influence on overseas emigration. Between 1926-1937 a total of 16,700 Jews emigrated from Łódź, which corresponded to 8.1% of general Jewish emigration. This was 1/3 lower than the share of Łódź Jews in the general Jewish population of Poland (12.2%). Arie Tartakower, *Emigracja żydowska z Polski* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Narodowościowych, 1939), 45.

<sup>97</sup> Konrad Zieliński, “Emigracja żydowska z Rosji i Królestwa Polskiego do USA (1881-1918),” *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów*, no. 201 (2002): 19.

could travel freely around the Austro-Hungarian Empire and those who lived in Congress Poland could relocate within the area and to cross into the Pale of Settlement.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, in the first decades of twentieth century, a number of Central and Eastern European Jews engaged in new forms of mobility and travel. Leah Garrett was right to note that most Jewish travelers were often excluded from the “good forms of travel,” as their movements were often a matter of necessity instead of free will.<sup>99</sup> Yet, this did not reflect the situation of an entire Jewish population. At the beginning of the twentieth century, new travel-centered types of mobility, such as trekking or sightseeing, became increasingly popular and were not limited only to the secularizing middle class. These forms of movement accompanied migration in influencing the character of Jewish mobility at the turn of the century.

In the 1920s and 1930s, an increasing number of Polish Jews had an opportunity to travel for pleasure. Despite the increased role of tourism and sport in Jewish life, only a few had a chance to perform the so-called *lustrayzen*, that is, to travel abroad for pleasure. Much more common was cheaper inland tourism, such as trekking. The situation of other European nations was similar.<sup>100</sup> One of the few Polish Jews who did travel abroad was Mordechai Weismann from the town of Węgrów in central Poland. In the 1890s, this rich tenement house owner set off for a “lustrayze” to Argentina. He was later described as “having a restless spirit,” which pushed him to travel and a trustworthy wife who managed his business when he was abroad. His return to Węgrów drew the attention of all the town’s inhabitants. Weismann talked about Argentine traditions, about its endless richness. This was supposed to have woken up dreams and fantasies among the young people of Węgrów, who “dreamt about a safe home, a better future and a beautiful life.”<sup>101</sup> His stories probably motivated some Węgrowians to immigrate to Argentina: their landsman association was one of the first to be formed in Buenos Aires.

I view the travel writing of Peretz Hirschbein and Hersh D. Nomberg as an answer to and an additional facet of increased Jewish mobility of the early twentieth century. Nomberg

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<sup>98</sup> John Klier, “Pale of Settlement,” YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe. See Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>99</sup> Using James Clifford’s typology, Garrett examined Jewish travels by applying a set of criteria of “good travel.” Good travel had to be “heroic, educational, scientific, adventurous and ennobling.” Leah V. Garret, *Journeys Beyond the Pale: Yiddish Travel Writing in the Modern World* (Madison, WI: Wisconsin University Press, 2003), 16-18.

<sup>100</sup> In the 1930s foreign travel was becoming more available at least for some Poles and Polish Jews. In 1932, Polskie Transatlantyckie Towarzystwo Okrętowe and Linja Gdynia-Ameryka published a guidebook for travelers going by vessel to the Norwegian fjords, Amsterdam or Copenhagen. In 1934, the same steamship lines were inviting passengers for the Canary Islands and Madeira. See *Przewodnik Letnich Wycieczek Morskich* (Warsaw, 1932), DŻS XVIII A 2g, Polona Library and *Linja Gdynia-Ameryka: Marokko, Wyspy Kanaryjskie, Madeira*, DŻS XVIII A 2g, National Library in Warsaw.

<sup>101</sup> Leizer Kochan, “Tsu der geshikhte vengrover yidn in argentine,” in *Yuvl oysgabe tsu der 15 yoriker gezelschaftleker tetigkayt fun vengrover landslayt farayn in argentine* (Buenos Aires, 1940), 7.

and Hirschbein were not forced to go to Argentina, they were not economic or political emigrants. It was their personal interest in the new Jewish diasporas, the Yiddishist agenda and a certain passion for travelling that encouraged them to travel around the world. The development of tourism in interwar Poland had the same historical and social background as the expeditions of both Jewish writers to Argentina.<sup>102</sup> It was secularization, industrialization, the demise of the shtetl and migration. Jewish emigration from Eastern Europe expanded the Jewish world both geographically and psychologically. Geographical relocation became physically possible and psychologically comprehensible for more and more people. As the new diasporic Jewish identities evolved, travel and migration became increasingly connected. Emigration and the new diaspora consciousness came together with other forms of the Jewish mobility, travel and tourism.<sup>103</sup> Nomberg's and Hirschbein's texts exemplify the close relation of both phenomena. Their books connected the worlds of East European Jewish immigrants in Argentina with the reality of those who planned to emigrate, but also with the experience of this group of Polish Jews who preferred to look at distant Argentina from the safe and comfortable position of a reader of a travel report. Through the travelogues Jews explored the non-Jewish worlds lying beyond the well-known un-Jewishness of their Polish gentile neighbors. These books promoted interest in the non-local and non-Jewish aspects of life.

Jewish-Polish travelers who departed for Argentina during the first decades of twentieth century were influenced both by the Jewish and gentile mass emigration and by the travel and sport movement developing in their native Poland. At the same time that the impact of migration was growing and becoming ever more visible, Poland experienced the development of new secular Jewish identities that encouraged a number of Polish Jews to sightsee, trek or join scouting organizations.<sup>104</sup> The travel writings of Nomberg and Hirschbein combined the new interest in travel and adventure narratives with the need for counseling about emigration opportunities and life in other countries. In their writing, both authors merged the quest for adventure and the exotic with describing the life of Jewish immigrants in remote corners of the world.

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<sup>102</sup> In the gentile Polish world, an exemplary figure linking migration and travel can be found in Mieczysław Fularski (1896-1969). Fularski stood behind key decisions in the Department of Emigration Policy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, wrote a travelogue about Argentina and was a researcher of the tourist movement. Mieczysław Fularski, *Argentyna, Paragwaj, Boliwia: wrażenia z podróży* (Warsaw: M. Arct, 1929); Mieczysław Fularski, *Zagadnienia ruchu turystycznego* (Warsaw: Główna Księgarnia Wojskowa, 1935); Mieczysław Fularski, *Polska w międzynarodowym ruchu turystycznym* (Warsaw, 1937).

<sup>103</sup> I mean here a project of building a new form of Jewish diasporic consciousness, one that understood the dispersion in relation to Eastern Europe, rather than to a mythical Zion.

<sup>104</sup> This change was especially visible among Jewish youth. For more information on Polish Jewish interwar adolescent identities, see Jeffrey Shandler, *Awakening Lives. Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Poland Before the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

In independent Poland, during the 1920s and 1930s, industrialization and urbanization also found their aftereffects in transformed Jewish attitudes toward leisure, sport, the body and tourism. Migration to the cities helped to develop a new social stratum: secularizing proletarian Jewish youth, who formed a “reservoir of souls” ripe for recruitment by political youth movements. The Zionists, Bundists and communists were attracting Jewish youth not only with their political programs, but also with a wide array of sports activities that supported socialization between the peers, including of the opposite sex. Physical fitness, trips and summer camps constituted a new and attractive model of being Jewish.<sup>105</sup> The democratization of leisure, sport and travel helped to incorporate a new group of urban, often proletarian youth, into the sport and tourism movement, earlier reserved largely for the intelligentsia and bourgeois families. Following the broader European trends, young Polish Jews, mostly those living in big urban centers, such as Warsaw, Łódź, Lwów, Kraków or Vilna, began to embrace sport and leisure as integral parts of their daily life. The body, physical strength and athletic beauty played an increasingly important role. At the same time, both in Poland and in Argentina or the USA, the Jewish involvement in sport and travel became a space for negotiating ethnic and national identities and claiming a belonging.<sup>106</sup>

By the same token, Polonization become more and more pronounced. This appears in the testimonies of many Jewish immigrants from Poland who settled Argentina. The majority of the young Jewish men served in the Polish army, where they often distanced themselves from Judaism. Leon Menin who later immigrated to Argentina, recalled that during his military service he immersed himself in Polishness and stopped being religious.<sup>107</sup> Iankl Fuks said that he refused to go to a Jewish religious school and enrolled in a public school with Polish as the language of instruction, though with a majority of Jewish students.<sup>108</sup> Next to secondary schooling, sport and travel were typical arenas where the Polonization process was more and more visible.<sup>109</sup> In the 1930s a number of Polish Jews were involved in the same

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<sup>105</sup> Jacob Borut, “The Politics of Jewish Sports Movements in Interwar Poland,” in *Emancipation through Muscles: Jews and Sports in Europe*, ed. Micheal Brenner and Gideon Rouveni (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 77-92; Jack Jacobs, *Bundist Counterculture in Interwar Poland* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009), 48-61 (Chapter 3: “Morgenshtern: A Bundist Movement for Physical Education”); Yuu Nishimura, “On the Cultural Front: The Bund and the Yiddish Secular School Movement in Interwar Poland,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 43, no. 3 (2013): 266-281.

<sup>106</sup> See Jack Kugelmass (ed.), *Jews, Sport and the Rites of Citizenship* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Raanan Rein and David Sheinin (eds.), *Muscling in on New Worlds: Jews, Sport, and the Making of the Americas* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

<sup>107</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, Archivo de Palabra, no. 47, Leon Menin.

<sup>108</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, Archivo de la Palabra, no. 160, Iankl Fuks.

<sup>109</sup> In the 1936/1937 school year, 73% of Jewish high school students attended private schools. Polish was the language of instruction in around 70% of these institutions, 22.3% were bilingual and in 6.7% of classes took place in Yiddish or Hebrew; Nathan Cohen, “The Jews of Independent Poland-Linguistic and Cultural Changes,” in *Starting the Twenty-First Century: Sociological Reflections & Challenges*, ed. Ernest Krausz, Gitta Tulea (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 168.

social transformations as their gentile neighbors. The development of an interest in sports and travel among Polish Christians without a doubt had an influence on the younger generation of Polish Jews as well. A pan-Slavic sports organization “Sokół” was already established in the 1860s,<sup>110</sup> three decades before Max Nordau’s famous call for the “recreation of a muscle Jewry.”<sup>111</sup> For the founders and members of Polish “Sokół,” physical strength, sport and *krajoznawstwo*, or traveling oriented at familiarizing oneself with one's homeland, were closely related to political goals: formation of a strong national identity among Polish teenagers who would later become aware citizens of a reborn Poland.<sup>112</sup>

“Sokół” could be understood as a gentile counterpart to the Jewish sport movements that emerged in Poland at the very turn of the century. Both Poles and Jews closely linked sports with national rights and the struggle for national emancipation. To be sure, the Jewish sport movement should not be reduced to Zionist organizations that called for the creation of a new, athletic Jewry that would immigrate to Palestine. Polish Jewry produced a plethora of sport movements, characterized by diverse social and political stands.<sup>113</sup> The Zionists were busy competing with the anti-Zionists, the Yiddishists with the Hebraists, but various discrepancies could also be found within the same political wing (linguistic differences or based on attitudes towards immigration to Palestine or the situation of Jews in Poland). The Jewish left sported “Gwiazda-Sztern” (Proletarian Association of Physical Education “Gwiazda-Shtern”), which was aware of both the Polonization of Jewish youth and of its interest in sport and tourism. It targeted both Polish and Yiddish-speaking youngsters, tempting them with a secular offer of summer camps: a reading room, radio and music played on a gramophone.<sup>114</sup>

The “sport turn” among the younger generation of Polish Jewry was closely linked with the development of mass tourism and travel that attracted both Christian and Jewish

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<sup>110</sup> “Sokół” contained branches in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Russia, Germany and the Balkans. In 1933 the Polish MFA was considering building a “Sokół”-like youth sport and sightseeing society among immigrants in Argentina. Argentyna. Akcja wychowania fizycznego i sportu wśród Polonii, AAN MSZ 10911 B27324.

<sup>111</sup> Max Nordau formulated his desire to recreate a “new, muscle Jewry” during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Zionist Congress in Basel in 1898. Since then he repeated his words on various occasions. He supported the development of a new, fit, sporty and self-confident Jewry, ready for the challenges of Zionism, nationalism and modernity. See: Max Nordau, *Zionistische Schriften* (Köln: Köln Jüdischer Verlag, 1909).

<sup>112</sup> The Polish term *krajoznawstwo*, translated into German as *Landeskunde* or *Heimatkunde* and as לאנדקענשאפט (*landkenschafit*) to Yiddish, does not easily translate into English. It means a tourist movement oriented at discovering the history, geography and culture of one's homeland, with emphasis on local history and nature.

<sup>113</sup> Jacobs, *Bundist Counterculture in Interwar Poland*, 93.

<sup>114</sup> Socialist youth organizations competed Zionist ones. Maccabi clubs sported swimming, boxing or tourist-skiing sections and owned a mountain hostel in the Carpathian Mountains. In 1931 Maccabi had around 45,000 registered sportsmen, whereas in 1938 the number grew to around 200,000. See “Makabi w Polsce,” <http://www.sztetl.org.pl/pl/term/446,maccabi-in-poland/> [accessed on 27.5.2014]; “Jewish Football in Interwar Warsaw: Gwiazda-Sztern Warsaw,” [http://www.warszawa.sport.pl/blogi/rightbankwarsaw/2013/01/jewish\\_football\\_in\\_interwar\\_warsaw\\_gwiazdasztern\\_warsaw/1](http://www.warszawa.sport.pl/blogi/rightbankwarsaw/2013/01/jewish_football_in_interwar_warsaw_gwiazdasztern_warsaw/1) [accessed on 27.5.2014].

Poles alike. Jewish traveling in Poland had developed as a form of individual and organized tourism. In 1925, the Jewish Sightseeing Association (pol. *Żydowskie Towarzystwo Krajoznawcze w Polsce*, yid. *Yidishe gezelshaft far landkentnish in poyln*) was established.<sup>115</sup> Throughout the 1920s and 1930s it developed a broad network of regional branches (including Kraków, Warsaw, Częstochowa, Lwów, Wilno, but also smaller localities such as Tomaszów Mazowiecki or Łęczyca). ŻTK primarily targeted the acculturated Polish speaking Jews, who could afford travelling, sightseeing and accommodation in resorts. For members of ŻTK, the shtetl and the shtetl culture were already exotic spaces which they perceived as objects of tourist attention and even as an ethnographic curiosity. Similar tendencies were already traceable at the turn of the century among some Jewish integrationists in Poland.<sup>116</sup> In 1934 the ŻTK journal invited its members for a talk about “shtetl life” that was conducted by the section of “Jewish folklore and Polish regionalism.”<sup>117</sup>

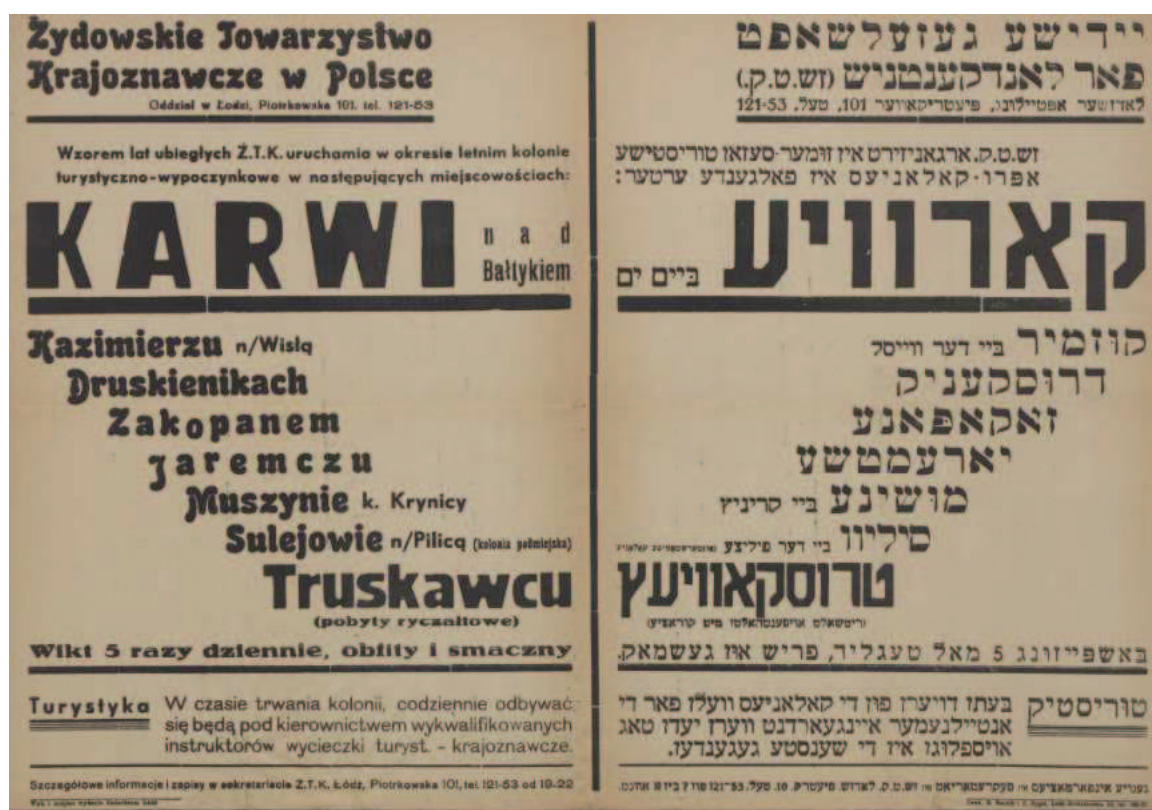


Illustration no. 21. Invitation to a summer camp organized by the Jewish Sightseeing Association in the 1930s. DŻS XVIII 9a, National Library in Warsaw.

<sup>115</sup> See Samuel Kassow, “Travel and Local History as a National Mission Polish Jews and the Landkentenish Movement in the 1920s and 1930s,” in *Jewish Topographies: Visions of Space, Traditions of Place*, ed. Alexandra Nocke, Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 241-265.

<sup>116</sup> In 1900 Alfred Lora writing for integrationist *Izraelita* wrote about Poland's writers who do not need to go for expensive foreign trips to Morocco or to explore dangerous Indian jungles. According to Lora exotic people (Yiddish-speaking Jews) lived also in Poland. For the integrationist the shtetl Jews were “unexplored multitude”, yet “with interesting customs” and “original psychology.” See Zuzanna Kołodziejaska, „*Izraelita*” (1866-1915). *Znaczenie kulturowe i literackie czasopisma* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2014), 315.

<sup>117</sup> *Wiadomości ŻTK* (The News of the Jewish Sightseeing Society), April 1934, no. 1(16).

The target readership of the ŻTK can be easily identified by the language of their publications. Their quarterly *Wiadomości Żydowskiego Towarzystwa Krajoznawczego* was published almost entirely in Polish, with a mere two to three pages of Yiddish summary at the end of each issue. However, trying to reach out to the Yiddish speaking masses, ŻTK decided to publish a Yiddish language quarterly *Landkenschaft*. This move was connected with the democratization of sport and tourism. Polonized Jews included the development of tourism among the poorer Yiddish speaking Jewry as one of the ŻTK goals. They believed that travel and a healthy lifestyle should become available to everyone. In addition, the general Jewish newspapers featured tourism, sightseeing and ethnography. *Unzer Ekspres*, a Yiddish daily that sold around 40-60 thousand copies each day, sported a regular column entitled “Landkentnish un turistik” (Sightseeing and Tourism).<sup>118</sup> Also, the most popular Yiddish weekly, *Velt-shpigl* featured articles that described “nations and countries.”<sup>119</sup>



Illustration no. 22. Orthodox Jews visiting the resort of Szczawnica, 1938. USHMM, ID: Collections: 2003.425.1

Middle-class Polish Jews were exceptionally fond of skiing and hiking in the mountains. Their frequent visits to resorts in the Carpathian Mountains were related to the general growing interest in mountains, which in the interwar years were commonly associated with unexplored nature, a healthy lifestyle and the wilderness.<sup>120</sup> Polish Jews began to

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<sup>118</sup> Marian Fuks, *Prasa żydowska w Warszawie 1823-1939* (Warsaw: PWN, 1979), 208.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibidem*, 228.

<sup>120</sup> Żydowskie Towarzystwo Krajoznawcze regularly invited its members for longer hiking trips to Zakopane or skiing during the wintertime. Its thematic branches organized various courses, such as rock climbing or skiing.



frequent Zakopane, Muszyna, Szczyrk, Ustroń and other spa towns. Those who preferred sport to leisure could join Jewish travel and skiing associations.<sup>121</sup> Some localities, such as Rytko, or Otwock by Warsaw begun to be clearly identified with Jewish tourism. *Wiadomości ŻTK* informed readers that most of these towns offer “modern and comfortable villas” that could accommodate several thousand people a year. Among the “Jewish spas,” Szczawnica, occupied a prominent place. This resort, famous for its alkalai sorrel springs in the interwar period attracted affluent Jewish merchants, who developed a modern tourist infrastructure in the town that was supposed to fit the needs of the “foremost Israelite intelligentsia.” The prestige of Szczawnica on “the Jewish street” of Poland also encouraged elderly rabbis, who came regularly to the resort benefiting from its healthy climate and healing waters. Famous *tsadikim* of Lesser Poland and Mazovia regularly visited the town, together with numerous poorer Chasidim who accompanied their spiritual leaders.<sup>122</sup>

### 2.3. Travel Writing and Expanding the Jewish Cultural Worlds

The development of Jewish tourism, manifested by the existence of organizations such as ŻTK and frequent travels to mountains and resorts, created a new group of people among Polish Jews, who were interested not only in leisure activities, but the exploration of remote corners of the world. In the same years, emigration was a constant subject in Jewish Poland. Many personally experienced the emigration of their family members or friends and were interested in accounts of Jewish life in the countries of emigration. Even if they did not plan to leave Poland, a novel or a press article about fellow Polish Jews in Argentina or Palestine provided them with first-hand opinions. Both the ongoing emigration debates and the new interest in sport and tourism fueled the increasing production and consumption of travel literature. Both those who planned to emigrate and those unable to travel to remote countries, happily welcomed the opportunity to discover other lands through literature. Reading books was also the most common pastime of the 1920s and 1930s, especially among the secularizing young generation. In the interwar years, reading books was also an ideological act or at least a specific statement about one’s worldview.<sup>123</sup>

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ŻTK rented their own guesthouse in Zakopane and, emphasizing the importance of the Tatra Mountains for the Polish Jewish tourist movement, even considered erecting their own building. ŻTK also organized summer and winter camps in Zakopane, the so-called *kolonie*. In summer 1933 these events attracted around 700 visitors, compared to around 500 in winter 1932/1933 (numbers only for data from the Warsaw branch of ŻTK).

<sup>121</sup> The southern Polish town of Bielsko contained Żydowskie Towarzystwo Turystyczno-Narciarskie “Makkabi” (Jewish Tourist-Skiing Association “Maccabi”), which focused on mountain tourism and skiing.

<sup>122</sup> Barbara Alina Węglarz and Alina Lelito, *Żydzi w szczawnickim kurorcie* (Szczawnica: Wydawnictwo APLA, 2005).

<sup>123</sup> Ido Bassok, “Mapping Reading Culture in Interwar Poland – Secular Literature as a New Marker of Ethnic Belonging among Jewish Youth,” *JBDI / DIYB Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 9 (2010): 15–36.

This interest in narratives of life in other countries was expressed by an impressive number of travel accounts published in Poland in the interwar years. This can be traced both in Yiddish literature, but also in books written in Polish. Hersh Dovid Nomberg, apart from his Argentine travelogue, also published a book about Palestine and North America.<sup>124</sup> Peretz Hirschbein wrote about India, Palestine, Soviet Russia, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Other travel writers included Elimelech Neufeld, Schulim Gottlieb, Bentsiyon Hoffman, Shemarya Gorlik and Boruch Glazman.<sup>125</sup> Apart from written travel accounts, Polish Jews eagerly participated in evening lectures given by the travelers. In 1925 in Radom a theatre poster invited audiences for a meeting with B. Jesurowicz, who was supposed to talk about his trip to India.<sup>126</sup> Also in Radom, in 1927, a famous Yiddish poet Zusman Segalovitch shared his impressions of a trip to Paris and London with the public.<sup>127</sup> In 1924 G. Zybert, who “traveled around the entire America,” spoke in Lublin, Radom and Biała Podlaska.<sup>128</sup> Yiddish-language travel journals were also available.<sup>129</sup> When Hersh Dovid Nomberg returned from Palestine, he delivered several lectures in provincial cities. Zerubavel did the same after coming back from Argentina. In the 1930s Leib Malach gave public talks on life in Brazil and Argentina.

The travels of Peretz Hirschbein and Hersh Dovid Nomberg were regularly reviewed in Poland's Jewish journals, opening new debates about Argentina and the intersection of migration and travel. In 1929 *Literarische Bleter* published a review of Hirschbein's Eretz Israel travelogue.<sup>130</sup> When visiting Poland Hirschbein met not only with fellow writers from the Yiddish writers union, but also took part in public meetings. Returning from Asia in December 1927, he gave a lecture entitled “Iber indyen, yapan un khina” (Through India, Japan and China) in Nowości Theater at Bielańska St.<sup>131</sup> Another lecture, “Di velt vi ikh ze zi” (The World as I See It), took place in Kamińska Theater.<sup>132</sup> Similar lectures were organized in Białystok and Vilna.<sup>133</sup> The prices were very cheap in order to enable the participation of the poor. Already a year earlier, in 1926, Hirschbein published regular travel articles from Asia in

<sup>124</sup> Hersh Dovid Nomberg, *Erets-yisroel: ayndrikn un bilder* (Warsaw: T. Yacobson-M. Goldberg, 1925); *Mayne rayze iber rusland* (Warsaw: Kultur-Lige, 1928).

<sup>125</sup> Elimelech Neufeld, *A rayze keyn erets-yisroel* (Warsaw: Grafia, 1935); Boruch Glazman, *Step un yishev: bilder fun a rayze iber di yidishe kolonyes fun soviet-rusland un ukraine* (Warsaw: Kultur-Lige, 1928); Shemarya Gorelik, *In vander-lebn: rayze-bilder un felyetonen* (Warsaw: Gitlin, 1918); Schulim Gottlieb, *Tsvishn sinay un zanzibar: togbukh fun a rayze iber mizreh-afrike (mit ilustratsyes un mapes)* (Warsaw: Grafia, 1937); Bentsiyon Hoffman, *Mayne rayze in erets-yisroel* (Warsaw: Di Velt, 1923).

<sup>126</sup> Poster, DŻS XVIIIC 1c, Polona Library, National Library in Warsaw.

<sup>127</sup> Poster, DŻS IK 2f, Polona Library, National Library in Warsaw.

<sup>128</sup> Poster, DŻS IK 2f, Library, National Library in Warsaw.

<sup>129</sup> For instance *Di Velt: ilustrirt wokhnblat far unterhaltung, rayze un turistik* (Warsaw ?-1939).

<sup>130</sup> Nakhmen Mayzel, “Peretz hirschbein eretz israel,” *Literarische Bleter*, 25.8.1929, no. 34, 658-659.

<sup>131</sup> “Peretz hirschbein kumt keyn varshe,” *Haynt*, 8.12.1927, 6.

<sup>132</sup> “Kronik,” *Literarische Bleter*, 27.1.1928, no. 4, 83.

<sup>133</sup> “Di forlezungn fun peretz hirschbein in poynl,” *Moment*, 15.12.1927, 5.

Warsaw's *Literarische Bleter*.<sup>134</sup> Travel articles from his Eretz Israel expedition were printed in *Moment*.<sup>135</sup> The daily published Hirschbein's texts every Friday and presented him as a unique voice among Jewish travel writers. Upon returning from a trip to Soviet Russia, Hirschbein gave another series of public lectures in Poland and a few articles were printed in the Warsaw Yiddish press.<sup>136</sup>

The emigration debates and the new interest in tourism were experienced not only by the Jews, but were a part of broader non-Jewish reality in interwar Poland. Around 1.8 million people left Poland in the interwar years, most of them non-Jews.<sup>137</sup> State Emigration Office (Państwowy Urząd Emigracyjny), as well as Jewish and non-Jewish emigration and colonization societies, fueled discussions about the possibilities of emigrating from Poland. At the same time, Christian Poles were also more and more interested in travelling. There were a few Polish-language journals that featured columns on travel and tourism. A good example was *Świat* (World), an illustrated weekly edited by gentile authors, but published by the Jewish publishing house of the Orgelbrand family. *Świat* published a book series "Biblioteka Podróży Egzotycznych" (Library of Exotic Travels) that, next to Argentina, also featured Borneo, Angola or Ethiopia. In 1929 the traveler, emigration activist and researcher of tourism, Mieczysław Fularski, published a travelogue from Bolivia, Paraguay and Argentina.<sup>138</sup> Fularski, a gentile, similarly to Nomberg and Hirschbein, focused foremost on his own ethnic group: non-Jewish Poles. Yet he noticed the increasing presence of Eastern European Jews in Argentina, both in Buenos Aires and in the agricultural interior. He mentioned the economic success of Max Glücksman, a Czernowitz-born Jew who became an owner of a cinema chain or the activities of the Jewish Polish Union in Argentina (Poylisher Farband). Fularski also transmitted accounts about Jewish colonists and concluded that the colonies produced "a new type of brave, Jewish farmer."<sup>139</sup> Like their Yiddish counterparts, Polish-language fiction writers (Konrad Wrzos, Zbigniew Uniłowski or Antoni Słonimski)

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<sup>134</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, *Literarische Bleter*: "Fir hundred milion (briv fun khina)," 12.11.1926, 752; "A yapanisher revolutsyoner," 11.6.1926, 379-381; "Di geyshe," 8.10.1926, p. 667-668.

<sup>135</sup> "Peretz Hirschbein dertselt in moment vos er hot gezen un ibergelebt in erez israel," *Moment*, 9.8.1927, 1; Peretz Hirschbein "Bet lekhem," *Moment*, 20.1.1928, 6.

<sup>136</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, "Di yidishe ibervanderung tsu erd-arbeyt in soviet rusland," *Haynt*, 30.7.1929, 6.

<sup>137</sup> Jacob Lestchinsky estimated that between 1920 and 1937 around 1,425,000 non-gentiles and 395,000 Jews emigrated from Poland. Jacob Lestchinsky, *National Groups in Polish Emigration* (New York: Conference on Jewish Relations, 1943), 109.

<sup>138</sup> See Fularski, *Argentyna, Paragwaj, Boliwja*. Two years earlier, Fularski published a book entirely devoted to Polish agricultural colonies in Argentina: *Polskie kolonie rolnicze w Argentynie* (Warszawa, 1927).

<sup>139</sup> Most of the Polish gentile travelers, who visited South America focused on the biggest Polish peasant settlement in Brazil or on explorations of the Amazon. See, as example: Stefan Barszczewski, *Na ciemnych wodach Paragwaju. Wspomnienia z podróży* (Lwów: Książnica Atlas, 1931); Tadeusz Chrostowski, *Parana. Wspomnienia z podróży w roku 1914* (Poznań: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha, 1922); Mieczysław Lepecki, *Argentyna* (Warsaw: Międzynarodowe Towarzystwo Osadnicze, 1936); or a much earlier account by Józef Siemiradzki, *Szlakiem wychodźców* (Warsaw: A.T. Jezierski, 1900).

traveled to South America to investigate the experience of Polish immigrants and to give accounts of South America. The interwar years witnessed a shared reality in which traveling and migration played an increasingly prominent role for both Polish Jews and Christian Poles.

A similar development of Jewish travel writing and travel reportage was the case in 1920s and 1930s Argentina. The journalist Marcos (Mordechai) Regalsky traveled to Eretz Israel and in 1936 published in Buenos Aires a Yiddish travelogue from this journey.<sup>140</sup> When he visited Miami in 1926, his daily *Yidische Zaitung* also published travel reports.<sup>141</sup> The local cultural activist and literary critic Yankev Botoshansky wrote a series of travel texts from his trip to Brazil.<sup>142</sup> Leon Kibrick of *Mundo Israelita* travelled to Poland in 1924 where he interviewed the Zionist deputy Yitshak Grünbaum, later printed in his Argentine weekly.<sup>143</sup> Also, authors who only spent a few years in Buenos Aires, like Leib Malach, continued to update the newspapers of Buenos Aires Yiddish with their travel narratives. Visiting Canada in 1929, Malach mailed his travel account to be published in Buenos Aires.<sup>144</sup> When he was again in Poland in 1933 *Di Presse* published his letters in a special column entitled “Bletlekh fun poyln.”<sup>145</sup> In 1928 *Di Presse* published Ukrainian reportages of the US-based Boruch Glazman.<sup>146</sup> Borekh Schefner, who later came to Argentina as an TSYSHO envoy, wrote reports for *Di Presse* in Buenos Aires from his visit in Cologne and provincial Polish towns.<sup>147</sup>

Thus, the Argentine journeys and travel writing of Peretz Hirschbein and Hersh Dovid Nomberg did not exist in a cultural and historical void, but were part and parcel of the Jewish experiences of 1920s and 1930s century Poland and Argentina. Emigration from Eastern Europe created a new diasporic Jewish world and Yiddish literature, while the media evolved to a major platform linking the communities in Europe and the Americas. Social changes in the Jewish heartland of Eastern Europe increased the interest of Polish Jews in the non-European world. The Argentine travel narratives of Peretz Hirschbein and Hersh Dovid Nomberg serve as a lens for exploring the immigration of Polish-Jews to Argentina and offer an additional perspective for analyzing the expansion of Yiddishland and the beginnings of Jewish immigrants’ transformation into Jewish-Argentines.

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<sup>140</sup> Marcos Regalsky, *Vos hob ikh gezen in eretz israel* (Buenos Aires: Avoda, 1936).

<sup>141</sup> Marcos Regalsky, *In a hurbn-shtot miami*, *Yidische Zaitung*, 31.10.1926, 12

<sup>142</sup> Yankev Botoshansky, *Di Presse*, 18.11.1929, 25.11.1929, 28.11.1929, 29.11.1929, 7.12.1929

<sup>143</sup> “A traves de Polonia. Una entrevista con el diputado Grünberg,” *Mundo Israelita*, 23.9.1924, 3.

<sup>144</sup> Leib Malach, “Winnepig. Fun mayne rayze iber mayrev kanade,” *Di Presse*, 4.11.1929, 5; “Edenbridge. Fun mayne rayze iber mayrev kanade,” *Di Presse*, 27.10.1929, 11.

<sup>145</sup> *Di Presse*, 2.4.1933, 7; 23.4.1933, 4; 30.4.1933, 7(?).

<sup>146</sup> *Di Presse*, 1.12.1928, 7.

<sup>147</sup> Borekh Schefner, “Keln,” *Di Presse*, 24.10.1928, page unknown; “Funken iber poyln. Fun mayne rayze iber poylishe provints,” *Di Presse*, 2.4.1933, 7.

### 3. The Travel Writer as Celebrity: Argentina Welcomes Guests from the Old Home

Although Jewish travel has become an increasingly researched topic of recent, the bulk of scholarly interest goes in the direction of contemporary heritage trips to Eastern Europe, pilgrimages to Israel, journeys to Nazi German death camps or expeditions in the footsteps of “lost” tribes or diasporas. In addition, medieval and early modern Jewish travel books serve as a basis for scholarly research, including the texts of Benjamin of Tudela, Abraham Levie or David D’Beth Hillel.<sup>148</sup> However, the links between migration, travel writing and high and popular culture are rarely examined. Although Jewish travel writing bears many similarities to the travels texts written about and by other ethnic groups, it also has many peculiarities. It becomes very visible when we approach the intersection of celebrity and travel writing. As Robert Clark has noted, “Jewish travel writers transcend scholarly typologies of celebrity traveling,”<sup>149</sup> They do not belong clearly to the category of a *travel celebrity* that, according to Clark, includes writers who gained celebrity status for their travel texts, but also hardly fit the group of *celebrity travelers*, or people who acquired fame and fortune in other domains and use their travels and celebrity status for various social or political causes. Nomberg and Hirschbein transcended these two spheres. Although their fame and respect could be basically traced back to their literary accomplishments, it was their later travel writing that helped them to establish themselves as important figures of Argentine cultural life with a quasi-celebrity position.

Traveling and celebrity were and are inherently connected and functioned as mutually reinforcing and influencing institutions.<sup>150</sup> However, celebrity travel writing was never a major concern of travel-writing studies. More emphasis has been placed on other aspects, chiefly the role of travel writing as an agent or tool of colonial oppression. I argue that the role of Nomberg and Hirschbein, who did not engage in that kind of colonialism-like activism, was no less important. Their role as mediators and cultural translators allowed Polish Jews to conceptualize and understand Argentina and see it as a complex space of Jewish and non-Jewish interactions. At the same time, the visits of Nomberg and Hirschbein influenced internal Argentine dynamics. In the Argentine context, writers embodied the

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<sup>148</sup> For instance: Martin Jacobs, *Reorienting the East: Jewish Travelers to the Medieval Muslim World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Gary S. Schiff, *In Search of Polin: Chasing the Jewish Ghosts in Today’s Poland* (New York, NY: Lang, 2012); Marianne Hirsch, *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), Elkanan Nathan Adler, *Jewish Travellers* (London: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>149</sup> Robert Clark, “Travel and Celebrity Culture: An Introduction,” *Postcolonial Studies* 12, no. 2 (2009): 145-146.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibidem*, 145-146.

symbols of Eastern European Jewish “greatness” and mobilized their hosts to perceive themselves as hospitable Jewish-Argentines. Thanks to their interest in the Argentine diaspora, they were transformed into local celebrities, underlining the development of a new transnational era in Jewish history. Nomberg and Hirschbein became Jewish-Argentine celebrities precisely through their travels. It would not be possible without their personal visits to Argentina. Although they might have been known and respected there as good Yiddish writers, the process of their Argentine celebritization was conditioned by their temporary physical presence in Argentina.

### 3.1. The Defenders of the Good Name of Jewish Argentina

When Peretz Hirschbein visited Argentina for the second time in 1925, he was already surrounded by an aura of an admirer and expert of Argentina. His arrival was preceded by the establishment of the Hirschbein Committee that coordinated his visit, organized public meetings and was responsible for spreading information about the writer’s visit.<sup>151</sup> The daily press reported about his every step in the country, printed texts of his talks and treated him as a guest of honor. Hirschbein himself noted that his arrival in Buenos Aires was a unique experience for him, with hundreds waiting for him curiously at night in the Buenos Aires port. Hugging and pushing him from hands to hands.<sup>152</sup>

The same happened when Hersh Dovid Nomberg arrived to Argentina in 1922. A special committee organized a gala dinner in prestigious Prince George Hall with a performance by a famous Jewish-Argentine singer Berta Singerman.<sup>153</sup> During the evening, as *Yidische Zaitung* promised, Nomberg “sent greetings from European Jewry.”<sup>154</sup> The Warsaw author was received festively, especially by fellow writers. A. Reziner, in a text written one year after Nomberg's death, recalled that Nomberg felt very well in Buenos Aires. During his visit, local young Yiddish authors “surrounded him with their hot eyes and beating hearts, really almost hugged him.” Nomberg was supposed to have felt “like a rabbi between the students.”<sup>155</sup> Eastern European Jewish writers visiting Argentina enjoyed an exceptional treatment and were greeted with a genuine enthusiasm (apart from Hirschbein and Nomberg, these included Shmuel Niger, H. Leivick, Anohi, Melech Ravitch, etc.). In Argentina they became *sui generis* celebrities of that era: glorified, followed and cheered. In this section I

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<sup>151</sup> “Peretz hirschbein komite: konferents in avallaneda,” *Yidische Zaitung*, 20.10.1925, no. 3289, 1.

<sup>152</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, “Doyrem (briv fun veg),” 2.

<sup>153</sup> Berta Singerman was born in 1901 in Russia and immigrated to Argentina at the age of four. In the following decades, she made a career as one of the most popular Argentine actresses and singers. See her biography: Berta Singerman, *Mis dos vidas* (Buenos Aires: Ed. Tres Tiempos, 1981).

<sup>154</sup> Invitation, *Di Yidische Zaitung*, 6.4.1922, 1

<sup>155</sup> A. Reziner, “Aynike momentn mit nomberg in buenos aires,” *Di Presse*, 21.11.1928, 7.

examine what factors helped to develop their special status and what it says about the identities and belongings of Eastern European immigrants in Argentina.



Illustration no. 23. The cover of *Far grois un klayn*, Bueno Aires, 1925. The bottom line reads: “Peretz Hirschbein. For his arrival to Buenos Aires.”

The ecstatic reception of Hirschbein in 1925 was first and foremost an outcome of the special interest he took in Argentine problems. His book *Fun vayte lender*, published in 1916 by the publishing house of New York's daily *Der Tog*, was one of the first comprehensive accounts of Jewish life in South America. A book written by an important figure of European and American Jewish about the story of Argentine Jews gave its subjects a powerful sense of recognition. Hirschbein's book elevated the Argentine Jewish experience to a level similar to the North American diaspora. Argentine Jewry that struggled with marginalization and a dubious reputation, was finally embraced into the ranks of high Jewish culture and its problems resonated in other parts of the Jewish world. Hirschbein's description of both the Jewish urban experience and the agricultural colonies proved to skeptics the vitality of Jewish settlements in Argentina and showed that despite numerous problems the newly emerged Argentine diaspora was far from ephemeral.

A journalist M.N. Shpirnberg of Buenos Aires's *Penimer un penimlekh* claimed that Hirschbein was received as a guest of honor by all of Argentine Jewry.<sup>156</sup> He underlined the interest Hirschbein took in the problems of Jewish migrations. In Shpirnberg's text he was presented as an unusual figure representing both the Old World and the USA, which were then the centers of Jewish life and Jewish creativity. It was appreciated that Hirschbein decided to focus on a diaspora country that many regarded as less important or marginal. Shpirnberg identified the work of Hirschbein in Argentina as quasi-ethnographic. He described him as a one who unveiled Jewish Argentina to a broader public. His texts on the Latin American diaspora served, in Shpirnberg's opinion, as a showcase that displayed Argentina to the unfamiliar Jewish public of Europe and North America.



Illustration no. 24. The article, “Our gast Peretz Hirschbein,” by M.N. Shpirnberg in *Penimer un penimlekh*, Buenos Aires, 1925.

Shpirnberg perceived Hirschbein's second visit to Argentina as a chance to present to the Jewish world the recent achievements of Argentine Jews. He emphasized that during his second stay Hirschbein “would see a different Jewish Argentina: more stable, stronger rooted in local society and finally playing some role on the scene of the Jewish world.”<sup>157</sup> Shpirnberg

<sup>156</sup> M.N. Shpirnberg, "Unzer gast peretz hirschbein," *Penimer un penimlekh*, 3.7.1925, 1.

<sup>157</sup> Ibidem.



believed that Argentina finally became “mit laytn glaykh,”<sup>158</sup> was “normalized” and began to be perceived as any other Jewish diaspora. He hoped that Hirschbein would notice the changes, appreciate the efforts and progress of the local community. Szpirnberg hoped that during his second visit the traveler “would have much more study material” and probably would present Argentina in a better light than in *Fun vayte lender*, which some regarded as overly critical and pessimistic. The first visit of Hirschbein in Argentina was a permanent point of reference in articles covering his second trip in 1925. The attention he devoted back then to the problems and challenges that Jews faced in Argentina transformed him into an expert on Argentine issues and a friend of local Jewry. Especially cordial were the reactions of the Yiddishist media, which shared the progressive and Jewish ethno-national agenda of the writer. The leftist *Di Presse* described Hirschbein’s arrival to Buenos Aires as a comeback of an old, long unseen friend.<sup>159</sup>

During both visits, Peretz Hirschbein traveled widely, visiting Buenos Aires, provincial cities such as Córdoba or Santa Fe and Jewish agricultural colonies of the interior. His 1914 visit had a less festive character and was focused on examining the situation of developing Jewish farms. The Argentine Jewish press was then barely existent, which makes it almost impossible to locate any printed reports. During his visit in 1925, Hirschbein visited not only Buenos Aires and the colonies, but also big provincial cities, including Santa Fe, Córdoba, Mendoza, Parana and Rosario. This time his arrival was noticed not only by the Yiddish press, but also by Spanish-language Jewish periodicals that appreciated his interest in Argentina.<sup>160</sup>

In every visited locality Hirschbein was welcomed as a genuine celebrity. Local Jewish leaders established so-called Hirschbein’s Committees that coordinated preparations for the writer’s visit: they spread information about the meeting, arranged a venue for the event, printed posters or taught children poems that they would recite for Hirschbein in Yiddish. Some newspaper reports were quite emotional and full of excitement. Rosario’s local journal described the writer as “our Hirschbein.” His interest in the problems of the Argentine diaspora seemed to have made him close and dear to the local community. As the author of the article wrote, “no one will ever forget the beautiful moments that we spent with Hirschbein.”<sup>161</sup> Rosario Jews needed to cooperate with each other in order to comfortably settle the guest. As reported by *Penimer un penimlekh*, the Music Society played songs to impress their special guest, Y. Groysman offered a moving welcome speech, while N.

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<sup>158</sup> Yid. “equal with the people.”

<sup>159</sup> “Unzer gast peretz hirschbein,” *Di Presse*, 3.7.1925, unknown page.

<sup>160</sup> “Peretz Hirschbein,” *Mundo Israelita*, 27.6.1925, 1.

<sup>161</sup> “Fun rosarier yidisher gezelschaft,” *Penimer un penimlekh*, undated newspaper clipping, IWO Buenos Aires Peretz Hirschbein clippings collection.

Pukhovitch organized a banquet at the headquarters of the Jewish Bank that was later followed by an afternoon *tasa de chocolate* meeting prepared by the Ladies' Union.



Illustration no. 25. Peretz Hirschbein during his visit to Córdoba in 1925, photo from an unidentified newspaper clipping, IWO Buenos Aires.

The evening in honor of Hirschbein greatly resembled similar events of the aspiring Argentine middle class. The social gatherings revealed how people perceived their socioeconomic status and ways in which they chose to demonstrate their identities.<sup>162</sup> Those events were not insider meetings of a local elite with the visitor, but public meetings broadly covered by the Jewish press. Participating in a Yiddish-language event in honor of a Yiddish writer was a sign that Eastern Europe, Yiddishland and its culture were relevant for many Argentine Jews at the time. As such, they were confident and conscious manifestations of one's identity, linguistic and cultural choices and belonging. A meeting with Hirschbein was not a re-enactment of Old Home nostalgias. The author symbolized and embodied a new, modern, secular ethno-national Jewish identity. By participating in the meetings with Hirschbein, the Jewish immigrants underscored their desire to be part of the modernizing

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<sup>162</sup> Mollie Lewis Nouwen, *Oy My Buenos Aires! Jewish Immigrants and the Creation of Argentine National Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), 91.

project of the Yiddishland. Their growing Argentine patriotism, and a sense of already being Jewish-Argentines, was reflected in their will to represent Argentina in the modernizing debates about Jewish peoplehood and its future in times of a global diasporism.

The attachment to Yiddish culture that some Argentine Jews shared is visible in an article in *Rosarier Wochenblatt*, which covered the Hirschbein's visit in this city. His stay in Rosario was described as a day of "joy, Jewish happiness and moral pleasure."<sup>163</sup> Hirschbein and his wife were perceived as emissaries of high Yiddish culture that Rosario Jews seemed to adore. Their visit united often conflicted groups: Zionists and socialists, shopkeepers and members of the local elite. Many Eastern European Jews living in the town gathered together to celebrate the *yidishkayt* that Hirschbeins embodied. In a town with a small number of Jews, there was a need and longing for Jewish cultural contact. The Yiddish language and a common past in Eastern Europe were one of the few things shared by Argentine Jews, who were often separated along lines of gender, class or politics. A meeting with a popular and beloved author was one of the few opportunities that brought such a diverse crowd together. Hirschbein attracted them not only as a man of letters, but also on account of his social agenda, underlining the importance of Yiddish-centered ethnicity, secular Yiddishist schooling and an increasingly global Jewish life.

Similar welcome ceremonies took place in other locations. Hirschbein's visit in Santa Fe was covered in *Di Tribune*. His stay was described as a holiday "that made any other issue unimportant." The writer's visit was celebrated festively: Hirschbein and the local organizers began it, as the newspaper reported, "with a beautifully served lunch that was followed by a moving welcome speech of Peretz Hirschbein."<sup>164</sup> Usually the visiting authors did not spend much time in town. In Santa Fe it was just three days. However, the Yiddish press covering the writer's visits often expressed the conviction that "the honorable guest would soon arrive again." It was stressed that the travelers were surprised by the warm welcome they received, by the high level of local Jewish cultural life and the community's vitality. Argentine Jews were interested in preserving the interest of writers dealing with Argentine Jewish life, in securing their support and attention. In order to do this, they presented to Hirschbein and Nomberg their efforts to develop the Yiddish press, schooling and literature, and by showing their attachment to Eastern Europe and their strong interest in the problems of the Old Home. Although these efforts might have been temporal, they underlined the relevance of Yiddishism in the immigrants' value system. Choosing what to present to the travelers was an

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<sup>163</sup> "Fun rosarier yidisher gezelshaft," *Penimer un penimlekh*, 1925, undated clipping, IWO Buenos Aires, Peretz Hirschbein clippings collection.

<sup>164</sup> "Peretz Hirschbein in Santa Fe," *Di Tribune*, 1925, undated clipping, IWO Buenos Aires, Peretz Hirschbein clippings collection.

ethno-cultural process, far from a mere desire to show how the traditional ethnic identity was maintained. Hirschbein was an advocate of change and the Argentine Jewish life that was then in the process of defining its character was a field where the new ethno-national Yiddishist project was taking root. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Yiddishist vision of the Jewish future was one of the many available options. It did not contradict becoming Jewish-Argentines, but occurred simultaneously. Choosing to present to travelers the trappings of progressive Argentine *yidishkayt* revealed the values and ethnic emblems that the immigrant Jews were proud of or supported.

For Jewish-Argentines, Hirschbein's sixtieth birthday served as an opportunity to celebrate the writer as an Argentine-Jewish literary celebrity. On October 15, 1941, H.D. Nomberg Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists (*Yidishe literatn un zhurnalistn farayn "H. D. Nomberg"*) organized a festive gala in Teatro Excelsior, where "Puste Kretshme," one of Hirschbein's best known dramas, was staged. The ceremony was broadly advertised in the Yiddish press. *Di Presse* informed readers that apart from the theater performance the event included speeches about Hirschbein, for example, one by Dr. Lazaro Zhitnitsky, one of the daily's editors, and Samuel Rollansky.<sup>165</sup>

Nehemías Zucker, the secretary of the Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists regarded celebrating the writer's birthday as "an obligation of Argentine Jewry." He repeatedly described Hirschbein as "our playwright," "our creator," "our writer."<sup>166</sup> This symbolic appropriation of Hirschbein for Argentine Jewry had two layers. First, it signified Zucker's understanding of the transnational turn in Jewish-Yiddish life that transcended political borders. Then, "our" would mean belonging to the diasporic people of Yiddishland. Zucker saw Yiddish as a common vernacular language of diaspora Jews and a linguistic platform that united all Yiddish-speaking authors and their reading publics. This was all thanks to Yiddish, as "our" could be marked by Yiddish writers, who lived in any center of the Yiddish diaspora. Zucker's wording also manifested Hirschbein's "belonging" to Argentine Jewry. His travels to Argentina, and the fact that his writing at least temporarily brought Jewish-Argentine issues into the mainstream of Yiddishland discussions, signified for Jewish-Argentine literati that Hirschbein was one of them. Understanding it more broadly, the attention Hirschbein gave to Argentine Jewry transformed him into a *sui generis* local ethnic

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<sup>165</sup> "Groyse tsol institutsyes ongeshlosn in der fayerung fun 60 yorikn yubiley fun peretz hirschbein," *Di Presse*, 3.10.1941, unknown page; IWO Archives in Buenos Aires, clippings collection of H. D. Nomberg Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists in Argentina.

<sup>166</sup> A letter of Nehemías Zucker, a secretary of the Yidishn Literatn un Zhurnalistn Farayn "H. D. Nomberg" to the Board of the Farayn, 23.10.1941; IWO Archives in Buenos Aires, collection of H. D. Nomberg Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists in Argentina.

hero. Zucker appreciated that Hirschbein's texts consolidated other narratives on Jewish Argentina than earlier predominant depictions of the country as a hotbed of Jewish prostitution. The 1941 *yubiley akt*, or jubilee ceremony, honored an author who was the first to “rehabilitate” the reputation of Argentine Jewry. The ceremony in Excelsior Theater was an expression of gratitude on behalf of the entire Argentine Jewish community.<sup>167</sup> The “holiday of Argentine Jewry,” as it was labeled by *Di Presse*, was supported by a number of landsman organizations, including the Galitizianer Farband, Poylisher Farband and even the Union of Jewish Furniture Manufacturers.

The texts of Nehemías Zucker were part of a row of texts that encouraged popular participation in the celebrations. Also, the literary critic Yankev Botoshansky appealed to Buenos Aires Jewry to participate in the *yontev* (holiday) in Teatro Excelsior. Partaking in this event would be, according to the journalist, a chance to show the gratitude of Argentine Jewry to its “discoverer.” Botoshansky called for massive participation in Hirschbein's jubilee, which would show the writer that Jewish Argentines “will always be with him.”<sup>168</sup> Botoshansky wrote that it was Hirschbein who showed Argentine Jewish life to the reading public in Europe and the USA and through his texts “normalized” the Argentine Diaspora. He described Hirschbein as “our Columbus” and a true lover of Argentina, who “was happy with every cultural success” of the local Jewry.<sup>169</sup> Another literary figure Natan Fruchter in his article for *Di Presse* described Hirschbein foremost as an author. For him the *yubiley akt* was not just another ceremony of the Writer's and Journalists Union, but a “festival of Jewish literature, of modern Jewish theater and of our cultural treasures.”<sup>170</sup> Fruchter perceived the ceremony in Teatro Excelsior as a chance to prove the vitality of Argentine cultural life and the support of the local community for Jewish cultural endeavors. He was deeply dissatisfied with the fact that although an impressive number of Jewish leaders decided to formally join Hirschbein's jubilee celebrations, only a few of them bought the pricy tickets for the loge seats. Fruchter, by citing the texts of Hirschbein and Nomberg, in which both writers praised the lively Jewish cultural life in Argentina, attempted to encourage theater-goers by referring to the “good name of Jewish Argentines” that could be ruined if they did not support Hirschbein's festivities.

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<sup>167</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>168</sup> Yankev Botoshansky, “Tsvishn yo un neyn. A manifestatsye far unzer kolumbus,” *Di Presse*, 14.10.1941, unknown page; IWO, clippings collection of Hersh Dovid Nomberg Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists in Argentina.

<sup>169</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>170</sup> Natan Fruchter, “A kultur-yontev in a kultur-shtot,” *Di Presse*, 12.10.1941, unknown page; IWO, clippings collection of Hersh Dovid Nomberg Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists in Argentina.

In several articles, Hirschbein's 1941 jubilee was linked to the situation in German-occupied Poland. Natan Fruchter saw the participation in the festivities in Teatro Excelsior as a way of showing a support for Jews suffering in ghettos. Citing calls made by the Literatn un Zhurnalistsn Farayn, he wrote:

At a time when hatred attempts to violently break Jewish life in the Old Home, we need to answer it with our intellectual power, with our encouragement and support for our cultural initiatives that will help our writers and all of us.<sup>171</sup>

Jewish-Argentine intellectuals perceived the festive celebration of one of the best-known Yiddish authors as a manifestation of the vitality of Argentine-Yiddish culture. They believed that in the new situation, when the Jewish continuity in Eastern Europe was endangered, it was their turn to take the responsibility for Yiddish literature and other forms of creativity. The situation was seen in a similar way by Nechemias Zucker. "At a time when Hitlerite hordes are murdering Jewish life in almost all of Europe," Argentine Jewry faced new challenges that demanded a stronger support for Yiddish culture.<sup>172</sup> In this way the young Argentine Diaspora defined itself as a stronghold of Yiddish culture, marking itself as a continuation of Eastern European life that proudly embraced Yiddish as a language of cultural and ethnic expression. At the same time, the contrast between endangered Jewish life in Europe and vital Jewish Argentina, manifested how anchored in the new country were the immigrants and their children. Argentine-Jews were proud of the social and economic opportunities that Argentina offered and were sure that in a country like Argentina Jewish life could flourish. It was more and more their country, where they felt more and more like hosts than guests.

A few days before Hirschbein's *yubiley akt*, the Yiddish press was flooded with articles about the event, encouraging the Jewish public to join the festivities. In an article published on the very day of the show, *Di Presse* presented Hirschbein as one of the brightest stars of the Yiddish theater.<sup>173</sup> The daily wrote that his plays were staged not only in Yiddish, but also in Polish, English and Hebrew. The journal presented Hirschbein's birthday as an event celebrated around the world, reinforcing his image of a well-acclaimed author, popular not only in Argentina, but also in major Jewish centers, as Poland and the USA. Although Hirschbein's jubilee attracted several hundred Jewish Argentines, the public was not that

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<sup>171</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>172</sup> A letter of Nechemias Zucker, a secretary of the Yidishn Literatn un Zhurnalistsn Farayn "H. D. Nomberg" to the Board of the Farayn, 23.10.1941; IWO Archives in Buenos Aires, collection of H. D. Nomberg Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists in Argentina.

<sup>173</sup> "Haynt der peretz hirschbein yovl akt in teater excelsior," *Di Presse*, 15.10.1941, unknown page; IWO, collection of Hersh Dovid Nomberg Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists in Argentina.

generous and preferred mostly lower-priced tickets. The income from the event did not cover the cost of the theater rental and Literatn Farayn asked its members to pay the debt.<sup>174</sup> Botoshansky claimed that it was gossip about poorly prepared actors that made the evening less successful, whereas Fruchter criticized the cultural leaders, who were eager to join the event “on paper,” but in fact preferred “banquets, dances or staying at home” over paying tribute to Peretz Hirschbein.<sup>175</sup>

### **3.2. Talking to the Jewish Masses: Travelers and Their *Konferentsyes***

Public talks given by the travelers were key points on their Argentine itineraries. The so-called “lektsyes” or “konferentsyes” (speeches, lectures) were effectively advertised in the Jewish press, which usually described them as the great success of local ethnic leaders and organizers. As the Jewish press reported, hotels and theaters that hosted the events were usually almost completely packed. Journalists described the talks delivered by the guests as moving, interesting or meaningful. The newspapers, often with a certain pathos, expressed the hope and the conviction that the words of the speakers “will remain forever in the memory of the public.” The conferences were meticulously prepared shows. The literati were performing on the stage in order to be well visible and hearable for the audience. To some extent the *lektsyes* resembled contemporary talks given by celebrity academics or music concerts. Also, the press articles covering the *lektsyes* were close to the reviews or follow-up texts about the art shows. The authors were “performing” (yid. *oystreten*) on the stage and were enthusiastically received by the spectators (yid. *publikum*). The speeches of Peretz Hirschbein usually included fragments of his works read aloud by the author.

The problems discussed during the conferences pertained to a variety of contemporary social and literary issues. In 1935 Shmuel Niger, a Vilna-experienced, New-York based literary critic presented the situation of Jewish immigrants in North America to the Buenos Aires Jewish public. Speaking at the Yidisher Teater at Avenida Corrientes, he offered a wittingly titled speech, “A Jew in America: Who He Was, Who He Is and Whom He Could Have Been?” On another occasion, in Teatro Albeniz, he entertained the public with a talk, “Humor and Satire in Jewish Literature,” and later speaking about writers like Sholem Asch

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<sup>174</sup> “Der peretz hirschbein yovl akt,” *Di Presse*, 17.10.1941; IWO, unknown page, clippings collection of Hersh Dovid Nomberg Union of Jewish Writers and Journalists in Argentina.

<sup>175</sup> Yankev Botoshansky, “Tsvishn yo un neyn”; Natan Fruchter, “Ver iz shuldik? A nokhvort tsum durkhgefirten peretz hirschbein yovl-akt,” *Di Presse*, 18.10.1941, unknown page; both IWO, clipping collection of Hersh Dovid Nomberg Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists in Argentina.

and H. Leivick.<sup>176</sup> Despite the obviously captivating character of the *lektsyes*, the Yiddish press emphasized their educative function. Meetings with personalities known from the literary world were supposed help Argentine Jews to familiarize them with contemporary Yiddish culture and its transnational challenges, and to ground their identities in modern *yidishkayt*.

Hirschbein and other traveling writers, like H. Leivick or Shmuel Niger, did not come to Argentina only because of their fondness of Argentinian Jews. Their visits also had an economic aspect. Numerous meetings held by Niger and Hirschbein in Argentina allowed them to improve their often precarious financial situation. *Lektsyes* or *konferentsyes* were usually against offering payment. Describing preparations for Hirschbein's visit in Rosario, the *Yidische Zeitung* noted that the local "organization committee" was in charge not only of renting a *salon* to host the writer's meeting, but also printing and managing the tickets.<sup>177</sup> Yet there were voices, for instance in *Mundo Israelita*, that strongly rejected any financial incentive on the part of Hirschbein or the organizers.<sup>178</sup> Ticketing and charging for the *lektsyes* had the effect of lowering the popular character of the events. With only those who could afford it participating in the lectures, the public meetings ultimately turned into arenas for manifesting not only *yidishkayt* and an interest in letters, but a better-off social and economic status.

In order to increase the number of spectators, the *lektsyes* were sometimes offered alongside Spanish translation. This practice became quite common in the 1930s when the number of Argentina-born Jews increased. When in 1935 Shmuel Niger spoke about humor and satire in Yiddish literature, a simultaneous Spanish translation was offered. About 10 years earlier, in the mid-1920s when Hirschbein was time in Argentina for the second, the organizers did not feel a need to offer a translation. This shows that in the 1920s the Argentine Jewish community was still relatively new and consisted mostly of Yiddish-speaking immigrants. In the 1930s the Spanish-speaking children of the immigrants gained a stronger foothold on the Buenos Aires Jewish cultural scene, but remained interested in Yiddish subjects from the Old Home. That underscores my argument concerning argentinization and re-yidishization, which went hand in hand. Although in the 1930s acculturation was on the rise, interest in global agents of cultural Yiddishism did not decrease. The Jewish-Argentines adopted new methods (simultaneous translation) that combined their Argentineness and belongingness to the Yiddish people.

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<sup>176</sup> Poster, Shmuel Niger Papers, YIVO, folder 2162.

<sup>177</sup> "Groyse tsugreytungen tsu peretz hirschbein bezukh in rosario," *Yidische Zeitung*, undated clipping.

<sup>178</sup> "Peretz Hirschbein," *Mundo Israelita*, 11.7.1925, page unknown.





Illustration no. 26. An invitation to a meeting with H.D. Nomberg, *Far grois un klein*, 1922.

### 3.3. Travel Writers as the Emissaries of Yiddishland

The visits of Eastern European authors were especially cherished by Argentine Yiddishist circles. In the 1914/1925 and 1922 years, when Hirschbein and Nomberg visited Argentina, respectively, it was the first-generation Jews who defined the character of Jewish life in Argentina. Among them was a group of cultural leaders, who desired to mobilize the broader population for the Yiddishist cause. Importantly, the visits of both travelers coincided with the main wave of post-World War I Jewish migration from Poland that brought a renewed *yidishization*. Most of those who arrived after the war were already versed in Yiddish literature and experienced the rise of the Yiddish press and Jewish political movements. Yidishism, a cultural ideology that stressed the importance of the Yiddish language for the Jewish people, as well as a redefined secular *yidishkayt*, served as basis for discussing the Jewish peoplehood and its situation in a changing world. Prewar immigrants largely did not share these experiences. Yet also among them was a sizeable group of secular progressive Jews, who were aware of the new tendencies developing in Europe. Those Jews who personally experienced the beginnings of a Jewish social evolution in Poland were most interested in manifesting their connection to the modernizing change reshaping Eastern European Jewishness (and often left-wing political positions). The visits of writers who shared a similar worldview were an opportunity to manifest their beliefs and ethnic belonging. This was especially true for the recent Jewish-Polish arrivals. As the Yiddishist Pinie Katz

noted, almost every Yiddish author who visited Argentina was also invited to the Poylish Farband, an organization that united immigrants from Poland.<sup>179</sup>

In order to support his like-minded Argentine proponents of Yidishism, Peretz Hirschbein visited a number of secularist Yiddish cultural establishments. His support was especially important in the 1920s when new left-wing Jewish school networks were formed in Argentina, modeled on Poland's TSYSHO schools. Support from a prominent Yiddish writer justified the efforts of the local Yiddishist and presented their cause as a part of a global project. During his second visit in Argentina, Peretz Hirschbein visited the Yiddish-language Workers' School Ber Borochoy, where he was festively greeted by the students. As a part of the preparation for his visit, the teachers familiarized the students with the writer's persona and creativity. Children drew pictures for Hirschbein and wrote poems that featured, among others, his time in Vilna. One of the Borochoy children wrote in their "kompozitsyes" (essays) that the visit of Hirschbein and his wife was a great holiday for the entire school. Another student recalled that the writer was interested if children truly understood the socio-political stand of the school they attended.<sup>180</sup> It showed the crucial importance of Jewish secular schooling for Hirschbein. His visits in these establishments were a clear sign of his ideological preferences. Despite the warm welcome that he and his wife received in Jewish schools, Hirschbein was still worried about the condition and future of Jewish education in Argentina. More and more children attended the public schools that according to Hirschbein served as tools of "de-judaization."

The involvement of Peretz Hirschbein with the progressive schools in Argentina was closely related to his worldview and the situation in Poland. A visit in the Borochoy school, known for its left-leaning position, was not surprising. Hirschbein had repeatedly underlined the importance of secular Yiddish schooling and was its fervent defender both in Poland and in Argentina. He was a supporter of a secular Jewish national awareness and Jewish culture in the Yiddish language in the entire Yiddishland. The income from his 1927 lectures in Warsaw and Vilna were donated to TSYSHO schools.<sup>181</sup> His devotion to Yiddishism was also manifested in his support for the activities of the Jewish Scientific Institute in Vilna, which not only carried out research on the Yiddish language, but coordinated the entire Yiddishist

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<sup>179</sup> Pinie Katz, "Der sotsyaler beshtand fun di poylishe yidn in Argentine," *Almanakh 1928. Aroysgegeben fun poylish yidishn farband in argentine*, ed. Moises David Guiser (Buenos Aires: Poylish Yidisher Farband in Argentine, 1928), 57.

<sup>180</sup> Children's drawing and compositions – from the Worker's School "Ber Borochoy" in Buenos Aires, 1925; YIVO, Peretz Hirschbein Papers, folder 307.

<sup>181</sup> "Di forlezungn fun peretz hirschbein in poynl," *Moment*, 15.12.1927, 5.

enterprise. In 1928 Hirschbein travelled specially to Vilna in order to participate in the third anniversary of the YIVO Institute and offered a public lecture in a local Palace Theater.<sup>182</sup>



Illustration no. 27. Peretz Hirschbein (fifth from the right, first row sitting) at the YIVO Conference in Vilna, 1928. YIVO New York, Territorial Photographic Collection Poland, RG 120, Record ID 307781.

## 4. A Laboratory of Global *Yidishkayt* and Jewish *Argentinidad*

### 4.1. The Target Audiences and Agendas of Yiddish Argentine Travelogues

The Argentine expeditions of Peretz Hirschbein and Hersh Dovid Nomberg were not purely ethnographic. Both writers were key public intellectuals of the era, aware of the challenges that Jews faced and the changes that migration, modernity and assimilation brought to Jewish life. Nomberg was a folkist and an advocate of Jewish diaspora nationalism in Eastern Europe, but later in life supported Jewish emigration from Poland. Both intellectuals were aware of the growing poverty and anti-Semitism in their homeland. Like many ordinary Jews, they debated whether migration was the answer to the challenges of Jewish life. Both Nomberg and Hirschbein supported secular Yiddishist educational initiatives that were supposed to fit with the changing reality. Even as they welcomed emigration as a possible solution to the problems of Eastern Europe, they wanted to also see migration as a chance to build a modern and Yiddish life in the new diasporas. Their travelogues examined the factors influencing the development of a Jewish life in Argentina

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<sup>182</sup> “Dray yor yidisher visenshaftlekher insitut,” in *Yedies fun yidishn visenshaftlekhen institut*, no. 26, 14.9.1928. Published in *Literarishe Bleter*, no. 37, 14.9.1928, 728.

and the chance of seeing Argentina not only as a refuge, but a laboratory for building a modern diasporic Jewish peoplehood.

Consequently, their texts constructed Argentina as a Jewish space and inquired about the extent to which Argentina can be or was a chance for a stable *yidishkayt*-run diaspora. Nomberg's and Hirschbein's narratives were written in Yiddish. Most of the problems they discussed were Jewish problems and most of the described individuals were Jews. Yet the travelers drew a complex picture of immigrant Jewish life in Argentina, which was largely influenced by the local setting. Their books were an account of the beginning of the *drawing of the hyphen*, or of becoming Jewish-Argentines. Importantly, Nomberg and Hirschbein demanded from the immigrant Jews to acculturate, to argentinize, to give their Jewishness a specifically Argentine flavor. They mocked those who failed to try to become Argentine and held back to nostalgias and memories. As Yiddishists, they praised the development of the Argentine-Yiddish press, theaters and other cultural establishments. Hirschbein's and Nomberg's travelogues combined praising both the Jewish and the Argentine, signaling that the migrants could combine both.

Yet, aware that most readers would read their books for the sheer thrill of the travel reports, the travel writers fulfilled their expectations by emphasizing the exotic side of Argentina. The country was presented as foreign, dangerous and significantly different from Eastern Europe. Argentina was often portrayed as the opposite of Poland and other Eastern European lands. By defining Eastern Europe as “normal” and “familiar,” and Argentina as “strange” and “dangerous,” their Eurocentric approach revealed their target audience. The reading public consisted of both Polish Jews living in Poland, who might have considered relocating to Argentina, but also readers interested in texts about remote and exotic lands. Consequently, Nomberg's *Argentinishe rayze* was published only in Poland (not in Argentina or the USA): First, as travel articles in Warsaw's *Der Moment* and later in book form (in 1924). *Der Moment*, advertising travel articles by Peretz Hirschbein, wrote that the writer was not a party member, but a *folks-mensch* and poet, who portrayed the countries in a way that was understandable and useful to Jewish readers in Poland who were considering emigration.<sup>183</sup>

*Fun vayte lender* and *Argentinishe rayze* were also written for immigrant Jews living in Argentina. Presenting both the Jewishness and “strangeness” of Argentina, the authors answered the needs of Polish Jewish immigrants in Argentina, who faced the challenges of everyday life in a new country, searching for a recognition of their efforts and an explanation for their initial misfortunes. Nomberg and Hirschbein praised their accomplishments and

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<sup>183</sup> “Peretz hirschbein dertselt in moment vos er hot gezen un ibergelebt in ertz israel,” *Moment*, 9.8.1927, 1.

underlined the important role that the Argentine diaspora played for the broader Yiddishland and Jewish Poland. For immigrants the book served as a *sui generis* mirror that permitted them to critically reflect and reconsider their everyday reality. The Argentine Jewish press often praised Nomberg and Hirschbein as the first important Jewish figures to offer genuine and rather accurate (in their opinion) accounts of the situation of Eastern European immigrants in Argentina. In their eyes, the interest that both writers took in Argentine Jewish life at least partially “normalized” this diaspora and overshadowed earlier popular accounts that Argentine Jews deemed exaggerated and superficial.<sup>184</sup> Consequently, their books were interesting for readers both in the Jewish heartland of Eastern Europe and in the new diasporas of the Americas.

There was a number of key issues that both travelers deemed interesting, attractive or relevant to readers. First, during his first voyage to Argentina in 1914 Peretz Hirschbein carefully focused on the situation in the farming colonies established by the Jewish Colonization Association in the 1890s.<sup>185</sup> The chapters devoted to life in Moises Ville (province of Santa Fe), Villa Clara (province of Entre Rios) and to the problems of their residents occupy more than a half of his book. Further, Nomberg took an active interest in Jewish agriculture, seeing it as a new and fascinating form of Jewish settlement. Second, both writers devoted some attention to female trafficking and prostitution. Aware of the interest that Eastern European Jews took in this infamous aspect of Argentine Jewish life, both Nomberg and Hirschbein wished to personally investigate the problem. Third, the travel texts of both Jewish-Polish authors revealed their exoticizing gaze on Argentine nature and society. Writing about non-Jewish Argentina, they drew a picture of an exotic and strange country, a clear antithesis of the familiar Eastern European landscape. Finally, both travelers looked at immigrants' lives and their relationship to the new and old homeland. Peeking into their daily lives, they observed how identity and belonging evolved and how a new Jewish-Argentine self-understanding was formed. At the same time, they observed the overlap and tensions between their project of fostering Yiddishism in the new diasporas and formation of Argentine national identity and belonging.

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<sup>184</sup> In the early twentieth century, the Eastern European Jewry of Argentina was commonly associated with female trafficking and prostitution. Although these perceptions were rooted in the real problems of the local Jewish community, their scale and impact were probably exaggerated in Poland. The intersection of discussions of prostitution and the Jewish reputation was covered by Nomberg in *Argentinische rayze* (chapter entitled “Di tmeim”).

<sup>185</sup> Haim Avni, *Argentina y las migraciones judías. De Inquisición hasta el Holocausto y después* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Mila, 2005), 104-116.

## 4.2. Telling a True Story: The Strategies of an Ethnographic Narrative

In discussing travel writing, scholars face the problematic issue of the authenticity and veracity of these accounts. Both authors used literary techniques that were supposed to increase the “realness” of the depictions that they transmitted. In order to raise the level of authenticity of their narratives, Hirschbein and Nomberg included the personal voices of Jewish migrants. As autoethnographers, the travelers conducted interviews that, paraphrased later, served as a canvas for their travel texts. In discussing the early years of the colony Moises Ville, Peretz Hirschbein quoted at length one of the first settlers. On other occasion, he incorporated the personal story of an immigrant disillusioned with his life in Argentina. Nomberg broadly retold the narrative of one of the madams he met on the ship.<sup>186</sup> Hirschbein wrote that he was aware that his Argentine hosts wanted to show him the better side of their lives. Still, he decided to leave the bubble prepared for him by the welcome committees. He wrote: “I know how poorly you live in Argentina. I know how much you get for your jobs. I know how all your hard work allows you to rent the smallest flats with no windows. You did not take me to your houses. But I looked into your houses when you did not notice. Together with a rest of the Argentines, you drink from a cup of poverty and need.”<sup>187</sup>

Both travelers had a desire to experience the travel of an average immigrant. Their descriptions of ship travel were an attempt to re-enact a typical immigrant journey. It included departing on a vessel from a European port, spontaneous interactions with various ethnic groups traveling together and contacts with often unpleasant or disrespectful ship staff. Nevertheless, the travel conditions experienced by Hirschbein and Nomberg differed significantly from the journeys of third-class passengers, who spent around three weeks in dark and poorly ventilated *tsvishendek*, or steerage. However, in order to give at least a partially reliable account of the situation of poorer Jews, both writers descended from their comfortable cabins to the overcrowded third-class area. The passengers who traveled in the *tsvishendek* could hardly recognize a fellow Jew in Hirschbein and were confused by him. Yet, as a quasi-ethnographer, the traveler approached the Jewish family, talked with them in Yiddish, analyzed their fears and hopes. He conversed with the passengers, tried to understand what they knew about Argentina, how they perceived their emigration from Eastern Europe.<sup>188</sup> Nomberg also broke the rules of the ship by conversing with a third-class

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<sup>186</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinishe rayze*, 55-59.

<sup>187</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, “Doyrem (briv fun veg),” 2.

<sup>188</sup> Hirschbein, *Fun vayte lender*, 15.

Jewish worker, despite the dirty looks shot at him from the staff, which kept the social classes separated on the ship.<sup>189</sup>

The travelers walked on a thin line between an “insider” and “outsider” perspective. Nomberg often presented himself as part of the local Jewry. He frequently used the pronoun “we” in order to describe the situation of the Jewish colonists in Montefiore (province of Santa Fe). For example, a Spanish teacher working in this colony became “our teacher” in his narrative.<sup>190</sup> It appears that the few weeks he spent among the settlers in Montefiore sensitized him to their opinions, complaints and demands. Nomberg also took sides in local Argentine conflicts. He supported the Jewish actors in their dispute with the theater managers and set up an organization tasked with protecting the rights of the colonists.<sup>191</sup> Although his position of a guest was clear both to him and his hosts, Nomberg decided to pose as a local quasi-Argentine in the story told to the readers. Further, alluding to the situation of Jewish colonists, Hirschbein presented himself as an expert on the subject, as a person who, thanks to his Eastern European background, understood the psychology of Jewish immigrants and the problems of ordinary people. His interest and expertise in Jewish colonization supposedly eliminated the distinction between the man of letters and the land laborer who made a living on the field by the sweat of his brow.<sup>192</sup> The writer had firm views on Jewish agricultural settlements and their demographic and economic problems. He often used the pronouns “we” and “our” to embed himself in local life. Jewish-Argentine problems were understood as “ours,” pertaining to the Yiddishland and by extension to Hirschbein.

Like Western explorers, Eastern European Jewish travelers tasted local foods and aspired to follow some of the regional traditions. Participation in unusual practices and ceremonies emphasized their direct contact with foreign peoples and their immersion in the local context. In an attempt to make his story more authentic and entertaining, Nomberg joined the colonists for a ceremony of drinking *mate*, the national drink of Argentina. He not only enjoyed it, but even claimed that it “made him feel better.”<sup>193</sup> Here, Nomberg showed his readiness to explore the unfamiliar customs and supported the changes that the immigrant Jews were undergoing. They began to drink *mate* like the locals and this cultural practice symbolized their becoming Jewish-Argentines.

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<sup>189</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinishe rayze*, 18-19.

<sup>190</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinishe rayze*, 76

<sup>191</sup> A. Reziner, “Aynike momentn mit nombergn in buenos aires,” *Di Presse*, 21.11.1928, 7; “Tsu nombergs aktuatsye in argentine far der fertaydigung fun der yidishe kolonizatsye,” *Di Presse*, 21.11.1928, 7.

<sup>192</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, “Unzere kolonisten in argentine,” unpublished text, 1925, Peretz Hirschbein Papers, folder 123, YIVO Archive in New York, 2-3.

<sup>193</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinishe rayze*, 74.

The Argentine narrative presented by the travel writers, or by a broader range of temporary Jewish visitors in Argentina, were not always met with satisfaction by their hosts. In 1926, the journalist Gershon Henekh Zakhak (Zajak, Zajac) complained that the travelers falsely believed in being able to understand the complexities of life in Argentina in a matter of a few days. He criticized some writers, who had “smeared the face of Argentine Jewry, spread false misconceptions and created false opinions about Argentina throughout the world.” He criticized the focus of the travel writers on immigrant Jews, “who don't have much in common with Argentina” and appear not to have “grown together” with Argentine society. Zakhak argued that the Argentiness of the newcomers was nothing short of superficial.<sup>194</sup> The journalist condemned the exoticizing narratives that the travelers and the Eastern European press transmitted abroad:

[...] Jews who immigrated here in recent years live with their soul in Poland. Many of these young people, still in the Old Home, looked upon us [Argentina's Jews] as wild Indians with feathers on the head, who walk around Buenos Aires like that [...] This is truly how they think about us in civilized Europe.<sup>195</sup>

Zakhak's tirade was directed not only against the travelers who, in his view, transmitted distorted visions of Argentina, but the recent arrivals from Poland. He argued that immigrants, because of the narratives circulating in Poland, arrived in Argentina with strong preconceptions and did not engage enough with the local life as a consequence. Zakhak described the cultural life of the immigrant population as a “vinkele kultur,” a corner culture and a parody of social and cultural life in Eastern Europe. He saw the new immigrants as distanced from those who grew up in Argentina, the second-generation immigrants. Zakhak noticed the discursive interconnectedness between Jewish Poland and Argentina. He was convinced that the Eastern European narrative of Argentina had a negative effect in Latin America and resonated on local socio-cultural life.

The Jews in Argentina, both those who perceived Buenos Aires as a part of the global Yiddishland and those who saw themselves as patriotic Jewish-Argentines, were very sensitive concerning European and North American opinions of Argentina. In fact, this preoccupation marked their rootedness in Argentina. An editorial written in *Mundo Israelita* in 1924 read that the Yiddish dailies were alarmed by any negative opinion about Argentina to appear in the USA or Poland.<sup>196</sup> But the Spanish journal itself also complained about the misinformed European visitors, who were often surprised to find that Buenos Aires did not have a cultural level “lower” than Warsaw or Vilna. *Mundo Israelita* wrote about the lack of

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<sup>194</sup> Henekh Zakhak, “Ayngvanderte un argentinier yidn,” *Ydische Zaitung*, 8.10.1926, 8.

<sup>195</sup> Ibidem

<sup>196</sup> “Como nos conocen,” *Mundo Israelita*, 13.12.1924, no. 80, 1.



cultural reciprocity between Jewish Poland and Jewish Argentina. Whereas in Argentina there were circles that worked to promote Eastern European Yiddish culture, there was hardly anyone who would talk in Poland about Jewish-Argentine writer Gerchunoff and local cultural production. *Mundo Israelita* advised not to focus on the yellow press reports, but to support attentive and objective visitors, truly interested in Argentine Jewish life. As examples of such professional reports, the journal mentioned those of Nomberg, Anohi, Latzki-Bartoldi and Yuris. The Argentine narrative of Nomberg was seen as supportive of “Jewish rootedness in Argentina, our attachment to the land and our intellectual progress.” The weekly believed that his depictions of Argentina would produce “enlightenment work” in Poland and would balance the “legends originating in ignorance and malevolence.” The travelogue of Nomberg was seen as a tool for “revindicating” the good name of Argentina in Europe and a counterpoint for those who wanted to see the Argentine settlement as a failure. *Mundo Israelita* appreciated the value of Nomberg's book at a time of increased migration to Argentina and saw it as a credible source of information for those “who would settle on these beaches forever.”<sup>197</sup>

### 4.3. Writing the Farm: Argentine Jewish Colonization and the Jewish Place in the Nation

The agricultural settlements in the Argentine provinces of Santa Fe and Entre Rios became one of the founding myths of the Argentine Jewish community.<sup>198</sup> Printed media and literature, such as *Los gauchos judíos* (La Plata, 1910), the canonical novel of Alberto Gerchunoff, reinforced and perpetuated the image of Eastern European Jewish immigrants who – by settling in the Argentine interior, drinking *mate* and horse-riding – were transformed into Jewish *gauchos*.<sup>199</sup> The process of mythologization was enforced by the descendants of the first Jewish farmers, who narrated the powerful meaning of colonies for Jewish rootedness in Argentina in their memoirs. Martin Grinstein of Colonia de San Antonio wrote: “The Jews escaping the anti-Semitic countries in Eastern Europe [...] were received here with affection and a whole array of possibilities of development was opened for them [...]

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<sup>197</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>198</sup> For studies of Jewish colonization and its impact on Argentine-Jewish identities, see: Leonardo Senkman, “Identidades colectivas de los colonos judíos en el campo y en la ciudad enterrianos,” *Encuentro y alteridad: vida y cultura judía en América Latina* ed. Judit Bokser de Liwerant et. al. (Ciudad de Mexico, Jerusalem: Fondo de Cultura Económica, Universidad Autónoma de Mexico, Universidad Hebrea de Jerusalem, 1999), 717-725; Patricia Flier, “Volver a Colonia Clara. Historia y memoria de la colonización judía agraria en la Argentina, 1892-2950,” *Cuadernos Judaicos* 29 (2012): 37-66; Iván Cherjovsky, “La faz ideológica del conflicto colonos/JCA: el discurso del ideal agrario en las memorias de Colonia Mauricio,” in *Marginados y consagrados: nuevos estudios sobre la vida judía en la argentina*, ed. Emmanuel Kahan et al. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Lumière, 2011), 47-66.

<sup>199</sup> See José Libermann, *Los judíos en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Libra, 1966), 31-66.

They were appreciated. They settled here with love for the new Homeland. They were great patriots and never forgot the generous blessings [of Argentina].”<sup>200</sup> The literary representations that emphasized the farming successes of the Jewish settlers embedded the newcomers within earlier discussions about the future character of Argentina and the ethos shaping its national community. In the nineteenth century, Argentine identities were largely related to the cultivation of land.<sup>201</sup> During the first decades of the twentieth century, when the importance and impact of the federal capital in Buenos Aires was growing, Argentine ethnic and national identities began to adopt a new urban character.<sup>202</sup> However, as Argentina still struggled with the old discussions about the final shape of the state, the farming and colonization of the interior remained an important ethos. Jewish immigrants became both agents and subjects of this process.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, immigrants became increasingly important in Argentina’s political and social dynamics. Immigration not only reinforced discussions about Argentine national identity, but embraced the new European arrivals as actors and subjects of these debates.<sup>203</sup> The Jewish settlements in the provinces of Santa Fe and Entre Rios became the cornerstone of Jewish-Argentine mythology. The narrative of Jewish immigration sought to cast the Jews as a continuation of traditional Argentine land laborers, which fit well with the conservative/nationalist ethos. Raising cattle, cultivating the land and drinking *mate*, the immigrants seemed to realize the nativists’ dreams about the inclusion of immigrants within the Argentine-Creole social archetype. At the turn of the century, the Jewish agricultural settlement in Argentina became the mythological backbone for Jewish-Argentine identities and a channel that allowed the Jews to claim their belonging to Argentina. Even though the *porteño* Jews outnumbered the colonists, already in the second decade of the twentieth century the colonies remained an archetype of Jewish-Argentineness.

During the 1890s, Jewish immigrants established the first farming colonies administrated by the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA). The West European Jewish elite that managed the JCA believed that at least a part of Eastern European Jews should be retrained as land laborers. “Jewish productivization” became a catchy slogan at the end of the

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<sup>200</sup> Martin Grinstein, *Recuerdos de Entre Rios. Colonia San Antonio y Pueblo Cazés* (Buenos Aires: Acervo Cultural Editores, 1998), 12. See also José Libermann, *Tierra soñada. Episodios de la colonización agraria judía en la Argentina 1889-1959* (Buenos Aires: Luis Lasarre y Cia. SA Editores, 1959).

<sup>201</sup> Roy Hora, *The Landowners of the Argentine Pampas: A Social and Political History, 1860-1945*, (Gloucestershire: Clarendon Press, 2001).

<sup>202</sup> See Richard J. Walter, *Politics and Urban Growth in Buenos Aires, 1910-1942* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>203</sup> See Klaus Wolfgang Kesselheim, *Die Herstellung von Gruppen im Gespräch - analysiert am Beispiel des argentinischen Einwanderungsdiskurses* (Bern: Lang, 2009); Lilia Ana Bertoni, *Patriotas, cosmopolitas y nacionalistas. La construcción de la nacionalidad argentina a fines del siglo XIX* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001).

nineteenth century and projects for a “Jewish return” to farming were increasingly popular. Farming, not only in Argentina, but also in Southern Russia, the United States or Palestine, was believed to possess the power to reshape the “pathological” Jewish employment structure in Eastern Europe, dominated by “unproductive” petty trade. Emigration to agricultural colonies was also supposed to develop into a permanent solution for Russian Jews, who faced an everyday anti-Semitism and repeated waves of pogroms.<sup>204</sup>

The benevolent ideas of the charity-oriented hardly coincided with the reality in Eastern Europe. A massive, organized Jewish agricultural immigration to Argentina never happened. Yet, the concept of Argentina becoming as a safe haven for Jewish land labor circulated wildly around early twentieth century Poland. Zygmunt Turkow, a Polish-Jewish actor who traveled to Argentina three times between the world wars, recalled that when he was a child (he was born in 1896), immigration to Argentina was a frequent subject of discussion between his father and uncles.<sup>205</sup> According to Turkow, his family members knew little about Argentina and the local situation and could hardly see a difference between colonization projects in Latin America and Palestine. The debates on Jewish colonization in Argentina also reached Hersh Dovid Nomberg and Peretz Hirschbein, who decided to study the subject during their travels.

#### **4.3.1. The New Jews: Land Labor, the Struggle with Nature and Becoming Jewish-Argentines**

The way that the beginning of Jewish colonization was depicted in *Fun vayte lender* and *Argentinishe rayze* was similar to the imaginaries of the Zionist project of building a new muscled Jewry working on the lands. Immigration to Argentina was born from the same narrative of altering the Jewish professional structure and making Jews “productive.” Nomberg and Hirschbein portrayed the future colonists as brave men, who arrived to a virgin land and subdued local nature, turning it into a fruitful space serving man and his needs. Describing the establishment of the colony of Moises Ville, Hirschbein presented Pinchas Glazberg, Yosef Ludmer and Leyzer Koyfman (originating from Podolia, then the Russian Empire) as the founding fathers of the Argentine *yishev*. Despite being ordinary village Jews,

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<sup>204</sup> For information about colonization in Southern Russia, see: Jonathan L. Dekel-Chen, *Farming the Red Land: Jewish Agricultural Colonization and Local Soviet Power, 1924-1941* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008). For US Jewish colonization, see: Bernard Marinbach, *Galveston: Ellis Island of the West* (Albany, NY: Suny Press, 2008).

<sup>205</sup> Zygmunt Turkow, *Di ibergerisene tkufe. Fragmentn fun mayn lebn* (Buenos Aires: Tsentral farband fun poylishe yidn in argentine, 1961), 73-75.

they not only managed to make their way to Argentina, but also personally co-organized the emigration of the first groups of settlers.<sup>206</sup>

The travelers stressed the exceptionally hard conditions that awaited the Jewish immigrants, the conflicts and misunderstandings with the presumably unprofessional staff of the Jewish Colonization Association or a lack of experience with land labor. Describing the development of Moises Ville, Peretz Hirschbein mentioned numerous hardships and obstacles that the colonists had to endure for the years: the destruction of crops by locusts and floods, but also JCA attempts to close down the colony and resettle its residents.<sup>207</sup> Against all odds, the Jewish colonists continued their struggle with Argentine nature and poverty.<sup>208</sup> Hirschbein pictured the early years of Moises Ville as a heroic battle for dignity and independence. In his view, the suffering and effort only strengthened the colonists and helped them to form a close and intimate bond with the land they worked. The same technique was used by Nomberg when describing Colonia Montefiore. The colony was neglected, immigrant Jews disappointed and filled with apathy.<sup>209</sup> Unlike Hirschbein, Nomberg did not think Montefiore stood a chance: in his view, the colony was slowly dissolving and its residents were searching for ways to leave.

Pointing out the hardships that the colonists needed to go through only emphasized their subsequent success. Despite numerous problems and initial failures, both Nomberg and Hirschbein seemed to regard the Jewish colonies as an excellent project that could at least partially solve the problems of Eastern European Jewry. They clearly expressed their support for this initiative. Moises Ville was for both Nomberg and Hirschbein the best sign of successful Jewish colonization. The former described it as the “crown” of the Jewish colonies, and the latter saw it as a “jewel.”<sup>210</sup> For Hirschbein the existence of Moises Ville was a “miracle,” whereas Nomberg portrayed it as an idyllic land of green fields and strong, happy people working and resting under the beautiful blue sky.<sup>211</sup>

The Jewish colonies in Argentina gave the visiting authors a sense of pride. Unsurprisingly, their depictions of Jewish farming settlements emphasized the exceptional nature of the project. Peretz Hirschbein was thrilled to see that despite the problems in gaining the mere support of the Jewish Colonization Organization and the lack of agricultural

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<sup>206</sup> Hirschbein, *Fun vayte lender*, 61-66.

<sup>207</sup> Hirschbein, *Fun vayte lender*, 71-76.

<sup>208</sup> For a study of the conflict between JCA and the colonists, see Cherjovsky, “La faz ideológica del conflicto colonos/JCA.”

<sup>209</sup> Nomberg, *Argentinishe rayze*, 74.

<sup>210</sup> Hirschbein, *Fun vayte lender*, 71; Nomberg, *Argentinishe rayze*, 80.

<sup>211</sup> Nomberg, *Argentinishe rayze*, 81.

experience, his fellow Eastern European Jews were able to create and maintain a thriving community that he described as the best thing ever built by the “Jewish hand” in Argentina.

The heroic struggle of the Jewish colonists endowed them with a symbolic right to claim a sense of belonging to Argentina. The clash of Jewish newcomers with the unwelcoming nature proved their determination and heroism. Crossing the Atlantic they did not arrive to a “goldene medine,” where life was pleasant and easy, but rather to a demanding environment characterized by a struggle for survival against numerous obstacles. The clash with Argentine nature appeared here as a rite of passage and a right of entry for belonging in the new country. The travelers depicted the Argentine climate as capricious, with unusually strong winds and surely too heavy rains. The picture of the country that emerges from their travel texts is an unbearable one. Nevertheless, Jews continued to settle there and managed to establish the foundations of Jewish life.

For Hirschbein, struggling with an unwelcoming climate was part of the initiation into the life of Argentina. In order to emphasize it, the author incorporated into his text a story of one of the first Jews, who settled in the sparsely populated interior.<sup>212</sup> The settler described a number of obstacles faced by the colonists since their arrival in Argentina: administrative problems with the authorities, a lack of knowledge about the local conditions of life and poverty. But it was wild and mighty nature that was his toughest enemy. Only by subduing nature would Jewish newcomers be able to take advantage of the rich Argentine soil. The wild grass had to be cut with an axe to make passage for the colonists; wild bovines had to be domesticated. In the eyes of the writer, the first settlers were like the early modern *conquistadores*, who came to the wilderness of Latin America and struggled with the fearsome powers of nature. The depopulated Argentine interior became a space of exploration that justified the civilizing mission of the Jewish settlers.

The Argentine *pampa* was rumored to have been particularly unwelcoming. Nomberg pictured it as a dangerous and deserted space. The *pampa* was portrayed as an infertile land covered with a thin layer of soil, making it virtually unsuitable for farming. The trees of the *pampa* were short and sick. The land always thirsted for rain, was full of snakes and was regularly flooded by tropical rainfalls. The climate portrayed by Nomberg was far from mild: it was aggressive, there were no rains but heavy storms with thunder and lightning. It was not charming, it did not enchant the traveler, who could even become quite bored with the monotonous view from the train window.<sup>213</sup> In addition, the jungle along the Brazilian coast looked to the traveler as a living creature – moving, shining with different colors, almost “like

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<sup>212</sup> Hirschbein, *Fun vayte lender*, 62-71.

<sup>213</sup> Nomberg, *Argentinishe rayze*, 66-71.

a peacock.”<sup>214</sup> The strong *pampa* wind, known as the *pampero*, was angry and “no one should try to fight with it.”<sup>215</sup>

Traveling through the *pampa* in 1922, Nomberg portrayed a country hit by an economic crisis. He described neglected cows pasturing on the *pampa* without any interest of their owners. As the locals told him, “in current times a cow is not worth anything.” Europe was no longer interested in importing Argentine meat. Neglected animals were dying in the fields, while carnivorous birds were feasting on their bodies.<sup>216</sup> Nomberg noticed numerous shining white skeletons of fallen cows. In this section the *pampa* and thus Argentina was portrayed by the traveler as a land of death and misery. Underlining the difficult situation of Argentine farmers, Nomberg seemed to convey a message that although Argentina might have potential for farming, the current situation was not inviting at all. At the same time, he was convinced that while Argentina might be wild and perilous, but it still could develop into a safe harbor for Eastern European Jews. As the dry sands of the *pampa* through the hard work of Jewish settlers might turn into a fertile land, also Argentina might become a firm new branch of the Jewish diaspora.

Initially the nature was stronger than humans. The newcomers got lost in the *pampa*, the farm animals run away and pouring rains made any work impossible. The hardly prepared settlers were losing the “battle” against Argentine nature: they had no shelter and their children were dying out of hunger. Despite all the hardships and obstacles, the settlers continued to struggle with the wild nature of Argentine interior. They started to build houses, plant first crops and to burn out the overgrown grass. The civilization personified by the Jewish colonists begun to step by step win over mighty and perilous Argentine nature. Hirschbein was proud of settlers’ accomplishments. He appreciated their devotion and strong believe that they could create a better future in Argentina. The author perceived their sacrifice as a warranty that Jewish-Argentine diaspora would become strong and stable. He wrote that their suffering helped to create “a bond between the weak Jews and young, wild Argentine nature.”<sup>217</sup> Thus, struggling with Argentine nature, the Jewish colonists passed an entry exam to Argentine society and laid the foundations for a future Jewish-Argentine life.

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<sup>214</sup> Nomberg, *Argentinische rayze*, 35.

<sup>215</sup> Nomberg, *Argentinische rayze*, 73.

<sup>216</sup> See Simon G. Hanson, *Argentine Meat and the British Market: Chapters in the History of the Argentine Meat Industry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), Richard Perren, *Taste, Trade and Technology: The Development of International Meat Industry since 1840* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

<sup>217</sup> Hirschbein, *Fun vayte lender*, 70.

### 4.3.2. Yankele and Sorele on a Horseback: Sowing the Seeds of Jewish-Argentina

The travelogues of Nomberg and Hirschbein give account of the development of Jewish-Argentine identities. The travelers derided the homesickness and nostalgia of the Jewish immigrants and understood and supported selected aspects of argentinization. Whereas the immigrant generation was often pictured as a part of the Eastern European diaspora, their Argentina-born children were portrayed as a sign of ongoing argentinization and Jewish rootedness in Argentina. Nomberg welcomed the fact that the children of the colonists adapted to the life in the Argentine *pampa*. As he wrote, little Yankele and Sorele galloping on horseback was the most beautiful sight in Argentina.<sup>218</sup> Not less than their health and bravery, Nomberg cherished the fact that the mouths of Jewish children “were full of Yiddish words.” Although their appearance and habits – especially the darker complexion and the sight of riding bareback, unusual for Eastern Europe – might have turned them into foreign figures, by speaking Yiddish they managed to preserve the main marker of Ashkenazi Jewishness. The children that Nomberg marveled at were an example of the embryonic Jewish-Argentineness: perfectly Argentine at first sight, but rooted in *yidishkayt*. Similar observations were made by Hirschbein in 1925: “In this Jewish life, in Argentine life [...] Jewish children came to me, those born in Argentina, Argentinely slim and with Argentine pride in their eyes, and they spoke with me in Yiddish.”<sup>219</sup> Both travelers understood the Yiddish language as a central point in the modern Jewish culture they proposed. Speaking Yiddish, Argentine-born children were a promise that Nomberg’s and Hirschbein’s ethno-cultural project could be successful in Argentina, that Jewish migration was not a hindrance, but a chance for the development of Yiddish-centered identities. This situation was not permanent. In the late 1930s, the traveler Marek Turkow had already different observations concerning the linguistic changes in Argentina. He criticized the Argentina-born generation of degrading “the sounds of juicy Lithuanian Yiddish by blending in Spanish words or even entire phrases.”<sup>220</sup> Also, Hirschbein was surprised that a teenage shop-seller understood Yiddish, but could not formulate her thoughts in the same language. To all his questions in Yiddish she answered in Spanish: “Si, señor.”<sup>221</sup>

The ongoing cultural argentinization was also visible among those who arrived to Argentina as adults. This is traceable in a fragment where Nomberg described his arrival to Colonia Montefiore. The writer explained to his Eastern European readers that *mate* was the

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<sup>218</sup> Nomberg, *Argentinische rayze*, 70-71.

<sup>219</sup> Hirschbein, “Doyrem (briv fun veg),” 4.

<sup>220</sup> Lewinsky, “Eastern Europe in Argentina,” 262.

<sup>221</sup> Hirschbein, *Fun vayte lender*, 43.

national drink of Argentina and that Jewish immigrants also drank it while sitting in a circle, passing the *mate* mug from hand to hand.<sup>222</sup> Although drinking *mate* might have struck Nomberg as unhygienic and as possessing a quasi-narcotic influence, in his narrative drinking this liquid was a sign of a desired argentinization that Polish and Russian Jews went through in Argentina. For Nomberg, the adaptation to local conditions and the transfer of local customs was not condemned, but was seen as rather natural. During his second visit to Argentina in 1925, Hirschbein wrote that the country “already had too many idealist Jewish colonists” and advised the Jews to take example from other ethnic communities, use their methods of ethnic empowerment and adopt Argentine lifestyles.<sup>223</sup>

Jewish colonies were arenas of interaction between the Jews and the Creole population and thus both Jewish and Argentine spaces. Jewish immigrants were taught by the *criollos* how to speak Spanish and how to survive in the *pampa*. The Jewish presence in the colonies also influenced the native population. The *criollo* Spanish teacher whom Nomberg met in Colonia Montefiore was portrayed as starkly non-Jewish, unusually tall and masculine. He was initially full of prejudice against the Jews, but came to realize that in fact the Jews “stood on a higher social level” than his countrymen from the interior. Only among the immigrant Jews could he find partners for intellectual socialist discussions. These were the Jews who introduced him to anarchist theories. While visiting the Moises Ville, Nomberg was surprised to see a traveling gentile agent and a Jewish colonist, who answered him coldly and impolitely. In Argentina, the typical in Eastern Europe role of Jewish salesman and Christian farmer was turned around.<sup>224</sup> The Jewish colony became here not only a space of argentinization for the immigrants, but an arena that allowed mutual exchange and influence.

Both travelers marked a clear border for argentinization: the process should not lead to abandoning *yidishkayt*, which they understood in a linguistic and ethno-cultural context. The travelers argued that knowledge of Spanish was essential in a Spanish-speaking country, but believed that Yiddish should remain the main language of communication of Argentine Jews. They happily welcomed the fact that the Buenos Aires community sported Yiddish papers, theaters and schools. They saw these institutions as strongholds of *yidishkayt* that could also transmit a sense of Jewish ethno-national belonging to the young, Argentina-born generation. This attitude towards language was especially apparent during Hirschbein's visit to a JCA-administered Jewish school in Moises Ville. The traveler was disappointed by the low level of Jewish curriculum in the local school. Hirschbein noticed that a poorly prepared teacher was not able to attract children's attention and to raise their interest in Jewish subjects. He was

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<sup>222</sup> Nomberg, *Argentinische rayze*, 72-77.

<sup>223</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, “Argentine (briv fun veg),” 6.

<sup>224</sup> Nomberg, *Argentinische rayze*, 87.



deeply dissatisfied with the fact that the professor was unable to transmit to the children “a sense of Jewish pride and belonging to a broader Jewish world.” The traveler confronted both the Jewish teacher, as well as the Moroccan-Jewish school director.<sup>225</sup> According to Hirschbein, the principal looked upon Eastern European Jewry and described the students originating from Russia in the following manner:

[...] the Jews of Russia are indeed wild and uneducated. There is no chance [of integration] for the fathers, but the children must be rescued. True, they need to know that they come from Abraham, that their forefathers were enslaved in Egypt, but now they must see the light.<sup>226</sup>

Hirschbein saw the Moroccan-Jewish director as an enemy of Jewish schooling and an obedient servant of the Argentine government that promoted the argentinization of immigrant children through national Spanish-language education.<sup>227</sup> Although Hirschbein understood the need to speak the local language, he was equally sure about the need for competent and enriching Yiddish schooling. He wanted to see the future generations of Argentine Jews as a part of the Yiddish-speaking world, aware of their ethno-national *yidishkayt*. The supplementary Jewish schooling offered in Moises Ville was for him counterproductive. During his next visit in Argentina (1925), Hirschbein was involved in advocating for a modern Yiddishist schooling, based on the model of TSYSHO schools in Poland. Then, in much less pro-acculturationist approach, Hirschbein saw the Argentine atmosphere as “sick and foreign,” hence dangerous for the existence of Yiddish culture.<sup>228</sup>

Both authors devoted a lot of space to the ethnic heterogeneity of Argentina. Although their native Poland was filled with national minorities, the Spanish, Italian and *criollo* population was something new and exotic for them. In the travelers' narratives, not only were the indigenous described as exotic “others,” but also South Europeans, Moroccan Jews or West European Jewish leaders of the Jewish Colonization Association. The linguistic and cultural differences between Eastern European Jews and members of ethnic groups unknown

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<sup>225</sup> For a study of the educational system in Jewish agricultural colonies, see Daniel Bargman, “Construcción de la Nación entre la asimilación de los inmigrantes y el particularismo. Las escuelas de las colonias agrícolas judías,” in *Patrimonio Cultural y Diversidad Creativa en el Sistema Educativo*, ed. Leticia Maronese (Buenos Aires: Gobierno de la Ciudad Buenos Aires, 2006), 19-36; Mónica Liliana Salomón, “Las escuelas judías de Entre Ríos (1908- 1912),” *Todo es Historia* 332 (March 1995): 31-39; Efraim Zadoff, “La educación general y judía en las colonias agrícolas judías en La Argentina y Eretz Israel a fines del siglo XIX,” *Coloquio* 19 (1988): 95-108.

<sup>226</sup> Hirschbein, *Fun vayte lender*, 96.

<sup>227</sup> Speaking ladino and trained in the French schools of Alliance Israélite Universelle, Moroccan Jews were often employed by the Argentine government as Jewish teachers. See Adriana M. Brodsky, *Sephardi, Jewish, Argentine: Community and National Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 17. See also Michael M. Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Jewish Communities of Morocco, 1862-1962* (Albany: University of New York Press, 1983)

<sup>228</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, “Doyrem (briv fun veg),” 1.

in Poland were used as the fabric of an exoticizing narrative. The real or imagined tensions between Jewish immigrants and other ethnic groups were also reproduced by the travel writers. They often repeated the opinions and stories they heard from the Argentine Jews hosting them. The brief period of their stay and the difficulties in communicating in Romance languages did not allow them to interact with the local Spanish or Italian-speaking population. For Hirschbein, this was a major problem. In an unpublished text, “*Ikh kum on keyn buenos aires,*” he described himself as “a man without a tongue,” who could not chat with anyone. On the main streets of the Argentine capital, he felt foreign and detached from the familiar surroundings.<sup>229</sup>

Describing the non-Jewish aspects of Argentina, Hirschbein and Nomberg familiarized readers with the local ethnic structure, pointing out that the ethnic groups surrounding the Jewish immigrants were different from the local Eastern European *goyim*. Nomberg was amazed at the ethnic diversity of Rio de Janeiro, where he stopped before arriving to Buenos Aires.<sup>230</sup> Hirschbein made several mentions of encounters with Italians. He did not interact with them, but solely described their appearance and behavior. Arriving in the colony of Lucienville, not knowing the topography of the locality, he decided to stop at a hotel named *Italia*. The Jewish writer and Italian hotel manager did not even have a way to conduct smalltalk. Curiously, but not entirely surprisingly, the Jewish presence in the province of Entre Rios seemed to have an influence on the younger generation of non-Jewish immigrants. Hirschbein’s communication with the hotel owner was facilitated through translation by a teenage Italian immigrant who, through intensive contact with the local Jews, was able to learn basic Yiddish.<sup>231</sup> This linguistic exchange was also confirmed by Maximo Yagupsky, who grew up in a Jewish colony in Entre Rios. A number of local *criollo* women learned to speak Bessarabian Yiddish from colonist neighbors.<sup>232</sup> Lea Literat-Golombek remembered that *criollos* imitated Jewish prayers, tasted Jewish foods or even said blessings in Hebrew before drinking wine. For Literat-Golombek the mutual cultural exchange was smooth and never forced.<sup>233</sup>

Both travelers recycled common stereotypes and painted Argentines and Spaniards as exotics. Analyzing the influence of Spanish immigrants on Argentine society, Peretz Hirschbein noted that Spaniards had a hot and impulsive character that was “even

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<sup>229</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, “*Ich kum on keyn buenos aires,*” unpublished memoirs. YIVO Archive New York, RG 833 Peretz Hirschbein Papers.

<sup>230</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinishe rayze*, 42.

<sup>231</sup> Hirschbein, *Fun vayte lender*, 132-134.

<sup>232</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, *Archivo de Palabra*, no. 68, Maximo Yagupsky.

<sup>233</sup> Lea Literat-Golombek, *Moises Ville crónica de un shtetl argentino* (Jerusalem: La Semana Publicaciones, 1982), 89-91.

strengthened by mixing with the indigenous blood.” He noted that most of the Spaniards were Catholic and had a “Latin” temperament accompanied, in his view, by “shades of the Middle Ages.”<sup>234</sup> For Hirschbein a Spaniard might have been as foreign as the indigenous people. Temperamental and outspoken, in his perception they differed significantly from the Poles, Germans and Russians he knew from Vilna or Warsaw. Nomberg made similar observations after seeing Spanish beggars, whom he regarded as talking in an angry tone and having evil eyes. The dancing of Spanish villagers was for him wild, yet full of true happiness.<sup>235</sup>

Presenting the Jewish-Argentine immigrant reality, both travel writers often compared Argentina with other diasporas. They made references not only to the Eastern European society and landscape, but also to other emigration lands. Due to the dominant exodus to the United States, Polish Jews had a relatively well-grounded picture of this country and North America emerged as the classic model of Jewish emigration. As a result, the Argentina that appeared as an emigration destination some thirty years later was often compared to the United States. Hirschbein wrote that Argentina’s laws were as liberal and democratic as in the USA.<sup>236</sup> Nomberg, although sympathetic towards those struggling to establish a well-developed Jewish life in Argentina, was aware that Jewish-Argentine life was far behind its North American counterpart. Life in Argentina was no match in terms of modernization, as was the case with narratives of early twentieth century North America.<sup>237</sup> Argentina did offer possibilities and had the potential as a safe haven for immigrants, but industry and modernization hardly appeared in Hirschbein’s and Nomberg’s texts. Although some markers of modernity were included (trains that took settlers to colonies, Buenos Aires trams or electric street lamps), but these aspects were not featured as the key issues of their narrative. Focusing rather on the agricultural colonies, Nomberg and Hirschbein underlined the premodern reality of Argentina and its underdevelopment when compared with the classic, big city immigrant life in the United States.

In discussing the situation in Buenos Aires, Nomberg was relatively pessimistic. Visiting Argentina in 1922, the travel writer did not have a chance to experience the future industrial boom that redefined the entire districts of Buenos Aires. Nomberg devoted a lot of attention to the poverty of immigrant workers and their precarious living conditions. He criticized Argentines for not being able to save and invest their money, presumably spending significant sums on lotteries or horse races. The traveler criticized the Jews for their increasing fondness for gambling. His accusations were directed at the emerging Jewish-

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<sup>234</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, “Argentine (briv fun veg),” 1-2.

<sup>235</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinishe rayze*, 23

<sup>236</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, “Argentine (briv fun veg),” 1.

<sup>237</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinishe rayze*, 7-67.

Argentine identity. By embracing horse races or *la lotería*, immigrant Jews claimed their belonging to the socio-cultural world of Argentina.<sup>238</sup> At the same time, it was hard for many immigrants to save any money when one lived from hand to mouth. Ten years earlier, when Hirschbein was walking on the streets of the Once area in Buenos Aires, he noticed lots of Jewish poverty. Children were dressed poorly and on their faces he saw “all the despair that puzzled their parents.”<sup>239</sup> The immigrant poverty of Buenos Aires in the early 1920s was confirmed years later in an interview with Lazaro Pinchuk. Pinchuk recalled that when he arrived to Argentina in 1923 he could barely earn a living. He was unable to send any money to his family back in Włodzimierz Wołyński (Volodymir-Volynskiy) in Poland. Working as a *cuentenik* (a peddler), he had enough money for “a puchero” (a stew), but needed to share a room with four other single men and did not have enough money to buy a theater ticket.<sup>240</sup> Pinchuk described his early years in Argentina as sad and full of suffering.

Nomberg noticed the *porteño* customs that Jews were exposed to and to a great extent followed. He noted that life in Buenos Aires was much more public than in Poland. Men spent much of their time outdoors, conversing either on the *plazas* or in the cafes. Working-class Argentine homes, so-called *conventillos* (multi-story houses with a shared courtyard in the middle), were crowded, dark and encouraged residents to spend as little time as possible inside. Consequently, as Nomberg lamented, family life deteriorated: women spent their days alone in claustrophobic homes, whereas men went gaming or enjoyed their time at the *plaza*. The writer described these situations as significantly different from the Polish reality, as foreign and pathological. “These are not our houses, where one is immersed in a homey atmosphere,” Nomberg wrote.<sup>241</sup> Eastern Europe appeared in his narrative as a world of traditional values and Argentina as its negation. For Hirschbein, not only were the living conditions in poor and crowded *conventillos* problematic, but also the “exaggerated luxury of the main streets.” Hirschbein considered the expansive and well-kept entrance halls and gilded doorbells not truly Argentine, but rather “imported and exaggerated” or “without a soul.”<sup>242</sup> The city looked to him as “a palace from which the royals left and only the servants remained.”<sup>243</sup> He saw Buenos Aires as nouveau riche and chaotic, attempting to follow the European example, yet resulting in childish mimicry.<sup>244</sup> Exploring Buenos Aires in 1914, he

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<sup>238</sup> For the socio-cultural meaning of gaming, horse races and lotteries in Buenos Aires, see Ana Cecchi, *La timba como rito de pasaje. La narrativa del juego en la construcción de la modernidad porteña* (Buenos Aires 1900-1935) (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Biblioteca Nacional Teseo, 2012).

<sup>239</sup> Hirschbein, *Fun vayte lender*, 43-45.

<sup>240</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, Archivo de Palabra, no. 55, Lazaro Pinchuk.

<sup>241</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinishe rayze*, 64-65.

<sup>242</sup> Hirschbein, *Fun vayte lender*, 51; Hirschbein, “Argentine (briv fun veg),” 3-4.

<sup>243</sup> Hirschbein, *Fun vayte lender*, 50.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibidem*, 54-56.

noticed a sharp divide between the rich minority and the poor masses. He saw an impoverished multiethnic crowd that “lives outside the city, in houses covered by rotten metal and surrounded by mud.”

Both authors expressed criticism of the situation of women in Argentina, especially concerning their discrimination. Hersh Dovid Nomberg was deeply bothered by the uneasy situation of women in Argentina. He believed that Jewish men excluded women from participating in public life by following the example set by Spanish and Italian immigrants. In the early twentieth century, women in Argentina were confined to the private sphere of child rearing, cooking, cleaning and other house chores.<sup>245</sup> Similar conclusions were drawn by Martin Grinstein, who in his memoirs of Colonia San Antonio described the male colonists as “highly machista men.”<sup>246</sup> In the eyes of the travelers, the discrimination of women was an example of the negative influence that acculturation with Argentine society had on immigrant Jews. By the same token, they constructed Argentina as unprogressive and backward, a place where discrimination against women was inscribed into the system of national values.

Although at the beginning of the twentieth century women’s rights in Poland were a far cry from the rights of the male citizens, the situation in Argentina was worse. In Poland or the United States, Jewish women were often actively engaged in supporting their families working as merchants or in factories. Women who belonged to the urban middle class in Poland often socialized both with boyfriends and girlfriends, strolling around the city, going for picnics or sunbathing in the summer. Already in the first decade of the twentieth century, cafes had become popular on Warsaw’s Jewish streets, attracting both men and women. In the Jewish-Polish context, cafes quite often functioned as a nexus between secularism and progressive politics that advanced the position of women.<sup>247</sup> In Argentina the problem of female trafficking influenced the freedoms of ordinary Jewish women. Nomberg pointed out that in Argentina it was considered inappropriate for women to walk alone on the streets of Buenos Aires and going out with boyfriends was unthinkable. Parents were not supposed to

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<sup>245</sup> Sandra McGee Deutsch noted that women often took various paid domestic jobs, including seamstressing or cooking. Some women joined their husbands in family-run businesses. Technology was assigned to men, whereas women focused on painstaking and onerous manual labor. In the 1930s, the situation began to change and female employment outside the home became much more common. See Sandra McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880-1950* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 49-52. The employment of women was on the rise in the 1930s. Even in male-dominated sectors, such as the iron industry, the share of female workers rose from 3.5% in 1914 to 31.5% in 1935. See Yovanna Pineda, *Industrial Development in a Frontier Economy: The Industrialization of Argentina, 1890-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 26-27.

<sup>246</sup> Grinstein, *Recuerdos de Entre Rios*, 60.

<sup>247</sup> In his analysis of Warsaw Jewish cafe culture, Scott Ury points out that cafes were inclusive, secular and public. Kotik’s cafe was a hub for the Jewish intelligentsia, including both Bundists and Zionists. See Scott Ury, *Barricades and Banners: The Revolution of 1905 and the Transformation of Warsaw Jewry* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2012), 141-172.

allow their daughters to go out with boys and suspected every young man of having bad intentions.<sup>248</sup>

Hirschbein, who also noticed the underprivileged situation of women in Argentina, criticized it in the following words:

When a girl comes to Argentina wanting to work in a factory or to be independent in any other way, instead of looking for a groom who would rescue her – no, Argentina is a swamp for these kinds of girls. It is already a tradition in this country that a girl should sit and wait for a future husband. The daughter waits, parents wait. A woman is helpless here. And should the girl transgress the borders and just go out to look for a job, she will be treated with suspicion. After work she cannot spend any moment hanging outside. In North America, I see Jewish daughters who go out with whomever they want. This is natural. But the local ethics in Argentina do not allow it.<sup>249</sup>

This was also the experience of Raquel Mincés who arrived to Argentina from Poland at the age of twenty in 1930. She recalled that it was impossible for her to enter a restaurant alone and eat lunch by herself. Answering a question of a researcher who was interviewing her, she said: “You don't know the Argentina of sixty years ago [in the 1930s]. A woman could not walk alone in the street.” Raquel's neighbors complained to her mother that she was going out alone. Criticizing these developments in Argentina, Hirschbein opened his tirade against Argentine moralists. He mentioned that most of the young immigrant girls from Eastern Europe were accustomed to different standards and had much more personal freedom there than in Argentina.<sup>250</sup> Hirschbein was saddened by the fact that the Jews began to look down upon each and every girl who wanted to live as she lived in the “alter heym.” Hirschbein's narrative stressed that women, their voices and interests, could not be overlooked. The author reminded his readers that those considering immigration to Argentina should also keep in mind the widespread discrimination of women and their underprivileged situation.<sup>251</sup> Hirschbein, as an advocate of modern, secular Jewishness, associated the conservative backlash in Argentina with a traditional, Orthodox approach to Jewish women. He was disappointed as he wanted to see the new diasporas in the Americas as a better world, where tradition would not have that much oppressive influence. The discrimination of women collided with his perception of liberal and free Argentina.

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<sup>248</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinishe rayze*, 64-65.

<sup>249</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, “Argentine,” unpublished, 1926, YIVO Archive, Peretz Hirschbein Papers, Folder 126, 4-5.

<sup>250</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, Archivo de Palabra, no. 207, Raquel Mincés.

<sup>251</sup> Ibidem.

#### 4.4. They are So Closely Connected to Us! Home Country Nostalgias and Immigrant Perceptions of Yiddishland

The Argentine visits of Nomberg and Hirschbein were to a certain extent a form of ethno-cultural “check-up.” Both writers traveled to Argentina not only to provide Eastern European Jews with an account of the possibilities of emigration, but also (possibly even more importantly) to examine the lives of Polish Jews who settled there. As information about Jewish Argentina in Europe was rather limited, the travelers (as most Eastern European Jews) knew little about the local conditions. Their trips were supposed to bring answers to a number of questions: Could Jews in Argentina live a Jewish life? Was Yiddish still spoken? How strong were the challenges of acculturation? One of the key problems that the travelers wanted to investigate was also the attitude of the immigrants towards the Jewish ethno-national projects. As agents of cultural Yidishism, both Nomberg and Hirschbein wished to see Jewish Argentina as a new part of a global Yiddishland. They perceived Jewish migration not as a danger to the traditional culture, but rather as a chance of building a new, modern, secular sense of a diasporic Jewish peoplehood.

The travel texts of Nomberg and Hirschbein reveal that for first-generation immigrants their Eastern European homeland remained a major reference point. Many of them were nostalgic about their home towns, whereas others expressed their disillusionment and dissatisfaction with their lives in Argentina through homesickness. For some immigrants, Eastern Europe and the *shtetl* life were transformed into a familiar space of cohesive meanings and values, a stark contrast to the Argentine surrounding that often seemed suspicious and foreign. As Nomberg and Hirschbein pointed out, Polish and Russian Jews often yearned for their home in Eastern Europe, which they associated with warmth, close and authentic family relations and a sense of security. The ambiguous feelings of the immigrants signified that they lived in an *in-between* space: physically in Argentina, but still strongly rooted in an Eastern European context.

Hirschbein pointed to the psychological aspects of emigration. Despite the growing poverty and persecution, leaving the familiarity of Eastern Europe was a mayor social and psychological challenge, not to mention a sign of bravery. Hirschbein sympathized with the immigrants, who felt compelled to “uproot” themselves from everything they knew and “root” themselves anew in the unknown Argentina.<sup>252</sup> Consequently, as Rebecca Kobrin wrote, Eastern European Jews in the Americas often expressed strong dedication and maintained an

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<sup>252</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, “Argentine (briv fun veg),” 2.

impressive sense of belonging towards their former home.<sup>253</sup> As many immigrant Jews faced financial insecurity and anxieties related to their problematic situation in Argentina, Eastern Europe seemed to them a simpler and better world. The visits of Yiddish authors were for Argentine Jews a substitute for a personal re-experiencing of native lands. Only a very limited number of the immigrants had the financial resources to travel to Poland or Russia. This was different from Englishmen or Germans who, as Hirschbein noticed in 1926, “went home whenever they wanted.”<sup>254</sup> A business trip or a *lustrayze* (tourist visit) to Europe was so unusual that it was broadly covered in the Jewish press. The meetings with Yiddish writers, journalists or literary critics to some extent compensated the impossibility of returning home. The visits of the travelers were shining examples of Jewish creativity for the Argentine Jews and tangible proof that Jewish cultural life in Eastern Europe was as glorious and bustling as the immigrants imagined or remembered.

Although many quickly embraced Spanish, adapted to the new Argentine surroundings and became Argentine patriots, others chose different ways of defining their “embryonic” Jewish-Argentineness. The ideologies of cultural Yiddishism, ethno-national revival and Jewish modernization arriving from Eastern Europe also attracted a number of Jews living in Argentina. The migrations expanded the borders of Yiddishland and introduced new concepts concerning Jewish lives. In the 1920s and 1930s Yiddishism and a concept of reinvented Jewish peoplehood centered around Yiddish culture did not exemplify holding on to the old traditions. They were a sign of modernizing trend that influenced the Jews living all around the globe. In the Argentine context, these were chiefly Polish immigrants arriving in the 1920s who imported the new Jewish ethnic and cultural contents. Yet, some modernizing progressive concepts arrived in Argentina already prior to World War I, together with those who fled after the fall of the 1905 revolution in Russia. In the view of many immigrants, there was no contradiction between defining oneself as an Argentine Jew and supporting the renaissance of the Yiddish language and literature. Those worlds were interfused.

Nomberg's and Hirschbein's travelogues reinforced the cultural and discursive links between Eastern Europe and Argentina. Their books analyzed the dilemmas of the immigrants and suggested new ways of being a Polish Jew in the Argentine diaspora. The travel writers perceived the Argentine *yishev* as a chance for creating a new Jewish center, yet a part of a global Yiddishland. At the same time, they understood that the immigrants need to integrate with their host societies. On the one hand, the writers appreciated a spiritual connection with Eastern Europe that the immigrants strived to preserve, as well as their honest interest in the

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<sup>253</sup> Rebecca Kobrin, “The Shtetl by the Highway: The East European City in New York's Landsmanshaft Press, 1921-39,” *Prooftexts* 26 (1 & 2) 2006: 107–137.

<sup>254</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, “Argentine (briv fun veg),” 2.



new developments of the old country. On the other hand, the Eastern European guests quite often criticized the unreasonable and exaggerated longings of the immigrants, describing them as naïve and childish. Hirschbein mocked emigrants' attachment to the habits and patterns of the old country, perceiving them as not suited for their new Argentine reality and increasing a feeling of chaos. He compared the immigrants who earnestly kept their Eastern European habits to little children who want to follow their parents, the adults they know the most:

And exactly as the small children imitate the parents, the little boy puts on the father's caftan and his little sister mom's holiday dress. And one plays a game of "parents" and "grandparents" [...].<sup>255</sup>

The populous and newly immigrated Buenos Aires Jewish community was for both authors a potential basis for building a strong Argentine diaspora. The district of Once was for them a reservoir of *yidishkayt* that could be channeled in multiple directions. When Peretz Hirschbein arrived for the first time in Buenos Aires in 1914, shortly after descending from the ship he began his search for signs of Jewishness. Seeing a theater poster that invited theater-goers to a play in Yiddish, he was truly relieved. It was a clear sign that Yiddish life thrived in the capital. Theater plays like "Borrow me your wife" reminded him of analogous cultural productions elsewhere in the Yiddishland.<sup>256</sup> Hirschbein felt at home in Once, "as in any other big Jewish city." The local commercial streets reminded him of the bustling Dzikia and Dzielna streets in Warsaw. The face of a Jewish bookseller looked to him "familiar and Jewish."<sup>257</sup>

A few steps farther, the writer noticed the Yiddish bookshop of Mordechai Stoliar (who in a short time would establish the daily *Yidische Zaitung*). To his surprise the shop window displayed his own books and the newest publications from Warsaw and Vilna. Hirschbein started to comprehend that the local Jewry remained in permanent contact with the Yiddish cultural world in Europe.<sup>258</sup> A visit in a *porteño* Jewish bookstore showed Hirschbein that Argentine Jewish life was flourishing, and preserving its Yiddish character. The traveler was surprised by the perfect Yiddish spoken by the locals. As he wrote, "Spanish seems not to glue itself to Yiddish as happens with Russian or English." Hirschbein was amazed that people were able to argue in two different languages.<sup>259</sup> The writer frankly said that he did not expect such a "great Jewish youth that is up-to-date with the problems of the Old World." He felt ashamed that "we" (Polish, Eastern European Jews) knew so little about the life of their

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<sup>255</sup> Hirschbein, *Fun vayte lender*, 52-53.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibidem*, 41-44.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibidem*, 45.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibidem*, 44.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibidem*, 45.

countrymen in Argentina. He stressed that Jews in Poland were not aware of the extent to which their Argentine compatriots remained involved with the cultural, social and political problems of Eastern Europe.<sup>260</sup>

Hersh Dovid Nomberg was also surprised at how strongly connected to European reality the immigrants remained. When he visited Moises Ville in 1922 the colonists bombarded him with numerous questions about Jewish life in their native Eastern Europe. They asked him about the postwar situation, about anti-Semitism, but also about the newest Yiddish literary developments. Nomberg suggested that the colonists were not only interested in the Eastern European reality, but in Yiddish culture specifically. When visiting Jewish colonies, the settlers proudly led Nomberg to their library and showed him his own name in the library catalogue. In Moises Ville the newest books from Europe were supposed to be available and, no less important, collectively debated.<sup>261</sup> To his surprise and delight, Jewish farmers seemed to care not only about their economic well-being in Argentina, but also about the cultural scene in Vilna or Warsaw.<sup>262</sup> This exemplified the fact that Argentine Jews were becoming not only Jewish Argentines, but citizens of a global Yiddishland. The transfer of social and cultural material between Eastern Europe had created new global spaces. Meeting with the immigrants, Nomberg and Hirschbein personally experienced how Argentina was emerging as a new branch of Yiddishland.

Both Nomberg and Hirschbein noted that the immigrants often idealized Poland or Russia. Hirschbein wrote that those who left Europe were desperately awaiting any news from the old home. When a Jewish newspaper arrived from Eastern Europe, readers curious about the news were “falling on every line of the text.”<sup>263</sup> Hirschbein wrote that unlike Germans or Englishmen, the immigrant Jews “were pulled out with their roots from Eastern Europe” and only rarely had a chance to return back home.<sup>264</sup> The difficulty or impossibility of returning or travelling to Europe made Argentine Jews even more interested in the cultural Yiddish production of the old world.<sup>265</sup> The cultural material was able to pass through geographical borders rather easily, becoming relatively available. Although only a few immigrants led satisfying lives in Eastern Europe, many were proud of the local renaissance of Yiddish culture. The interest and participation in Yiddish cultural production did to some extent

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<sup>260</sup> Ibidem, 48-49.

<sup>261</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinishe rayze*, 82-83.

<sup>262</sup> Ibidem, 59-66.

<sup>263</sup> Hirschbein, *Fun vaye lender*, 58.

<sup>264</sup> Hirschbein, “Argentine,” 2.

<sup>265</sup> Some Jewish immigrants did travel back to Eastern Europe, a practice that was probably more frequent in the US than in the Argentine context. See, for instance, Daniel Soyer, “Revisiting the Old World: American Jewish Tourists in Interwar Eastern Europe,” in *Forging Modern Jewish Identities*, ed. Michael Berkowitz et. al. (London: Valentine-Mitchell, 2003).

substitute actual life in Eastern Europe. At the same time, the attachment to the culture of a stateless *yidishn folk* often did not interfere with the process of forming a sense of belonging to the Argentine nation.

Although the travel writers appreciated the engagement of the immigrants in the advancement of Yiddish culture in Argentina, they rejected their irrational nostalgias for the Old Home. The nostalgia was experienced especially by those who failed to succeed in Argentina or left behind their nearest and dearest in Eastern Europe. One of the immigrants developed a strong longing for Eastern Europe only when he realized that life in Argentina was far from easy and comfortable. He was not able to find any other job than that of a street cigarette seller and did not see any chance of improvement. Despite the fact that he was a victim of violent anti-Semitism in Russia, and consequently decided to leave his native Odessa, in Argentina he came to the conclusion that his decision was wrong and that he should have never left Eastern Europe.<sup>266</sup> Hirschbein was very surprised when he conversed with another immigrant, a young, broad-shouldered Jew, who still longed for his parents in Russia. The young man was jealous that the writer was able to travel or even to come back to Eastern Europe whenever he pleased. He did not see any chance for a return. The only thing he was left with was his nostalgia.<sup>267</sup> Others who longed for Eastern Europe referred to the deficiencies of Jewish life in Argentina. One of them, answering Hirschbein's question about his unwillingness to put down roots in South America and to acknowledge it as his new home, answered him angrily:

How can one forget Russia?! There Jewish life flows as a huge river, and here I'm suffocating. I was born there and it is my country. I would consider myself a beggar if I stopped thinking that this big country named Russia is not my home.<sup>268</sup>

Further, the wealthier Jews who enjoyed a privileged position in Poland, but experienced economic decline in and in Argentine, often longed to return. For Raquel Minces the first decade in Argentine was rather traumatic. Even though the growing anti-Semitism of the 1930s made her leave for Argentina, the unpleasant memories quickly vanished. She could not learn proper Spanish for a decade and constantly dreamt of returning to Poland. She identified Poland with an educated intellectual elite to which she belonged. She studied art at the University of Warsaw, her family included painters and sculptors and she corresponded with Polish poets.<sup>269</sup> Minces recalled that she never saw as good theater in Buenos Aires as she did in Warsaw.

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<sup>266</sup> Hirschbein, *Fun vayte lender*, 59.

<sup>267</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>268</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>269</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, Archivo de Palabra, no. 207, Raquel Minces.

Peretz Hirschbein was somewhat sympathetic and concerned about the motivations of Jews who longed for their native countries, whereas Hersh Dovid Nomberg was much more critical of their, as he saw it, exaggerated or childish nostalgias. The inability of Eastern Europeans to adjust to Argentine standards and customs was to him incomprehensible. For Nomberg the attitude of a Polish Jew, who was interested more in the little forest close to his home town of Wołomin than his everyday Argentine problems was strange and incomprehensible.<sup>270</sup> His criticism was probably related to his position of a visitor. The travelers were probably less aware of the hardships of daily life in Argentina than the immigrants. Often they mentioned that Argentina was a free and liberal country and praised its policy of “open gates” that also included the Jews. However, as short-term visitors, they were unable to see the complexities of Argentine Jewish life. Their outsider perspective allowed them to criticize the “illogical longings” of the immigrants, without personally experiencing the everyday struggles of Eastern European Jews.

As in the case of many other diasporas, it is certain that Jewish emigrants quite often idealized and sugarcoated their homeland and perceived it much more positively than prior to their departure. As numerous studies have shown, many immigrants developed a strong homesickness, at least at a certain stage of their lives. As Dan Hertz noted, immigrants face an increased level of stress that is related to the difficulties of immigration and acculturation.<sup>271</sup> Following the typology of Kuo Wen, he specified that immigrant stress, and consequently homesickness, is based on four major factors: social isolation, cultural shock, goal-striving stress and cultural change.<sup>272</sup> Eugene Tartakovsky, referring specifically to Jewish adolescents immigrating to Israel, differentiated three stages that immigrants go through: the devaluation of the homeland and idealization of the country of immigration in the pre-migration period, the disillusionment with the host country and strengthening of the cultural identity of the homeland in the first years after the emigration, and the formation of an inconsistent bi-cultural identity in the later post-migration period.<sup>273</sup>

Were the Jews encountered by Nomberg and Hirschbein in Argentina experiencing a prolonged second stage of Tartakovsky’s typology? A period when the homeland seemed like the only good place to be and the immigration country was becoming increasingly overwhelming and hostile. Even when memories of pogroms disappeared, wiped out by

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<sup>270</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinishe rayze*, 61.

<sup>271</sup> Dan G. Hertz, “Psychological and Psychosocial Adjustments of Migrants: Families in a Changing Environment,” in *Psychological Aspects of Geographical Moves: Homesickness and Acculturation Stress*, ed. Miranda van Tilburg and Ad Vingerhoets (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 77-79.

<sup>272</sup> Kuo Wen, “Theories of Migration and Mental Health,” in *Social Science and Medicine* 10 (1976): 297–306.

<sup>273</sup> Eugene Tartakovsky, “Cultural Identities of Adolescent Immigrants: A Three-Year Longitudinal Study Including the Pre-Migration Period,” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 5 (2009): 654-671.

fresher impressions of obstacles experienced every day on the Argentine street, not infrequently Eastern Europe emerged as better and friendlier than Argentina in their eyes. For some of the newcomers disillusioned with Argentina, even Polish food seemed to be much tastier and fresher than the food available in South America.<sup>274</sup> Nomberg viewed these nostalgias as pointless. To the complaints of an older immigrant about the weak aromas of Argentine food, Nomberg commented angrily: “Getting old, the man did not notice that his senses had become dysfunctional.” Here, the writer adopted an authoritative position: the subjective feelings of the immigrant were supposedly incorrect and only he, an outsider, was able to honestly and independently judge the situation.

For Hirschbein, the pain associated with putting down roots in Argentina was only a sign that the Jewish settlement in Argentina was becoming stable. Longing and homesickness were for him a sign that the immigrants considered a return impossible.<sup>275</sup> Despite all the obstacles they experienced, Hirschbein underlined the potential and the strength of Argentine Jews. In a chapter entitled “The Jewish Street Longs” (*Di yidishe gas benkt*), he repeats several times “but still, there is a Jewish settlement” (*Un dokh es iz a yidisher yishev*), repetitively re-assuring the reader about the “miraculous” development and stability of Argentine diaspora.<sup>276</sup> Although the Jews encountered by both travelers often mentioned the temporal character of their stay in Argentina, Hersh Dovid Nomberg seemed pretty sure that these voices were only a self-therapeutic tool that immigrants used in order to silence their longing and sense of disorientation that they experienced in Argentina. Not acknowledging that they would stay in Argentina forever, Eastern European Jews made themselves believe that they were in Latin America only for a short period (*yid. far dervayl*). Nomberg commented jokingly: “They opened their workshops for a while, they married for a while, they even died for a while.”<sup>277</sup> Similar observations were made by Aharon Leib Schussheim, once president of Poylisher Farband. Schussheim noted that while living in Argentina “for a while,” the immigrant Jews built up a bustling Jewish social infrastructure and experienced professional progress. Sons and grandsons of the peddlers were already journalists, architects, lawyers and doctors.<sup>278</sup>

Both Hirschbein and Nomberg noticed that many Jews who missed Eastern Europe did so because of the low position that Jews enjoyed within Argentine society. The arrival of a guest from Europe was an outlet for “a storm of emotions.”<sup>279</sup> One of the immigrants stated

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<sup>274</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinishe rayze*, 62.

<sup>275</sup> Hirschbein, *Fun vayte lender*, 60-61.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibidem*, 56-60.

<sup>277</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinishe rayze*, 62.

<sup>278</sup> Aharon Leib Schussheim, *Tsu der geshikhte fun yidishn yishev in Argentine* (Buenos Aires, 1954), 11-12.

<sup>279</sup> Hirschbein, *Fun vayte lender*, 58.

that “Argentina is not a country for the Jews,” arguing that it was a disgrace to admit that one was Jewish.<sup>280</sup> Another commented that in Argentina “people forgot that they once had souls,” likely alluding to selfishness and individualism that in his opinion dominated communal values. These voices stressed that internal Argentine Jewish dynamics were also a factor influencing longing and homesickness. Lonely Eastern Europeans, often let down by their fellow Jews, might have developed frustrations and longing for the familiarity and predictability of life in Poland or Russia. According to Nomberg, these were the Polish Jews who missed Eastern Europe the most. As he wrote: “No one is so connected to the *haymish* forest, river, nature, as the Polish Jew.” He described it as a specific weakness of Polish Jews that made it harder for them to accept their new country.<sup>281</sup> Nomberg explained the desire expressed by some immigrants to return to Eastern Europe with the fact that only rarely did they arrive in Argentina by their own free will. Some of them immigrated in fear of continuing pogroms, others were brought to Argentina as a “contingent” of the Jewish Colonization Association or chose Argentina because of an inability to afford a ticket to New York.<sup>282</sup> This was also the case with the Blutrajt family. Samuel Blutrajt recalled that his father wanted to immigrate to Argentina only in order to later move on to the USA. In the end, the entire family stayed in South America.<sup>283</sup> The “randomness” of immigration to Argentina made some question their future in the new country.

Hirschbein and Nomberg appreciated the strong interest of Argentine Jews in Eastern European literature and theater. Unlike their irrational longing for Eastern European foods and landscapes, their involvement in Eastern European high culture was a sign of their desired permanent attachment to their homeland. When Nomberg visited Argentina in 1922, he concluded that local Jewish life already had “strong foundations.” He was impressed by the number of Jewish libraries, workers’ organizations and political movements of all stripes. For Nomberg the vitality of the Argentine *yishev* was strongly interrelated with Jewish life back in Poland. He attributed the relatively high cultural capital of Argentine immigrants to their socialization in Eastern Europe. The Jews who immigrated to the USA at the very turn of the century were, as he saw it, “largely uneducated and socially and culturally passive,” whereas the immigrants who arrived to Argentina in the 1920s to a large extent had attended schools in

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<sup>280</sup> Ibidem, 60.

<sup>281</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinishe rayze*, 61.

<sup>282</sup> Ibidem, 60. Aaron Leib Schussheim of the Poylisher Farband also recalled that many Jewish immigrants chose Argentina only because it was not possible to go to the USA, Schussheim, *Tsu der geshikhte fun yidishn yishev*, 11-12.

<sup>283</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, Archivo de Palabra, no. 6, Samuel Blutrajt. In 1925, at the age of 17, Blutrajt immigrated to Argentine from Polish Volhynia.

Eastern Europe and were raised as a generation aware of the proletarian movement, Yiddish literature and Yiddish journalism.”<sup>284</sup>

Although the homesick Polish Jews who yearned for Eastern Europe bothered and surprised the writers, they were altogether impressed by the vitality of Argentine Jewish life. The Yiddish-speaking children of Polish and Russian immigrants in particular symbolized for them the stability and rootedness of *yidishkayt* in Argentina. Hirschbein and Nomberg often used a botanic metaphor that described the firm basis of Argentine Jewry and its permanent linkage with Eastern Europe. In this vision, Argentina appeared as a branch of Eastern European Jewry that experienced a new diasporic period. In the eyes of the travelers, Eastern Europe functioned like a trunk of an “Eastern European Jewish tree” with new green branches growing out in Argentina, the United States, Canada and France. Hirschbein developed this metaphor, attributing the weaknesses and problems of Argentine *yishev* to its relative youth and to the significant distance that divided it from the nurturing “trunk” of Eastern Europe. He commented that the Argentine Jewish settlement was as unstable as a thin and fragile branch that “can be broken by every rush of air.”<sup>285</sup> Elsewhere Hirschbein compared the immigrant Jews to seeds that are thrown from land to land, hardly able to strike roots anywhere. As a result, to the welcome of Hirschbein, a transnational Yiddishland was on the rise: “the borders were wiped out, all cities seem to become one, all countries become one land.”<sup>286</sup> Despite initial “groaning and longing,” the immigrants struck deep roots in the Argentine soil. These passages on the relationship between Europe and Argentina reveals that Hirschbein believed in a double rootedness. For him there was no contradiction between being a citizen of the Yiddishland and a confident Argentine Jew.

#### **4.5. Meeting the *Gaicho* and Searching for Indians: The Trajectories of Exoticization**

Although the lands and people described in the travel books of Nomberg and Hirschbein were far from the “Oriental” in a Saidian sense, they became objects of literary exoticization. Following Arjun Appadurai, I understand exoticization as a process of a constant underlining of the difference between “us” and “they” and adopting this difference as the only criterion of comparison.<sup>287</sup> Despite its growing European population, Argentina was commonly portrayed by Nomberg and Hirschbein as strangely different from Eastern Europe,

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<sup>284</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinishe rayze*, 63.

<sup>285</sup> Hirschbein, *Fun vayte lender*, 60.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibidem*, 14.

<sup>287</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Nowoczesność bez granic. Kulturowe wymiary globalizacji* (Kraków: Universitas, 2005), 235-236.

as dangerous and unstable. Although the travelers encountered in Argentina a sense of Jewish continuity as at least a part first generation of immigrants preferred to speak their native Yiddish, continued to cook Eastern European food and maintained strong family ties, much of their attention was devoted to Argentina's "un-Jewishness" and hazards that awaited the Jews venturing there.

The travelogues of Peretz Hirschbein and Hersh D. Nomberg formed and perpetuated the exotic and wild image of Argentina. Despite being well-traveled, both authors were deeply rooted in Eastern European realities. No less importantly, as any other travel writers, they were bound by the expectations of the reading publics. Although some readers in Poland might have used their texts as an emigration guidebook, others were drawn to them for their sheer entertainment value. Thus, both authors faced a need to strike a careful balance between providing readers with accurate accounts and offering them an entertaining literary text. Nomberg and Hirschbein were personally influenced by the earliest exoticizing depictions of immigration and colonization. Since the last decade of the nineteenth century, a great deal of printed materials on Argentina appeared in Poland. These brochures and books often reproduced popular myths and stereotypes. The 1893 Yankev Yedvabnik's guidebook to Argentina apart from comprehensive account of colonization, devoted much attention to the dynamics between the Argentine indigenous population and the new colonists. Describing the conflicts between both groups, Yedvabnik clearly stood on the side of the Europeans. The local inhabitants were described as wild, and their expulsion behind Rio Negro was pictured as a justified and logical step that opened the area to a new, civilized population.<sup>288</sup> Yedvabnik seemed to share the view of a part of the Argentine elite of that era, which saw European immigration as a factor that could soften the influence of the "barbaric" indigenous population.<sup>289</sup> He pictured the Indians as a barrier to the development of modern Argentina. By fighting with the newcomers, they made the colonization of the interior dangerous and relatively weak.

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<sup>288</sup> Yankev Yedvabnik, *Di beshraybung fon argentina un ire kolonyen* (Warsaw, 1893), 25–27. Yedvabnik referred here to the so-called *Conquest of the Desert* that until 1880 erased or subdued the indigenous population of Patagonia. See Gastón Pérez Izquierdo, *La campaña del desierto* (Buenos Aires: Academia Argentina de la Historia, 2009); Andrés Bonatti, *Una guerra infame: la verdadera historia de la Conquista del Desierto* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2015); Susanne von Karstedt, *Instrumente: Grundzüge der US-amerikanischen und argentinischen Indianerpolitik (1853-1899) im Vergleich*, (Berlin: Wissenschaftlichen Verlag, 2006)

<sup>289</sup> In the first decades of the twentieth century, we see a reverse tendency. Statesmen and intellectuals suggested the culture of the *mestizo criollo* peasant as a representation of true Argentine nationality. They argued that the asymmetry between European Buenos Aires and the interior must be amended by bringing the culture of the interior to the life and discourses of the capital. See Oscar Chamosa, *The Argentine Folklore Movement: Sugar Elites, Criollo Workers, and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010); Adolfo Prieto, *El discurso criollista en la formación de la Argentina moderna* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1988).



Several decades later, in a similar Eurocentric way, the “indigenous question” struck Hersh D. Nomberg. He clearly stated by coming to Argentina he was looking for encounters with the “red Indians.”<sup>290</sup> The non-Jewish and non-European aspects of Argentina were portrayed by Nomberg as an exotic space that should be subjected to European exploration. Following the *zeitgeist* of the era, the writer believed that every corner of the planet should be investigated, described and thus subjected to rational and progressive white men. Although Nomberg did not meet any representatives of the indigenous populations, his travelogue contained numerous descriptions of these people (based probably on Yiddish penny press news and rumors he heard from Argentine Jews). In a chapter entitled “Mayses fun patagonye” (Patagonia Stories), Nomberg presented Argentina’s natives as a quasi-mythical people populating the remote and inaccessible areas of the country. The Andean mountains were supposed to be inhabited by a cruel and exceptionally tall Indian tribe, whereas the northern areas, on the border with Paraguay, by shorter people, exploited by Europeans in sugar mills and silver mines. The way that Nomberg described both tribes was radically different from the way he referred to the Jews. Nomberg approached the indigenous from a superior position and clearly excluded himself from this collective. The indigenous appeared only as a homogenous amalgam of people, without any individual experiences and narratives. Although Nomberg was sympathetic and moved by their suffering during colonial rule, the indigenous remained for him only an interesting, but an inferior group that could be examined as a subject of anthropological study, but could never treated on an equal footing.<sup>291</sup>

Nomberg extensively used the exoticizing stories he heard about Patagonian Indians and the *guarani* tribes in his texts.<sup>292</sup> Both groups were described as unusual and depicted as living in fear of the white man. Describing the indigenous population, Nomberg clearly did not attempt to make his story at least partly based on credible facts or to present it as ethnographic. He did not verify the narratives he heard about the indigenous. Instead, he decided to transmit the legends and tales. Further, describing the Creole population of the interior, the so-called *pamperos*, Nomberg retold the opinions he heard from Jewish colonists. He depicted the *pamperos* as figures who relied on primordial skills, lived close to nature and were familiar with its laws and moods. His *pamperos* were able to recognize the beginning of the rain season by observing snakes and shared this knowledge with the Jewish colonists.

For Nomberg, the *criollos* constituted an interesting and attractive group of people. They signified the primordial Argentineness, but also the ultimate exotic Other. Creoles belonged to the native population of Argentina, inhabited the virgin *pampas* and mountains,

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<sup>290</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinishe rayze*, 45.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibidem*, 90-91.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibidem*, 89-95.

and came to signify for Nomberg the “real Argentina.” Descending from the European colonizers, the Creoles were certainly different from the indigenous people. Their relative whiteness and European descent placed them closer to the immigrants. Nevertheless, the borders between the Jews and the Creoles, who often lived side by side in the Argentine interior, were clearly defined. Nomberg mentioned that in Buenos Aires he was warned of them. The *porteños* he met described the Creoles as good-hearted and “sweet as sugar,” but aggressive and dangerous when insulted.<sup>293</sup> In attempting to reflect the popular understanding of the Argentine “Other,” Hersh Dovid Nomberg used phrases like “people say” and “some believe.” These less personal words significantly weakened his statements that became vague and generalized. Yet by reproducing these stereotypes, Nomberg again applied an exoticizing narrative, making his story entertaining for the readers in Eastern Europe.

Quite often, the Jewish colonists expressed a sense of superiority over the *criollos*. Discrimination against the *criollo* may mark their own sense of exclusion and lack of security in the Argentine ethnic mashup. It might have been related to a sense of European superiority claimed by some of the Jews. Within this framework, immigrant Jews represented the enlightened Europe that challenged the allegedly backward *criollo* habits. In the 1930s middle class children on European immigrants were increasingly involved in inland tourism, travelling to the Andean villages, Patagonia and other places inhabited by indigenous populations. This came in the light of the discourse that emphasized the need on the part of *porteños* to travel to the Interior (*internarse*) by establishing bond with the national territory. The discourse of a “patriotic travel” saw the rural Argentines as both purveyors of the ancient spirit of the Argentine nation and as the exotic Others. The tourist movement revealed the hierarchies within Argentine society by “darkening” subaltern classes and strengthened the notion of homogenously white Argentina. White Argentine tourists of European ancestry constructed visualizations of *criollo* as enclaves of tradition among modern white nation.<sup>294</sup> This attitudes towards presumed *criollo* inferiority were perfectly visible in the interviews conducted with Jewish-Polish immigrants by Rosana Gruber in the 1980s. One of them said:

The Jews have more culture because they come from Europe and bring with them all their knowledge, their past. A Creole, on the contrary, what does he know? He is born and dies in a village. The Jews live in the cities and in the cities culture is created. And the Creole lives in a village and even when he comes to the city he won't learn [the culture] as the young children do.

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<sup>293</sup> Ibidem, 78. Also Alberto Gerchunoff referred to presumably violent and impulsive *criollos*. See Alberto Gerchunoff, *Los gauchos judíos* (Buenos Aires: Aguilar, 1975), 79-82.

<sup>294</sup> Oscar Chamosa, “People as a Landscape: The Representation of the *Criollo* Interior in Early Tourist Literature in Argentina,” in *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina*, ed. Paulina Alberto and Eduardo Elena, (Cambridge: Cambridge: University Press, 2016), 53-72.

Another added:

[...] The immigrants were important here, they taught [the locals] how to work. The Creole liked the grilled meats, mate [...] [The Jews] taught him how to work.<sup>295</sup>



Illustration no. 28. An image of a *gaucho*. From *Draysik yor in argentine. Memuarn fun a yidishn kolonist* by Mordechai Alpersohn, vol. I (Berlin, 1923), 6.

The local Jews helped Nomberg to familiarize himself with the Argentine imaginary of the “Other.” Jewish immigrants informed the travel writer about local conflicts and politics. They were the intermediaries and cultural translators, who linked the Eastern European visitor with the popular opinions circulating in Argentina. The years that they spent in South America influenced their perception of local conflicts and dynamics. Themselves foreigners and outsiders, the Eastern European immigrants sought to understand the Argentine hierarchies and were quick to realize that the indigenous were at the bottom of the social ladder. Aspiring to join the Argentine mainstream, many Jews adopted the local attitudes towards non-whites. As May E. Beltz put it, “European immigrants discovered all too soon they could benefit from local racial policies and often only acquired an ‘ethnic consciousness’

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<sup>295</sup> Rosana Gruber, “La construcción de la identidad étnica. Integración y diferenciación de los inmigrantes judíos ashkenazim en la Argentina,” in *Ensayos de Antropología Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Belgrano, 1984), 197-211.

and a ‘white’ skin color after coming to their host country.”<sup>296</sup> Although Hirschbein and Nomberg were bothered by negative opinions about the Eastern European Jews circulating in Argentina, they did not have a major problem with Eurocentrically stereotyping and stigmatizing the indigenous.

## 5.6. The Impure and Narrating Vicious Jewish Argentina

The second component of exoticizing Argentina was done in reference to local Jewish prostitution. The early twentieth century Eastern European Jewish discourse often equated Argentina with a nest of Jewish pimps and prostitutes. Stories about poor women forced into prostitution dotted Poland's Yiddish newspapers. The migration induced a global approach to Jewish social problems, including female trafficking. Argentina, imagined as a hotbed of Jewish prostitution, found its place within debates of the Yiddishland in this way. The Jewish-Argentine reality increasingly influenced what was being discussed in Jewish Poland. Argentina was so commonly associated with Jewish prostitution that the theme appeared even in the texts of classic Yiddish writers, such as Sholem Aleichem.<sup>297</sup> In this context, the panoramic travelogues of Nomberg and Hirschbein, which portrayed Argentina in a complex, rather than a sensational way, were received positively by immigrants in Argentina. Jewish-Argentine journalists praised Nomberg and Hirschbein as the first European Jews who liberated the Argentine Jewry from the heavy burden of linking Argentina with Jewish female trafficking. Of course, this problem did appear in their *Fun vayte lender* and *Di argentisnische rayze*, and Argentine Jews were thankful to the travel writers not for hiding or omitting the involvement of Argentine Jews in the sex business, but rather for portraying multiple facets of Argentine Jewish life. The fact that the travelers also wrote about Jewish farming colonies, the situation of the immigrants, local climate, etc. presented Argentina as any other diaspora country, with better or worse sides. Depicting prostitution as merely a fraction of Jewish experiences in Argentina normalized the new *yishev* in the eyes of the Jewish-Polish public opinion.

Both travelers were aware that Jewish prostitution was the first association with Argentina for Eastern European Jews. However, Hirschbein only briefly mentioned this issue in his 1916 travelogue. He wrote of popular stories circulating in Eastern Europe about young girls who were seduced, fooled with a promise of marriage and later forced into prostitution in

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<sup>296</sup> May E. Beltz, *Immigration and Acculturation in Brazil and Argentina, 1890-1929* (New York: Pallgrave Macmillan, 2010), 4.

<sup>297</sup> Sholem Aleichem, “The Man from Buenos Aires,” in *Tevye the Dairyman and The Railroad Stories* (New York: Schocken Books, 1987), 176. Originally published in 1909 as “Der mensh fun buenos aires.”

Argentina.<sup>298</sup> Nomberg, on the other hand, devoted much more attention to the problem. He included two entire chapters that pertained to his encounter with local Jewish prostitution. He examined the origins of female trafficking, efforts to reduce it, as well as the “reputation dilemmas” of the Jews not involved in the sex industry. Nomberg pointed out that for the Jews in Poland the link between female trafficking and Argentina was so strong that Buenos Aires prostitution even appeared in local folk songs. Several slang words for female traffickers were also used in the Yiddish spoken in Poland. As Nomberg noted, Buenos Aires was popularly nicknamed as “Boyne.”<sup>299</sup>

Writing about Jewish prostitution, Nomberg drew on the existing popular conceptions in Poland and provided readers with the “juicy news” to confirm their stereotypes. He was aware that he personally shared the popular Eastern European beliefs and preconceptions of promiscuous and vicious Jewish Argentina. He admitted that next to the local Indians, the *hevre-layt* were those sectors of Argentine society that he wanted to see the most.<sup>300</sup> He perceived the local pimps and prostitutes as an exotic fragment of local Jewish life, as an unusual group that existed largely only in Argentina.<sup>301</sup> Nomberg eagerly used Argentine prostitution as an erotic and scandalous emblem exoticizing the country. Although Jewish prostitution was common in Poland, its Argentine variant was constructed as unusual and cruel.

Even as he criticized female trafficking, Nomberg belittled the actual scale of the phenomenon. He emphasized that in reality it was Frenchmen who dominated the Argentine sex business. Attempting to challenge the stereotypical European misconception of Argentine Jews, he emphasized the measures taken by the local Jews in combatting female trafficking. Referring to the social exclusion of pimps and prostitutes, he labeled the *porteño* kehilla as “one of the cleanest in the whole world.” Describing the *tmeim*, Nomberg used a very strong vocabulary.<sup>302</sup> The pimps and prostitutes were pictured as “wild and immoral animals hidden in their holes.” The local community was supposed to have avoided them as one avoided “a pest.” Nomberg happily concluded that the influence of *tmeim* was already much weaker. Earlier, “they made up the most of Buenos Aires Jewry.” In 1922, thanks to the joint efforts of local ethnic leaders, female traffickers were allegedly already marginalized and “hunted down.”<sup>303</sup> Nomberg's text clearly supported the efforts of the moralists and simultaneously

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<sup>298</sup> Hirschbein, *Fun vayte lender*, 35.

<sup>299</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinishe rayze*, 43-45.

<sup>300</sup> *Hevre-layt*, yid. people involved in female trafficking

<sup>301</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinishe rayze*, 45.

<sup>302</sup> *Di tmeim* – a nickname used for the Jews involved in sex business. The term stems from the Hebrew word *tame*, which means “dirty” or “unclean.”

<sup>303</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinishe rayze*, 47-49.

sent a clear message to his Polish readers: “Look, good Jews also live in Buenos Aires.” Hirschbein would probably disagree with that opinion. When he visited Argentina for the second time in 1925, he wrote blatantly: “There is a direct path from a brothel to a Jewish theater. There are 20,000 prostitutes and pimps among a population of 100,000. The truth will always come out, no matter how bitter it is.”<sup>304</sup>

Nomberg not only borrowed the anti-prostitution vocabulary of the local Jews, but also their stand on the issue. In his rage against female traffickers and the preoccupation with the reputation of ordinary Jews, Nomberg seemed again to blur the difference between himself and his Argentine hosts. Like most of them, he usually did not make a distinction between the pimps and their female victims, often seduced and kidnapped in Europe. For Nomberg, a woman who was already involved in prostitution was forever marked with a shameful stamp and was responsible for her miserable situation. Nomberg seemed to care more about the good reputation of the Poylisher Farband, an organization uniting his Jewish-Polish countrymen, than about the situation of enslaved and humiliated young women. Yet in other places, Nomberg portrayed a Jewish madam from Łódź, who embodied the independent female agency of the international sex business. The madam expelled her husband, who did not earn a living and expected her to take the burden of financing the family, and chose instead to manage a bordello in Latin America.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, “Argentine (briv fun veg),” 4.

<sup>305</sup> Nomberg, *Di argentinishe rayze*, 55-57.

## Chapter Three

### ***Israelita Argentino or Argentinera Yid? Cultural Choices, National Belonging and the Weight of European Baggage***

מיר רופען אונז ארגענטינער יידן מיט דעם גאנצן באווסטזיין אונזרן, מיט איבערצייגונג און גלויבן אז מיר זיינען דאס און מיט אונזער הייסן פארלאנג דאס צו זיין. מיר, מיינע איך די הי-געבוירענע אידן, ווי די איינגעוואנדערטע, וואס האבן זיך דא באזעצט און האבן פארבונדען מיט דעם לאנד זייער גורל, זייער צוקונפט און האבן דאס ליב וואס מען האט ליב א זאך, וואס מען שאפט אליין אדער מען העלפט זיי שאפן און פארפולקומען. ווי מען האט ליב די חיים וואס מען האט מיט אייגענע הענט אויסגעבויט.

*We call ourselves Argentine Jews with full awareness and conviction that we are Argentine Jews, and that we desire to be Argentine Jews. Both those of us who were born in Argentina and those who immigrated, who settled here and linked their destiny and future with this country, we love this country as one loves a thing that one has made himself or has helped to create, as one loves a heym that one has built with one's own hands.*

— Pinie Katz, 1940

As Warsaw-born Argentine Yiddishist Samuel Rollansky once put it, the years of Jewish-Polish immigration to Argentina were “a time of storm and stress.”<sup>1</sup> The post-World War I immigration of Yiddish-speaking, largely secular and nationally mobilized Polish Jews shaped the way that *yidishkayt*, Argentineness and being a Polish Jew were conceptualized in Argentina. These immigrants invigorated Argentine Jewish life with new ideas and their arrival shook up previously held assumptions and attitudes. The issues of ethnic identity and national belonging appeared at the center of social and cultural debates. In the 1920s and 1930s, Argentina became a unique space where Argentine policies of nationalizing immigrants competed with and enriched Yiddishist and Zionist national visions of the Jewish future.

The immigrants of the pre-1918 and interbellum periods often differed in terms of their orientation towards the Old Home and the new South American homeland. For most veteran and established Jewish Argentines, Poland was an *alter heym*, still visible on the Argentine horizon, but definitely not a central axis of their lives and debates. To this group belonged largely second-generation immigrants, children of those who arrived at the very end of the nineteenth century or those who immigrated at a very young age. In short: those “formed” in Argentina. Many of them abandoned Yiddish in search of integration and success in Argentine society and looked for a language that would not remind them of their immigrant parents.<sup>2</sup> In a 1923 editorial the acculturationist *Mundo Israelita* proclaimed, “We are different,” demanding recognition and respect from the new immigrant generation. The editor pointed out that Jews who were socialized in Argentina were influenced by the surrounding society and obviously differed from later immigrants. Rejecting any notion of cultural superiority, Jewish Argentines demanded that immigrant Jews recognize the socio-cultural differences between them and not decry natural cultural and linguistic changes.<sup>3</sup>

For the post-World War I generation of immigrants, Poland remained an important reference point, a center of the imagined Yiddishland and a place from where Jewish social, political and cultural trends resonated on smaller diasporas. Their Old Home was rather a malleable state of mind and a relation to a past left behind or as Frank Wolff put it, a

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Rollansky argued that most of the authors who came after 1918 brought new problems to Jewish Argentina: “hard feelings from the *alte heyman*, war and occupation experiences, hunger, revolution, class struggle, anti-Semitism (...).” Rollansky, *Dos yidische gedrukte vort un teater in argentine* (Buenos Aires, 1941), 136.

<sup>2</sup> Alejandro Dujovne, *Una historia del libro judío. La cultura judía argentina a través de sus editores, libreros, traductores, imprentas y bibliotecas* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2014), 80-81.

<sup>3</sup> “Somos distintos,” *Mundo Israelita*, 22.6.1923, 3.



“mythscape filled with emotions, experiences and expectations.”<sup>4</sup> Polish politics attracted their attention. Opinions held by fellow Jews in Poland regarding their new home were of a big importance. Yet there was no clear division between the attitudes of old and new Jewish immigrants. The lines were blurred. Their approach to issues such as language, their relationship to Poland and the perception of the Jewish place in Argentina varied due to several factors. This chapter analyzes the tensions introduced to Argentine Jewish life by the new wave of Jewish-Polish immigrants. By tracing the stories of Jewish-Polish immigrants, I explore their Argentine lives and the process of becoming Argentine and/or developing a hybrid diasporic Jewish-Polish identity. This chapter shows to what extent the Polishness of immigrant Jews was a factor that influenced their situation in Argentina. It examines whether and how being a Polish Jew found its expression in the social and cultural life of 1920s and 1930s Argentina.

This section follows Argentine discussions about *argentinidad* and Jewishness and about the place of Jews in Argentina. I look at generational and class differences to portray a complex picture of immigrant experiences, as they were expressed in printed media and immigrant writing. I uncover the narratives hidden in Argentine-Yiddish literature, examining the literary creations as a lens for observing changing attitudes towards the new and old homeland. I see the sometimes unprofessional, sometimes highly-praised Argentine-Yiddish writing as a community-building practice and a space for discussing the tensions between Jewish ethno-national identity and belonging to Argentina. Yiddish literature acted as a field for discussing the meaning of language, the future of the youth, the relationship to Poland and, as such, served not only as an artistic expression but also a position in social and political debates. Finally, I argue that Polish immigration of the 1920s intensified Argentine discussions on Yiddishism and on Jewish ethno-national identity, contributing to the temporal “re-yiddishization” of Jewish life in Argentina.

The Jewish-Polish immigration of the 1920s reshaped Jewish-Argentina debates about identity, belonging and language. Many of the newcomers were familiar with or were involved in the recent ethno-national and political revival in Jewish Poland. To a certain extent, this challenged and redirected the ongoing acculturation processes in which the older generation of immigrants was involved. In the 1920s and 1930s, discussions about the place of Jews in Argentina and the meaning of Yiddish culture were led on a number of fronts. These included the Spanish and Yiddish general press, landsman debates, Yiddish literature,

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<sup>4</sup> Frank Wolff, “The Home that Never Was: Rethinking Space and Memory in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century,” *Historical Social Research* 38, no. 3 (2013): 198.

but also in communal institutions.<sup>5</sup> At the very beginning the relations between the “gele” acculturationists and the “grine” Yiddish-speakers were far from smooth. The Yiddish word “gel,” or yellow, referred to immigrants who already spent a longer time in Argentina, whereas “grin,” or green, denoted the newly arrived. Many of the veteran Jews, following Argentine cultural nationalism that dominated the intellectual discourse of the era, accused the newcomers of not being or not wanting to be fully Argentine. This was visible in the approach to Jewish immigrants following the 1905 Revolution in Russia, as well as the Jewish-Polish immigration in the 1920s. At the same time, some of the Spanish-oriented Jews noticed their own distancing from Judaism and Jewishness and saw the newly arrived as more authentic, and found a growing interest in Jewishness and the Jewish ethno-national revival in Eastern Europe and beyond. This alignment to progressive *yidishkayt* was primarily characteristic of the proletarian socialist groupings, who felt disillusioned within the general socialist parties, in which they were often accused of Jewish sectarianism.<sup>6</sup> Yet argentinized middle-class Jews also rediscovered Yiddish culture, mainly in Yiddish popular theater. Samuel Rollansky noted that Yiddish theater was “a school of *yidishkayt*” for the Jewish *porteños*.<sup>7</sup>

The economic progress, or generational differences, did not always go together with linguistic and broader indentitarian changes. In order to grasp these complexities, it might be useful to adopt Raanan Rein's notions of “Argentine Jews” and “Jewish Argentines,” with the former emphasizing Argentina as a place of residence, while at the same time identifying with world Jewry or the Yiddishland, and the latter stressing a stronger indentitarian and national connection to Argentina as an adopted homeland.<sup>8</sup> In thinking about the new Polish immigrants in the 1920s and 1930s, I prefer to use the term “Argentine Jews,” or *argentinier yidn*, as their cultural rootedness in the Yiddish culture was often a dominant identity factor in the Yiddishist progressive ethno-national project. They were of course simultaneously Argentine, but their Argentineness rather referred to representing Argentina within the global Yiddishland. I see being an “Argentine Jew” as a temporal stage that led to becoming a “Jewish Argentine” later in life. In the Argentina of the 1920s and 1930s, we had to do with both groups living side by side: more veteran, argentinized Jewish Argentines and Argentine Jews, who were relatively recent arrivals. Although using different argumentation, both

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<sup>5</sup> Efraim Zadoff, *Historia de la educaccción judía en Buenos Aires 1935-1957* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Mila 1994), 34-37.

<sup>6</sup> Frank Wolff, “Als Wilna neben Buenos Aires stand. Die Transnationalität jüdischen Lebens am Rio de la Plata, 1904-1939,” in *Migration-Religion-Identität. Aspekte Transkultureller Prozesse*, ed. Kerstin Kazzazi, Angela Treiber and Tim Wätzold (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2016), 69.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedruckte vort*, 214.

<sup>8</sup> Raanan Rein, *Argentine Jews or Jewish Argentines? Essays on Ethnicity, Identity and Diaspora* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010).

groups claimed their belonging to Argentina. Whereas some saw themselves as Argentine patriots and underlined the cultural-religious basis of their Jewishness, the Yiddish-speaking immigrant majority described themselves as *argentiner yidn*, an ethno-national diaspora of those who belonged to a *yidishn folk* and formed an Argentine part of a global Yiddish ethno-cultural network.<sup>9</sup> The Argentine Yiddishist activist Samuel Rollansky believed that *yidishkayt*, defined by a common Yiddish language and Eastern European past, marked Jews in Argentina as a “national group.”<sup>10</sup> Yet as time passed, more and more Jews saw themselves as Jewish Argentines, citizens and members of the Republic, not as Jews in a national sense.

## 1. The Place of Jews in the Argentine Nation

Generational, economic, class, linguistic and political differences were expressed in the social and cultural composition of Argentine Jewry. Whereas in the interwar years the majority (both new and old immigrants) were Yiddish-speaking proletarian families, the number of acculturated, Spanish-speaking, Jewish middle-class families was on the rise. The sociologist Jacob Shatzky estimated that at the beginning of the 1950s 40% of Jewish press readers read only Yiddish journals, while another 40% only in Spanish.<sup>11</sup> Although in the 1920s and 1930s the number of those who read only in Spanish was certainly lower, this tendency was already visible. Economic progress moved Jews closer to the Spanish-speaking sphere.<sup>12</sup> Recalling his childhood in 1930s Buenos Aires, Isaias Lerner identified two clearly separate spheres: public Argentine and private Jewish. His parents decided to look for a private Jewish teacher instead of sending him to a Jewish school, at home they read Yiddish literature with him and celebrated Jewish holidays in a secular way as a “folkloric-gastronomic practice.” At the same time, the Lerner mingled within the circle of liberal Argentine Catholics and Isaias went to a public school.<sup>13</sup> I would be hesitant extrapolate Lerner’s experience and to argue that a clear-cut separation between “a private Jewish” and

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<sup>9</sup> Pinie Katz defined the *yidishkayt* of Argentine Jews as the feeling that they were part of the Jewish nation and their *argentinishkayt* was love for their Argentine home. See Pinie Katz, “Argentine yidn (esey),” 395-399.

<sup>10</sup> Alan Astro contrasted the vision of Rollansky with the views of Max Weinreich of New York's YIVO. In his writings, Weinreich referred to Jewry in a cultural sense and did not perceive North American Jews as a national minority in the prewar Eastern European sense. See Alan Astro, *Persistencia del idish en Argentina: reflexiones comparativas con Estados Unidos y Canadá*, unpublished work in progress, available at the website of IDES: <http://ides.org.ar/archivos/7675>. Accessed on 10.3.2016.

<sup>11</sup> Jacob Shatzky, *Comunidades judías en Latinoamérica* (Buenos Aires: American Jewish Committee, 1952), 51.

<sup>12</sup> For a study of the emergence of the Argentine middle class, see Ezequiel Adamovsky, *Historia de la clase media argentina: apogeo y decadencia de una ilusión, 1919-2003* (Buenos Aires: Planete, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Isaias Lerner, “A Half Century Ago: The Jewish Experience in Argentina,” in *Identity in Dispersion: Selected Memoirs from Latin American Jews*, ed. Leon Klenicki (Cincinnati: The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of American Jewish Archives, 2000), 60-65.

“public Argentine” arena existed in Argentina. There was a broad Jewish public sphere, encompassing both Spanish and Yiddish expressions. Nevertheless, there was a clear tendency among the Argentina-born generation to perceive Spanish as a language of communal and national belonging. This was cause for lament among some Yiddishists, who envisioned Jews in Argentina as embedded in Yiddish and centered around the linguistic principle of Jewish peoplehood. Others were more ambiguous concerning the identitarian and linguistic evolution, with some Yiddishist perceiving it as needed and desired.

The Yiddishist Pinie Katz noticed that in the 1920s some Jewish merchants perceived the linguistic conversion into Spanish as a social upgrade.<sup>14</sup> The need to speak Spanish with non-Jewish customers was often transformed into a worldview and Yiddish began to be perceived as a ballast. Some Jews pretended not to speak Yiddish, which turned them into tragicomic figures, in the eyes of Katz. Others, like Jewish doctors or lawyers working with Jews, were forced to use Yiddish, but sometimes they perceived it as questioning their integration and progress within the Spanish-speaking world. Pinie Katz claimed that linguistic acculturation was often superficial and was reduced merely to speaking Spanish without being involved in the Spanish-language culture. Another Argentine Yiddishist, Yankev Botoshansky, was much more sceptical about acculturation, arguing in 1931 that 60% of Argentine Jews “stood on the verge of an abyss.” In his view, the younger generation was not rooted enough in the Yiddish language and culture and was becoming more comfortable in Spanish.<sup>15</sup> Botoschansky was not optimistic about the future of Yiddish in Argentina and saw linguistic transformation as a danger.<sup>16</sup> David Ajzensztat of the Poylisher Farband had similar views and wrote in 1941: “our children are naked. Without Jewish contents, without Jewish hope. Without a Jewish environment.”<sup>17</sup> An anonymous landsman writing in the journal of the Poylisher Farband was convinced that linguistic acculturation was dangerous as it “alienated the youth from the Jewish language, culture and their own parents.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Pinie Katz, “Der sotsyaler bashtand fun poylisher yidn in argentine,” in *Almanakh 1928. Ferter zamlbukh aroysgegeben fun poylish yidishn farband in argentine*, ed. Moisés David Guiser (Buenos Aires: Poylish yidisher farband in argentine, 1928), 55. Pinie Katz was born in southern Ukraine (Cherson region) in 1882 and arrived to Argentina in 1906. He was one of the most important figures of Argentine cultural Yiddishism, as well as editor of the *Di Presse* daily and a convinced communist. Katz was also a translator from Spanish into Yiddish.

<sup>15</sup> In an interview given to the Polish Yiddishist journal *Literarische Bleter*, Botoshansky was much less pessimistic. He emphasized that a segment of second-generation immigrants “falls out” from *yidishkayt*, yet the *yidishkayt* of the *yishev* was strong, enthusiastic and young. “Dos yidishe kultur-lebn in argentine. A shmues mit yankev botoshansky,” *Literarische Bleter*, no. 12, 20.3.1931, 229, 230.

<sup>16</sup> “A lebediger grus fun yudish lebn un yudisher kultur in argentine. Vos dertselt der bekanter yudisher shriftshteler fun argentine, yankev botoshansky,” *Grodner Moment Express*, no. 62, 13.3.1931, 7.

<sup>17</sup> David Ajzensztat, “Ver vet farzetsen unzer arbet?,” *Poylishe yidn in doyrem amerike. 25 yor gezeshaflekeh tetikayt* (Buenos Aires: Tsentral farband fun poylishe yidn in argentine, 1941), 155.

<sup>18</sup> “Di yidishe yugent un di yidishe kultur,” *Dos Naye Vort*, no. 140, October 1932, 17.

The Argentinization of Argentina-born or socialized generation of Jews was strongly interconnected with Argentina's state policies concerning nation-building. The beginning of the twentieth century was an era of national positivism that underlined values such as patriotism, hard work and aspiration for social progress. The sociobiological discourse of the era saw Argentina as a living organism that was supposed to progress in a way similar to the evolution of nature. Argentina was supposed to aggrandize and to become powerful, and immigration was primarily seen as a source of population increase that was supposed to guarantee Argentina's bright future. The immigrants were supposed to be turned into Argentine subjects, while Argentineness, or national belonging, was supposed to neutralize class differences in society.<sup>19</sup> National education was conceived as tool for creating a "governable" nation that favored the interests of the *patria* over the individual. The educational system designed by José M. Ramos Mejía (head of *Consejo Nacional de Educación*, 1908-1912), by establishing practices of *culto de la patria* and shaping the "patriotic spirit," was a key mechanism of "making" Argentines. This was supposed to counter both the presumed immigrant isolationism and a sense of proletarian (not national) identity.<sup>20</sup> The generation of immigrant Jews that grew up in Argentina around the *Centenario* (1910) was to great extent influenced by these visions of national belonging and Argentineness.

These socio-economic changes were reflected in the Argentine-Jewish press. The Buenos Aires humoresque Jewish social weekly *Penimer un penimlekh* (1923-1935) featured a large photographic section that presented the aspiring new Jewish middle class of Buenos Aires. They portrayed numerous formal and informal meetings of owners of Jewish banks, factories, cooperatives, charities and other institutions. The weekly was full of commercials showing the economic changes that were taking place in Buenos Aires. We find numerous ads by furniture factories, like those of B. Garzentstein. The ads showed luxurious furniture, but at the same time Garzentstein offered special prizes for *cuenteniks* (ambulant merchants). Another ad from "La Americana" by the Rujensky brothers was selling stylish bedroom sets. On the same page, a merchant named Finkelstein advertised his jewelry. There was also an ad for the *El Sibarite* restaurant that invited guests to a Rosh Hashana meal.<sup>21</sup> In another issue, we see the commercials by Gidekel and Sons offering pianos or Café Billares at Corrientes Street inviting patrons to drink coffee and play billiards. Among the artsy Jewish-Argentine

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<sup>19</sup> Luis E. García Fanlo, *Genealogía de la argentinidad* (Buenos Aires: Gran Aldea Editores, 2010), 113-140.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>21</sup> *Penimer un penimlekh*, 15.9.1925, 41.

personalities (like Alberto Gerchunoff, Berta Singerman or Samuel Eichelbaum) the restaurant Internacional owned by Leon (Leib) Poaley was especially beloved.<sup>22</sup> The advertisements reveal the upward ascent of a specific middle-class segment of the Jewish public: those who succeed as factory owners or big merchants.<sup>23</sup> In 1936, already 3.5.% of Argentine Jews were owners of companies and factories and 4.5.% worked in the free professions (the 65% majority was employed in commerce).<sup>24</sup> Economic progress (or at least aspirations) was also true for the increasingly burgeoise members Poylisher Farband.<sup>25</sup> In its 1928 almanac, we find a big commerical for café *El Japones*, owned by Japanese immigrants Sakai and Nanakusaki.<sup>26</sup> The commercial was in Yiddish, which was supposed to attract Polish Jews in their mother tongue, but simultaneoously symbolized the increasing involvement of Argentine Jews with other immigrant groups and their ongoing Argentinization.

The cultural and political attitudes of argentinized Jewish Argentines were inspired by a number of gentile politicians and intellectuals, the *zeitgeist* of that era and a desire common to all immigrants to be accepted by the majority. The Argentine attitude towards European immigration evolved with time and the immigrants' place in the nation was a subject of constant political and social debate. The Argentine liberals of the nineteenth century considered European immigration as a chief way of developing Argentina. The statesman and politician Juan Bautista Alberdi argued that European immigration would elevate the economic and cultural level of Argentina. His views were largely incorporated into the 1853 Constitution and the phrase *gobernar es poblar* (to govern is to populate) became the motto of an "open door policy" that reigned in Argentina until 1930.<sup>27</sup> Alberdi's views were later shared by the future president, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, who drawing on the famous dichotomy of *civilización* versus *barbarié*, called for reshaping Argentina into a modern European-styled state by promoting European immigration.<sup>28</sup> For Sarmiento, the Argentine countryside was a hotbed of barbarism that produced *caudillos* and dictators like the

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<sup>22</sup> Ricardo Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Ameghino Editora, 1999), 171.

<sup>23</sup> *Penimer un penimlekh*, no. 111, date unknown, September 1926, 2.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, 132.

<sup>25</sup> I prefer to use an abbreviated form *Poylisher Farband* instead of a full name *Poylish yidisher farband in argentine*. The Farband, established in 1916 was the biggest and most dynamic Argentine landsman organization uniting Jews originating from Poland.

<sup>26</sup> Moisés David Guiser, ed., *Almanakh 1928. Ferter zamelbukh aroysgegeben fun poylish yidishn farband in argentine* (Buenos Aires: poylish yidishn farband in argentine, 1928), 115.

<sup>27</sup> For details of Alberdi views see: Juan Bautista Alberdi, *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República de Argentina* (Buenos Aires 1853).

<sup>28</sup> For a broader study of Sarmiento's attitude to Jewish immigration see: Samuel Rollansky, *Sarmiento y los judíos* (Buenos Aires: IWO, 1993).

“infamous” Juan Manuel de Rosas. It was Europe that, for him, was an example of an advanced civilization and European immigrants were to serve as the material for remodeling the society and politics of Argentina in the desired direction.<sup>29</sup> Sarmiento’s views reflected Argentine racial explanations that ascribed certain characteristics to the European and indigenous population. For instance, the liberal politician and publicist Lucas Ayagarray asked rhetorically in 1904: “How can western institutions, born in the homogenous and superior [...] nations, function in a semi-indigenous environment [...]?”<sup>30</sup> The sociologist Carlos Octavio Bunge believed in the superiority of the Argentine Creole race, due to its “relatively homogenous racial character” when compared with other countries of the region. As a Social Darwinist, he relied on the category of race and imagined that a new *argentinidad* could be constructed, as the positivists believed.<sup>31</sup> In his vision, immigrants and *criollos* were supposed to become subjects unifying Argentine nationalism.

At the very beginning of the twentieth century, around the *centenario* of Argentine independence, new voices of cultural nationalism began to gain in power. Intellectuals and politicians, such as Manuel Gálvez, Ricardo Rojas or Emilio Bécher, feared that the flocking of a foreign population endangered the essence and traditions of Argentina.<sup>32</sup> The parliamentarian Estanislao Zeballos suspected that Buenos Aires would become “[...] like Montevideo, a city without features, [and] one day we will find ourselves transformed into a nation without language, traditions, character or flag.”<sup>33</sup> The nationalist slogan of “coming back to the roots” of Argentina by emphasizing the symbolic value of soil and *gaucho*, together with the influence of immigration, were supposed to produce a genuinely Argentine nation. The visions of the intellectuals were transferred both to natives and immigrants via the very popular so-called *literatura criollista*.<sup>34</sup> As José Moya pointed out, around 1910, the settlement of the land and agro-pastoralism came to be imagined as an embodiment of

<sup>29</sup> Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Civilización i barbarie. Vida de Juan Facundo Quiroga*. First published in 1845. This reference is taken from an edition by Editorial Huemul: *Facundo*, Introducción, 57-64 (Buenos Aires, 1978). For a broader discussion on Sarmiento's vision of Argentina and immigration, see: Joséph T. Criscenti (ed.), *Sarmiento and His Argentina* (Boulder, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993).

<sup>30</sup> Lucas Ayagarray, *Cuestiones y problemas argentinos contemporáneos* (Buenos Aires: J. Lajouane & Cía., 1926), 14, quoted in Carlos Altamirano, “Pensar en la Argentina entre dos centenarios,” in *Argentina 1910-2010. Balance del siglo*, ed. Robert Russell (Buenos Aires: Taurus, 2010), 319.

<sup>31</sup> Luis E. García Fanlo, *Genealogía de la argentinidad* (Buenos Aires: Gran Aldea Editores, 2010), 91-112.

<sup>32</sup> Jean H. Delaney and Jeane H. Delaney, “Imagining “El Ser Argentino”: Cultural Nationalism and Romantic Concepts of Nationhood in Early Twentieth-Century Argentina,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 34, no. 3 (2002): 626–628; Earl T. Glauert, “Ricardo Rojas and the Emergence of Argentine Cultural Nationalism,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 43, no. 1 (1963): 1-13. See also Ricardo Rojas, *La Argentinidad* (Buenos Aires, 1916) and *La resteuración nacionalista* (Buenos Aires, 1909).

<sup>33</sup> María Fernanda Astiz, “Jewish Acculturation: Identity, Society and Schooling Buenos Aires, Argentina (1890-1930),” *Journal of Jewish Identities* 3, no. 1 (2010): 45.

<sup>34</sup> See Adolfo Prieto, *El discurso criollista en la formación de la Argentina moderna* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno, 2006).

authenticity and national ethos. Discursive associations between the new immigrant and the *gaucho* served the former as a claim for belonging to the national body. The Baron de Hirsch Jewish agricultural project at the turn of the century was in fitting with this paradigm. It allowed Jews to imagine themselves and be imagined as primordial Argentine land-laborers. This was visible in the speech given by Juan Montovani, the Minister of Education and Development of Provincia Santa Fe, on the 50th anniversary of the Jewish colony of Moises Ville: “The Jewish colonies reflect the economic effort and the effort of the irreversible assimilation with our soil... Although they preserve their religion, the Jewish colonies are villages filled with the national spirit [...]”<sup>35</sup> Next to the Jews, access to the nation via land labor was also true of other immigrant groups in Argentina, including Germans, Danes, Poles or Ukrainians.<sup>36</sup>

The *crisol de razas* (melting pot) ideology that was dominant in Argentina from the end of the nineteenth century often demanded from the immigrants the abandonment of the old country customs and loyalties and integration into a newly formed Argentine ethno-national community. This was intensified by the cultural nationalists, who around 1900-1910 began to downgrade the positive influence of immigration and feared a “disorder” that the intermingling of peoples and races could bring about.<sup>37</sup> Józef Włodek, the first consul of Poland in Argentina, wrote in 1923 that “Argentines do not like the phrase “*colonia*” [colony, settlement] or “*colectividad extranjera*” [a foreign community] [...] and prefer to see only Argentine citizens or at least Argentine residents. Argentine society, especially the nationalists, demand that all immigrants quickly adopt the essence of Argentine national life.”<sup>38</sup> The process of embracing Argentine nationality by immigrants, and its effectiveness, was viewed ambiguously. Sarmiento, for instance, believed that whereas immigrants in the USA supposedly quickly became Americans, in Argentina “the immigrant preferred to remain a foreigner forever.”<sup>39</sup> The beginning of the twentieth century marked an intensified patriotic

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<sup>35</sup> *Medio siglo en el surco argentino. Cincuentenario de la Jewish Colonization Association (J.C.A.). Homenaje de la Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (D.A.I.A.) a la Jewish Colonization Association (J.C.A.) con motivo de su cincuentenario. 1891 agosto 1941* (Buenos Aires: D.A.I.A., 1942), 22-23.

<sup>36</sup> José C. Moya, “The Jewish Experience in Argentina in a Diasporic Comparative Perspective,” in *The New Jewish Argentina: Facets of Jewish Experiences in the Southern Cone*, ed. Adriana Brodsky and Raanan Rein (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 109.

<sup>37</sup> Paulina L. Alberto and Eduardo Elena, “Introduction: The Shades of the Nation,” in *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina*, ed. Paulina L. Alberto and Eduardo Elena (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>38</sup> Józef Włodek, *Argentyna i emigracja. Ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem emigracji polskiej* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo M. Arcta, 1923), 275-276.

<sup>39</sup> Julio Mafud, “El desarraigo del inmigrante. La influencia migratoria en el carácter nacional,” in *Inmigración y nacionalidad*, ed. Dardo Cúneo et. al. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós, 1967), 74.



nationalization of immigrants. Argentineness was defined as something that can be constructed and formed, and the state apparatus engaged intensively in “making Argentines.”<sup>40</sup>



Illustration no. 29. Jewish colonists in Entre Rios, Argentina, around 1920, Organización Sionista Femenina Argentina, reproduced in *Pioneros de la Argentina. Los Inmigrantes judíos* (Buenos Aires: Manrique Zago Ediciones, 1998), 64.

Fears of mistakenly constructing an overly segmented and not truly Argentine society were also voiced in relation to Jewish immigrants. In 1917, Carlos Ibarguren, a historian and a former Minister of Justice and Education, argued in the acculturationist Jewish weekly *Vida Nuestra* that “the sons of the Hebrew immigrants should above all be Argentine.”<sup>41</sup> On another occasion, Ibarguren convinced the readers of *Vida Nuestra* that “your homeland is where you live well” and supported the amalgamation of immigrants into a “great Argentine nation.”<sup>42</sup> Further, Alberto Gerchunoff, a canonic Argentine-Jewish writer, endorsed the acculturation of Jews into the Spanish-speaking world. His 1910 novel *Los gauchos judíos* was a manifesto of the Jewish contribution and devotion to Argentina. As May E. Beltz put it, Gerchunoff’s book transferred the Jewish immigrant culture to the nationalist nostalgia of the early 1900s. Gerchunoff, as an immigrant, but also a member of the Argentine pro-nationalist

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<sup>40</sup> Luis E. García Fanlo, *Genealogía de la argentinidad* (Buenos Aires: Gran Aldea Editores, 2010), 17-22.

<sup>41</sup> Carlos Ibarguren, “La suerte del pueblo hebreo,” *Vida Nuestra*, no. 1, July 1917, 1. Later in life Ibarguren became a fierce critic of the radical government of Hipolito Yrigoyen and turned to nationalism and fascism.

<sup>42</sup> Carlos Ibarguren, “A los judíos en la Argentina,” *Vida Nuestra*, no. 3, September 1918, Buenos Aires, 34.

avant-garde circles, attempted to bridge the chasm between upper-class and immigrant formulations of Argentineness.<sup>43</sup> By cultivating the Argentine land, returning to pastoral, quasi-biblical activities and interacting with the *gauchos*, the first immigrant Jewish colonists pictured by him claimed a place in the national imaginary. On the land, they were not corrupt city cosmopolitans, but a truly Argentine creation. Gerchunoff's book transformed Jewish colonists into a part of the Argentine nation. Writing the book in perfect Spanish, using no Yiddishisms, Gerchunoff established the "right" linguistic code for Jewish inclusion in the nation.<sup>44</sup>

Yet Jewish agricultural settlements did not relinquish the fears associated with Jewish immigration to Argentina. The anti-Jewish sentiments were still vivid in the 1920s and 1930s. Some Catholic reactionary nationalists feared an intensified Jewish immigration. One of the earliest voices was *La Bolsa* (1891) by Julián Martel, which served as an anti-Semitic tirade against foreigners in general.<sup>45</sup> Using the theme of Jewish involvement in female trafficking, Martel portrayed Jews as prone to crime and promiscuity, and as a group actively destroying traditional Argentine morality.<sup>46</sup> Importantly, his book was published precisely during the first years of the Jewish agricultural settlement in the Argentine interior. The tendencies against Jewish immigration continued throughout subsequent decades. Following the coup d'état of 1930, the nationalist author and journalist Gustavo Adolfo Martínez Zuvirría gained popularity for his anti-Semitic novel *El Kahal* (1935). The political situation raised him to the position of director of the Argentine National Library and Minister of Education in the early 1940s. Zuvirría's racial anti-Semitism was nurtured by Argentine nationalism and Catholic militancy that dominated Argentine public life of the 1930s. Under the pseudonym of Hugo Wast, Zuvirría produced a number of pulp novels that posited the existence of a world Jewish lobby and played on anti-Jewish race rhetoric popular in that era.<sup>47</sup> Isaias Lerner recalled that *The Protocols of Elders of Zion* were openly sold on newsstands in the 1930s and Wast's pamphlets were frequently read at public Argentine schools.<sup>48</sup> An exemplary figure for the 1930s nationalist Argentine opposition against Jewish immigration was the writer and

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<sup>43</sup> May E. Beltz, *Immigration and Acculturation in Brazil and Argentina: 1890-1929* (New York: Pallgrave Mcmillan, 2010), 101.

<sup>44</sup> Beltz, *Immigration and Acculturation*, 101-114. For a broader discussion of Gerchunoff, see Naomi Lindstrom, *Jewish Issues in Argentine Literature: From Gerchunoff to Szichman* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989); Leonardo Senkman, *La identidad judía en la literatura argentina* (Buenos Aires: Pardes, 1983).

<sup>45</sup> Julián Martel (1867-1896) was a conservative writer and editor of *La Nación*.

<sup>46</sup> Nora Glickman, *The Jewish White Slave Trade and The Untold Story of Raquel Liberman* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 29-30.

<sup>47</sup> David Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina: The Nationalist Movement, Its History and Impact* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 104-110.

<sup>48</sup> Lerner, "A Half Century Ago," 61.

historian Manuel Gálvez. Belonging to the same intellectual groups as Gerchunoff, Gálvez strictly differentiated between a conservative Jewish family (which he desired in Argentina) and revolutionary “communist” Jews, who endangered the newly established nationalist order of José Uriburu. In 1932, Gálvez wrote:

The nationalists know well, as does the entire country, that there are thousands of conservative Jews who are not polluted by the revolutionary poison. The nationalists know that there are reactionary Jews, that there are thousands of Jews who do not have political opinions. Would anyone with such an evil soul accuse all these honorable people of more or less criminal activities as the disciples of Lenin?<sup>49</sup>

Gálvez opposed the open door policy, especially following the Jewish-Polish immigration of the 1920s, linking it to the “Latin spirit” of Argentina that the big Jewish influx was supposed to endanger. Referring to the earlier visions of Buenos Aires as a chaotic Tower of Babel, Gálvez repeated the popular accusation that imagined immigrants as threatening the soul of Argentina.<sup>50</sup>

[...] no one should touch the Jews already living in this country, except only if they follow destructive ideas. They are here and they should stay here. But it is impossible that their number should grow. This is the immigration that destroys our character. The admission of these immigrants should be limited, not due to a hatred of a specific race, but in order to preserve the Latin spirit of the Argentine Homeland.<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, Argentine discourse on nationality and citizenship to a certain extent allowed for maintaining emotional relations with former homelands and the underlining of one's ethnic origin. In a multinational country, with hundreds of thousands of new immigrants, it was impossible to impose ethnic and linguistic uniformity. As Desmond King argued in the US context, the Americanization (and in our case, Argentinization) did not conform to the melting pot ideal as ethnic traditions were not abandoned. In fact, much more powerful was a gradual “bottom-up” or “organic” acculturation of immigrants. For instance, spontaneous immigrant associations constituted a medium of socialization into the new society.<sup>52</sup> The Argentinization expectations of policymakers did not always coincide with the practice on the ground and the social reality. In Argentina, Juan A. Alsina, director of the Migration Department, already in 1910 acknowledged the existence of multiple immigrant belongings:

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<sup>49</sup> Manuel Gálvez, *Criterio*, no. 239, 29.9.1932, 32; quoted in Senkman, *La identidad judía*, 422.

<sup>50</sup> Mafud, “El desarraigo del inmigrante,” 70.

<sup>51</sup> Manuel Gálvez, *Criterio*, no. 239, 29.9.1932, 34; quoted in Senkman, *La identidad judía*, 423.

<sup>52</sup> Desmond King, *Making Americans: Immigration, Race, and the Origins of the Diverse Democracy*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), quoted in Anat Helman, “Hues of Adjustment: Landsmanshaftn in Interwar New York and Tel Aviv,” *Jewish History* 20, no. 1 (2006): 55.

We do not force the new homeland upon an immigrant, but we expected that arriving under the protection of our flag, of his own free will, he would quickly want to acquire Argentine nationality in order to fulfill the obligations of a citizen and enjoy the rights of a citizen. We expected that he would cut off contact with the *madre patria*, with the school that shaped him, with family, friends and national memories. But the reality turned out differently. Immigrants not only did not erase the image of the homeland from their heads, but some are trying to oppose his family and descendants becoming Argentine [...] the immigrant does not stop to love his homeland, the immigrant seems to love two homelands, the one where he was born and the one whose welfare he enjoys.<sup>53</sup>

Language was a key sphere through which immigrants manifested their identity and ethnic background. Despite nationalist influences, in the 1920s and 1930s Argentina existed as a place of national-linguistic heterogeneity and affection for the European *madre patria*.<sup>54</sup> I share the point of view of Leonardo Senkman, who argued that the Argentine regime allowed Jews to claim belonging to the Argentine nation, yet simultaneously demanded that they define their ethnic identities as private or semi-private and operated within family or civic society.<sup>55</sup> This was also noticed by Isaias Lerner, who grew up in 1930s Buenos Aires. He wrote: “Jewish life was never led in public and consisted of minimal religious practices that were hardly visible. Thus we led a double life [...] We were Jews within the walls of our homes and citizens whose religion became imperceptible in life, but began only when we stepped out into the street.”<sup>56</sup> Argentina never legally recognized the existence of national minorities, but on a lower level of social life (family, neighborhood, civic society) ethnic identities were expressed in various forms.<sup>57</sup> Mobilized by nationalizing influences of the state, immigrant Jews claimed national belonging within the framework provided by Argentina. The myth of Jewish colonization assimilated Jews as citizens of an agrarian country. Public schooling raised the new generation of Jews with a common Argentine national memory, mythology and vernacular language.<sup>58</sup> At the same time neighborhood societies, often of ethnic character, taught the immigrant how to participate in a quasi-political

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<sup>53</sup> Juan A. Alsina, *La inmigración en el primer siglo de la independencia* (Buenos Aires, 1910), 8, quoted in Wlodek, *Argentyna i emigracja*, 308

<sup>54</sup> Beatriz Sarlo, “Oralidad y lenguas extranjeras: El conflicto en la literatura argentina durante el primer tercio del siglo XX,” in *Oralidad y argentinidad., estudios sobre la función del lenguaje hablado en la literatura argentina*, ed. Walter Brune Berg et al. (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1997), 28-41.

<sup>55</sup> Leonardo Senkman, “Ser judío en Argentina: las transformaciones de la identidad nacional” in *Identidades judías, modernidad y globalización*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr, Yom Tov Assis and Leonardo Senkman (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Ediciones Lilmod, 2007), 403-454.

<sup>56</sup> Lerner, “A Half Century Ago,” 60-61

<sup>57</sup> Senkman, “Ser judío en Argentina.”

<sup>58</sup> See Juan Carlos Tedesco, *Educación y sociedad en la Argentina (1880-1945)* (Buenos Aires: Solar 1993); Lilia Ana Bertoni, “Nacionalidad o cosmopolitismo. La cuestión de las escuelas de las colectividades extranjeras a fines del siglo XIX,” *Anuario del IEHS* 11 (1996): 179-199.

process, for example how to negotiate with municipal authorities.<sup>59</sup> Taken as a whole, Argentina offered immigrant Jews a perspective of an inclusive civic nation that the individuals needed to negotiate with the powers of diasporism and ethnicity.<sup>60</sup>

The experience of being an ingredient in Argentine melting pot that mixed immigrants of diverse *patrias* into an Argentine nation was not as attractive as in the United States. Citizenship was not granted to immigrants that quickly and for many years Jews struggled for economic and social inclusion, rather than actively participating in Argentine politics.<sup>61</sup> Whereas the first years of the twentieth century were marked by intensive communist and anarchist Jewish political activity, following World War I the partisan left-wing problems never regained their prewar importance. In the 1920s and 1930s, other issues stood at the center, chiefly the social and economic progress, Jewish education and the status of Yiddish culture. A Yiddish proletarian culture arose from the Jewish proletarian movement, which saw *yidishkayt* as the highest value per se.<sup>62</sup> Consequently, the naturalization and political identifications of immigrants were not at the core of the debates of the era.<sup>63</sup> Many Jewish-Polish immigrants who arrived after 1918 could not vote and were mostly excluded from the political process.<sup>64</sup> Edgardo Bilsky concluded that foreigners were marginalized and could not find ways of expression in a traditional political process.<sup>65</sup> However, the children of the more veteran immigrants were granted citizenship by birth and placed many hopes with the *Union Cívica Radical* (UCR) in the 1920s, especially during the governments of Marcelo Alvear and Hipólito Yrigoyen. The UCR opened channels that incorporated immigrant children into

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<sup>59</sup> Leandro H. Gutiérrez and Luis Alberto Romero, “La construcción de la ciudadanía 1912-1955,” in *Sectores populares, cultura y política. Buenos Aires en la entreguerra*, ed. Luis H. Gutiérrez and Luis Alberto Romero (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2007), 161.

<sup>60</sup> See Anthony D. Smith, “The Myth of Modern Nation and the Myths of Nations,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 11, no. 1 (1988): 1-26.

<sup>61</sup> Oscar Kornblit estimated that in 1914 only around 1.4% (33,203 persons) of immigrants in Argentina were naturalized citizens, whereas in the USA it was 24.1% in the case of Jewish and 21.6% in the case of Polish immigrants (in 1914). See Oscar Kornblit, “Inmigrantes y empresarios en la política argentina,” in *Los fragmentos del poder: de la oligarquía a poliarquía argentina*, ed. Torcuato S. Di Tella and Tulio Haperin Donghi (Buenos Aires: Alvarez, 1969), 416-418. According to Józef Włodek, the numbers were similar (22 naturalized for every 1,000 foreigners). Jews were not divided as a separate national group, but the information on Russian and Austro-Hungarian citizens allows us to speculate on the Jewish share. In 1914, 3.1% of Austro-Hungarians and 2.0% of Russians were Argentine citizens. Włodek, *Argentyna i emigracja*, 298-300.

<sup>62</sup> Wolff, “Als Wilna neben Buenos Aires stand,” 60-62.

<sup>63</sup> Beltz, *Immigration and Acculturation*, 89-91.

<sup>64</sup> The Argentine naturalization law enabled applications for Argentine citizenship already after two years of living in the country. Yet, as *Di Presse* commented, the naturalization process was hard, lengthy, expensive and often humiliating. Consequently, only a small fraction of immigrants applied for citizenship. See: “Naturalizatsye,” *Di Presse*, 29.11.1929, page unknown. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimated that in 1933 a mere 1,069 Polish citizens were naturalized in Argentina, out of them  $\frac{3}{4}$  were Jews. In the same year, a number of Polish citizens in Argentina was estimated at 50,000, including 25,000 Jews. AAN, MSZ, 9618, 147, quoted in Izabela Klarner-Kosiński, “Polonia w Buenos Aires,” in *Dzieje Polonii w Ameryce Łacińskiej*, ed. Marcin Kula (Wrocław: Polska Akademia Nauk, Komitet Badań Polonii, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1983), 236.

<sup>65</sup> Edgardo Bilsky, *La Semana Trágica* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Ryr, 2011), 35.

Argentina's political life and was indeed supported by middle-class Jews.<sup>66</sup> The coup d'etat of 1930 ended this period of relative tolerance and inclusion and brought about an “oligarchic restoration” that lasted until 1943.<sup>67</sup> In 1931 the government of José Félix Uriburu closed the gates of Argentina to new immigrants and reinstated an alliance between conservatives and the Catholic Church, suppressing left-wing political movements.

For some Jews, especially after the 1917 Balfour declaration, the development of Zionism was a chance to claim their own *madre patria*. Possessing a national home in the Middle East would present Jewish immigrants as similar to Spaniards, Italians and other nationalities and erase the mark of “homelessness.” Argentine Zionism had less to do with a political process of rebuilding a Jewish state than a way for Jews to claim their place and belonging in a multinational Argentina.<sup>68</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s, the Zionist cause was supported in Argentina not only by the acculturated middle-class elite, but also by some proletarian leaders and even gentile intellectuals.<sup>69</sup> The rise in support for Zionism was noticed in 1925 by the Yiddishist travel writer Peretz Hirschbein. He wrote in a memoir that in Latin America Zionism often coincided with assimilation, which Hirschbein of course condemned.<sup>70</sup> Sometimes migrants were swayed ideologically after emigration. Zelik Turkenich was a devoted communist in Poland, whereas after becoming firmly rooted in La Plata in Argentina, he turned to Zionism.<sup>71</sup> Marcos Regalsky, a Labor Zionist and editor of *Yidische Zaitung*, argued in 1919 that Jewish colonization in Argentina was a first step to rebuilding the Jewish statehood in Palestine, “a gate that leads to the liberated homeland.”<sup>72</sup> A few years later, the Jewish-Argentine journalist León Kibrick expressed his support for founding a “Jewish national home” in Palestine, but opposed it being the “only Jewish home.”<sup>73</sup> He rejected the

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<sup>66</sup> Mollie Lewis Neuwen, *Oy, my Buenos Aires. Jewish Immigrants and the Creation of Argentine National Identity* (University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque, 2013), 17-18. For a general study of radical governments and their social policy, see David Rock, *Politics in Argentina 1890-1930: The Rise and Fall of Radicalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

<sup>67</sup> Gutiérrez and Romero, “La construcción de la ciudadanía,” 155-174.

<sup>68</sup> Raanan Rein, “Jewish Latin American Historiography. Challenges Ahead,” in *Returning to Babel: Jewish Latin American Experiences, Representations and Identities*, ed. Amalia Ran and Jean Axelrad Cahan (Boston: Brill, 2012), 24.

<sup>69</sup> For a study of Argentine Zionist political activism, see: David Sheinin and Lois Baer Barr, *The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America: New Studies on History and Literature* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 239-250.

<sup>70</sup> Peretz Hirschbein, “Doyrem (briv fun veg),” 1926, YIVO Institute, Peretz Hirschbein Papers, folder 123, 3.

<sup>71</sup> Eduardo D. Faingold, *Diaspora y exilio. Crónica de una familia argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Al Margen, 2006), 26-27.

<sup>72</sup> Marcos Regalsky, “Que la Argentina representa para nosotros,” *Vida Nuestra*, 4.10.1919, 79-81.

<sup>73</sup> León Kibrick (1892?-1974) was born in Russia and immigrated to Argentina as a child. He co-founded the Jewish-Argentine *Sociedad Hebraica Argentina* and for years edited *Mundo Israelita* and earlier *Vida Nuestra*. Kibrick was one of the most prominent figures of Argentine Jewish acculturationist circles. See the memoirs of Leon's brother Salvador: Salvador Kibrick, *Mi paso por la vida* (Buenos Aires: Editores Acervo Cultural, 1978).

right of Zionism to be the only option and solution for the problems of the Jews.<sup>74</sup> In 1928 the acculturationist *Semanario Hebreo* clearly voiced the compatibility of Zionism with Argentine patriotism.<sup>75</sup> Although until the 1940s most of the Jews in Argentina were rather apathetic towards Zionism, the presence of this movement was definitely visible.<sup>76</sup> In the late 1930s, the Jewish journal *Judaica* was regularly publishing articles about Zionism and Palestine. It printed a report from the World Jewish Congress in 1936, referring to the development of Hebrew University of Jerusalem or to cultural life in Tel Aviv. The monthly also eagerly published calls for support for *Keren Hayesod*, a Zionist foundation raising funds for the development of Palestine. In addition, the daily *Mundo Israelita* took a clear Zionist stand in the 1930s. In 1935 numerous Zionist groupings were in existence among many Jewish neighborhoods in Buenos Aires (Villa Devoto, Villa Crespo, Barracas), which together called to support the *Keren Kayemet* campaign.<sup>77</sup> In 1937 the Argentine branch of the Women's International Zionist Organization prepared an 80-day trip to Palestine, while Jewish bookstores sold a new Spanish-Hebrew dictionary by León Winocur and *Editorial Israel* published Zionism- and Palestine-themed books.

The first Zionist bodies in Argentina were already established in the 1890s and in the coming decades *Federación Sionista Argentina* (established 1913) came to represent the Yiddish-speaking Zionists. The *Federación* had a General Zionist profile, and similarly to its Polish counterparts was dominated by wealthier elements.<sup>78</sup> Reaching out to the new Jewish middle class of Buenos Aires, Zionism to some extent went hand in hand with linguistic acculturation and growing economic prosperity of some Jews. Yet, the acculturated circles represented by *Mundo Israelita*, opposed Zionism as “the only national solution,” which they regarded as one potential “national solution” among others. In an editorial from 1925 its editors offered a vision of diverse Jewishness that included both those “who love Jehova,” as well as those who “supported the program of Herzl.” It described patriotic Jewish Argentines as no less “nationalist” than the Zionists. In this context, every person for whom the Jewish people were dear and who fought for their well-being was regarded as a “nationalist.”<sup>79</sup> In underlining Jewish success and “spiritual rootedness” in Argentina, *Mundo Israelita* demanded that Zionists acknowledge the legitimacy of multiple visions of Jewish life.

<sup>74</sup> León Kibrick, “Sionistas y herejes,” *Mundo Israelita*, 1.1.1927, 3.

<sup>75</sup> “Puede un sionista participar en la política del país en que vive?” *Semanario Hebreo*, 8.6.1928, 1.

<sup>76</sup> Victor A. Mirelman, “Early Zionist Activities Among Sephardim in Argentina,” *American Jewish Archives* 34, no. 2 (November 1982): 190-205.

<sup>77</sup> “A los israelitas de Argentina,” *El Mundo Israelita*, 13.7.1935, 5. *Keren Kayemet* (KKL), or the Jewish National Fund, is a Zionist foundation that prior to 1948 focused on purchasing land in Palestine.

<sup>78</sup> A part of the Jewish proletariat supported the more left-wing Labor Zionism.

<sup>79</sup> “Colaboracionismo o exclusivismo?” *Mundo Israelita*, 11.4.1925, 1.

However, for the *Federación Sionista Argentina* it was problematic to even acknowledge the discrepancies in their own movement. The Revisionists, the religious Zionists Mizrahi Party and left-wing Poaley Tsiyon were discriminated within the Argentine Zionists movement.<sup>80</sup> Also Sephardi Jews, who were a minority both within the general Jewish population and within Argentine Zionism, were often placed on the margins.<sup>81</sup> The World Zionist Organization and Ashkenazi Argentine Zionist bodies were suspicious of their linguistic differences and attachment to religion and tradition. Whereas European-rooted Zionism arose as a negation of the religion-based way of life, Sephardi Zionism was able to combine both modern Jewish nationalism and Judaism.<sup>82</sup>

The growing support for Zionism in Argentina was visible in the funding allocations. A telling example is a financial report of the Hevra Kadisha Ashkenazi for 1920-1921, at that time largely controlled by argentinized Jewish circles.<sup>83</sup> Almost 20% of the budget for assistance to other Jewish institutions was devoted to *Keren Hayesod* (2,000 pesos), whereas only 700 for help to new immigrants or 500 for the *Folks-bibliotek* (a Yiddish library).<sup>84</sup> In the 1922-1923 budget year, *Keren Hayesod* received 3,000 pesos out of the entire sum of 5,180 pesos (58%). Further, in the fiscal year of 1924-1925, *Keren Hayesod* was the biggest beneficiary. To keep the supporters updated about the goals that their money was spent on, *Keren Hayesod* published short notices informing readers about how much money was spent for purchasing land in Palestine, how much for agricultural colonization, etc.<sup>85</sup> The slow but steady rise of Zionism complicated the dynamics of Jewish-Polish life in Argentina even more. Among Ashkenazi Jews in the early twentieth century, Zionism was a national model in competition with Yiddishist ethnonationalism. Apart from positioning themselves towards the Old Home and the *nuevo hogar*, they faced a need to take a stand concerning Zionism. Whereas until 1939 Zionism was not the core of Jewish Argentine discussions, the 1940s and 1950s brought a noticeable change in the matter. The sociologist Jacob Shatzky estimated in

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<sup>80</sup> Adriana M. Brodsky, *Sephardi, Jewish, Argentine: Community and National Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 113-118.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem*, 120-121.

<sup>83</sup> Hevra Kadisha (also spelled as Kedusha or Kadusha), established in 1894, was an official Jewish representation (a kehilla) in Buenos Aires. Later it changed its name to Hevra Kadisha Ashkenazi and in 1949 it transformed into AMIA (Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina).

<sup>84</sup> Aharon Leib Schussheim, *Tsu der geshikhte fun yidishn yishev in argentine* (Buenos Aires, 1954), 61-62. Schussheim noted that the full amount of Hevra Kadisha support for Jewish socio-cultural institutions remained minimal. In 1920-1921, it included 9,580 pesos from the entire budget of 370,154 pesos.

<sup>85</sup> A report for the 1921-1925 years was published in *Penimer un penimlekh*, no. 100, 9.7.1926, 12.



1951 that the majority of Argentine Jews were pro-Zionist, yet the number of active Zionists was small.<sup>86</sup>

## 2. We Are Argentines, not European Guests! The Paths of Jewish Inclusion into the Nation

Although becoming Argentine in a political sense might have been problematic, it was easier on the social and cultural level. Already in the 1910s and 1920s Argentina witnessed the linguistic acculturation of second-generation children.<sup>87</sup> Children of Jewish colonists often received public education in Spanish, and only a limited course of Hebrew and Yiddish organized by the so-called *Cursos Religiosos* (established in 1911).<sup>88</sup> In 1914 *Cursos Religiosos* had only 16 schools in Buenos Aires (out of a network of around 100 in Argentina) and most Jewish children in the capital studied only in the obligatory state schools.<sup>89</sup> In 1929 in Buenos Aires only a third of Jewish children received any Jewish education, which corresponded to 8,493 students at all levels of instruction.<sup>90</sup> This situation was criticized by some ethnic activists in the capital and in the colonies. Already in 1901 Yankev Liachovitzky complained in a letter sent to Poland that “they [young Jews in Argentina] wear the same clothing as the Argentines, go shopping on Saturday and play a local game *bollas*.” He lamented the fact that “those under twenty do not have any connection to their people.”<sup>91</sup> Likewise, the Jewish-Polish writer and journalist Marek Turkow, who traveled around the Jewish colonies in the late 1930s, bemoaned the linguistic Argentinization of *colonia* Moisés Ville.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Shatzky, *Comunidades judías*, 54-55. The Zionists stabilized their power in the Jewish community only around 1955. See Lawrence D. Bell, “Bitter Conquest: Zionists against Progressive Jews and the Making of the Post-War Jewish Politics in Argentina,” *Jewish History* 17 (2003): 285-308.

<sup>87</sup> Eduardo D. Faingold, “Educational Attitudes and Language Choice at the Birth of a Progressive Yiddish-language Folks Shule in Argentina,” *International Journal of Jewish Education Research* 7 (2014): 55-76.

<sup>88</sup> As a private communal endeavor, Jewish education in the colonies, and later in Buenos Aires, was a subject of a heated debate between the JCA, colonists, intellectuals and Jewish institutions such as Hevra Kadisha. Similarly to the situation in Poland, until the 1930s parents were required to pay tuition, while the schools received very little support. At the same time since 1884 (Ley de Educación Común), Argentina offered free access to state schools. See Celia Gladys Lopez, *El sistema de educación no formal implantado por las cooperativas agrarias en las colonias judías entrerrianas* (Concepción del Uruguay: Instituto de Investigación Ibarra Grasso, 1993),

<sup>89</sup> Astiz, “Jewish Acculturation,” 52.

<sup>90</sup> Shatzky, *Comunidades judías*, 43-46.

<sup>91</sup> Liachovitzky added that in some provincial towns improvised religious classes took place, for instance in Casares, Santa Fe, etc. See Yankev Shimon Liachovitzky, “Brif fun argentine. Unzere kinder-ertsiyung,” *Der Yud*, no. 5, 31.1.1901, 7-9.

<sup>92</sup> Bernard Mark, “A bukh vegn yidishe kolonizatsye problemem. Mark Turkow, *Oyf yidishe felder (a nesiye iber di yidishe kolonies in argentine)*,” *Literarische Bleter* 43, no. 754, 11.11.1938, 716-717.

Yet even limited Jewish schooling was perceived as a danger by state educational institutions and by some Argentine nationalists.<sup>93</sup> Governmental *Monitor de la Educación Común* complained in 1908 that “it is insulting and depressing that there are schools where the education that children receive is exclusively foreign.”<sup>94</sup> Throughout the entire pre-World War II period the quality of Jewish schooling was considered a major problem and schooling was an arena where conflicting visions of Jewishness and Argentineness met. Contrary to the fears of Argentine nationalists, the children of Jewish immigrants were increasingly fluent in Spanish and proud Argentines. This was the case in provincial cities, where, in the words of Poland's consul Józef Włodek, “parents did everything so that no one would recognize they were Jews and even sent their children to Jesuit schools.”<sup>95</sup> Włodek noted that state schooling was a channel for nationalizing immigrant children in the spirit of Argentine patriotism. In public schools “patriotism was a prayer, learning, entertainment, morality, an ideal and even a god.”<sup>96</sup> Włodek noticed that the Argentine government gave special attention to the nationalizing function of schooling, which primarily emphasized love for the new homeland. Włodek's observations were very accurate. Since the end of the nineteenth century, “school patriotism” became a key tool of Argentinization. Nationalist schoolbooks (like *Nuestra Patria* of Carlos Octavio Bunge, 1910), patriotic youth associations or celebrations of national holidays were supposed to create Argentines devoted to their homeland. School patriotism was supposed to differentiate between good and bad Argentines or between Argentines and non-Argentines.<sup>97</sup> At the same time, public schooling offered the promise of university education, often had better infrastructure and was considered to be on a higher educational level than complementary ethnic schools.<sup>98</sup>

The second generation of *colonias*-born Jews, many of whom later left to Buenos Aires, were key figures in the Argentinization of Argentine Jewish cultural and social life.<sup>99</sup> For this group, reading a journal in Spanish or belonging to a Spanish-speaking Jewish ethnic club was marking their actual self-perception as Argentines, but also their desire not to be considered outsiders, holding on to old-country traditions. Lazaro Zhitnitsky, a *Di Presse*

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<sup>93</sup> Ezequiel Gomez Caride, “‘Catholic Secularism’ and the Jewish Gaucho School: Salvation Themes of the 19th Century Argentinean Citizen,” in *The “Reason” of Schooling: Historicizing Curriculum Studies, Pedagogy and Teacher Education*, ed. Thomas S. Popkewitz (New York: Routledge, 2015), 130.

<sup>94</sup> *Monitor de la Educación Común* 1908 (Buenos Aires: Consejo Nacional de la Educación, 1908), 602.

<sup>95</sup> Włodek, *Argentyna i emigracja*, 312.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>97</sup> Luis E. García Fanlo, *Genealogía de la argentiniadad* (Buenos Aires: Gran Aldea Editores 2010), 24-25.

<sup>98</sup> Astiz, “Jewish Acculturation,” 53-54.

<sup>99</sup> Michael Humphrey, “Ethnic History, Nationalism and Transnationalism in Argentine Arab and Jewish Cultures,” in *Arab and Jewish Immigrants in Latin America. Images and Realities*, ed. Ignacio Klich and Jeffrey Lesser (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 167-188.

contributor and later president of Argentine IWO (Yiddish Scientific Institute), argued that the colonists' children had “creolized” by choosing a path between Jewish *natsyonalkayt* (a Jewish ethno-national identity) and assimilation.<sup>100</sup> A son of first-generation colonists in Moisés Ville proclaimed his belonging and gratitude to Argentina: “I am a son of those immigrants full of belief and hope, love of work and a cult of this land of promise. I am a native son of this colony that celebrates today its fiftieth anniversary [...] I proclaim with pride to be profoundly Argentine, I am blessing my parents thousands of times for coming to this land.”<sup>101</sup> The *Centro Juventud Israelita Argentina* that grouped sons of colonists who left for Buenos Aires, was established as early as 1909. Many of them felt themselves first and foremost Argentine rather than Jewish in an ethno-national sense, yet wished to stress their Jewishness.<sup>102</sup> The acculturationist journal *Juventud* proclaimed in 1916 that: “Israelites [...] have found a profound sense of belonging and look at this adopted land as their own [...] we are convinced that respect to [our] tradition and origin does not decrease [our] love to the adopted nation [...]”<sup>103</sup>

A few years later in 1923, the *Asociación Juventud Israelita Argentina* (AJIA, Association of Argentine Jewish Youth) was founded, which apart from diffusing Jewish culture, argued for a need of strengthening the ties between Jewish and gentile cultural circles. In 1928 *Sociedad Hebraica Argentina* (SHA), established after the unification of AJIA with *Asociacion Hebraica* in 1926, had 1,400 members and exercised influence over an important, but small fraction of Argentine Jewry.<sup>104</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s, *Sociedad Hebraica Argentina* and its circle became a center for the formation of a new Argentine-Jewish cultural elite.<sup>105</sup> It was secularism, liberalism and the Spanish language that formed the ideological framework of SHA. The fact that most of its members were middle-class citizens, who already proved their success in Argentina, made this group credible and marked them as “good Jews” in the eyes of the Argentine political elite.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Lazaro Zhitnitsky, “Transformatsyes inem yishuv fun argentine,” in *Zamlbukj fun h.d. nomberg shrayber faryn in argentine* (Buenos Aires, 1962), 77.

<sup>101</sup> *Medio siglo en el surco argentino*, 42.

<sup>102</sup> Manuel Bronstein, “Origenes de la Sociedad Hebraica Argentina,” *Davar* 119 (Oct-Dec 1968): 71; quoted in Victor A. Mirelman, *En busqueda de una identidad. Los inmigrantes judios en Buenos Aires, 1890-1930* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Mila, 1988), 295.

<sup>103</sup> *Juventud*, no. 49 (1916), 1, quoted in Astiz, “Jewish Acculturation,” 58.

<sup>104</sup> *Sociedad Hebraica Argentina. Memoria y Balance 1928* (Buenos Aires, 1928), 14, quoted in Mirelman, *En busqueda de una identidad*, 298.

<sup>105</sup> For more information on *Sociedad Hebraica*, see Jacobo Kovadloff, “La Sociedad Hebraica Argentina en Buenos Aires,” in *Comunidades Judías de Latinoamérica* (Buenos Aires: Instituto de Relaciones Humanas, 1966).

<sup>106</sup> Membership in SHA included young engineers, lawyers and doctors, as well as individuals who shaped Jewish life in Argentina in subsequent years: Matías (Mordechai) Stoliar, Alberto Gerchunoff and León Dujovne.

Argentinized Jews attempted to find their own ways of inclusion in the national discourse that developed around the *centenario* in 1910s. For some, it was an expression of devotion and belonging to Argentina. For instance, in 1924 *Semanario Hebreo* proclaimed: “[...] if Argentina wouldn’t have conquered liberty we celebrate on May 25th, Jews wouldn’t have this generous land, and wouldn’t have conquered the new Canaan, a new land of promise, a new blessing from God.”<sup>107</sup> Soon after the formation of the first argentinized Jewish-Argentine societies, they began publishing their own journals that voiced their acculturationist agenda. For Jewish-Argentines, Spanish-Jewish journals were an attempt to try to feel at home and to claim their right to Argentina.<sup>108</sup> *Juventud* (1911-1917) and *Vida Nuestra* (1917-1923) were followed in the 1920s by *Mundo Israelita* (1923) and *Semanario Hebreo* (1923). *Vida Nuestra* invited gentile Argentine intellectuals to comment on Jewish problems, especially after the Russian Revolution and the Balfour Declaration (1917). The contributors included among others Leopoldo Lugones (a nationalist author), Alfredo Palacios (a socialist politician and professor), Juan E. Carulla (a nationalist politician), Ricardo Rojas (a nationalist historian).<sup>109</sup> *Vida Nuestra* created a space of discussion on Jewish and non-Jewish issues that included both the gentile and Jewish-Argentine cultural elite. Around the same time, *Liga Israelita Pro-Argentinidad* was established in Buenos Aires. It endorsed an overly patriotic form of Argentinization that regarded knowing one's new country, its laws, culture and language as a requirement for Jews. *Liga* was formed by a group of Jewish businessmen connected with Argentine political and economic elite. The organization quickly associated itself with the gentile nationalist *Liga Patriótica Argentina* and backed anti-immigration policies aimed against the Yiddish-speaking proletariat.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> “25 de Mayo,” *Semanario Hebreo*, no. 68, 24.5.1924, 1, quoted in Astiz, “Jewish Acculturation,” 58.

<sup>108</sup> The sense of belonging to Argentina among Jews was often emphasized by frequent references to a *marrano* heritage, a Spanish Jewish Golden Age and a meticulous use of the language of Cervantes. See: Liliana Ruth Feierstein, “The New Midrash. The Jewish Press in Argentina,” in *The PRESSA: International Press Exhibition Cologne 1928 and the Jewish Contribution to Modern Journalism*, ed. Susanne Marten-Finnis and Michael Nagel (Bremen: Edition Lumiere, 2012), 570-574.

<sup>109</sup> Lugones wrote the famous *Oda a los ganados y las mieses*, in which the hardworking Jewish colonists are redeemed as they decide to assimilate and integrate into the Argentine nation. See Leopoldo Lugones, “Las odas seculares,” in *Obras poéticas completas* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1948).

<sup>110</sup> Humphrey, “Ethnic History, Nationalism and Transnationalism,” 181. For a broader study of the rise of the right in 1930s Argentina, see Sandra McGee Deutsch, *Las Derechas. The Extreme Right in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, 1890-1939* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999). For attitudes of the Argentine right towards the Jews, see Sandra McGee Deutsch, “The Argentine Right and the Jews 1919-1939,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 18, no. 1 (1986): 113-134.



Illustration no. 30. The cover of *Vida Nuestra* no. III/1917

## 2.1. Bridging the Gap: The Hybrid Routes of Becoming Argentine

Answering the needs of a growing community that socialized in Spanish, a part of the ethnic leadership preferred to deliver the Jewish contents in more accessible Spanish, rather than to bemoan the decreasing importance of Yiddish among second-generation immigrants. This phenomenon was visible not only concerning journalism, but also in book publishing. The founders of the Spanish-language daily *Mundo Israelita*, León Kibrick and Salomón Resnick, took up a project of translating the key works of Yiddish literature into Spanish. The transmission of Jewish culture to the younger generation born in Argentina was a major concern of community activists. Some argued that the lack of interest in Jewish issues was related to linguistic deficiencies, as the young rarely read Yiddish or Hebrew. In the context of the Jewish press in Spanish, the translation of Jewish works into Spanish seemed to many a

reasonable solution.<sup>111</sup> The Jewish writer and journalist Yosef Mendelson described the Spanish publications on Jewish themes as “spiritual nourishment for Jewish youth” and “a tool for informing the gentiles about the Jews and thus a way of combating anti-Semitism.”<sup>112</sup> Resnick’s translation projects were supported even by the left-wing and starkly Yiddishist daily *Di Presse*, which saw in Resnick “a true lover of Yiddish” and understood his desire to make Yiddish literature more available.<sup>113</sup> Resnick’s translation project not only informed Argentine-Jewish readers about the richness of Yiddish literature, but helped immigrant Jews to formulate their belonging to a high Jewish culture and defined the Yiddish tradition as not inferior or less progressive than Argentine or Western European.<sup>114</sup>

Jewish Argentines rejected accusations of assimilation hurled at them by some Yiddishist groups in Argentina and abroad. When Yiddish-speaking Labour Zionists from *Poaley Tsiyon* raised the issue of the linguistic assimilation of Jewish youth in Argentina, *Mundo Israelita* fiercely defended its position.<sup>115</sup> The situation in Argentina was depicted by the journal not as assimilation, but as “involuntary distancing” (*alejamiento*). Argentine youth was described as close to Jewish ethno-national life, interested in Jewish history and culture, yet not knowing Yiddish well enough, searched for ways of expressing their interest in Jewish topics using Spanish. As *Mundo Israelita* summed up, “the essential lies in the feelings, not in the exterior,” while critics who demanded Jewish culture only in Yiddish and Hebrew were described as archaic. The voices about the intermixed and diverse character of Argentine Jewry were articulated already in 1919 by Yosef Mendelson. Mendelson wrote that Jewish life in Argentina was an amalgam of the old life in Russia with new La Plata influences.<sup>116</sup> Years later, Samuel Rollansky wrote that apart from the obvious local impact, Argentine Yiddish writing was inspired by multiple sources: by modernist Yiddish from the USA, the unrest of Polish Yiddish poetry and social themes characteristic of Soviet writers.<sup>117</sup> Jewish-Argentine cultural leaders argued that Spanish could be a way of manifesting Jewishness, and that in Argentina Jewishness and transnational links with Eastern European Jewry were legitimately articulated in various linguistic ways and constructed in relation to belonging to Argentina.

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<sup>111</sup> Dujovne, *Una historia del libro judío*, 125-129.

<sup>112</sup> Yosef Mendelson, “Discurso de José Mendelson,” *Judaica*, no. 62, August 1938, 45-47.

<sup>113</sup> Sh. Feinberg, “Cuentos judíos,” *Di Presse*, 21.11.1920, 4.

<sup>114</sup> Pinie Katz, “Salomón Resnick el enamorado del ídish,” 1947, republished in *Noaj: Revista Literaria*, no. 12-13 (1997), Homenaje a Salomón Resnick y la revista *Judaica*, 138-140.

<sup>115</sup> “Alejamiento, no asimilación,” *Mundo Israelita*, 16.8.1924, 1.

<sup>116</sup> Yosef Mendelson “Unzer svive, unzer geshtalt,” in *Oyf di bregñ fun plata* (Buenos Aires: Farlag Yidische Zaitung, 1919), 3-15.

<sup>117</sup> Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte*, 193.



Illustration. no. 31. Salomon Resnick, *Noaj* 12-13 (1997), 4.

Salomón Resnick was a perfect example of argentinized Jewish-Argentines. He belonged to the first wave of Jewish immigrants to Argentina that arrived before World War I. In 1902 he emigrated from southern Ukraine as a six-year-old boy and was socialized in Argentina, after his father was commissioned to become a rabbi of a Jewish agricultural colony. Like many second-generation colonists, Resnick left for Buenos Aires. He began working for the journal *Juventud*, and from 1917 he was translating literary works from Yiddish to Spanish, and cofounded both Yiddishist *Di Presse* (1918) and the acculturationist *Mundo Israelita* (1923). In 1929 he gave classes on Yiddish literature in the Spanish-language Colegio Secundario Israelita that he also helped to create. In 1933 Resnick founded the Spanish-language Jewish journal *Judaica* and till his premature death in 1946 was a key promoter of making Yiddish literature available for Spanish speakers. *Judaica* was largely based on translations from Yiddish to Spanish. An issue from September 1934, published to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> birthday of Sholem Aleichem, included almost in its entirety the translated texts of Shmuel Niger or Baal Mahshoyves. Resnick also translated the works of historian Simon Dubnow and of essayist Abraham Coralnik. Among his translations from Yiddish was Sholem Aleichem's *The Travels of Benjamin III*, which Resnick coupled with a new subtitle: “The Jewish Don Quijote.” Many others belonged to the same group of Spanish-writing Jewish-Argentines, such as Alberto Gerchunoff (writing for *La Nación*), Gregorio Fingermann (*La Nación*), César Tiempo (*La Columna*, later *La Prensa*), Enrique Lippschutz (*La Prensa*) and Enrique Dickman, the first Jew to become a member of the Argentine

parliament. A number of Jewish immigrants were also active in non-Jewish publishing. Samuel Glusberg was an editor of the Babel publishing house and of a literary journal under the same name. Manuel Gleizer was a successful publisher in the gentile world and until 1937 did not focus on Jewish subjects.<sup>118</sup> Writing in Spanish was a clear sign of acculturation within Argentine society. Yet it was not equivalent to sugarcoating the Argentine reality or avoiding descriptions of tensions within the immigrant community. Samuel Eichelbaum, a son of Russian-Jewish colonists and a member of an argentinizing generation of colonist children that left for Buenos Aires, was very critical regarding Jewish immigration and integration in Argentina in his texts. His depictions of the colonies were full of conflict: between Jews and non-Jews and between the elders and the young people who were more “interested in aping the bourgeois Buenos Aires attitudes and dress” than working the field.<sup>119</sup> His refusal to write about a happy immigration narrative probably led to Eichelbaum’s lack of success for many years. The numerous dramas he wrote were usually met with a chilly reception by the Spanish-speaking Jewish public.



Illustration no. 32. Cover of Salomon Resnick’s *Judaica*, no. 9, March 1934.

<sup>118</sup> Dujovne, *Una historia del libro judío*, 147-157.

<sup>119</sup> Darrell B. Lockhart, *Jewish Writers of Latin America: A Dictionary* (London: Routledge 2013, 133-144).



The formation of Jewish-Argentine identity was present in the fusion of Yiddish and gentile Argentine cultural subjects. The most prominent example might have been Hevl Katz, a popular Yiddish performer, singer and comedian of 1930s Argentina. Katz, born in Vilna in 1902, immigrated to Argentina in 1930 and quickly became a key figure that reflected the experiences of thousands of other immigrants. His songs brimmed with Argentine subjects, parodied the challenges of life in Argentina and consequently helped to anchor immigrants in their new surroundings.<sup>120</sup> His satirical songs allowed the immigrants to laugh about their problems, like poverty or imperfect Spanish. At the same time, his songs focused on the Argentine reality, often with a tango-melody and spiced up with argentinized Yiddish, exemplifying the formation of Jewish-Argentine ethnic identity. The figure of Jevl Katz shows how popular culture became an arena of negotiating the inclusion of immigrant Jews and their children into Argentine society. A fellow Jewish-Polish immigrant journalist, Yosef Horn, wrote that Hevl Katz's success was a natural development. Polish Jews slowly forgot the words and melodies of the songs they knew from Poland, and Katz's music fit their new situation in Argentina.<sup>121</sup>

During the 1920s peak of Jewish and gentile debates on prostitution, morality and the nation, tango served as an arena of merging the Jewish and the Argentine. Jews and gentiles followed the press reports, read pulp novels or saw theater plays themed around *trata de blancas* and the struggle with Jewish prostitution.<sup>122</sup> Even the titles of tango hits reflected the proximity between the Jewish sex underworld and Argentine national music. The songs as *El Cafishio* (the Pimp, 1918) by Iriarte and Cavanesi, *Carne de Cabaret* (Flesh of the Cabaret, 1920) by Roldan and Lambertuci, *Mano Cruel* (Cruel Hand, 1928) by Tagini and Mutarelli, *Muñeca brava* (Wild Doll, 1928) by Cadicamo and Visca, directly or indirectly alluded to prostitution and pimping.<sup>123</sup> Also, Jewish-themed comedies by César Tiempo (Israel Zeitlin) were an expression of Buenos Aires Jewish life and the new intimacy between immigrants and the city. Tiempo's texts, targeted at the gentile *porteños*, explained to them the peculiarities of the Jewish experience in Argentina. A similarly humoristic approach to

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<sup>120</sup> Zachary M. Baker, "Gvald, Yidn, Buena Gente. Jevl Katz, Yiddish Bard of the Rio de la Plata," in *Inventing the Modern Yiddish Stage: Essays in Drama, Performance, and Show Business*, ed. Joel Berkowitz and Barbara Henry (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012), 202-224.

<sup>121</sup> Yosef Horn, "Poylishe yidn: di shefer fun unzer kultur-svive un boyer fun a aygn yidish lebn in argentine" in *Poylishe yidn in doyrem amerike*, 151.

<sup>122</sup> See Julio L. Alsogaray, *Trilogia de la trata de blancas (Rufianes, Policía, Municipalidad)* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Tor, 1934); Bernard Shaw, "Trata de blancas. Drama en cuatro actos," *Teatro Selecto. Revista Teatral* 1 (1921); German Schmersow Marr, *La trata de blancas. Comedia inédita* (Buenos Aires, 1909).

<sup>123</sup> Glickman, *The Jewish White Slave Trade*, 28-29.

Jewish-Argentine reality was expressed in his texts written under the pseudonym of a Jewish prostitute, Clara Beter.<sup>124</sup>

Although *Mundo Israelita*, *Sociedad Hebraica Argentina* and their circle might have seen Argentina as their physical and spiritual home, they were not indifferent to the problems of Jews in the Old World. Although the numerous fund-raising initiatives for the Jews of Poland were managed chiefly by the Yiddishist wing of Argentine Jewry, we do find its repercussions in the Spanish-language news. The Yiddish newspapers wrote about “brothers in Poland” and “having national responsibilities,” whereas in *Mundo Israelita* they dealt with “coreligionists.” This wording tells us something about the ethnic and religious identities of Jewish Argentines. Some of them might have considered themselves as “Argentines of the Mosaic faith,” with their Jewishness reduced to cultural and religious aspects. Acculturationist institutions usually preferred to use the neutral and quasi-religious word *israelita* (Israelite), instead of the ethnically loaded word *judío* (Jew). Yet, it would be misleading to draw a dichotomy of Yiddish speaking masses that saw themselves as Jews by nationality, language and religion, and Jewish-Argentines who were first and foremost Argentine patriots, and Jews second. The divisions were hardly ever clear-cut and changed over time. Yet the more veteran Jewish Argentines often differed in cultural and identitarian aspects from the new immigrants arriving from Poland in the 1920s.

For instance, the issue of maintaining relations with Poland and being perceived as Jewish-Polish was not always met with understanding among argentinized circles. León Kibrick, Resnick's friend and one of the cultural leaders of Jewish Argentines, saw *argentinidad* as a new phenomenon, fresh and uncontaminated by the Old World plagues. Kibrick believed that “Argentina belongs to Jews in the same way that it does to Catholics” and proudly voiced his identification with the Argentine Republic.<sup>125</sup> For instance, he fiercely opposed linking Jewish prostitution and female trafficking with Argentine Jewry and Argentineness as such. He described it as a clearly Jewish-Polish issue, as most of the pimps and prostitutes were supposed to originate from Poland. He wrote in 1926: “we deal here with a Polish question, rather than an Argentine problem. We can proudly shout that no Israelite woman born here practices prostitution and no man who saw the the light of this country works as a pimp.”<sup>126</sup> Kibrick went on to continue that these were the Jews of Poland who accused the Jewish Argentines of vice and a lack of morality, spreading the bad fame of

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<sup>124</sup> Senkman, *La identidad judía*, 153-155.

<sup>125</sup> “Gálvez y el anti-Semitismo,” *Mundo Israelita*, 22.10.1932, 1-2, quoted in Senkman, *La identidad judía*, 426-427.

<sup>126</sup> León Kibrick, “Un falso problema,” *Mundo Israelita*, 18.9.1926, no. 172, 1.

Argentina. “The sons of Polish Jewry come to us, to share with us our freedom and our bread, and as soon as they disembark they start to preach to us about morality and cast a plague on us that is exclusively theirs,” the journalist noted. Kibrick drew lines of separation between the Jews socialized in Argentina and those who immigrated recently. He later argued that:

[...] it's high time that we start to see ourselves as Argentine residents, rather than European guests. We should get rid of prejudices and also mentally move to Argentina, as we did physically. Then we would see things in a different light. Our colleagues from the Yiddish press, so badly influenced by the recent immigration wave, should be the first to give example and stop living on a lease. The Jewish-Argentine organism is robust enough to emancipate itself [from Eastern European influence].<sup>127</sup>

Kibrick's accusations resulted in a fierce protest by Poylisher Farband that saw the article as besmirching all of Polish Jewry, including those living in Argentina.<sup>128</sup> The Poylisher Farband president argued that in the current situation, when cultural contacts between Jewish Poland and Jewish Argentina grew much stronger (after the new wave of Polish Jewish immigrants), it was absurd to continue imagining Polish Jews as female traffickers.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, Pinie Katz from the competing *Di Presse* criticized Kibrick by pointing out that their accusations about Polish Jews, including the new immigrants, were just stupid.<sup>130</sup> Yet in 1937 Jacobo Muszkat, another member of Poylisher Farband, claimed in a tone similar to Kibrick's that in the wake of rising anti-Semitism in Argentina, Jewish immigrants should “finally become Argentine Jews.” For Muszkat, becoming “Argentine Jews” did not mean breaking the ties and obligations towards the *alter heym* and giving up on Jewish ethnicity. He understood it rather as a need to form a united political Jewish front that would defend Jewish interests in the country.<sup>131</sup> The ten years that passed between Kibrick's article in 1926 and Muszkat's remarks were also the decade when acculturation left its mark on the post-1918 Jewish immigrants from Poland. Those who were new immigrants at the beginning of the 1920s, clearly voiced their firm belonging to Argentina in the late 1930s.

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<sup>127</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>128</sup> “Hilfs kampeyn,” *Almanakh 1928*, 11.

<sup>129</sup> P. Hershkovich, “Vos der poylish yidisher farband hot durkhtsufirn un der hov fun poylishe yidn legabey dem zelbn,” *Almanakh 1928*, 14-15.

<sup>130</sup> Pinie Katz, “Der sotsyaler,” 58-59.

<sup>131</sup> Yaacov Muszkat, “Shoyn tsayt zikh tsu fartrakhten!” *Dos Naye Vort*, August-September 1937, 6.

## 2.2. Our Glorious Country: The Jewish Literary Embracements of Argentina

The fusion of Jewish and Argentine was visible in Yiddish immigrant literature. In a number of Yiddish texts, Argentina was glorified and idealized as a new Jewish safe haven. The devotion expressed towards the new homeland was part of a broader process of negotiating the nation and language in ever-diversifying, immigrant society. Writing about the beauty, justice and freedom that was supposedly so prevalent in Argentina was embedded within debates about the place of Jewish immigrants in Argentina. It was a way of claiming the right to call Argentina a homeland. As Beatriz Sarlo argued, the attitude towards immigrant languages and immigrant literatures informed the discussion about the place that the voice of the immigrant had in the society, and about what was Argentina and who were the Argentines. The minority literatures, such as Yiddish, were often accepted and endorsed if they fulfilled a goal of building a new Argentine-Jewish literature and proclaimed a belonging and gratitude to the Republic.<sup>132</sup>

The embrace of Argentina as a homeland was visible in the creativity of those Jewish authors who mastered Spanish enough and those who still lived in the Argentine nationalist agenda of the 1910s. In his collection of short stories (in Spanish), the writer and editor Samuel Glusberg pictured the arrival of Jewish immigrants to Argentina and their inclusion into the nation. In “Mate Amagro,” a greenhorn immigrant named Petacovsky, after a short time as a peddler, decides to establish a copperplate company, together with the Creole sons of his landlord. At the beginning, Petacovsky’s family fears interactions with gentiles and his wife can not imagine cooking in the same kitchen as *goyish* women. Yet, working together with the Bermudez family, Petacovsky begins to eat *galletas* and drink *mate*. The Bermudez brothers give him lessons on Argentina's history and he moves from a conventillo on *calle Corales* into a beautiful house on *avenida Almirante Brown*. His daughter receives a Christian name of Elisa, enrolls in *Escuela Nacional* and when she is big enough to play, the father purchases her a piano. Glusberg's “Mate Amagro” was a story of Argentinization, of progress and success in the new land. By writing it in Spanish, Glusberg presented the Jewish narrative to the gentile public. Jews were portrayed here as good entrepreneurs, eager to interact with Creoles and to embrace Argentina as a homeland.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Sarlo, “Oralidad y lenguas extranjeras,” 28-32.

<sup>133</sup> Samuel Glusberg, “Mate amagro,” in *La levita gris. Cuentos judíos de ambiente porteño* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Babel, 1924). The positive picture of immigration offered in “Mate amagro” was challenged in the story’s ending: Potacovsky’s wife dies following the escape of their daughter Eliza with a *goy*, while Potacovsky

Jewish belonging to Argentina was visible in the canonical *Los gauchos judíos* (1910) by Alberto Gerchunoff. The book portrays immigrant Jews as turning into Argentines by cultivating the land and subsequently becoming like the archetypal *gaucho*. Gerchunoff, alluding to religious concepts, depicted the travel of Jews from oppressive Russia to generous Argentina. In this narrative, Russia appears as biblical Egypt enslaving the Jews, and Argentina as the Promised Land of Zion. By incorporating the biblical element, Gerchunoff referred to widespread Christian concepts in Argentina.<sup>134</sup> The archetypal virtues of a Jew as a farmer corresponded with the virtues of a *gaucho*: by cultivating the *pampa*, immigrant Jews found appreciation in the eyes of centennial intellectuals. The Jews in *Los gauchos judíos* do not speak any Yiddish, but perfect Castilian Spanish, and seem to already be linguistically Argentine.<sup>135</sup> *Los gauchos judíos* functioned as a claim or request for Jewish naturalization in the country, allowing Jews to argue for their incorporation into Argentine culture.<sup>136</sup> As one of the best “gerchunoffians,” as Edna Aizenberg put it, *Los gauchos judíos* was a story of negotiating the breach between the demands of homogeneity and the need to sustain ethnic identity.<sup>137</sup> Gerchunoff has been criticized for his “uncomplicated Argentine territorialism” by younger intellectuals, yet as Aizenberg argued, his book was not one-voiced and he was not an uncomplicated figure.<sup>138</sup>

Further, post-1918 immigrant Yiddish writing is a significant source of eulogistic literature about Argentina. The texts analyzed below were written in Yiddish, proving that attachment to the new country could also be expressed in the language of the Old World. This underscores the hybridity of Jewish Argentine lives of the 1920s and 1930s: lives lived in multiple cultural and geographical frameworks. A great example of the Argentine Jewish experience, combining both a desire to feel at home in Argentina and nostalgia after the lost Old Home, was visible in a poem, “Boydem shtiber,” by Grodno-born Moshe Kaufman. The author “singing a song of his *green brothers*,” claimed to represent the voice of other

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himslef is murdered in the *Semana Tragica*. Other stories in the volume present figures of successful Jews: those becoming doctors or publishing articles in the national Spanish press.

<sup>134</sup> Carride, “‘Catholic Secularism’ and the Jewish Gaucho School,” 115-129.

<sup>135</sup> As Ariana Huberman noted, *Los gauchos judíos* does not avoid portraying the hardships of immigration. The book also encapsulates fragments that reflect the fear of assimilation, violent interactions with the *gauchos* or memories of a better life in Eastern Europe. See Ariana Huberman, *Gauchos and Foreigners: Glossing Culture and Identity in the Argentine Countryside* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2011), 102.

<sup>136</sup> Cúneo et al. *Inmigración y nacionalidad* (Buenos Aires: Instituto Judío Argentino de Cultura e Información, Editorial Paidós, 1967), 13.

<sup>137</sup> Edna Aizenberg, *Parricide on the Pampa: A New Study and Translation of Alberto Gerchunoff's Los Gauchos judíos* (Madrid: Voruert, Iberoamericana, 2000), 12.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibidem*, 17-29. In her re-reading of the 1910 original, Aizenberg stated that Gerchunoff did not silence the territorial disputes about Jewish homelands, noting that the text was in fact filled with linguistic baggage of Yiddish-speaking immigrants and that *Los gauchos judíos* actually did not idealize the *gaucho* figure and assimilation itself.

immigrant Jews. On the one hand, he praises the sun of Argentina, that “burned inside him as a big fire,” is “deadly in love with Argentine skies,” and the big city life had “swallowed” him. The immigrant-narrator is ready to hug the Argentine soil, a foreign soil that is slowly becoming his own. On the other hand, he does not avoid mentioning “stinky, dark *conventillos*.” The main character already feels argentinized, filled with Argentine air and the local lifestyle. He is aware that now he would not recognize his European homeland, he does not have a passport from his country anymore and is afraid of the “new flags blowing on the wind” of growing nationalism in Poland. Kaufman wrote about his feeling of being uprooted, but simultaneously expressed the hope that one day he would feel at home in Argentina.<sup>139</sup> Kaufman’s poem was a well-articulated description of Argentinization: a process that might be painful and arduous, but in the end very rewarding. Kaufman understood that nostalgia is a part of the migration experience, he did not pretend to camouflage it, yet he knew that time would allow him to feel at home in Argentina.

Other Yiddish texts by Kaufman were a sign of an embracing of Argentina as a new homeland. In his 1935 “Taykh Parana” (Parana River), the poet represented the amazement that Argentine nature supposedly evoked in “greenhorn” immigrants.<sup>140</sup> Kaufman mentioned the essential symbols of Argentineness: *mate*, *gauchos* or the indigenous population, marking them as a new cultural code that the immigrants needed to acquire. The newcomers experienced a “wild, hot sun,” and were proud of the local earth “pregnant with coal and petrol.” Kaufman was amazed by the immigrant diversity of Argentina, “where Old Creoles mix with Jews, Czechs and Italians.” His poem was a description of a process of discovering Argentina, its nature, people and customs. Kaufman was full with curiosity and willing to accept his new homeland as it is. The ethnic diversity of Buenos Aires and its big city flair also attracted Kohet Kliguer.<sup>141</sup> As seen by journalist Yosef Horn, Buenos Aires streets and neighborhood formed a great part of his creativity. Kliguer's poetry is an interesting testimony of everyday life in the city. Reading his texts, we pass by a bar “En Ancla,” meet the patrons of the cafes or together with tango-dancers immerse ourselves in the heat of a Buenos Aires summer. Further, the reader wanders through *calle Lavalle* and meets the poor folks at *Plaza*

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<sup>139</sup> Kaufman titled his 1944 poetry volume “Fun ale mayne heymer” (From all my homes), emphasizing a multiplicity of his homes-homelands.

<sup>140</sup> Moshe Kaufman, “Der taykh parana (poeme),” *Antologye fun der yidisher literatur*, 698-701.

<sup>141</sup> Kohet Kliguer, born in Volodimir Volinsk in 1904, later lived in Warsaw, where he began to publish in *Wokhenshrift for literatur un kunst* and *Literarische Bleter*, as well as a number of regional periodicals. He immigrated to Argentina in 1936.

*Once*. In Kohet Kliguer's texts, it is Buenos Aires, and not the Argentine nature that become an object of immigrant fascination.<sup>142</sup>

The devotion and gratitude to Argentina is traceable in the poetry of Aba Kliger. Born in Łuck in 1893, Kliger moved to Warsaw in 1906 and left for Argentina in 1912. In his poem, "Oyf di bregn fun plata" (On the Shores of La Plata River), Argentina appears as a land of satisfaction and peace. La Plata river brings on its back "ships and nations filled with hope." Argentina represented for Kliger a new world, a new order that called all *farbenkte* [longing] from the Old World to its shores.<sup>143</sup> Argentina was for Kliger an embodiment of his dreams: already in Europe he was stretching his hands towards the Argentine "summerland."<sup>144</sup> In Argentina everything that previously seemed so foreign, became familiar to him. In the poetry of Aba Kliger, we notice a neophyte fascination with Argentina. In "Tango" the poet described the eroticism of this local dance. Tango was for him wild, seducing and ecstatic. Similar scenes are visible in "Karnaval." Buenos Aires appears here as vicious and drunk, but exciting and charming.<sup>145</sup> In "Mendoza" the Andean city is portrayed as Garden Eden, filled with flowers, palm trees, the air smelling after perfume. The Yiddishist Samuel Rollansky described Kliger's poetry as full of pathos and called him "the most Spanish" of the Argentine Yiddish poets.<sup>146</sup> Lazaro Shallman also pointed to the Argentinization visible in Kliger's poetry, especially in the high number of latinisms.<sup>147</sup>

The relationship between old and adopted homeland was also discussed in "Oyf san martin erd" (On the Earth of San Martin) by Schneur Wasserman.<sup>148</sup> The narrator, probably the poet himself, admitted that he did not grow up and socialize in Argentine, yet it was in Latin America that he "harvested" - where his poetry received its full form and shape. Wasserman welcomed the Argentinization of his offspring: his blond children were now suntanned by the subtropical sun – yet still Jewish and speaking Yiddish.<sup>149</sup> Argentina as refugee for the persecuted of the world appears in a short story "Dos dorf fun haylikn anele"

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<sup>142</sup> Horn, "Poylishe yidn: di shefer," 72.

<sup>143</sup> Aba Kliger, "Oyfn di bregn fun plata," *Antologye fun der yidisher literatur*, 708-709.

<sup>144</sup> Aba Kliger, "Zumerland," *Antologye fun der yidisher literatur*, 720.

<sup>145</sup> Aba Kliger, "Tango," *Antologye fun der yidisher literatur*, 707; "Karnaval," *ibidem*, 709.

<sup>146</sup> Rollansky, *Dos yidische gedrukte*, 147.

<sup>147</sup> Lazaro Shallman, untitled, in *Comunidad judia de Buenos Aires 1894-1994: AMIA 100 años* (Buenos Aires: AMIA, Editorial Milá, 1995), 74.

<sup>148</sup> Schneur Wasserman was born in 1899 in a village close to Chełm near Lublin, Poland. He immigrated to Argentina in 1924 and mainly wrote poems for children.

<sup>149</sup> Schneur Wasserman, "Oyf san martin's erd," in *Argentinish*, vol. 2, *Tsvishn shtotishe vent*, ed. Samuel Rollansky (Buenos Aires: Literatur gezelschaft baym iwo in argentine, 1976), 386.

by Pinchas Bizberg.<sup>150</sup> The author narrates the colonization of the province of Entre Rios by Jewish and non-Jewish settlers. The lands between Parana and Uruguay become for Bizberg “a home for the persecuted from all nations.”<sup>151</sup> Yet, Bizberg’s later collection of short stories “Naye Haymer” depicted the decay of colonization. As journalist Yosef Horn put it, “Bizberg built a memorial stone over a ruin.”<sup>152</sup> Bizberg feared that assimilation and immigration to the city would destroy the essence of Jewish life in the *campo* (field).

### **2.3. Whose Argentina? The Conflicting Ethnic Narratives of Jewish Immigration to Argentina**

A part of immigrant Jewish cultural production and discourses directed at the non-Jews was bound to suffer from a problem characteristic of ethnic history: the over-representation of success and the tendency to reduce the meaning of experienced hardships, tensions and hostilities. As Michael Humphrey put it, ethnic history has been written and forged by the successful in the context of exclusionary discourses.<sup>153</sup> Also, much of the scholarship on Jews in Latin America portrayed them as a homogenous, unstratified group that rapidly and exclusively moved to the middle class.<sup>154</sup> In that context, Yiddish literature written by Jewish-Polish immigrants is a great complementary source for uncovering the stories that ethnic leaders preferred to hide. Some Yiddish writers and cultural leaders took up the task of complicating the narrative of migration and Jewish life in Argentina in a way that would include disillusionment, misery, nostalgia and a sense of displacement. Among others, we can mention here Pinie Wald, Moshe Granitstein, Moshe Kaufman, Hirsh Blostein and Moisés David Guiser.

Despite an often common agenda and overlap, there were several observable differences between the Yiddish and Jewish-Argentine cultural scene. Jewish literature and journalism in Argentina of the 1920s and 1930s was happening mostly in Yiddish, which defined it as an

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<sup>150</sup> Pinchas Bizberg was born in Zgierz near Łódź, Poland. After studying agronomy in Germany, he arrived to Argentina in 1927. He settled in a colony close to Basavillbaso and later moved to a suburban Jewish colony close to Buenos Aires. Bizberg was a secretary of Buenos Aires IWO, served as a director of many schools and contributed to the local Jewish press. During World War I, he was a German correspondent of Warsaw’s *Haynt*. In 1939, he published a book entitled *Naye Heymen* that featured life in the Jewish colonies. In 1949, he published an autobiographical novel *Shabas-yomtevdike yidn. Dos gezang fun a dor* (Buenos Aires: Tsentral faraband fun poylishe yidn in argentine, 1949). In 1953, Bizberg left for Chile and later for Israel, where he died in 1969. Bizberg was one of the few Polish Jews who immigrated in the 1920s and settled in the colonies.

<sup>151</sup> Pinchas Bizberg, “Dos dorf fun haylikn anele,” *Antologye fun der yidisher literatur*, 65-70. See also his text, “Konflikt tsvishn di yidishe kolonistn in Argentinern un der lokaler JCA-administratsye,” *Argentinern IWO Shriftn* 4/1947, 85-107.

<sup>152</sup> Yosef Horn, “Los nuevos escritores judíos de la Argentina,” *Judaica*, no. 70, April 1939, 123-129.

<sup>153</sup> Humphrey, “Ethnic History, Nationalism and Transnationalism,” 187.

<sup>154</sup> Lesser and Rein, “Challenging Particularity,” 257.



intragroup experience often unavailable to the outside Spanish-speaking world.<sup>155</sup> Those who wrote in Yiddish felt more comfortable with criticizing life in Argentina. As Alan Astro correctly noted, in Yiddish writers rarely had to engage in apologetics, whereas in gentile languages they often had to negotiate with specific agendas.<sup>156</sup> Writing in Yiddish, the writers enjoyed the comfort zone of an intra-communal debate. Yiddish was a language that permitted internal Jewish discussions, without the fear of being accused of lack of gratitude to Argentina for its liberties and the chances it offered. Simultaneously, the public use of Yiddish, with its foreign alphabet, marked Jews as others, holding on to their old-country belonging. In the event of political and social upheavals, this could have had negative or even violent consequences. As the 1919 *Semana Trágica* pogrom in Buenos Aires proved, immigrant Jews were at times accused of dual-loyalty and importing left-wing propaganda. That, together with common racism, anti-religious prejudice and resentment towards the success of a “ruso” or a “turco,” often ranked the Jews at the bottom of Argentine society.<sup>157</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s the official, often acculturationist Jewish institutions and individuals at times attempted to ignore or disguise the surrounding immigrant misery. The leaders of *Hevra Kadisha Ashkenazi* worried about the respectability and reputation of the Jews as such and opted not to include stories of poverty, frustration, exploitation and fear in their ethnic history. Consequently, the ethnic narrative about early twentieth century Argentina was centered around hardworking colonists and rapidly progressing urban entrepreneurs. The 1920s immigration from Poland was often pictured as a challenge to which the veteran community responded with sympathy and assistance. Although a number of middle-class-run Jewish ethnic bodies in Argentina existed, which openly dealt with difficult and unpleasant problems like prostitution or poverty, they performed their activities from the position of respectable, acculturated, rich *argentinos israelitas* fearing for the reputation of

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<sup>155</sup> Raanan Rein and Jeffrey Lesser claim that the fact that the sources for the study of Latin American history are often in Yiddish makes a false impression that Jews lived in closed communities. I do not entirely agree with this statement. Of course, the general Argentine social and political problems influenced the lives of Argentina's Jews. Yet the discussions taking place in the Yiddish press did indeed to a certain degree leave the gentiles aside. Whereas the daily lives of Jews in Buenos Aires were influenced by interactions with the gentile world, a part of intellectual discussion and media discourse happened and was located within the transnational Yiddishland, rather than in Buenos Aires. See Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein, “Challenging Particularity: Jews as a Lense on Latin American Ethnicity,” *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2006): 254.

<sup>156</sup> Alan Astro, *Yiddish South of the Border: An Anthology of Latin American Yiddish Writing* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 7.

<sup>157</sup> Humphrey, “Ethnic History, Nationalism and Transnationalism,” 168. For an in-depth study of the 1919 *Semana Trágica*, see John Dizgun, “Immigrants of Different Religion: Jewish Argentines and the Boundaries of Argentinidad, 1919-2009” (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 2010), chapter “Semana Trágica,” 14-67 and the references. See also Edgardo Bilsky, *La Semana Trágica* (Buenos Aires: Educaciones Ryr, 2011); Marcelo Dimenstein, “En busca de un pogrom perdido: Diáspora judía, política y políticas de la memoria en torno a la Semana Trágica de 1919 [1919-1999],” *Sociohistórica* 25 (2009): 103-122.

Jews as a whole. A vivid example can be found in charities like Rescue Society of Israelite Ladies (*Sociedad de Socorros de Damas Israelitas de Beneficencia*), “Ezrah” Charity Society (*Sociedad de Beneficencia “Ezrah”*) or League Against the Tuberculosis (*Liga Contra Tuberculosis*). Those standing behind these institutions were proud of their involvement in the cause of poor immigrants, but at the same time they drew borders of separation along lines of social class, immigration, generation and status.<sup>158</sup> The Yiddish weekly *Penimer un penimlekh* regularly printed photos depicting those involved in the case of the poor, as in 1926 when journalists visited the *Beit Yetomim* (orphanage). The visitors were impressed by the magnificent building of the orphanage that was a “pride for the entire Argentine Jewry.”<sup>159</sup> The eulogic articles served the interest of the rich benefactors, portraying them as economically and socially successful Argentines, yet generous and devoted Jews.

The degree of actual assistance of Jewish charities and *Hevra Kadisha* to the poor was at times questionable. Even though between 1922-1926 around 25,000 immigrants arrived in Argentina from Poland, SOPROTIMIS (Society for the Protection of Jewish Immigrants) offered its assistance to barely 3,343 souls.<sup>160</sup> *Hevra Kadisha* (AMIA from 1949) saw its role mostly in providing religiously motivated, yet in the 1920s and 1930s rather ethnic community-focused assistance. Thus, it financed *Moshav Zkenim* (old age home), *Beit Yetomim* and *Yidishn Shpital* (hospital), and perceived these institutions as the “jewels” of the community. At the same time, the challenges of daily life were often neglected or pushed aside. The Jewish working-poor or unemployed were supported only with symbolic amounts of money and *Hevra Kadisha* hoped that other institutions would take care of the problem of Jewish poverty.<sup>161</sup> The mere help that the charity institutions offered did not correspond with the actual needs. It was especially visible in the early 1930s, following the economic crisis. *Dos Naye Vort* reported that both *Ezrah* and *Hevra Kadisha* reduced their assistance to the poor.<sup>162</sup> Charities were in constant argument, passing tasks on each other. A *vengrover* landsman wrote that many communal leaders only searched for “tumults, noise and pomp.”<sup>163</sup>

The competition to be the most involved and benevolent, as well as the charities’ deficiencies, were often a subject of satire in the *Penimer un Penimlekh*. In 1926 the

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<sup>158</sup> For a study of women contribution to the welfare in Argentina see Donna J. Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State: Performing Charity and Creating Rights in Argentine, 1880-1955* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.)

<sup>159</sup> “Unzer (...) raykhtum: der nayer beit yetomim,” *Penimer un penimlekh*, 22.10.1926, 17.

<sup>160</sup> “Sociedad de Protección de Inmigrantes Israelitas. Su actividad desde 20.5.1922 al 30.6.1926,” *Mundo Israelita*, 10.7.1926, no. 162, page unknown.

<sup>161</sup> Schussheim, *Tsu der geshikhte fun yidishn yishev*, 64.

<sup>162</sup> “Ken es den azoy vayter geyen?” *Dos Naye Vort*, no. 140, October 1931, 3.

<sup>163</sup> Leizer Kochan, “Tsu der geshikhte vengrover yidn in argentine,” *Yuvl oysgabe tsu der 15 yoriker gezeshaflekher tetigkayt fun vengrover landslayt farayn in argentine* (Buenos Aires, 1940), 8.

humoresque weekly published a cartoon portraying a fat cow (embodying *Hevra Kadisha*) and a dying man trying to suck its milk. The caricature pointed at the minimal support that the relatively better-off institutions offered the poorest members of Buenos Aires Jewry.<sup>164</sup> Another comic strip alluded to a planned unification of three charity institutions (*Tsentralkomite fun folkshilf, Imigranten shuts farayn* and *Kneset orhim*), portrayed as an unwanted matchmaking.<sup>165</sup> The weekly ridiculed the efforts of established organizations, portraying them as quarrels of the rich. The weekly mocked the Jewish elite, its constant arguments, superficiality and lack of connection with the lives of ordinary Jews. It was also visible in the context of Poland-centered activities. When the Committee for the Help for Jewish Schools in Poland published its financial report, *Penimer un penimlekh* criticized the exaggerated costs of the office work and propaganda (almost 600 pesos for 2,000 pesos of income).<sup>166</sup>



Illustration no. 33. *Penimer un penimlekh*, no. 106, 13.8.1926, 1. The cartoon criticized the material interests of the candidates to the authority of *Sociedad Israelita de Beneficiencia* “Ezrah.”

<sup>164</sup> *Penimer un penimlekh*, no. 100, 9.7.1926, 13

<sup>165</sup> *Penimer un penimlekh*, no. 101, 16.7.1926, 1

<sup>166</sup> “Men darf zayn shparzam,” *Penimer un penimlekh*, no. 100, 9.7.1926, 1.



Illustration no. 34. *Penimer un penimlekh*, no. 100, 9.7.1926, 13. The strip reads: “Concerning the resolution of *Hevra Kadisha*, which suggests that their collectors should ask the members of the Central Committee of Folks-Hilf. The dying Committee answers: It must be from *Hevra Kadisha*. If... Enjoy!”

The proletarian narratives of disillusionment often did not become a part of the official history that the burgeoning Jewish leadership chose to write. It became especially visible in the emphasis given to the mythological founding ethos of Jewish colonization and omission of narratives of poverty and lost dreams.<sup>167</sup> The process of “whitening” the history of Jewish immigration to Argentina became visible already in the first decade of the 20th century, but strengthened in the 1930s. A desire not be perceived as a *yishev* of prostitutes and *froyenhendler* was not shared exclusively by the wealthier veteran community members. But certainly those who were already successful were more afraid for losing their good name, while tarring the entire Jewish population with female trafficking endangered their reputation as good citizens, good immigrants and good Argentines. The same held true for reflections on the failure of Jewish colonization. The colonist enterprise was imagined as a glamorous founding of Jewish Argentina and a negation of the anti-Semitic narrative about “unproductive” Jews. The frustration of many colonists with the administration of JCA, the debts they had or sometimes the forced immigration to the city were hardly visible in the

<sup>167</sup> David Szyszacki of IWO argued that most of the colonists came to Argentina “to earn for their bread, and not because of idealism.” Yet this is the way that the colonization enterprise was later interpreted. Szyszacki, “Tsu der geshikhte fun landsmanshaftn in argentine,” 97.

official Spanish-language channels.<sup>168</sup> Nonetheless, for many Yiddish-speaking poorer Jews the colonization also served as an anchor that justified the Jewish contribution to building Argentina, which balanced the negative narrative of Jews as *froyen-hendler*.<sup>169</sup>

Silencing the narrative that included the shady side of Jewish immigration to Argentina was especially visible in anniversary publications, which were supposed to underline the Jewish contribution to Argentina and the success stories of individuals and community. A good example is *50 Años de colonización judía en la Argentina*, a 1939 volume celebrating fifty years of Jewish agricultural colonies in Argentina. The book does not mention at all the challenges faced by colonist children and their problems with making ends meet. It opens with a quote from the Argentine constitution and is written in Spanish, serving as evidence validating Jewish usefulness, productivity and belonging to Argentina. The prologue highlights the “assimilation” of Jewish immigrants into Argentina. The Jews are euphemistically named *pueblo de la Biblia* (people of the Bible), instead of the more accurate, but sometimes negatively emotionally charged word “judío” (Jew). Argentina appears in the book as an “immaculate blue and white pavilion,” whose doors were opened wide to migrants by the Constitution.<sup>170</sup> *50 Años* quotes a full list of names of the first immigrant contingent that arrived to Buenos Aires in 1889. It establishes the internal hierarchies within the immigrant community: the heroic early agricultural pioneers versus the difficult, complaining later arrivals of the 1920s. A similarly euologic and sycophantic characterization can be found in publication unsurprisingly edited by the Jewish Colonization Association itself.<sup>171</sup>

The story of agricultural colonists building Argentina and the economic and social progress of Buenos Aires did not tell the complete story of immigration. New immigrants (after 1918) belonging mostly to the working class did not share the same experiences as the successful businessmen, who in the 1920s were already sending their children to universities and well-paid professions. The division between the history of the middle class and the history of proletarian Jews was clearly visible in the days of the *Semana Trágica* in 1919, a labor unrest that transformed into an anti-Jewish pogrom in which numerous Jews were

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<sup>168</sup> Criticism of colonization is visible in many Yiddish sources, including the narratives of Chasanovitch, Alpersohn or Vital.

<sup>169</sup> Samuel Rollansky, even in 1989, wrote about the Yiddish colonization enterprise with great passion, even though it was not part of his personal experience. Rollansky ascribed the guilt for the failures of colonization to the frauds of JCA that “did not share the folk spirit of Baron Hirsch.” He continued by stating that the colonists “washed away” the bad name of the Jews as female traffickers and that colonization was a “mikveh for Jewish Argentina.” See Samuel Rollansky, “100 yor yidishe kolonizatsye un der yishev in argentine,” *Argentiner IWO Shriftn* 15 (1989): 11-14.

<sup>170</sup> *50 Años de colonización judía en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: DAIA, 1939), 5.

<sup>171</sup> *Medio siglo en el surco argentino*.

raided by the nationalist volunteer squads of *Guardia Blanca*.<sup>172</sup> Whereas for working class Jews these were the days of anti-Semitic violence and a heyday of struggle for a more just world, the conservative and established Jewish elite perceived the strikes as a danger to their position in the Republic. Those Jews associated with *Sociedad Israelita de Beneficencia* “*Ezrah*”, *Hevra Kadisha* or *Sociedad de Socorros de Damas Israelitas* even asked the Argentine gentile public for forgiveness regarding “the crimes of a minority” that “could not have developed in the womb of [our] community,” but were rather based in “the negation of God, *la patria* and law.”<sup>173</sup> The acculturated leaders continued saying that Argentina was their adopted homeland and that they were loyal to the Constitution and were ready to defend the interests of the Nation. Soon afterwards, the acculturationist *Vida Nuestra* asked the prominent personalities of the Argentine gentile elite to answer their questionnaire about the situation of Jews in the country. As they expected, the popular figures rejected the responsibility of Jews for the recent violence and stated that the Jews were loyal and useful residents.<sup>174</sup> Some prominent acculturationists, such as the acclaimed author Alberto Gerchunoff, remained silent about the events.<sup>175</sup>

The Poland-born proletarian leader and journalist Pinie Wald, who himself was imprisoned during the *Semana Trágica*, slammed the Jewish elite for presenting the Jews only as “desirable guests” without a claim of belonging to Argentina. For Wald, Jews were already rooted in Argentina, they were its citizens with the rights guaranteed by the democratic Constitution.<sup>176</sup> The controversies that were aroused in Argentina after the *Semana Trágica* showed how class and ideology divided the Jewish population. The attitude towards the *Semana Trágica* offered an interesting perspective on Jewish identities and belonging, and their attitude to Argentina and Eastern Europe. For those who feared for their economic and social status, the strikes and unrest endangered their vital interests. At the same time, the underprivileged, new immigrant blue-collar workers saw it as a heyday of socialist struggle that ended in typical anti-Jewish violence that they knew so well from Eastern Europe. This last point of view is visible in the memoirs of Pinie Wald, who in 1919 was imprisoned and

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<sup>172</sup> Class differences often coincided with generational ones. Those who arrived in Argentina earlier often had access to middle-class professions, especially in the private sector.

<sup>173</sup> Poster, “150.000 Israelitas al pueblo de la Republica,” quoted in Pinie Wald, *Los judíos en la Semana Trágica*, reprinted (Buenos Aires: Instituto Hebreo de Ciencias 1985), 27. For a study of *Semana Trágica* see Bilsky, *La Semana Trágica*; Dimenstein, “En busca de un pogrom perdido.”

<sup>174</sup> “Encuesta de *Vida Nuestra* sobre la situación de los judíos en la Argentina,” *Vida Nuestra* 8 (February 1919), page unknown, quoted in Pinie Wald, *Los judíos en La Semana Trágica*, reprinted (Buenos Aires: Instituto Hebreo de Ciencias, 1985), 31. Wald’s text was originally published in *Argentinier IWO Shriftn*, “Yidn in der tragisher wokh,” no. 4/1947, 5-55.

<sup>175</sup> Huberman, *Gauchos and Foreigners*, 100.

<sup>176</sup> Wald, *Los judíos en La Semana Trágica*, 55.

accused of importing communism to Argentina.<sup>177</sup> Wald feared for his life, did not know what the Argentine authorities were planning to do with him and felt deprived of his rights as in tsarist Russia.<sup>178</sup> The Argentina that appeared in Wald's narrative was violent, reactionary and far from the ideals of freedom that brought Wald from Polish Tomaszów to Buenos Aires. The observations of Wald were very apt. The postwar economic crisis, the disarmament of the proletarian movement and the conservative ideological transformation of the Argentine liberal elite increased the power of nationalism in Argentina. The immigrant population began to be considered a risk to the unity of the nation and for many organizations, such as *Liga Patriótica Argentina*, was regarded as a source of the presumed "dangers of the social disorder."<sup>179</sup>

### **3. For the Case of Progress: Jewish Argentines, *Argentiner Yidn* and Cultural Alliances**

For many immigrants from Poland who arrived after World War I, the cultural choices and socio-economic background of Argentina-socialized Jewish Argentines were initially quite foreign. Upon arrival to South America, those who grew up and formed their worldview in Poland needed to formulate it anew in Argentina. Although the embrace of Argentina as a safe haven that offered economic opportunities was relatively easy, the socio-cultural aspects of integration were much more complex. The obvious aspects desired by Jewish Argentines included embracing Argentina as a caring and generous homeland and being fluent in the majority-language, which might have been difficult for the new immigrants. Especially complex was the question of language and ethnicity.

For many Polish Jews who arrived after 1918, it was Yiddish and *yidishkayt* that defined their hybrid Jewish-Argentine life. Some perceived the maintenance of Yiddish as a guarantee of not only for safeguarding the Jewish ethnicity, but also as a tool for Argentine Jews to participate in global Jewish ethno-national projects. The Argentine Yiddishist journalist Yankev Botoshansky said in 1931 that "Yiddish is the best security belt. Yiddish isolates and

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<sup>177</sup> See Victor Mirelman, "The Semana Trágica of 1919 and the Jews of Argentina," *Jewish Social Studies* 37 (January 1975): 61-73; Sandra McGee Deutsch, "The Argentina Right and the Jews, 1919-1933," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 18 (1986): 113-134; Bilsky, *La Semana Trágica*. Compare also David Viñas's novel with *La Semana Trágica*'s theme: David Viñas, *En la semana trágica* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Jorge Alvarez, 1936).

<sup>178</sup> Pinie Wald, *Koshmar* (Buenos Aires: n.p., 1929), 42.

<sup>179</sup> María Silva Ospital, *Inmigración y nacionalismo: Liga Patriótica y la Asociación del Trabajo (1910-1930)* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de America Latina, 1994), 44-72.

concentrates, Yiddish is a substitute for territory, for land. This is also acknowledged by the non-Yiddishists.”<sup>180</sup> Botoshansky was proud of the development of secular Yiddish life in Argentina. In another interview, he described Yiddish as the “ground under the feet,” a cultural space that promised a certain identitarian stability to Jews.<sup>181</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s the proletarian majority of Jewish Buenos Aires was not overly enthusiastic about the acculturationist position of the veteran generation. Some immigrant intellectuals began to imagine Argentina as a branch of a transnational Yiddishland. Although many new immigrants quickly learned Spanish in order to function in the multinational city, the linguistic evolution from Yiddish to Spanish gave rise to opposition well into the 1940s.

I argue that relative stability of Yiddish in Argentina had to do not only with a “hanging on” to the familiar language and culture, typical of migrants, but was embedded in the transnational ethno-national Yiddishland project that resonated from Eastern Europe to Argentina.<sup>182</sup> Many of the post-1918 immigrant Jews from Poland brought with them a sense of *yidishkayt*-centered cultural pride, if not cultural nationalism, and did not deem Yiddish culture as inferior to the surrounding Spanish-Argentine culture. This reasoning came in the wake of the revival of Yiddish cultural life in interwar Poland, the USA and the Soviet Union. As Frank Wolff pointed out, in the interwar period Poland was a center of innovation, ideas and publications that were transferred to the Americas by migrating Jews. Consequently, these developments in Jewish Poland partly defined Argentine goals, conflicts and structures when it came to Yiddish culture.<sup>183</sup> Yiddish conveyed not only the traditional ethno-religious culture of Ashkenazi Jews, but also a newly envisioned, ethno-national project of a diasporic Yiddish Nation (*yidisher folk*) inhabiting an imagined Yiddishland. European Diaspora Nationalist intellectuals, such as Nokhem Shtif, desired to build a modern, secular Jewish national culture, with the Yiddish language as a linguistic national principle. In the interwar period, this was realized both by forming the YIVO Institute in Vilna, establishing Yiddishist educational institutions, supporting a blossoming Yiddish literature and including Yiddishism in the agenda of Jewish political parties.<sup>184</sup> These developments of the interwar years also

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<sup>180</sup> “A lebediger grus fun yudish lebn un yudisher kultur in argentina. Vos dertselt der bekanter yudisher shriftshetler fun argentina, yankev botoshansky,” *Grodner Moment Express*, no. 62, 13.3.1931, 7.

<sup>181</sup> “Dos yidische kultur-lebn in argentine. A shmues mit yankev botoshansky,” *Literarische Bleter*, no. 12 20.3.1931, 229, 230.

<sup>182</sup> The expansion of the Yiddishland from Eastern Europe to North and South America was manifested by frequent visits by Yiddishist writers, journalists and charitymen. They kept the Yiddishist agenda alive in Argentina and emphasized a shared ethno-national and cultural interest between “Yiddish” Jews scattered around the world.

<sup>183</sup> Wolff, “Als Wilna neben Buenos Aires stand,” 59, 68.

<sup>184</sup> Esther Kuznitz, *YIVO and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture: Scholarship for Yidish Nation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 17-18.



reached Argentina. The freshness and attraction of the Yiddish ethno-national project to some extent temporarily tempered the desire to embrace Argentine nationalism represented by the veteran immigrants. Although other European ethno-nationalisms crossed the Atlantic and put down roots in Argentina (like Basque or Irish), the grassroots, diasporic and transnational character of Yiddishist ethnic, cultural and national belonging gave it a special status. Consequently, the *re-yiddishization* of Argentine Jewish life following the 1920s immigration had few parallels among other immigrant groups.

One of the intellectual imports from Poland was a project of secular Yiddishist schooling. Although a number of educational establishments related to various left-wing movements existed in Argentina already prior to the 1920s wave of Polish Jewish immigration, the crystallization and strengthening of the movement happened only later, largely thanks to the transnational networks of the Bund.<sup>185</sup> In 1924 Guitl Zak de Kanutsky immigrated to Argentina, who was engaged in Bundist schooling back in Polish Białystok where she worked as a tailor.<sup>186</sup> Two years later, Zalman Orenshtein arrived, who was active in leftist Labor Zionism in his *shtetl* of Sokółów. Next to them came thousands of other Jews inspired by secular progressive Jewish movements in Poland. Kantusky, together with Samuel Rollansky and Pinie Wald, established in 1931 the Society for Secular Yiddish Schools in Argentina (*Gezelshaft far yidishe veltleke shuln in argentine*), which was linked to the Argentine chapter of the Bund.<sup>187</sup> Orenshtein was a crucial figure behind a competitive network of Central Secular Yiddish School Organization (TSVYSHO) schools.<sup>188</sup> The new organizations were supposed to “bring to Argentina the spirit of TSYSHO (abbreviation for *Tsentrale yidishe shul organizatsye*) schools in Poland.”<sup>189</sup> In 1930s Argentina the blossoming of secular schooling manifested a desire to build a new Yiddish life in the diaspora. Between 1934 and 1938, around 40% of Jewish children in Buenos Aires also went to supplementary secular-Yiddish schools.<sup>190</sup> In that era, Yiddish schools were multidimensional cultural

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<sup>185</sup> The 1920s saw to the establishment of supplementary Borochov schools related to Labor Zionism, communist *Arbetershulorg* schools, *Folks-schul-rat* schools that combined Yiddish and Argentine elements and a free Bundist school established in 1925. In 1930 the schools were closed down by the authorities and reopened within changed structures around 1931 (with a *Gezelshaft far yidishe veltleke shuln in argentine* and *Tsentrale fun di yidishe veltleke shuln in argentine*). See Frank Wolff, *Neue Welten in der neuen Welt. Die Transnationale Geschichte des Allgemeinen Jüdischen Arbeiterbundes 1897-1947* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2014), 380.

<sup>186</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, Archivo de la palabra, no. 11 José Chiaskelevitz, no. 32 Guitl Kanutsky

<sup>187</sup> In the early 1930s, two competing Yiddishist educational networks were in existence in Argentina: “Gezelshaft” and “Tsentrale.”

<sup>188</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, Archivo de la palabra, no. 54, Zalman Orenshtein.

<sup>189</sup> Wolff, *Neue Welten in der neuen Welt*, 387.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibidem*, 289.

institutions that attracted not only children, but served as a basis for the development of a progressive Yiddishist agenda also among adults.<sup>191</sup>

Despite linguistic and cultural discrepancies, both the Jewish Argentines and the newly arrived immigrants from Poland found a common language and spaces for cooperation. For instance, some causes that were clearly Yiddishist were backed by the Jewish-Argentine daily *Mundo Israelita*. The committee founding the Argentine section of Vilna's Yiddish Scientific Institute YIVO (IWO in Argentine spelling) included both Yiddishist leaders such as Pinie Wald or Yankev Botoshansky, but also acculturated editor Salomon Resnick. When Yaakov Zerubavel arrived to Argentina in 1928 to raise money for the TSYSHO schools, he was warmly welcomed by the Spanish-speaking newspaper.<sup>192</sup> *Mundo Israelita* expressed the sympathy for his efforts and wished him lots of success.<sup>193</sup> Despite ideological differences, the secular Yiddish schools were seen by many as a symbol of "Jewish modernization" in Poland, consistent with the modern cultural values of editors and readers of *Mundo Israelita*. It was appreciated that Zerubavel wanted to "liberate the new generation of Jews in Poland from the disgraceful influence of religious fanaticism." The newspaper even praised his "clear and elegant" Yiddish.<sup>194</sup>

The attitude towards religion and social modernization made the Spanish-speaking acculturationists an ally of the Yiddishist cause. Jewish Argentines saw the TSYSHO schools as a good example of modern Jewish education, much better than the one offered locally in Argentina. Although emphasis on Yiddish and Jewish national claims might have been controversial, a modern Jewish curriculum was definitely something to aspire to.<sup>195</sup> As *Mundo Israelita* commented, Argentine Jewry also needed to "end the period of infancy and dependency" and develop its own modern Jewish schools that would raise Argentine and

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<sup>191</sup> The conflicts around Yiddishist education in Argentina were internationalized and followed in Poland. In 1935, H. Gold wrote a text that was published in Warsaw, "Tsvey yidish-shul organizatsyes mit ayn nomen un tsil in argentine," *Literarische Bleter*, no. 5, 25.1.1925, 55.

<sup>192</sup> Yaakov Zerubavel was a Labor Zionist leader, yet a strong supporter of Yiddish as a Jewish national language. Born in 1886, Zerubavel immigrated to Palestine in 1910, but was forced to leave in 1915. Between 1918 and 1935 he lived in Poland, working as an editor and leader of Poaley Tsiyon Left. He immigrated to Palestine again in 1935.

<sup>193</sup> "Por las escuelas judías de Polonia," *Mundo Israelita*, 30.4.1928, 1. For a broader study of Jewish schooling in Argentina, see Zadoff, *Historía de la educación*.

<sup>194</sup> "Por las escuelas de Polonia," *Mundo Israelita*, 21.5.1928, 4.

<sup>195</sup> A similar modernizing potential of Yiddish was identified by Jewish-Polish integrationists. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Warsaw's *Izraelita* began to publish translations from Yiddish and some of its contributors argued that only the issue of language separated Polonized and Yiddish-speaking modernizers. Despite linguistic and social differences, the progressive attitude towards Jewish "dark religious radicals" allowed both groups to come closer to each other. See Zuzanna Kołodziejaska, *Izraelita (1866-1915). Znaczenie kulturowe i literackie czasopisma* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2014), 310-312.

Jewish children.<sup>196</sup> The daily complained that traditional Jewish education led to a distancing of Jewish youth from the Yiddish language and culture.<sup>197</sup> The focus on religion in regular Jewish educational establishments did not reflect the conditions of life in Argentina and a growing interest of the youth in broader universal problems. The TSYSHO was a good example of modern Jewish schooling that the acculturated Jews found a liking for. Also, the figure of Yaakov Zerubavel, who was both an Yiddishist and a Zionist, attracted the support of the more veteran, middle-class circles of Argentine Jewry. The attitude towards TSYSHO in Jewish Argentine circles exemplified a cultural *re-yiddishization* of the argentinized segments of Argentina's Jewish society. The progressive charm of Yiddishism proved to be also attractive to the acculturated Jewish-Argentines.

Similarly, Salomón Resnick became an unexpected defender of Yiddish as a Jewish national language in his dispute with philologist Teofilo Wechsler. Wechsler argued that *castellano* should become a national language of Argentine Jews and accused Yiddish of being a “yellow rag decorating the attire.”<sup>198</sup> Resnick strongly criticized Wechsler's aversion to Yiddish, named him an “outdated *maskil*,” who failed to notice the development of modernist Yiddish literature in Europe and North America. For Resnick Yiddish was a language of the people, which contributed to the cultural diversity of the world.<sup>199</sup> Fifteen years later, Resnick was deeply convinced about the vitality of Yiddish literature and appreciated its “literary citizenship” when Yiddish received a formal recognition by the PEN-Club. He welcomed the heterogeneity of Yiddish writing that developed due to its diasporism.<sup>200</sup> For the key Yiddishist figures in Argentina Resnick was a person who was able to bring together Yiddish and Spanish-speaking Jews, without antagonizing them and quarreling about cultural supremacy. A confirmation of this can be found in the fact that in 1936, Salomón Resnick was sent by Vilna's YIVO on a research trip to Colombia, Chile and Peru. For this purpose, YIVO, a Yiddishist authority, needed a middleman who was equally immersed in Yiddish as in Latin American culture. The nomination of Resnick was warmly

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<sup>196</sup> “Por la enseñanza judía,” *Mundo Israelita*, 2.7.1927, no. 213, 1.

<sup>197</sup> “Alejamiento, no asimilación,” *Mundo Israelita*, 16.8.1924, 1.

<sup>198</sup> Teofilo Wechsler, “El castellano idioma nacional para los judíos,” *Vida Nuestra*, no. 3, September 1918, Buenos Aires, 58-61.

<sup>199</sup> Salomón Resnick, “El idioma nacional de los judíos,” *Vida Nuestra*, no. 4, October 1919, 82-85.

<sup>200</sup> Salomón Resnick, *Esquema de la literatura judía* (Buenos Aires: M. Gleizer Editor, 1933), reprinted (Buenos Aires: Mario Saban, 2006), 165-166. During the 1936 PEN-Club congress, Resnick served as a Spanish translator of H. Leivick representing Yiddish literature.

welcomed by Yiddish periodicals *Yidische Zeitung* and *Morgnzeitung*.<sup>201</sup> Two years later Resnick was nominated president of Buenos Aires YIVO (IWO) that he headed until 1940.<sup>202</sup>

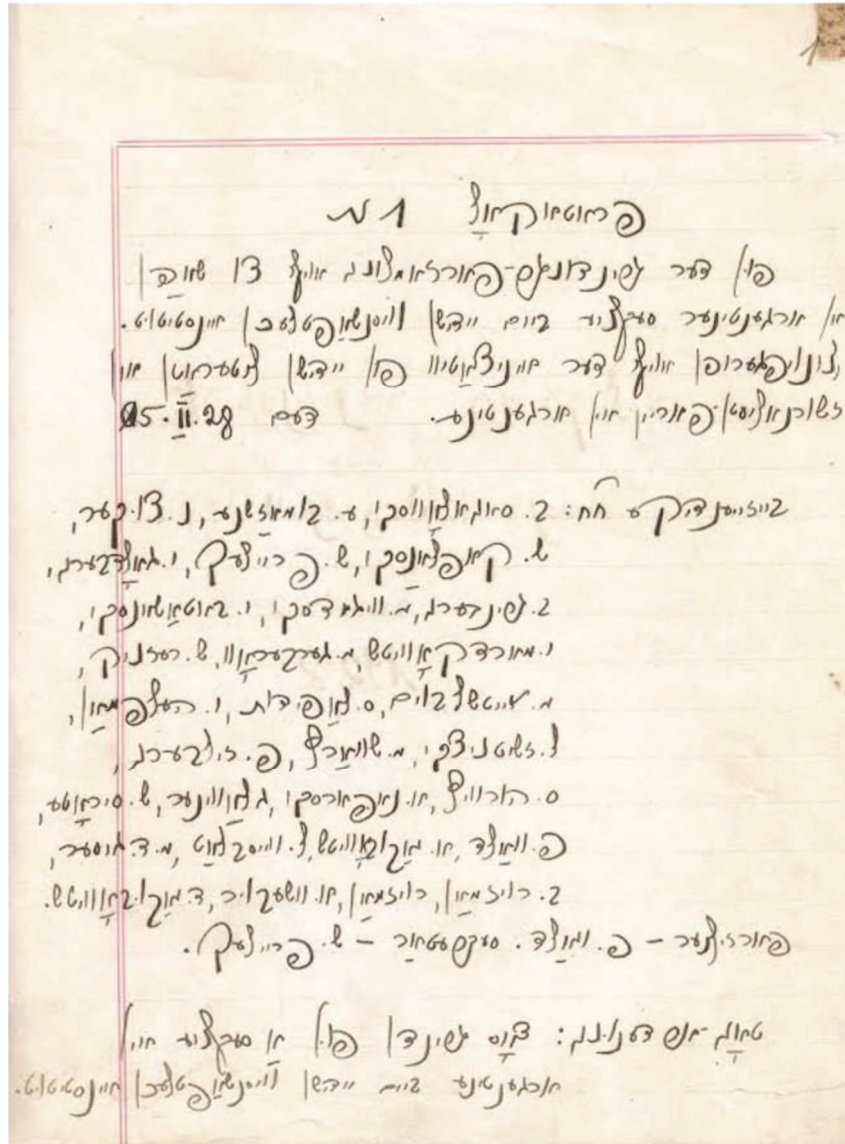


Illustration no. 35. The founding act of the Buenos Aires IWO, 1928, with signatures (selected) of: Nehemias Zucker, Sh. Kaplansky, Sh. Frieilech, Berl Grinberg, Yankev Botoshansky, Salomón Resnick, Lazaro Zhitnitsky, Israel Halfman, Pinie Wald, IWO Archive, Buenos Aires.

In the 1930s the separation between the veteran Jewish-Argentine cultural circles and the propagators of Yiddish culture might have been becoming very vague. Yiddishism, especially after the foundation of Vilna's YIVO Institute, was an important factor in global Jewish life, including Argentina, and did not automatically contradict acculturation. The 1925 editorial of

<sup>201</sup> “El Instituto Científico Judío ampliara su labor en la America,” *Judaica*, July 1936, no. 37, 44-45.

<sup>202</sup> Rosa Perla Resnick, “Salomón Resnick, pionero de la cultura judía en lengua castellana en Latinoamérica,” *Noaj. Revista Literaria*, no. 12-13 (1997), Homenaje a Salomón Resnick y la revista *Judaica*, 10.

*Mundo Israelita* encapsulated the diversity of possible Jewish allegiances in Argentina. The daily claimed that only “narrow minds” would think about the exclusive duality between being Argentine and being involved in global Jewish problems. Being an Argentine and an active Jew standing up “for the rights of his brothers” elsewhere in the world was seen as complementary.<sup>203</sup> The Argentine reality proved that Yiddish could at times be employed as a tool for claiming belonging to Argentina, as in the case of Yiddish tales about the childhood of president Sarmiento.<sup>204</sup> There was a number of Argentine ethnic leaders, who moved smoothly between the pastimes of the Spanish-speaking middle class, the Zionist cause, support for Yiddishist schooling and defending the rights of the Jewish minority in Poland. When the editor of *Yidische Zaitung* Matías Stoliar went to the US in 1935, the acculturationist *Mundo Israelita* praised him for informing the world about the progressive character of the Argentine *yishev*, and appreciated Stoliar's organizational talents and intellectual curiosity.<sup>205</sup> His trip to the US was seen as strengthening the ties within the *familia judia*, which served here as a synonym for global Jewry. For *Mundo Israelita* it was important that Stoliar properly represented Jewish Argentina abroad. When a Yiddishist Stoliar contributed to elevating the status of Argentina in other diasporas, the acculturationists also backed it. His personal linguistic and cultural choices were then irrelevant.

When Marcos Regalsky, a contributor of *Yidische Zaitung*, traveled to Europe in 1935, he not only represented Argentina in a Zionist congress, but also went to Vilna for a conference of YIVO.<sup>206</sup> The acculturationist *Mundo Israelita* expressed satisfaction that a representative of Argentine Jewry will be there, keeping the Argentine Jewish public updated about developments in the Old World. As *Mundo Israelita* remarked, even though YIVO was founded by the partisan Yiddishists, with time it focused on Yiddishism in a cultural sense, making it acceptable for the Zionists, too.<sup>207</sup> At the same time, to certain extent Zionism accepted multiple visions of a Jewish future, including both a Hebrew-speaking settlement in Palestine and Yiddish revival in the diaspora. Consequently, even the Zionist-leaning *Mundo Israelita* appreciated the advancement of Yiddish culture. A fitting example can be found in the warm welcome offered by the Spanish-language weekly to the Yiddish literary critic Shmuel Niger, who was described as “our illustrious guest” during his visit in Argentina.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> “La colectividad israelita en la Argentina,” *Mundo Israelita*, 5.1.1924, 1

<sup>204</sup> See Yardena Fain, *Dos yingl fun karaskal* (Buenos Aires, 1941).

<sup>205</sup> “Ha regresado el director del Diario Israelita,” *Mundo Israelita*, 31.8.1935, 1.

<sup>206</sup> “Partira para Europa el señor M. Regalsky,” *Mundo Israelita*, 20.7.1935, no. 632, 1.

<sup>207</sup> “La conferencia de la IWO,” *Mundo Israelita*, 25.8.1935, 1.

<sup>208</sup> “El escritor judío S. Niger, nuestro ilustre huésped, emite interesantes juicios sobre la actualidad cultural y la política judía,” *Mundo Israelita*, 4.5.1935, 2.

The journal *Judaica* edited by Resnick, despite its Jewish-Argentine character, took part in the cultural Jewish life of the global Yiddishland.<sup>209</sup> *Judaica* was not only a platform that popularized translated Yiddish classics within the Spanish-speaking population, but at times took a stand on Yiddishland debates. For instance, its February 1937 issue was entirely devoted to the Yiddish writer Yosef Opatoshu, and the list of contributors included Yiddish intellectuals Jacob Shatzky, H. Leivick, Osher Finkelstein, Rokhl Korn and Kadia Molodowsky. *Judaica* welcomed Jewish culture in all its linguistic forms and was motivated to keep Argentine Jews updated about developments in Poland, the US and other countries. This broad geographic focus referred not only to Jewish problems. For instance, in a universalist approach *Judaica* called on Jews to support the Spanish Republicans during the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s. Salomón Resnick was the main contributor to Argentine-Jewish transculturation. His *Judaica* was a most successful attempt at drawing both back to Jewish tradition, as well as to a secular Jewish heritage. As Leonardo Senkman wrote, Resnick helped to creatively transform the tradition of Eastern European Jewry into South American modernity.<sup>210</sup>

Further, in terms of Jewish Poland, *Judaica* kept its finger on the pulse. In 1937 the journal discussed Meier Balaban as a pioneer of Jewish historiography in Poland.<sup>211</sup> Another article by Moses Merkin discussed the social challenges of Polish Jewry and called upon the Jews of Argentina to extend a helping hand in a gesture of Jewish brotherhood.<sup>212</sup> In July of the same year, Jacob Lestschinsky, a renown sociologist, published a detailed report about the economic crisis hitting the Jews of Poland.<sup>213</sup> A report written and sent from Warsaw was first-hand evidence proving that Spanish-speaking Jewish-Argentines also took an interest in Polish problems. In the same issue, Yosef Horn, a member of Poylisher Farband and a writer, informed the readers of *Judaica* about the most recent Yiddish literature in Poland. Another

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<sup>209</sup> See Isaac Rubel, “Salomón Resnick y su revista JUDAICA como factores de mediación e intercambio entre la cultura judía, la literatura ídish y la sociedad argentina,” in *Buenos Aires ídish* ed. Perla Sneh, (Buenos Aires: Comisión para la Preservación del Patrimonio Histórico Cultural de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, 2006), 161-166.

<sup>210</sup> Leonardo Senkman, “La construcción de un espacio de transculturación judeo-iberoamericano,” *Noaj. Revista Literaria*, no. 12-13 (1997), Homenaje a Salomón Resnick y la revista *Judaica*, 1-3.

<sup>211</sup> F. Fridman, “El historiador Meier Balaban, Sexuagenario,” *Judaica*, no. 45, March 1937, 93-95.

<sup>212</sup> Moses Merkin, “El problema judeo-polaco. A proposito de la campania en favor de los judíos de Polonia,” *Judaica*, no. 45, March 1937, 96-98.

<sup>213</sup> Jacob Lestschinsky, “Situación catastrófica de los judíos en Europa Oriental y Central,” *Judaica*, no. 48, June 1937, 209-2017. For more information on Lestchinsky, see Gur Alroey, “Demographers in the Service of the Nation: Liebmann Hersch, Jacob Lestschinsky, and the Early Study of Jewish Migration,” *Jewish History* 20, no. 3/4 (2006): 265-282.

article discussed medieval and modern history of the Jews in Poland.<sup>214</sup> In the mid-1930s, following the sharp rise of anti-Semitism in Poland, *Mundo Israelita* also published frequent reports about the worsening situation.

Yiddish-speaking and argentinized Jews mingled in the same cultural institutions, foremost in Yiddish theaters. Samuel Rollansky noticed that those Jews who were very distant from Jewish life, quite often already very high within the Argentine social hierarchy, were filling up Yiddish theaters, especially for the popular so-called “tshulent-pieses.” Rollansky wrote that some Buenos Aires Jews did not speak Yiddish, did not read any books or newspapers in Yiddish, and the theatre was their only connection with *yidishkayt*.<sup>215</sup> Yiddish theaters in Argentina mostly staged foreign works, usually those composed in Poland or the US. Theaters served as a space that extended the borders of Yiddish life and included those who felt more comfortable in Spanish-speaking circles. Also, gentile theater critics visited Yiddish stages, especially in the 1920s when Spanish theater was supposedly still not well-developed. Especially attractive were the guest-plays by foreign directors. Zygmunt Turkow from Poland or Maurice Schwartz from the US were always received as stars. Despite performing a more challenging literary theater, the venues seemed to be packed with theater aficionados.<sup>216</sup>

The Yiddish cultural sphere was not an immigrant insular space, but a hybrid place where Argentine Jews voiced their Argentineness. Their self-perception as both Argentines and Jews was not exclusive. There was no “either this or that.” As in other diaspora countries, the first-generation migrants derived inputs and inspiration both from their Jewish-Polish and local (here Argentine) experiences. This is well articulated in a pioneering essay on Jewish cultural diversity written by Melech Ravitch, a Jewish-Polish writer and intellectual, during his visit in Argentina in 1938.<sup>217</sup> The text entitled “Bigamia cultural” explored the possibility of Jewish belonging in more than one culture, and is a fine source for exploring the situation of Polish Jews living in Argentina. Explaining the phenomenon on his own example, the writer claimed his belonging to Jewish, Polish and German cultural spaces. Ravitch clearly

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<sup>214</sup> Israel Friedlander, “Breve historia de los judíos de Polonia,” *Judaica*, no. 55, January 1938, 29-36, no. 56, 73-83, no. 56, 135-140.

<sup>215</sup> Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte*, 216-217.

<sup>216</sup> “Z. Turkow un der yid. teater in buenos aires,” *Literarische Bleter*, no. 50, 14.12.1935, 836. For a short overview text on Argentine Yiddish theater see Susanna Skura, Leonor Slavsky, “El teatro ídish como patrimonio cultural judío argentino,” in *Encuentro: Recreando la cultura judeoargentina 2*, ed. Ricardo Feierstein and Stephen A. Sadow (Buenos Aires: Editorial Mila, 2004), 41-50. For a longer study see: Nora Glickman, Glora F. Waldman, *Argentine Jewish Theater: A Critical Anthology* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1996).

<sup>217</sup> In 1938, Ravitch was in Argentina as an envoy of the YIVO Institute in Vilna.

approached the transcultural exchange in positive terms. He wrote: “[...] I feel richer than the cultural exclusivists. And in this aspect, I am not an exception. There are millions of individuals like me within the Jewish people and tens of millions in other nations of the planet.”<sup>218</sup> Ravitch rejected both the concept of absolute Jewish cultural autonomy and those who endorsed “cultural assimilation.” In an era of growing nationalism and biological reasoning concerning ethnicity and race, the views of Ravitch brought a spirit of imminent multiculturalism in the postwar era. Ravitch's article in the Jewish Argentine *Judaica* seemed to convince the newcomers that they did not need to decide whether to be Jewish or Argentine. He was sure that mixed identities were possible and that Polish, Jewish and Spanish influences could be smoothly integrated. In that respect, Ravitch endorsed the positions of Salomón Resnick, Yosef Mendelson and the socio-cultural profile of *Judaica*. The weekly and many of its contributors lived between two cultures and did not feel a need for exclusivist ethno-linguistic choices. Salomon Resnick wrote that his journal, apart from being Jewish-focused, was open to non-Jewish readers and contributors.<sup>219</sup> The Jewish and the Argentine were co-fertilizing each other, creating an especially interesting mixture of insights.

The views of Ravitch were to some extent shared by the Argentine Yiddishist Pinie Katz, who explicitly argued in the Spanish-language *Judaica* that the linguistic preference that Jewish youth lately gave to Spanish did not pose a danger to Yiddish. Conversely, believing in the possibility of a coexistence of two-linguistic spaces, Katz argued that the Jewish youth of Argentina were anyway connected to modern, global Jewish life and the flock of new migrants from Europe would further strengthen the local Yiddish culture. For Katz, of much greater importance were the progressive, secular and democratic values conveyed by Yiddishism.<sup>220</sup> On another occasion, he rejected the presumed Yiddishist isolationism and wrote that “Jewish culture cannot remain untouched from the Argentine ambience and Argentine spirit.” In an integrationist appeal, he concluded that the Argentine climate and environment influenced Jewish thoughts and feelings. Katz believed that there was a huge difference between Argentine-influenced Jewish culture (that he supported) and consciously chosen assimilation. Noticing the emergence of Jewish Argentines in place of Eastern European Jewish immigrants, Katz said:

[...] we are being connected with the interests of this country; and everything cultural that we brought with us, everything we get every day from the general Jewish world,

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<sup>218</sup> Melech Ravitch, “Bigamia cultural,” *Judaica*, no. 59-61, May-July 1938, 196-201.

<sup>219</sup> Resnick, “Salomón Resnick, pionero de la cultura,” 8.

<sup>220</sup> Pinie Katz, “Ídish e Judaica,” *Judaica*, no. 59-61, May-July 1938, 251-252.



and all things Jewish that we ourselves create here and in Yiddish [...] need to be imbued with local tones, different from analogous Jewish creations in Russia, Poland, North America, etc. Otherwise it would mean that we don't live in Argentina, that we breathe another air, that we don't have a clue about what's going on around us, that we have closed ourselves in an economic and spiritual ghetto.<sup>221</sup>

Pinie Katz noticed that immigrants from Poland contributed to the “yidishizatsye” (“Yidishization”) of Jewish life in Argentina. Growing cultural contacts with other parts of the Yiddishland wove Argentina deeper and deeper into the fabric of Yiddishland. Years later, Yosef Horn also expressed a similar view, noting that despite the linguistic acculturation and “burning fire of assimilation,” Yiddish-based Jewishness was the soul of Jewish Argentina.<sup>222</sup>

#### **4. All Immigrant Jews Live with Their Soul in Poland? Debating the Tensions between the Old and New Home**

Yiddish writing (both literature and periodicals) was the main arena of voicing the agendas, belonging and evolving identities of the Yiddish-speaking immigrant public. It was an ethnic space, shaped both by the Argentine presence and the Polish past of the immigrants. Its malleable and diverse character is poignantly visible in the development of the Argentine Yiddish press. Yiddish periodicals began to appear in Argentina in the 1890s, following the arrival of the first immigrants from Eastern Europe. The first journals *Viderkol*, *Di Folks Shtime*, *Der Yidisher Fonograf* all appeared in 1898. They were quickly followed by two anarchist periodicals *Der Avangard* (1908) and *Broit un Ehre* (1909), as well as *Der Zionist* of Jacobo Liachovitzky (1899-1904) and *Idisher kolonist* (1909).<sup>223</sup> The immigrants also had access to newspapers printed in Poland, Russia and Galicia, which were brought to Argentina on the same ships as the new transports of Jewish immigrants.

The Great War that broke out in 1914 made the circulation of vessels nearly impossible. The European journals ceased to arrive to Latin America and the immigrants were largely cut off from any Yiddish source of information on developments in their homelands and in Argentina. In order to fill this gap, a group of activists founded *Di Yidische Zaitung* (*El*

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<sup>221</sup> Pinie Katz, “Der sotsyaler bashtand,” 55-59.

<sup>222</sup> Yosef Horn, *Arum yidisher literatur un yidische shrayber: ophandlungen un fartsaykhenungen shrayber* (Buenos Aires: Altveltlekher yidisher kultur-kongres, argentiner aptayl, 1973), 60.

<sup>223</sup> Boleslao Lewin, *Comó fué la inmigración judía en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 1983), 229-231. *Viderkol* was edited by Miguel Hacohe Sinay, *Broit un Ehre* by Pinie Wald.

*Diario Israelita*) in 1914.<sup>224</sup> The daily was directed for many years by Matias (Mordechai) Stoliar and with time evolved closer to Labor Zionism. A few years later, in 1918, the pro-communist daily *Di Presse* started to be published. *Di Presse*, managed by its long-years editor Pinie (also Pinchas, Pedro) Katz, became a platform for voicing the interests of Argentine Yiddish-speaking proletarian Jews.<sup>225</sup> Both dailies featured short news articles from Argentina and abroad and longer political and cultural essays, especially in the more robust weekend editions. Although most of the contributing journalists lived in Argentina, the texts sent by Eastern European authors made up a significant share of the *Di Presse* and *Yidische Zaitung* columns. Apart from the two leading political dailies, a number of satirical popular papers, such *Penimer un penimlekh* (*Caras y caritas*) and *Der Kundas* or literary journals like *Argentine*, *Der Spiegel* and *Zeglen* enriched the panorama of the Yiddish press in Argentina.<sup>226</sup> There were also theater magazines, journals representing specific professions and landsman newspapers. It was estimated that in 1938 a total of 131 Yiddish periodicals and 285 books were published in Yiddish in Argentina.<sup>227</sup>

Writing in Yiddish allowed immigrant Argentine Jews to imagine themselves as “citizens” of Yiddishland and to participate in global Jewish discussions, including debates about the challenges faced by the Jews of Poland. Already in 1900 Jacobo Liachovitzky was writing in the Argentine *Der Tsionist* about Warsaw-based canonic Yiddish writer Y.L. Peretz.<sup>228</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s the key figures of Argentine Yiddish cultural life gladly took up the opportunity of writing for Poland's or the US Yiddish press. Yankev Botoshansky was a longtime contributor of *Literarische Bleter* in Warsaw and in 1933 the weekly managed to publish his *Portretn fun yidishe shrayber*. The book included biographies of Yiddish authors and was also based on impressions from personal meetings that Botoshansky had with them in Poland, Germany, France and the US.<sup>229</sup> The essayist and poet Volf H. (nickname of Israel Friedman), after immigrating to Argentina in 1924, published two of his philosophical books

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<sup>224</sup> Eliahu Toker and Ana E. Weinstein, *Trayectoria de una idea: Nueva Si3n, 50 a3os de periodismo judeo-argentino con compromiso: 1948-1998* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Fundaci3n Mordejai Anilevich, 1999), 7.

<sup>225</sup> Feierstein, “The New Midrash,” 568.

<sup>226</sup> For a review of early Yiddish periodicals, see Samuel Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte* and Pinie Katz, *Tsu der geshikhte fun der yidisher zhurnalistik in argentine* (Buenos Aires: Yidishn literaten un zhurnalistn farayn, 1929).

<sup>227</sup> Samuel Rollansky, “Di ambitsyes fun yidishn gedruktn vort bay di bregn fun la plata,” in *Argentinisch*, vol. 2, 10.

<sup>228</sup> Samuel Rollansky, “Y.L. peretzes batsiyung tsu argentine,” *Argentiner IWO Shriftn*, no. 1, 1941, 121.

<sup>229</sup> *Portretn* did not include any writer working in Argentina. The book received a positive review by Vilna educator and translator Aharon Mark; Aharon Mark, “Portretn fun yidishe shrayber,” *Literarische Bleter*, no. 34, 25.8.1933, 548-549.

in Warsaw.<sup>230</sup> *Literarische Bleter* often informed readers about the Argentine careers of Jewish-Polish authors, as in the case of Moisés David Guiser.<sup>231</sup> The growing involvement of Argentine Jews with Jewish Poland and the Yiddishland corresponded with their growing ambitions and desire for external recognition. A great allegory of the global outreach of Argentine Yiddishist circles was an illustration published in *Di Presse* in 1929. We see here a globe wrapped with a ribbon reading *Di Presse* and standing on the top of a pyramid. The daily saw itself as a “velt tsaytung” (world newspaper) that reached all places where Jews lived.<sup>232</sup> *Di Presse* was proud that it had contributors in all major Jewish centers of Europe and North America.<sup>233</sup>



Illustration. no. 36. *Di Presse*, 8.9.1929, 12

For Argentine Jews, not only for those of Polish origin, Poland of the interwar years was a major reference point as a bustling center of Ashkenazi civilization. For about two decades, many Argentine Jews largely perceived themselves as a new branch or chapter of

<sup>230</sup> H. Volf, *Etisher sotsyalizm*, (Warsaw: Ferlag Brzoza, 1936); *Di ibergangs-gezelschaft* (Warsaw: Ferlag Brzoza, 1937). Volf was born in the Łomża region of Poland in 1904. He published in *Di Presse* where he also worked as a typesetter. In 1927 he lived in Montevideo, editing a local Yiddish journal, *Unzer Lebn*.

<sup>231</sup> Nakhmen Mayzel, “Fun vokh tsu vokh,” *Literarische Bleter*, 1.9.1933, 570.

<sup>232</sup> *Di Presse*, 8.9.1929, no. 4494, 12.

<sup>233</sup> *Almanakh 1928*, 67.

Eastern European Jewish life. At the same time, the acculturationist powers quickly helped to develop their sense of belonging to Argentina. The Argentine *yishev* attempted to underline its “independence” in cultural and social areas, but relations with Eastern Europe were defined by center-periphery dynamics. Even in anthologies that celebrated Argentine-made Yiddish literature, the editors felt obliged to include texts by authors from the Eastern European center, who, by visiting and describing Argentina, put a *sui generis* stamp of approval on the local Yiddish creativity.<sup>234</sup> In the wake of the worsening economic and political situation in Poland and the progress of Yiddish culture in Latin America, recognition for an Argentine chapter of Yiddishland was eagerly given by Jewish Poland.

These dynamics were visible during the October 1929 visit of the *Di Presse* editor Pinie Katz in Vilna.<sup>235</sup> S. Erzet (probably Vilna-based Leyb Szereszewski), in a report to *Di Presse*, mentioned that Katz was the first guest from Argentine literary-journalistic circles to come to Vilna.<sup>236</sup> His visit was described as a unique opportunity for face-to-face learning about Jewish life in Argentina. His leftist Yiddishist beliefs were warmly welcomed, and his newspaper was considered one of the few Jewish proletarian titles with a clear agenda, one of the few journals that did not move in the direction of the yellow press. Katz was seen as a representative of all Argentine Jewry and was warmly welcomed by Zalmen Reyzen, one of the most prominent figures of the YIVO Yiddish Scientific Institute. Katz's visit to Vilna and the recognition given to him by YIVO was a symbolic embrace of Argentina into the Yiddishland, no less important in its symbolic capital of Vilna. Welcoming Katz, Reyzen said:

It is a pleasure to spend time with this quiet, modest man, to hear his stories and descriptions about the remote, here so unknown land and its residents. What do we know about Yiddish colonization in Argentina that once had made so much noise in our local Jewish society [...]? What do we know about this healthy, unique Jewish life on the shores of La Plata, on the endless South American pampa? What do we know about suffering and happiness of those pioneers of Jewish productivization, liberating the Jews from their humiliating professions [...]?

I read the sensational book of Pinie Katz *Tsu der geshikhte fun der yidisher zhurnalistik in argentine* with so much interest. But only in hearing his stories about the builders and activists of the Jewish *yishev* in Argentina has this land become so close to me, this land of so many fulfilled and broken hopes for a new healthy, productive Jewish life. [...] a

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<sup>234</sup> In *Antologye fun der yidisher literatur in argentine* we find a whole section “Shrayber-gast” (Visiting Writers) that featured Peretz Hirschbein, Hersh Dovid Nomberg, Melech Ravitch or Borekh Schefner.

<sup>235</sup> Katz was invited to visit Soviet Russia as a delegate of *Procor* to promote Jewish colonization there. After visiting Russia, he traveled for a week to Vilna. Afterwards Katz continued to Warsaw where he also gave a lecture in Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists.

<sup>236</sup> Sh. Erzet, “Pinie katz in vilne,” *Di Presse*, 1.11.1929, 6. The article was written in Vilna on 17.10.1929. Katz was not the first Argentina-based Jewish ethnic leader to visit Poland. A few years earlier, León Maas was in the country, but he did not reach Vilna. Lazaro Zhitnitsky visited Poland in 1925 and reported to *Yidische Zaitung*.

land of people who within forty years laid a strong foundation for a yishuv of 250,000 souls, a *yishev* that already began to contribute its part to world Yiddish culture [...].<sup>237</sup>

Reyzen's speech was an eulogy to Jewish Argentina. The Yiddishist scholar was amazed by the development of Jewish life in Argentina and argued that Argentina was dear and close to him. For Reyzen, Argentina was already a part of the Yiddishland microcosm, unique in certain aspects, but also sharing many commonalities with other diasporas. In that way, Katz's visit to the YIVO Institute in Vilna was a symbolic confirmation of Argentina's status as a part of the Yiddishland.<sup>238</sup> Katz, who served as one of the key promoters of Yiddishism and progressive *yidishkayt* in Argentina, was welcomed in Vilna as an old comrade. The community of interests between Katz's agenda in Argentina and the YIVO socio-cultural program were clearly visible and officially voiced during the 1929 meeting. Jewish Argentina received the desired recognition from the Yiddishist heartland, while YIVO leaders could use the example of Argentina to speak about a global and vital Yiddish culture.

Katz spent a week in Vilna, visited numerous Jewish institutions (schools, theaters, editorial offices etc.) and gave a lecture about Jews in Argentina in the Vilna branch of Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists (*Yidishn iteratn un zhurnalistn farayn*). The local activists of Yiddish Pen-Club used Katz's visit in Vilna as an opportunity to talk about opening an Argentine branch of the institution. During his visit, Katz probably commissioned an article from Zalman Reyzen that was later published in *Di Presse* in November 1929. In the article, Reyzen described the economic crisis in Vilna, pointing out the recent changes that challenged the traditional Jewish economy.<sup>239</sup> Zalmen Reyzen saw the pauperization of Jewish Vilna as a threat to Yiddish cultural life in the city, as many authors, teachers and activists, unable to make ends meet in Vilna, left to other places in Poland and abroad. Reyzen's article also touched on the issue of the TSYSHO schools, which were then on the agenda in Jewish Buenos Aires. He described the overfilled classes and children who wanted their education in Yiddish and addressed the subject of modern secular Jewish schooling, which was close to all involved in Yiddish progressive policies around the world. By writing about the problems relevant for Jews both in Poland and Argentina, Reyzen imagined them as

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<sup>237</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>238</sup> Vilna was often imagined as the capital of the Yiddishland. The city was a central proving ground of Yiddishist activism already before World War I. Later the "Jerusalem of Lithuania" was imagined as the capital of booming Jewish socialism. Gennady Estraiikh argued that Vilna received its status for a number of reasons: it had a long tradition of Jewish publishing, boasted a sizable Yiddish-speaking proletarian population and the local yeshiva and Teachers' Seminar acted as a reservoir of dissenting men of letters who were later recruited for Jewish socialism. See Gennady Estraiikh, "Yiddish Vilna: A Virtual Capital of a Virtual Land," *Zutot* 3, no. 1 (2003): 135-141.

<sup>239</sup> Zalmen Reyzen, "Briv fun vilne," *Di Presse*, 11.11.1929, 7.

co-citizens of a diasporic Yiddishland. Despite the geographical distance, the problems centered around Yiddish language and progressive *yidishkayt* seemed to be similar everywhere.

The literary exchange between Poland and Argentina was fostered by the Union of Yiddish Journalists and Writers in Argentina (*Yidishn zhurnalistn und literatn farayn in argentine*). The Farayn participated in inviting European or North American Yiddish authors for study or fundraising trips in Argentina. The union considered these visits as an opportunity for presenting the work of the Argentine *yishev* to the central figures of the Yiddishland. The organization was established in 1922 by a Warsaw writer, H.D. Nomberg, during his trip to Argentina.<sup>240</sup> In an attempt to mark its place on the map of the Jewish world, the Farayn meticulously prepared for the World PEN-club Congress in Buenos Aires in 1936.<sup>241</sup> As Yosef Horn recalled, “Jewish Buenos Aires was burning in these months.”<sup>242</sup> Two famous Jewish men of letters arrived to Buenos Aires: H. Leivik, representing Yiddish writers, and Shaul Tchernichovski, representing Hebrew literature. At the same time, Borekh Schefner also arrived to Buenos Aires from Poland's TSYSHO and Zerubavel from the *Linke Poaley Tsiyon* party. Leivick's Congress speech touched on Polish-Jewish relations and was allegedly commented upon with interest and support in the Jewish street of Buenos Aires. Leivick stood up against anti-Jewish repressions in Poland and succeeded in raising this issue on an international level. Horn described Leivick as a quasi-national hero, who fought against the nationalist Polish and Italian writers opposing his appearance in the congress. Leivick internationalized the recent anti-Jewish violence in Poland (several pogroms took place in the summer of 1936), appeared as a tribune of a diasporic Jewish folk, and referred to the humanist responsibility of literature. Using the congress as an opportunity to showcase Argentine Yiddish literature, the Writers' Union organized a party to honor Leivick. Pinie Katz presented a speech about the last fifty years of Jewish life in Argentina and Pinie Wald portrayed the local proletarian movement.

The Jewish press, both Spanish and Yiddish, was central in updating those living in Argentina about the situation in Poland. We can divide the press articles about Poland into several categories: 1) reprints from Poland's Yiddish press, 2) articles commissioned from

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<sup>240</sup> Samuel Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte*, 113. Rollansky was a co-founder of the Union of Yiddish Writers and Journalists in Argentina.

<sup>241</sup> In earlier PEN-Club Congresses in Oslo and Vienna, Yiddish was represented respectively by Shalom Asch and Yosef Opatoshu.

<sup>242</sup> Horn, *Arum yidisher literatur un yidishe*, 78.

authors living in Poland, 3) news agency reports, 4) satiric texts and 5) articles written by Argentine experts on Jewish Poland. The texts of Yosef Horn belonged to the last category. Horn was a member of Poylisher Farband and a Bundist activist. He updated the Argentine-Jewish public usually on recent developments in Poland's Yiddish literary scene. In one of his texts, he mentioned Chaim Grade, Avrom Sutzkever, Rokhl Korn and numerous others, who were described as the new starlets of Yiddish letters in Poland.<sup>243</sup> Yosef Horn (1906-1943) was born in Międzyrzec Podlaski of eastern Poland. In 1936 he emigrated to Buenos Aires, where he began to write for the local press and was an editor of *Dos Naye Lebn*, a monthly of Poylisher Farband in Argentina. After his immigration to Buenos Aires, Horn continued writing for Poland's Jewish periodicals and about Poland for the local Argentine titles. Yosef Horn embodied the transnational Polish-Argentine Jew, living between two geographical centers, yet bound together by the Yiddish word and Yiddishist ideology. In the late 1930s, Horn was an editor of the literary journal *Der Spigl* and, as Samuel Rollansky argued, Horn understood the young Argentine *yishev* better than those living for a long time in Argentina.

An important section of Buenos Aires Yiddish periodicals were texts reprinted from Poland's Yiddish newspapers.<sup>244</sup> In 1928 and 1929, *Di Presse* published the articles of Melech Ravitch on Yiddish female writing.<sup>245</sup> On other occasions, these were texts about the port cities Danzig and Gdynia<sup>246</sup>, about debates in the *Literatn un zhurnalistsn farayn* in Warsaw<sup>247</sup> or about conflicts concerning the TSYSHO schools in Poland.<sup>248</sup> In November 1929 a text appeared about Józef Piłsudski and his relations with the Polish parliament, written by a certain Warsaw-based B. Abramson.<sup>249</sup> Another Warsaw journalist, Borekh Schefner, under the nickname of Beit Shin, published regular pieces, including his impressions from his travels in the Polish periphery.<sup>250</sup> Zerubavel wrote regular updates from Warsaw about the

<sup>243</sup> Yosef Horn, "La nueva literatura judía en Polonia," *Judaica*, no. 49, July 1937, 7-12

<sup>244</sup> The Argentine Yiddish press also reprinted texts by North American authors, including Avrom Reyzen, Shmuel Niger, Yosef Opatoshu and others.

<sup>245</sup> Melech Ravitch, "Di yidishe shilern fun shiler," *Di Presse*, 8.9.1929, no. 4494, 11. The article featured Else Lasker-Schüller; "Yaakov dinezon," *Di Presse*, 17.11.1929, 10; "In der poylisher literature," *Di Presse*, 20.12.1928, 7.

<sup>246</sup> I. Shames, "Danzig un Gdynia," *Di Presse*, 8.9.1929, no. 4494, 13.

<sup>247</sup> "Konflikt in farayn fun yidishe literatn un zhurnalistsn in varshe iber palestiner geshenishn," *Di Presse*, 30.10.1929, 7. The editors of *Haynt* left the Literatn Farayn following its lack of condemnation after the revolt in Palestine. Afterwards *Haynt* attacked the Farayn, which led to one of the biggest conflicts of Yiddish cultural life in Poland. See "Shtimen fun yidishe dikhter un literatn vegn di haynt anfaln ofn literatn farayn," *Di Presse*, 6.1.1929, 8.

<sup>248</sup> "Far di yidishe veltleke shuln in poyln," *Di Presse*, 31.10.1929, 6. When the Warsaw *Haynt* called for stopping municipal and kehilla support for the TSYSHO schools, TSYSHO accused *Haynt* of "being a tool in the hands of Polish reactionaries."

<sup>249</sup> B. Abramson, "'Di sheyne helene' hot ongehoybn den politishn sezon in poyln," *Di Presse*, 1.11.1929, 8. The problem was followed in subsequent issues.

<sup>250</sup> Borekh Schefner, "A yidisher kontsert in a poylish shtetl," *Di Presse*, 8.4.1933, 6.

worldwide conference of the YIVO Institute in Vilna or about conflicts between Jewish artists in Poland and the US.<sup>251</sup> In 1928 *Di Presse* reprinted an article by Lazar Kahane about the filming of a novel by Yosef Opatoshu in Warsaw.<sup>252</sup> Some of the commissioned authors had visited Argentina previously and the links they established were continued after their return to Poland.

Next to articles commissioned from Poland, reprints and editorials by local Argentine journalists, *Mundo Israelita*, *Yidishe Zaitung* and *Di Presse* received news from the Associated Press (AP) and the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. The big news agencies had their own correspondents in Poland, Palestine, the US and more, serving as intermediaries spreading the “Jewish news” (*yidische naves*) around the Jewish world. The articles based on the agency reports were usually political. The AP informed readers about the opening session of the Polish Sejm, the political upheaval of 1926, economic data, etc.<sup>253</sup> *Mundo Israelita* published regular news from Poland in the section “Jewish Information from Around the World” (*Información judía del todo el mundo*), including, for instance, texts on the development of academic anti-Semitism in the late 1930s or Zionist projects in Poland.

*Di Presse* also published a separate column “Images and Events from the Old Home” (*Bilder un pasirungen fun der alter heym*). They usually contained sensational news, which reflected similar columns in Poland's Yiddish dailies. Whereas in Poland it was Argentina that was a source of weird stories, in *Di Presse*, the Old World began to function as a place of irrational, strange events. An alleged new trend in Galicia, where Jewish weddings were supposed to be organized without a klezmer orchestra, was depicted in this way.<sup>254</sup> Other articles featured a transsexual artist travelling through the region of Polesie,<sup>255</sup> a story of man buried alive in Vilna or a wave of suicides in Warsaw.<sup>256</sup> In 1933 the column received a specifically Polish character and was entitled “Comical and Serious Images of Jewish Life in Poland” (*Komishe un ernste bilder fun yidishn lebn in Poyln*). An analogous column was found in *Yidishe Zaitung*. In it, a certain K. Israel reported from Łódź about a love affair between the wife of Polish officer and a Jewish doctor.<sup>257</sup> Presenting the Old World as weird and

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<sup>251</sup> Yaakov Zerubavel, “Alveltlekhe konferents fun yidishn visenshafteker institute,” *Di Presse*, 1.1.1929, 7; “Likvidirt di milhome tsvishn yidish aktyorn org. in nord amerike un in poyln,” *Di Presse*, 18.12.1929, 8.

<sup>252</sup> “A par sho bay der arbet fun opatoshu ‘poylishe velder,’” *Di Presse*, clipping in IWO Buenos Aires, unknown page and issue, 1928.

<sup>253</sup> “Haynt vern benayt di sitzungen fun poylishn sejm,” *Di Presse*, 5.9.1929, no. 4549, 1.

<sup>254</sup> S. Lvovski, “Oys klezmer in galitsie,” *Di Presse*, 5.11.1929, 8.

<sup>255</sup> “A ‘bakhurte’ vos iz gor geven a manparshoyn,” “Bilder un pasirungen fun alter heym,” *Di Presse*, 9.11.1929, unknown page.

<sup>256</sup> “Shoyderlekhe selbst-mordn in varshe,” *Di Presse*, 3.10.1928, 4.

<sup>257</sup> K. Israel (Probably Israel Kahan) “Yidishe nekome,” *Yidishe Zaitung*, 7.10.1925, 7.



funny marked immigrants' growing sense of belonging to Argentina. As time passed, the Argentine reality, not Polish memories, began to be perceived as standard and normal.

A distinct category of periodicals formed the landsmanshaft publications. Whereas in general Jewish-Polish problems depicted in the Argentine-Yiddish press were important, though one of many issues, in landsman periodicals they occupied a central place. Like the daily newspapers, the landsman titles reprinted texts by leading Polish authors or analytical texts written by more up-to-date landslajt. The book celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Poylisher Farband included a whole selection of Poland-based journalists and researchers. There was a text by Jakub Appenzlak, a prominent journalist of the Yiddish and Jewish-Polish press in Warsaw, a socio-economic analysis by Arie Tartakower, and articles by a parliamentarian Ignacy Schwarzbart and actor and director Marek Turkow. The landsman journals were also an arena for more or less amateur poetry and prose.<sup>258</sup>

Regular articles written by journalists residing in Poland had a prominent place in shaping Jewish-Argentine discussions about the Old Home.<sup>259</sup> A veteran Poland correspondent of Buenos Aires *Yidische Zaitung* was Abraham Goldberg (1891-1933). Commissioning Goldberg as the daily's correspondent signified that the editors of *Idische Zaitung* were well-informed on Poland's Jewish life. Abraham Goldberg was not just the usual journalist, but one of the leading figures of pre-1939 Jewish Poland. He was the founder of *Haynt*, a liberal Zionist and fervent defender of Jewish national rights. Like many of his generation, Goldberg believed that Jewishness should be based linguistically in both Hebrew and Yiddish, yet secular in its essence. In 1928 he helped to establish a secularist *Shul-un kulturferband* that managed a network of schools teaching both in Yiddish and in Hebrew.

His articles appeared in Buenos Aires almost every week and featured a broad cultural and political spectrum. For instance, in 1926 Goldberg informed Argentine Jews about developments surrounding the coup d'état of Marshal Józef Piłsudski. He reported that out of approximately 300 victims of the revolt, around twenty were Jewish. Goldberg's article rejected accusations in the foreign press that described the fallen Jews as victims of a pogrom. He assured readers that most of them were in fact soldiers, who died "fulfilling their obligations towards their homeland" and quoted the Defense Minister who described the

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<sup>258</sup> The fourth part of my dissertation chapter examines the landsman activities in detail.

<sup>259</sup> The powerful influence of the Jewish press on the beliefs of ordinary readers was supposedly enormous. A good allegory of this can be found in a caricature in *Penimer un penimlekh* from 1926. It showed the editors of *Yidische Zaitung* and *Di Presse* sculpting the stone figure of a Jewish reader. The image implied that the editors had the power to influence the opinions of the Jewish public, *Penimer un penimlekh*, no. 104, 6.8.1926, 13

fallen youths as “heroes.”<sup>260</sup> On another occasion, Goldberg reported on conflicts between left-wing secularists and the orthodox or commented on news about Poland appointing its first Jewish minister.<sup>261</sup> Goldberg’s input to Argentine journalism was recognized by the daily in 1928 when he was invited to contribute to the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary jubilee issue of *Yidische Zaitung*.<sup>262</sup>

In commissioning texts by Abraham Goldberg, Mendel Menin, I. Goldinger or other Polish correspondents, the editors of *Yidische Zaitung* utilized their network of contacts with Jews in Poland.<sup>263</sup> In the same vein, the acculturationist *Semanario Hebreo* published articles by Warsaw-based N. M. Fregler. Their first-hand articles were more reliable and detailed than the correspondence of press agencies. By publishing their texts, the Jewish journals brought to Argentina a range of clearly Jewish-Polish problems and opinions. These articles answered both the needs of new immigrants for updates from their homeland and manifested the involvement of Argentine Jewry in Jewish-Polish affairs and Yiddishland as such. Goldberg writing from Warsaw to *Yidische Zaitung* or Argentina's Yankev Botoshansky writing for *Literarische Bleter* in Warsaw, as well as thousands of longer and shorter pieces about Jewish Poland, established lines of cultural, literary and discursive connections between Jewish Argentina and Jewish Poland.

Events in Argentina were followed in Poland with curiosity, and Jewish news from Argentina reached it regularly. The Argentine Yiddish press was subscribed by all major Polish Jewish dailies. When the Buenos Aires *Yidische Zaitung* did not arrive to Poland on time, its editor Matías Stoliar turned to the Polish Embassy to clarify the issue with the authorities in Warsaw.<sup>264</sup> In his correspondence, we see that among the subscribers of Buenos Aires dailies were editors of numerous Yiddish periodicals published in Poland: *Unzer Tog*, *Di Tsayt* (both Vilna), *Unzer Express*, *Literarische Bleter*, *Folkstsaytung*, *Haynt*, *Der Moment* (all Warsaw), *Nayer Folksblat*, *Lodzer Tagesblat* (both Łódź), *Der Morgen* (Lwów), YIVO Institute in Vilna, *Zhurnalstn un literatn farband* in Warsaw, *Yidishn artistn farayn* and several individuals.<sup>265</sup> This shows that the Jewish media in Poland, as well as the country’s

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<sup>260</sup> Abraham Goldberg, “Ydishe karbones fun revolutsye,” *Yidische Zaitung*, 24.6.1926, 4(?).

<sup>261</sup> Abraham Goldberg, “Tragishen forfalen un shlagerayen in yamim noraim in poyln,” *Yidische Zaitung*, 24.10.1926, page unknown; “Men zukht in poyln a yidishn minister,” *Yidische Zaitung*, 10.6.1926, 3 (?).

<sup>262</sup> Abraham Goldberg, “Kalman un zelde forn keyn argentine,” *10 yor Yidische Zaitung*, Buenos Aires 1924, 74-75.

<sup>263</sup> Samuel Rollansky noted that commissioning foreign versus Argentine authors was a result of the growing financial prosperity of the Yiddish journals. See Rollansky, *Dos yidische gedrukte*, 131.

<sup>264</sup> Letter from the Polish Embassy in Buenos Aires to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, January 28, 1935, MSZ AAN B24051, 3-4.

<sup>265</sup> Ibidem.

Yiddish cultural elite, kept a pulse on developments in Argentina and were able to transmit Argentine subjects further to readers in Poland. Yet on several occasions Poland's government (fearing revolutionary propaganda) forbade importing Argentine Yiddish dailies, limiting the possibilities of learning about what was going on in Jewish Argentina. These kinds of problems were reported in 1934 by *Di Presse*'s editor Pinie Katz.<sup>266</sup>

#### 4.1. Looking across the Ocean or an Argentine Style? Ethnic Belonging and Immigrant Cultural Expression

With time, many Yiddish-speaking and Yiddish-reading Jews, who immigrated to Argentina after 1918, also began to consider themselves clearly Argentine. Whereas their primordial Eastern European subethnic identifications as *poylisher* or *galitsianer* played an important role, many immigrant Jews felt a sense of community as an Argentine chapter of the world Jewry. Being an Argentine Jew also meant for some representing Argentina within the Yiddishland, at times defending the new homeland in internal and international Jewish debates.<sup>267</sup> The *argentinidad* of the immigrant Jews was an amalgam of Polish and Argentine experiences, manifested in the transformation of language, new pastimes and communal and family life. Argentine Yiddish incorporated words such as *taller*, *conventillo* and also a number of latinisms. Eliahu Toker described the Yiddish spoken in Argentina as *idishñol* or *castidish*.<sup>268</sup> The Yiddishist Pinie Katz saw the Jewish immigrants (and specifically their literary expression) as a tree that had both a Jewish and an Argentine root. As he saw it, creating in Yiddish meant being a part of the transnational community of Yiddishland, but discussing Argentine problems and expressing the “Argentine fever” enriched global Yiddish writing with a specific Argentine-Jewish character.<sup>269</sup>

Liliana Ruth Feierstein described the Jewish Argentine writing as a “writing territory” (*Schriftserritorium*) that stretched between the Jewish settlement in Argentina and the

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<sup>266</sup> Letter from the Polish Embassy in Buenos Aires to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, April 19, 1934, AAN B24051, 19.

<sup>267</sup> For instance, in 1926 the vitality, stability and reputation of Argentine Yiddish-speaking Jews was tested by the financial crisis of the Folks-teater, the first stage in Buenos Aires to exclude the *tmeim*. As we read in *Penimer un penimlekh*, the demise of the theater would be a “dirty stain” on the dignity of honest Argentine Jews, ruining their reputation within the Yiddishland. See “Der prestizh funem argentinier yidntum-oyfn vagshal,” *Penimer un penimlekh*, 22.10.1926, 2.

<sup>268</sup> Eliahu Toker, *El idish es también Latinoamérica* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Desde la Gente, Instituto Movilizador de Fondos Cooperativos, 2003), 17. These neologisms are a mix of the words *castellano* and *español* for Spanish and the Spanish transliteration of the word Yiddish – *idish*.

<sup>269</sup> Pinie Katz, “Der argentinier tsvayg fun der yidisher literatur. Forvort,” *Antologye fun der yidisher literatur*, 12. Yosef Horn noted that the “literary branch of the Argentine yishev was never as strong as the journalistic one.” Unlike in all other Yiddish literary centers, in Argentina the literature relied on journalism. See Horn, *Arum yidisher literatur un yidishe*, 62.

European homelands. She coined a very apt notion of a “paper bridge,” a literary-journalistic passage that immigrant authors used for combining their European past and Argentine present.<sup>270</sup> The immigrant literature written in Argentina quite often referred to the pre-emigration experiences. Also, widely discussed problems, such as Jewish poverty, lack of hope, generational and cultural changes, attracted attention on both sides of the Atlantic. The immigrant authors brought their cultural baggage, European motifs and themes. Consequently, Argentine-Yiddish literature and literary criticism became an arena for discussing the tensions between the challenges of new Argentine life and the memories of Jewish Poland, which, although physically left behind, still resonated in texts by migrant writers. Discussions focused on Argentine Yiddish literature were in fact a conversation that reflected various options available for the Jews of Argentina. Some stressed their growing rootedness in Argentina, marking the beginnings of becoming Jewish-Argentines, whereas others, including many freshly arrived authors from Poland (after 1918), claimed a right to focus on Old World themes and asserted that Argentina is not yet familiar enough for them. Similar time-space developments can be traced in immigrant literatures of other immigrant groups.

The relations and discussions that some immigrant writers wished to maintain with Jewish Poland, Polish Jewry and the broader Yiddishland world were at times met with sharp criticism. The accusations of not willing to become truly Argentine were often heard not only from acculturated, argentinized veterans, but also from fellow immigrant “greenhorns.” The Poland-born journalist Gershon Henekh Zakhak (Zajak, Zajac) claimed in 1926 that the *argentinidad* of the immigrant population was only external and a wide gap existed between immigrant and Argentina-born Jews. Although many new immigrants changed their names to sound more Hispanic (Yankel became Jacobo and Fayvel Federico),<sup>271</sup> Zakhak argued that “they were spiritually fed with what they brought in their baggage.”<sup>272</sup> He claimed that the immigrant Jews had barely anything in common with the Argentine reality, and “there was nothing new, nothing that would mark their Argentine character.” They “were not grown together with Argentina.” Using a botanic metaphor, Zakhak argued that the immigrants were “rooted in the warmth and health of the *alter heym* environment” and “could not bloom in a

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<sup>270</sup> Liliana Ruth Feierstein, “*Oyf di bregn fun Plata – Am Ufer des Silberflusses. Versuch einer Topographie jüdischer Erfahrungen in Argentinien*,” in *Der Ort des Judentums in der Gegenwart*, ed. Michael Kümper et al. (Berlin: Bebra Verlag, 2006), 93-118.

<sup>271</sup> Contrary to the policies of the US, it was not easy to change a last name in Argentina. As an article in *Mundo Israelita* from 1935 suggested, the government made it difficult to change a name in order to be able to differentiate Jews from non-Jews. Although the officials of the *Registro Civil* demanded giving Spanish names to newborns, they were equally reluctant to a permit change in last name. See “Sobre el cambio de apellidos,” *Mundo Israelita*, 4.5.1935, 7

<sup>272</sup> Gershon Henekh Zakhak, “Ayngvanderte un argentinier yidn,” *Yidische Zaitung*, 8.9.1926, 3-5.

despairingly cold local intellectual atmosphere.” According to the contributor of *Yidische Zaitung*, only the immigrants' bodies were in Argentina, whereas their minds were “wandering around the world, through the *haymish* cities and shtetels.” Zakhak correctly noted that immigrants arrived to Argentina with many preconceptions and prejudices. Poland's Jewish discourse on Argentina to a great extent exoticized Argentina, marking it as a mixture of vice and economic failure. Zakhak criticized the importance that immigrant Jews placed on opinions in Eastern Europe. He complained that instead of gratitude for financial help, the only thing that the *alter heyim* offered was “a condemnation and a stupid pride.”

As Zakhak argued, a gap between Argentine Jews and immigrant Jews could be overcome by the children of the postwar immigrants. They were supposed to be freed from the nostalgias and liberated from their Old World views. Although Zakhak wrote that he did not want to force acculturation and did not believe in the “superiority of argentinized Jews,” his observations clearly downgraded the way of life and priorities of the new immigrants. He suggested that Argentine Jews should develop a sense of self-pride, independence and agency, and cease being dependent on Jewish communities in Europe. He called for ending discussion with the *oysland* [foreign lands] about the condition of Argentine Jewry and its reputation. Zakhak believed that newcomers should be incorporated into the Argentine environment instead of continuing to live in the “style of Nalewki Street in Warsaw.” Argentineness should become attractive for the new immigrants and should “force them to adopt our lifestyle.”

Zakhak categorically rejected any notion of identifying with the Old World homelands. He refused immigrants the right to define themselves as “Polish, Bessarabian or Romanian Jews” and encouraged Argentinization. This process, as imagined by Zakhak, was far from linguistic acculturation in Spanish. Zakhak saw it as a development of a specifically Argentine Jewry – proud and free of Old World belongings. Actually, the fury of Zakhak in criticizing the landsman movement for adopting a Jewish-Polish institutional model exemplified the powerful dominance of immigrant-shaped cultural and social phenomena in interbellum Argentina. To his frustration, many immigrant Polish Jews, including writers, remained connected with Eastern European life. For many, what acculturation afforded was hardly attractive or unavailable during the first years. Those who grew up in Poland, together with the development of Jewish ethno-national movements, experiencing poverty and harsh life in Argentina, noticing the socio-cultural deficiencies of a local Jewry (concerning Yiddish culture), rarely aspired to become exclusively Argentine. Conversely, many post-1918 immigrants participated in influencing Argentine Jewish life in a direction they desired: a

strong Yiddish-speaking diaspora, with Yiddish culture and schooling, involved in the issues of the Old World and in a socio-cultural dialogue with it.

The criticism of Zakhak might be related to his own biography. He himself was a post-World War I immigrant. The journalist arrived to Argentina in 1921 at the age of thirty, to use his own terminology, as “a formed” individual. In Argentina, he initially taught at the JCA schools in Jewish colonies Moisés Ville and Dora.<sup>273</sup> Teaching Jewish Argentine children, Zakhak probably became aware of his own deficiencies. He did not have the chance to grow up in Argentina. He was shaped by his home town of Siedlce in central-eastern Poland. Thus, in his text Zakhak criticized his own generation, the postwar immigrants who often saw Argentina as a second-best option and continued looking back to Poland. His criticism towards the situation in Argentine was led on both fronts: the Yiddish and Spanish press. His Yiddish article was followed by a Spanish one, where he described Sociedad Hebraica Argentina as a “bridge connecting new and old generations” and a cultural “speaker” of a newly formed Jewish Argentines. He welcomed the organization as a space that transmitted Jewish subjects to those who were not fluent in traditional Jewish languages.<sup>274</sup>

Although his diagnosis about the way Jewish-Polish immigrants differed from veteran Jews was rather just, the “enforced Argentinization” that he suggested was hardly feasible. Even acculturated Jewish ethnic leaders never voiced such radical and militant criticism towards Yiddish and transnational Jewish belonging. Zakhak seemed not to acknowledge that the Yiddish world entered a new era and that immigration did not automatically create strong links between immigrants and their new country. As Frank Wolff put it, the immigrants were working on “making it” in “the promised land,” while constructing the Old Home. While for some immigrant Jews Poland came to be imagined as a romantic cultural home, for the Yiddishists it was a progressive heart of their movement.<sup>275</sup> Within the transnational Yiddishland of the 1920s and 1930s, it was possible to be physically in Argentina and “mit nefushe in Poyln” (with a soul in Poland). The Jewish worlds of Poland and Argentina began to interfuse and “Argentine-only” separation and exclusivity ceased to be an option. In an era of developing transnational Yiddish culture, with Yiddish books from Poland regularly on sale in Buenos Aires, with Yiddish theaters traveling around the world, with newspaper reports keeping immigrants updated about Eastern Europe, no one could expect from the

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<sup>273</sup> *Leksikon fun der nayer idishe literatur*, ed. Samuel Niger and Jacob Shatzky (New York: Altveltlekhen yidishn kultur-kongres, 1965), vol. 3, 517. The 1965 edition was based on Zalmen Reisen *Leksikon fun der yidisher literatur, prese un filologye* (Vilna, 1926-1929).

<sup>274</sup> Enrique Zajak, “Una literatura judía en español,” *Mundo Israelita*, 7.7.1928, 11.

<sup>275</sup> Wolff, “The Home that Never Was,” 197-215.

immigrants that they would choose a blindfolded love and belonging to the new home. This change was also noticed by those whom Zakhak might have seen as a model: the burgeoning new Spanish-speaking Jewish elite of Buenos Aires. They were also becoming increasingly interested in the Old World. In the interwar period, it offered high-quality, modern, secular Jewish cultural, social and political contents and exercised a strong cultural influence on younger diasporas.

#### **4.2. Choosing the Focus: Argentine Jewish Identities and the Katz-Granitstein Debate**

Whereas Zakhak complained that the new Yiddish-speaking immigrants did not argentinize as quickly as he wished, the Yiddishist journalist and literary critic Pinie Katz interpreted developments in Argentina rather positively. For Katz, being Argentines and *yidishkayt*-spirited Jews was compatible. Katz did not see the generational divide that sharply. Speaking in the name of Argentine Jewry, he offered a *sui generis* manifesto of *argentinidad*:

We call ourselves Argentine Jews with full awareness and conviction that we are Argentine Jews [yid. “argentiner yidn,”], and that we desire to be Argentine Jews. Both those of us who were born in Argentina and those who immigrated, who settled here and linked their destiny and future with this country, we love this country as one loves a thing that one had made himself or one has helped to create, as one loves a *heyim* that one has built with one’s own hands.<sup>276</sup>

In his essay, Katz chose to describe Argentina with the intimate word “heyim” (home), usually reserved for the Old Home, the “alter heyim.” His 1940 text showed an emotional appreciation for the liberal policies of Argentina that allowed thousands of Jews to build new lives in the Southern Cone. Katz emphasized the need for coexistence with other immigrant groups and the willingness of Jews to contribute to the development of Argentina. His essay was an expression of Jewish gratitude to Argentina and a way of envisioning the immigrant Argentine Jews as Jewish-Argentines, already a part of the Republic's society. For Katz, the post-1918 boom of Yiddish culture in Argentina and elsewhere in the world was a sign of blooming Jewish ethno-national life. This life was also being transplanted together with the migrating Jews to Argentina and precisely thanks to Argentine liberties was able to flourish and evolve. Katz did not see any contradiction between being Jewish and Argentine and

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<sup>276</sup> Pinie Katz, “Argentiner yidn (esei),” 395.

endorsed the existence of a vital, *yidish* cultural-ethnic life, combined with love and praise for Argentina.<sup>277</sup>

His text, published in an anthology of Argentine-Yiddish writing, established a connection between the immigrant biographies and Yiddish literature written in Argentina. Yiddish literature, according to Katz, was supposed to be a product and a report of Argentine experiences and a contribution to the transnational Yiddish culture. Katz wished that Buenos Aires would become the fourth world center of Yiddish literature, in constant cultural dialogue with those in New York, Moscow and Warsaw.<sup>278</sup> The embodiment of his efforts was the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary volume published by *Di Presse*. The 1928 book was filled with texts by Yiddish authors from all over the world, yet Argentina was also presented as a Yiddish literary center. The dialogue and cultural exchange between Argentina and other parts of the Yiddishland was constantly developing, in the 1920s and 1930s, but Buenos Aires reached a more prominent place within the Yiddishland only when the Polish center was destroyed.

The world of letters was both a space where Jews defended their ethnic distinctiveness and proved their membership in the Argentine *crisol de razas*.<sup>279</sup> Literary discussions about national identity, belonging to Argentina and the meaning of the Old World were heated due to the strong relationship between print culture and nationalism.<sup>280</sup> The debate on the focus and roots of Argentine Yiddish literature was in fact a debate about immigrants' relationship to Poland and to the broader Yiddishland. It reflected a dilemma of typical migrants: the tension between a desire to belong to the new homeland, mixed with a wish to preserve their Jewishness.<sup>281</sup> The thematic and linguistic choices of Yiddish writers informed readers about the future of the Jewish immigrant community and/or Jewish inclusion into Argentina and/or Yiddishland.

Pinie Katz was convinced that while the roots of Jewish literature of Argentina were indeed located in Eastern Europe and should not be forgotten, he was equally sure that the immigrant-writers should be dealing with local problems and themes.<sup>282</sup> As a communist, he called on authors to remain close to the working class, to describe the everyday life of Jewish

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<sup>277</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>278</sup> *Di Presse yubiley numer 1918-1928* (Buenos Aires, 1928).

<sup>279</sup> Feierstein, "The New Midrash," 570.

<sup>280</sup> John Charles Chasteen, "Introduction: Beyond Imagined Communities," in *Beyond Imagined Communities: Reading and Writing the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*, ed. John Charles Chasteen (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2003), IX-X.

<sup>281</sup> Yehiel Scheintuch, "Safrut idish beargentina ksafrut me'agrim," *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies*, vol. IV, Division D (Hebrew Language, Yidish Literature, Jewish Languages), 1975, 202.

<sup>282</sup> Katz touched on the subject of Yiddish localism in numerous articles in *Di Presse* in 1925. Reference from Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte*, 137.



immigrants. Pinie Katz argued that Argentina needed its own “Argentine Yiddish literature,” versus “Yiddish literature written in Argentina.” Katz called for Yiddish literature to be written “*itst und do*,” “here and now.” In a jubilee edition celebrating the twentieth anniversary of his daily *Di Presse*, Katz wrote that the journal was “first and foremost a product of *argentinidad*.”<sup>283</sup> Katz ironically pointed out that immigrants “did not leave the shtetl” in order to deal with this theme in their writing. For him Argentina was a new *yishev*, grouping Jews together from all around the world, and a local Yiddish literature should express their Argentine experiences. For Katz, only those authors who dealt with current problems were regarded as “good servants of the Jewish nation.”<sup>284</sup> Katz was convinced that literature should represent the social struggles and did not believe in individualist narratives.<sup>285</sup> Otherwise, as Katz continued, Jewish life and Jewish literature would be in danger of stagnation.<sup>286</sup> Katz, who was the founder and editor of the *Di Presse*, had an important influence on young writers and his daily influenced their positions, style and focus. He suggested his own Argentine-Yiddish literary canon that praised Noah Vital, Moshe Pinchevsky, Aharon Brodski and Israel Helfman, as those who reflected Argentine-Jewish life of the new *yishev*. This came in the context of immigration from Poland in the 1920s, when some older writers and literary critics felt that the journals were “flooded” with the “green” newcomers and Old World topics.<sup>287</sup>

The decades Katz spent in Argentina influenced the way he perceived his new country and the Yiddishland. Even though Pinie Katz was a convinced Yiddishist, he did not share the experience of Yiddish revival in Eastern Europe. He emigrated from Russia to Argentina in 1906, prior to the development of new Yiddish social, political and cultural frameworks. The situation was different among those who arrived from Poland around the 1920s. For the newcomers, Argentina was not familiar enough to be reflected in their works. It was the Polish past and the experience of migrating that found expression in the literary creativity of this generation.

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<sup>283</sup> Quoted in “Bibliografia,” *Judaica*, no. 62, 36. Underlining Jewish immersion and interest in the Argentine public sphere, Katz also included in the volume a number of Spanish works translated into Yiddish.

<sup>284</sup> Pinie Katz, *Geklibene shriftn*, vol. VII (Buenos Aires, 1947), 122-123, quoted in Scheintuch, 200-201.

<sup>285</sup> Katz was described by Vilna-based Sh. Erzet as a “hater of humiliating Jewish professions, of the small burgeoise dump [...] he was a fighter for a Jewish *arbeter-mensch*.” See Sh. Erzet, “Pinie Katz in vilne,” *Di Presse*, 1.11.1929, 6.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>287</sup> Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte*, 137.

A key opponent of Pinie Katz's Argentine localism was Moyshe Granitstein, a young immigrant author from Kovel in eastern Poland.<sup>288</sup> Granitstein underlined the immaturity of the Argentine *yishuv* and advocated for the right of authors to deal with Eastern European problems along Argentine themes. Granitstein believed that due to the migration experiences, Argentine Yiddish literature was “nisht do gedakht un nisht itst gedakht” [Yid. “not conceptualized here, and not conceptualized now”]. Granitstein argued that immigrant Jewish authors should also touch on Old World topics in their work. He criticized Katz's desire for localism and expression of Argentine life and style [*shtayger*]. As Granitstein noted, no national literature started from a local style. Conversely, it originated in the life of the folk and was an “extract of its essence.” Granitstein, responding to Katz’s critique, wrote:

[...] when Argentine Jewry is chaotic and unstable, when it is based on transformation and adaptation, when everyone is still overloaded with the baggage from the *alter heyim*, when everyone still sucks from the breast of the *alter heyim* [...] when no sign of a local style is to be seen [...] where should I get you [a local] style from?<sup>289</sup>

Granitstein believed that the European experiences of immigrants could not be “unloaded” and left aside. He claimed that the whole Jewish experience in Europe, starting from life in the shtetl through the experience of World War I, was and would also resonate in Argentina. Granitstein criticized the older Argentine authors, who “were so busy with avoiding the “old [world]” that they were left with barely anything new.”<sup>290</sup> Granitstein believed that it was precisely by referring to the Old World that writers were joining and mirroring the experiences of the immigrant masses. In that sense, he thought that a construction of a Jewish identity in a new country was possible only by referring to Eastern Europe. Granitstein claimed that refusing to write about the Old Home made Argentine literature “culturally empty and *bodenloz*” (without a basis).<sup>291</sup> The views of Moshe Granitstein were also formulated in his novel *Avantures fun haver hamerl*, in which he portrayed the literary circles of Buenos Aires, including his opponent Pinie Katz. Granitstein's novel describes an immigrant Jewish writer, who suffers a creative breakdown following

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<sup>288</sup> Moyshe Granitstein was born in Kovel (Kowel), Poland in 1897. After World War I, he published for *Di Yidische Tribune* (Warsaw), *Voliner Gedank* (Lutsk) and *Di Yidische Vokh*. (Rivne). After immigrating to Argentina in 1927, he worked as a teacher in Jewish schools and published in *Di Presse*. He published numerous books, yet usually in very small editions. Granitstein died in Buenos Aires in 1956.

<sup>289</sup> Moyshe Granitstein, “Tsi ken argentiner yidische literatur zikh farneyemen durkhoys mit lokaln shtayger? (a politishn artikl),” *Fun tkhum tsu tkhum. Zikhroynes un betraktungen iber shtetl* (Buenos Aires, 1933), 36-37.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibidem*, 31-38.

<sup>291</sup> H. Gold, “Fun dem argentiner yidishn kultur-front,” *Literarische Bleter*, no. 6 (561), 8.2.1935, 89.

demands for “localism.” The protagonist writer is not local, he is not yet Argentine and cannot not find a way to express *argentinidad* in his writing.

Similar views on migration and Yiddish culture were held by Granitstein’s fellow Jewish-Polish immigrant writer Yosef Horn. As late as 1939, he noted that it could take years until the migrant community finds a connection with the surrounding reality. Horn wrote that “years can pass in a spiritual sterility [...] when an immigrant writer floats between sky and earth, without catching up with the new life [...] and in their writing they pay tribute to the past, to the life they carry in themselves, that [their past] from the distance appears as a glorious sunset.” Horn saw this preference given to the past in the writing of many Argentine authors, “who originated from the great Jewish masses of Poland,” including among others Pinchas Bizberg, Berl Grinberg, Sara Birenboim, and of course Granitstein.<sup>292</sup>

I believe that Moyshe Granitstein gave voice to a transnationality of Jewish experiences that stretched between the continents, not bound exclusively to the current place of residence. For Granitstein’s generation, it was obvious that Yiddish cultural life had multiple centers and that the experience of migration was one of the key factors shaping their literary creativity. Katz’s positions during the debate in the 1920s should be defined as that of a supporter of an old paradigm, characteristic of his own generation, which saw migration as a transformative point signifying a complete immersion in the New World. These two standpoints, although both voiced in Yiddish, reflected to certain extent the debates between argentinized veterans and the Yiddish newcomers. The dispute concerning Argentine localism and the right to continue writing about the *alter heym* was being transposed to the literary discussions in Warsaw. H. Gold, a regular Argentine correspondent of *Literarische Bleter*, pictured the different approaches towards Granitstein’s work and towards the creativity of “very Argentine” Berl Grinberg. Whereas Grinberg’s book was supposedly received warmly, the Granitstein novels were rather criticized in Argentina.<sup>293</sup>

With time, Katz largely accepted the arguments of Granitstein and his opposition towards Old World links became less radical. In the anthology published in 1944, Katz argued that Jewish life in Argentina had two roots, one Eastern European and one Argentine. But the crown of the tree was already a fully Argentine cultural product. The conciliatory change of Katz’s opinions might have been influenced by the ongoing destruction of Eastern European Jewish life and the transformations it brought to world Jewry.<sup>294</sup> The late 1930s were also a

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<sup>292</sup> Horn, “Los nuevos escritores judíos de la Argentina,” 123-129.

<sup>293</sup> H. Gold, “Fun dem argentiner yidishn kultur-front,” 89.

<sup>294</sup> *Antologye fun der yidisher literatur*, 12.

period when local subjects began to dominate Argentine literary landscape. There was no new immigration and the writers, who thematized the Old Home or challenges of working class individuals in the 1920s, gave more importance to the Jewish ethno-national question and the situation in Argentina in the 1930s.<sup>295</sup>

## **5. What to Do with These Greenhorns? Argentine Yiddish Writing and Portraying the Change and Tension**

The following chapter offer insights into Argentine Yiddish literature written by Jewish-Polish immigrants up to 1939.<sup>296</sup> I reconstruct the literary narratives marginalized in the dominant popular discourse that saw Argentina as a promised land for the persecuted and an idealized version of a Jewish pastoral paradise. The Argentine reality was very distant from what the immigrants (Jewish and non-Jewish) dreamt about. It was often hard to earn a decent living, as 1930s unemployment was on the rise and residential opportunities were substandard. To that came new challenges related to migration: disillusionment, family tensions, learning a new language, fear of informing the family in Poland about the Argentine misfortunes. I argue that the Yiddish poetry and prose written by immigrants from Poland contained not only artistic aspects, but was a medium for negotiating everyday Argentine problems and thus a first-hand source for historical research. Following Stuart Hall and Claudia Ferman, I believe that literary representation did not only reflect, but also constituted cultural identities.<sup>297</sup> Yiddish literature was a witness of the social and cultural changes that immigrants from Poland experienced: generational conflicts, rise into the ranks of the middle class and acculturation within the Argentine nation. Argentine-Yiddish fiction was rooted in everyday experiences of the immigrants and bridged their Polish past and Argentine present. In the same vein, I agree with Edmundo Murray, who in his study of Irish-Argentines suggested that immigrant literature is a rich source for research on cultural values, as long as seen within a complex network of immigrant identities and belongings.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte*, 139-140.

<sup>296</sup> The authors I selected were born and raised mostly in the territories that were part of the Second Polish Republic (1918-1939). Most of them left Poland in the 1920s, but a few did so already before World War I. I do not include here the group of post- World War II immigrants.

<sup>297</sup> Claudia Ferman, "Nuevas localidades para la producción cultural: diáspora, identidad y escritura," paper presented at the conference of Latin American Studies Association in Gaudalajara, Mexico, April 17-19 1997, printed proceedings, 9.

<sup>298</sup> Edmundo Murray, *Becoming Gauchos Ingleses: Diasporic Model in Irish-Argentine Literature* (Bethesda: Maunsel and Co., 2009), 1-6.

Yiddish literature became a sphere of negotiating the tensions of being a Polish Jew outside of Poland and becoming a Jewish Argentine. The borderline between those two identifications was fluid and the same authors could glorify the beauty of Argentina while falling into nostalgia about the European landscapes that, as they believed, they would never see again. Most of the Jewish literature written in Argentina in the 1920s and 1930s was written in Yiddish. Only later did some authors (like José Rabinovich) switch to Spanish, though it was Yiddish that dominated country's Jewish literary scene well into the 1940s. Despite the fact that Argentine Yiddish literature was assessed by many contemporaries as “low class” or as not achieving the greatness of other diaspora centers, it offers a unique mirror into early twentieth century Argentina and the challenges faced by Jewish immigrants.<sup>299</sup> The same was true also for other immigrants groups. Short literary forms, as sonnet or caricatures reflected the realities of Italian or Spanish newcomers.<sup>300</sup>

The problems of immigrant Jews in Argentina were largely also the problems of Argentina's Jewish literati. These two groups coincided. Most of the writers came from poor families and were employed in menial professions in Argentina. For many, literature was an “after-hours” activity. This was true both for the landsman writers, who wrote their poems or shorts stories for landsman publications, and for those, who later became part of the Argentine-Yiddish canon. In three key anthologies of Argentine-Yiddish literature, the biographies of the authors always pointed out their under-privileged background and belonging to the folk. We read about those who originated from Polish shtetels, whose fathers were *melamdim* or about those who came from working-class families in industrializing cities. The biographical notes reveal that upon coming to Argentina, the future writers often faced financial misery and worked in blue-collar professions. Many were carpenters, typesetters or tailors.<sup>301</sup> An immediate success as a writer<sup>301</sup> was hardly possible in Argentina. An Argentine landsman from the town of Ostróg recalled that “everyone needed to survive the period of

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<sup>299</sup> Samuel Rollansky argued that Jewish literature in Argentina did not use all the potential and inspiration that was available in Argentina. Rollansky noted that the urban Yiddish literature of Buenos Aires could not be compared with that of New York, and its authors “had limited themselves to barely commenting on what the eye see,” *Argentinish*, vol. 2, 9-16. Yosef Horn wrote that “The Argentine *yishev* always had too little spiritual powers than was needed, and it was starkly visible. [...] For decades, Argentina was hungry for ‘cultural guests,’ famous writers and well-known personalities [...] it seems that there is a hardened cover over the abundant Argentina that prevents its Jewish writers from reaching for greater heights.” See Horn, *Arum yidisher literatur*, 60-62.

<sup>300</sup> Sánchez Sívori, “La inmigración y la literatura,” 102-103.

<sup>301</sup> The 1931 report of Polish Embassy in Buenos Aires stated that most of the individual immigrants (who arrived without any organized assistance) were shopkeepers, artisans, merchants and many without a profession. *Emigracja polska w Argentynie. Sprawozdanie za 1931*, 30, AAN, MSZ 9618.

*green years*, for it was not easy for anyone to make it in ‘America.’”<sup>302</sup> The situation was no different from the original whereabouts in Poland, where authors could often barely make ends meet.

### **5.1. Between Two Sides of the Ocean: The Trajectories of Uprooting and Enrooting**

With the underdeveloped book market of the 1920s, most Yiddish literature in Buenos Aires was published in Yiddish dailies, either as poems, short stories or serialized longer texts. The Yidishist literary critic Samuel Rollansky believed in a big quality discrepancy between Yiddish literature and journalism. Books were supposed to be of lower value and quality, and Argentine Yiddish literature was consequently distributed on pages of Jewish journals. Writers were commonly employed by the newspapers and their literature was “journalized” in terms of style. Many Yiddish books in Argentina were described by Rollansky as a form of “graphomania.”<sup>303</sup> According to him, most of the books were rarely published by publishing houses (due to the precarious condition of the book market), but mostly by the booksellers or authors themselves. It was not the value of the book that decided if it would be published, but the financial resources of the author. Rollansky continued that some poor writers “saved on food and clothing” to finance their publication. A similar situation pertained to books published by the so-called “publication committees.” In fact, Rollansky believed that the committees were often authors themselves (instead of a board of editors). Similar views were shared by Yankev Botoshansky, who wrote that there was “no literary wine, but a literary bread” in Argentina. For Botoshansky, Argentine Yiddish literature was not marvelous, but had its important social function as community-builder.<sup>304</sup> The problems of the Argentine Yiddish book market were also reported in Poland. In his correspondence to *Literarische Bleter* in 1935, H. Gold complained that only 26 Yiddish books were published in Argentina, even less a year later it.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Michl Grines, “In loyf fun zvariantsik yor,” *Almanakh fun ostrog-ovliner landslayt farayn un umgegent in argentine 1924-1944* (Buenos Aires: Ostrog-ovliner landslayt farayn un umgegent in argentine, 1944), 10.

<sup>303</sup> Rollansky himself attempted to “liberate” Yiddish writers in Argentine from the “hegemony of the printed press and politicization.” In 1924, he co-founded a literary group called “Zeglen” that published a short-lived literary journal under the same name. The following belonged to the group: Mordechai Alpersohn, Leib Malach, Shmuel Glazerman, Borekh Benderski, H. Volf, Abraham Moshkovitch, Yankev Eisenstein, Yankev Streicher, Y.L. Gruzman and others. As Rollansky put it, “Zeglen” supported “cultural Yiddishism.” See Samuel Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte*, 110-112.

<sup>304</sup> “Dos yidishe kultur-lebn in argentine. A shmues mit yankev botoshansky,” *Literarische Bleter*, no. 12 20.3.1931, 229, 230.

<sup>305</sup> H. Gold, “Oyf der argentine yidishn kultur-front,” *Literarische Bleter*, 8.2.1935, no. 6 (51), 89.

Targeting the proletarian readers and relying on their own working class background, the authors often focused on proletarian motifs and used a popular language. As Rollansky noted, Yiddish writers contributing to the journals sought to write in a simple and clear language understandable to the average reader. Yet, he regretted that as a consequence the writers “used too many words for small events, small thoughts, small feelings, small people.”<sup>306</sup> For Rollansky, a long-time president of the Buenos Aires chapter of YIVO (IWO), the ambition to be close to the people resulted in too much *rederay* [prattle], in superficiality and selectivity. He criticized the overwhelming focus on proletarian life. Rollansky argued that the writers focusing on “proletkult” (proletarian culture) lived in an illusion “that a revolution is also about to break out in America” (as in Russia in 1917). He criticized not only the exaggerated inspiration by developments in Eastern Europe, but also the localism, or “ortigkayt,” endorsed by Pinie Katz. For Rollansky, the Yiddish authors ignored big parts of the Argentine Jewish reality, chiefly the ascent of Jews to the middle class and *petit-bourgeois*.<sup>307</sup>

Within the Yiddish literature written in Argentina, we can differentiate a few generational-thematic groups. According to Pinie Katz (who was later followed by Yehiel Scheintuch), the first group of immigrant writers was primarily focused on local life, described Argentine nature and life in the Jewish agricultural colonies.<sup>308</sup> Their writings expressed the experiences of the first group of Eastern European immigrants who settled in agricultural colonies. They usually originated from areas located to the far east of the broadly understood Polish lands: from contemporary central Ukraine and south Russia, such as the first group of 1898 Jewish settlers, who came from Kamenets-Podolskiy. Many of the first wave immigrants arrived in organized transports, rather than individually. The experiences of Jewish colonization were portrayed by authors, such as Borekh Benderski, Aharon Brodski, Marcos Alpersohn and Noah Vital, who lived or at least were brought up in the *colonias*. Like many others colonists' sons, they moved to Buenos Aires, where they defined life in the Jewish colonies as the main source of their creativity. Many of those authors criticized the colonization enterprise and described a sense of abandonment by the Jewish Colonization Association.<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte*, 130-132.

<sup>307</sup> Samuel Rollansky, “Di ambitsyes fun yidishn gedruktn vort bay di bregn fun la plata,” in *Argentinish*, vol. 2, 10-22

<sup>308</sup> Scheintuch, “Safrut idish beargentina,” 197-198.

<sup>309</sup> Samuel Rollansky described Alpersohn as the strongest critic of the JCA. His criticism was voiced as early as 1911 in his text “Halutsim ha-rishonim,” Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte*, 142. See also Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos*, 72-106.

The second category of immigrant Jewish authors reflected the post-1918 immigration wave and included those who did not settle in the colonies. This group of immigrants were in majority Polish Jews. Many of them grew up with the social-cultural revolution that hit Eastern European Jews at the beginning of the twentieth century. As the Yiddishist journalist Lazaro Zhitnitsky put it, “they brought with them political, national and cultural unrest.”<sup>310</sup> Many immigrants were previously exposed and active in secular Jewish movements, like Bundism, folkism, territorialism, socialism and Zionism. Some received both religious and secular educations, but their relationship to the conservative Jewish tradition was often hostile. Robert Weisbrot claimed that immigrants’ secularism was strengthened in Argentina and social activism was conceived as an alternative to a religious commitment.<sup>311</sup> A fitting example is León Menin, who immigrated to Argentina in 1930 at the age of 30. Even though he was raised in a small shtetl, he quickly distanced himself from traditional Judaism. Menin had enlisted in the Polish army, served in the personal guard of Marshall Józef Piłsudski and chose his wife without the help of a matchmaker.<sup>312</sup> Iankl Fuks, who immigrated to Argentina from Łódź, recalled that he rebelled against attending a religious *kheyder* and instead decided to go to a public school with instruction in Polish.<sup>313</sup> By now, Fuks's father was putting on a kipa only when visiting his traditional grandfather. Iankl Fuks himself rejected traditional Jewishness, preferred to watch Tarzan movies and was already enrolled in the Bund at the age of 13.

These immigrants were conditioned by the Yiddish press and literature bustling in Eastern Europe after the 1905 revolution. Although in this case it was also primarily economic factors and anti-Semitism that pushed them out of Poland, their relationship to the “alten heym” was much more complex. Argentine literary critics commonly criticized the immigrants for what they regarded as an excessively intimate and deep attitude towards their Eastern European homeland, describing it as problematic from the perspective of building Argentine-Jewish identity. Pinie Katz and Yankev Botoshansky noted, “they often looked with nostalgia not only to the port, but also to the other side of the ocean.”<sup>314</sup> Rollansky wrote that Jewish-Polish authors who came to Argentina in the 1920s “left their homes having gathered lots of social-cultural experiences.” Consequently, they had difficulties with “liberating” themselves from

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<sup>310</sup> Lazaro Zhitnitsky, “Transformatsyes in yidishn yishev in argentine,” 77.

<sup>311</sup> Robert Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina: From the Inquisition to Peron* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publishing Society of America, 1979), 4.

<sup>312</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, *Archivo de la Palabra*, no. 47, León Menin.

<sup>313</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, *Archivo de la Palabra*, no. 160, Iankl Fuks.

<sup>314</sup> “Der argentiner tsvayg fun der yidisher literatur,” *Antologye fur der yidisher literatur* 1944, 14.



the influence of the Old Home and nostalgia for it.<sup>315</sup> Similar views were held by Botoshansky, who wrote that the post-1918 immigrant “brought too much from the alter heym” and had a hard time finding a place in Argentina.<sup>316</sup> To this group of authors belonged numerous immigrant writers from Poland, like Moisés David Guiser, Moshe Goldstein, Nehemías Zucker and Moshe Kaufman.

Nonetheless, Jewish immigrants from Poland reinvigorated the Buenos Aires literary community.<sup>317</sup> For the writers who emerged from the post-World War I emigration wave, the strengthening of Yiddish culture was a central existential issue. That was a part of a broader Yiddishist agenda that saw literature as a tool for raising Jewish-Yiddish ethno-national questions. As Rollansky argued, the new migrants related to “veltlekhkayt” (secularism) and “groysshtotlekhkayt” (big city spirit) and challenged the provincialism and peripherality of Argentine-Yiddish culture embedded in mythologizing Jewish agricultural colonization. Those immigrants who came to Argentina in the 1920s and 1930s were already very far away from the *colonias* and the atmosphere of Jewish land settlements.<sup>318</sup> It was the urban life of Buenos Aires that defined the dominant character of the whole postwar immigrant community, and consequently also its literary manifestations. The 1920s were years of increasing proletarian struggle that found its expression in Yiddish literature. As Rollansky noted, the time between 1922 and 1930, the heyday of postwar Jewish-Polish immigration, was the golden age of Yiddish literature in Argentina.<sup>319</sup> The cultural trends arriving from the *alten heym* also influenced those who immigrated earlier. The newly arriving literati were transmitters of change not only concerning their own creativity, but spreading it all over the Argentine literary scene.<sup>320</sup> This *re-yiddishization* was observable throughout the entire Jewish cultural life in Argentina.

This was well visible in the biography of the Jewish-Argentine writer and cultural figure Yosef (José) Mendelson. Mendelson came to be known as a Yiddishist and Labor Zionist, but at the same time a product of the first immigration wave that settled in the colonies. Unlike Gerchunoff, who was six when he immigrated to Argentina, Mendelson arrived in Argentina as a twenty-three-year-old man. At the beginning, he worked as a teacher in Colonia Moíse

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<sup>315</sup> Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukke*, 137.

<sup>316</sup> “Dos yidishe kultur-lebn in argentine. A shmues mit yankev botoshansky,” *Literarische Bleter*, no. 12 20.3.1931, 229, 230.

<sup>317</sup> Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukke*, 135-138

<sup>318</sup> Samuel Rollansky, *Argentine. Fun land un yishev. Poezye, proze, publitsistik un bilder* (Buenos Aires: Alter-Rozental-Fond, 1960), 15-19.

<sup>319</sup> Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukke*, 136.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibidem*, 149-150. Rollansky gave the example of Russian-born Yankev Eisenstein and Yankev Streicher, who adopted a new modernist style in the 1920s and expressed the pain and misery of proletarian immigrants.

Ville's schools. Later, following the postwar immigration from Poland, he moved closer to Yiddishism, was an editor of the first anthology of Argentine-Yiddish literature in Argentina and joined the board of *Yidische Zaitung* for which he also translated gentile European literature.<sup>321</sup> The biography of Yosef Mendelson epitomized the changes and evolution in Argentine Jewry that the immigration of *yidishkayt*-spirited Polish Jews evoked. Even those socialized in the JCA colonist schools, who later built the acculturationist institutions, after 1918 often returned to the Yiddish language and a Yiddishism understood as a Jewish ethno-national and cultural movement. The return to Yiddish was also true for a number of Jews, who grew up with Polish as their mother tongue. Raquel Minceles was a Warsaw-born writer and teacher with Polish as her first language. Her family was rather affluent, she attended private Polish schools and studied art and law at the University of Warsaw. After immigrating to Argentina in 1930, she began publishing her poems in local Polish papers.<sup>322</sup> Only afterwards did she learn Yiddish and began working as a teacher of literature in Jewish schools in Buenos Aires, La Plata and Montevideo.

An exemplary figure among the group of young immigrants from Poland, who helped to *re-yiddishize* Argentine cultural life was Moisés David Guiser. He was born in Radom in central Poland in 1893. Guiser lived temporarily in Końsk and Łódź and published his first narrative poem in a modernist journal *Ringin* edited in Warsaw by Alter Kacyzne and Michał Weichert. In 1919 he moved to Warsaw and was a member of a prominent local avant-garde literary group *Khalyastre* for a few years. Guiser immigrated to Argentina in 1924 and began publishing in *Oyfsnay*, *Nayvelt* and in the yearly almanacs published by the Poylisher Farband. In 1933 Guiser moved to Chile where he edited a local periodical *Zidamerike* (together with another Argentine-Yiddish author Noah Vital) and independently the *Pacific* journal. Samuel Rollansky described Guiser as “the best poet Argentina ever had.”<sup>323</sup> Guiser’s early works included poems that praised Argentina and described the wonders of life in the big city. Yet, many of his poems were expressions of painful immigrant experiences (“Geyst fun oremkeyt,” “Conventillo,” “Almacen”). The variety of subjects that Guiser chose demonstrates the complexity of Argentine experiences. It was both nostalgia for what was left in Europe and a desire to be successful and respected, all mixed with the challenges of poverty and

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<sup>321</sup> From 1943 until 1969, Mendelson directed the Buenos Aires Yiddish Teachers’ Seminar. For a detailed biography of Yosef Mendelson, see Samuel Niger and Jacob Shatzky eds. *Leksikon fun der nayer ydisher literatur*. Volume VI (1965), 39-40.

<sup>322</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, Archivo de la Palabra, no. 207, Raquel Minceles.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibidem*, 155.

exploitation.<sup>324</sup> His work mirrored both the dark and rosy facets of immigrant life in post-1918 Argentina, offering heterogeneous representations of Argentine experiences. Guiser's poems frequently appeared in *Dos Naye Vort*, edited by the Poylisher Farband. The poet was considered an important figure of the Jewish-Polish *colonia* in Argentina: he edited the 1928 almanac of the Poylisher Farband and its members co-organized Guiser's jubilee banquet in 1932.<sup>325</sup>

Immigrant literature in Argentina often focused on the challenges of life in the new country. The writers portrayed immigrants, who felt they were refused basic rights and found it hard to properly function in the new society.<sup>326</sup> The challenges of immigrant life, the discrepancy between the Old World hopes for a better life and the hard reality on location were portrayed especially by those who arrived in the second immigration wave after 1918, yet also earlier by many who voiced their ambiguous opinions on the situation in Argentina. There was a variety of aspects related to the difficulty of adaptation in Argentina embraced by the immigrant writers. These included, for instance, problematic family relations, poverty, thoughts about returning to Poland and a general disappointment with life in Argentina.

Emigration unsettled traditional gender roles and relations within the nuclear and extended family.<sup>327</sup> The emigration of single men challenged family life, and family reunification was often a painful disappointment. A landsman, Borekh Ismach, recalled that because of the lack of stable employment, the immigrants preferred not to risk bringing their families to Argentina. Yet many men broke contact with their families on purpose and landsmanshaftn received letters from worried families that remained in Poland. Then landsmanshaftn often intervened, persuading the "confused" landsman to get back in touch with their family and to bring them to Argentina.<sup>328</sup> Another Jewish-Polish landsman, Abraham Milberg, remembered that at the beginning he felt estranged in Buenos Aires, he could not find any job, he had "sinister feelings in his heart," and began to have doubts if emigrating was a good idea.<sup>329</sup> Samuel Blutrajt recalled that he used to work 12-15 hours a

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<sup>324</sup> Samuel Rollansky noted that nostalgia (*benkshaft* in Yiddish) and "dreaming" (*farkholemkayt*) was one of the main characteristics of Argentine-Yiddish writing. Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte*, 147.

<sup>325</sup> "15 yoriker yubileum fun m.d. guiser shafn," *Dos Naye Vort*, October 1932, no. 140, 12.

<sup>326</sup> Amalia Sánchez Sivori, "La inmigración y la literatura argentina," in *Inmigración y nacionalidad* Dardo Cúneo et al. 1967, 114.

<sup>327</sup> Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016), 69.

<sup>328</sup> Borekh Ismach, "Vos hobn landsmanshaftn oyfgeton far di imigrantn in zayere naye heymer," *Argentiner IWO Shriftn*, no. 15, 1989, 67.

<sup>329</sup> Abraham Milberg, "A por verter tsu unzer hayntiker yuvl," *Yuvl oysgabe tsu der 15 yoriker gezeshafilekher tetigkayt fun vengrover landslayt farayn in argentine*, 12.

day in a textile factory.<sup>330</sup> Guitl Kanutsky, a tailor and Bundist activist, remembered that immigrant Jews were commonly exploited, including by the Jewish *talleristas* (workshop owners). She struggled for proper work conditions and a salary that would permit living with dignity.<sup>331</sup> Another female immigrant, Flora Abzac, recalled that in the 1930s her economic situation was very bad, and even as an adolescent she needed to work hard in exchange for poor pay.<sup>332</sup>

In the many stories and poems written by Jewish-Polish immigrants, emigration appeared as a factor that tore families apart. “Almacen” by Moisés David Guiser described a group of miserable immigrant men, who went out to Buenos Aires “watering holes.” Guiser’s poem revealed that the young men who lived alone in Buenos Aires spent long nights drinking because of despair and longing. Their wives were alone on the other side of the ocean, hardly aware of the psychological challenges that their husbands faced in “vaytn [remote] Buenos Aires.”<sup>333</sup> The challenges of single men in Argentina were also mentioned in testimonies. Samuel Blutrajt recalled that his brother, who immigrated to Argentina as an 18-year-old boy had suffered greatly by missing family. In his letters, he indirectly discouraged Samuel from joining him in Argentina.<sup>334</sup> The family left in Europe was also featured in Zalman (Salomón) Wassertzug’s poem, “Hoben im geshoynt di merder.”<sup>335</sup> The main character is an immigrant who lives in rich, plentiful Argentina, while his aging father lives alone in Poland. The immigrant is ashamed of leaving his parents in their old age, forcing them to face suffering and neglect alone.<sup>336</sup>

The motif of Argentine misery intensified by memory of the Old Home appeared in Nehemías Zucker’s “Leidenschaft” (Passion), a story from a volume of *Fun alts zu bislekh*,

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<sup>330</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, Archivo de la Palabra, no. 6, Samuel Blutrajt.

<sup>331</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, Archivo de la Palabra, no. 32, Guitl Kanutsky.

<sup>332</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, Archivo de la Palabra, no. 1, Flora Abzac. Mrs. Abzac was born near Łódź in 1917 and immigrated to Argentina in 1930.

<sup>333</sup> Moisés David Guiser, “Almacen,” *Antologye fun der yidisher literatur*, 160.

<sup>334</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, Archivo de la Palabra, no. 6, Samuel Blutrajt.

<sup>335</sup> Zalman Wassertzug was born in 1904 in Lubin, Włocławek county, Poland. Between 1923 and 1935 he studied in a state and Jewish religious teacher seminary in Warsaw. Between 1925-1927, Wassertzug worked as a teacher in Janusz Korczak’s orphanage. Later he began publishing pedagogical articles in *Dos Kind* and for a short time taught Jewish history in a Hebrew *gimnazjum* in Kutno. In 1927 he immigrated to Argentina. There, Wassertzug initially taught in a Jewish school in a JCA colony, later moved to Buenos Aires where he wrote articles and children’s stories for *Yidische Zaitung*. In 1932 he published a collection of poems and stories for children, together with another Jewish-Polish writer, Avigdor Shpritzer. After World War II, he served as an official of *Vaad hakehilot*, a body supervising Jewish education in Argentina.

<sup>336</sup> Zalman’s Wassertzug, “Hoben im geshoynt di merder,” *Antologye fun der yidisher literatur*, 331

published in Buenos Aires in 1935.<sup>337</sup> Here again we meet a Jewish immigrant disillusioned with Argentine reality, suffering from poverty, unemployment and unable to tell the truth to his family that remained in Europe. The main character suffers severe loneliness on the first anniversary of his wedding. He starts to drink wine alone, to kiss the picture of his wife, who had to stay behind in Poland. His longing and misery find an outlet when he begins hugging and pushing towards his heart a woman's nightgown that he found in a *conventillo's* courtyard. The gown is a substitute for his wife, whom he was unable to bring with him to Argentina.

The tension between the Old World and Argentina was visible in "Opgebrokhene tsvayg" (A Broken Branch), a short story written by Moshe Goldstein.<sup>338</sup> In "Opgebrokhene tsvayg" we deal with a classic example of emigration when a man sets out abroad alone to arrange a soft landing for his family that temporarily stayed in the Old Country. The main character, who already goes by the gentile name León rather than Leyzer, finally sends a "llamada" (an obligatory invitation) to his fiancé, who stayed behind in Poland. Yet when she comes to Argentina, the situation is far from rosy. León is not as successful as he reported in his letters. What bothers his fiancé the most is his indifference to the European homeland. She is shocked that León does not want to listen to anything about his own parents. Despite his misfortunes, for better or for worse, León has already become Argentine. Old World problems do not mean anything to him. To the disbelief of his newly arrived fiancé, he prefers to focus on his new Argentine life.<sup>339</sup> The short story pictured the family tensions that were a result of separation and diverse experiences. Many years in Argentina changed the main character in a way that was unrecognizable to his fiancé. Although the woman continued being shaped by Polish influences, León was on his way to becoming a Jewish-Argentine.

A similar problem was featured in a short story "Shabes likhter" (Shabbat Lights) by Kraków-born Nehemías Zucker. The story was an example of an *arebour* success in America. The male character, Volf, feels estranged in Argentina. He not only does not achieve spectacular success, but is financially devastated. Volf feels sad and uprooted from Eastern European Jewish life, yet with the passing of time he "hardens" and finally decides to bring his wife Rivka to Argentina. For Volf, the arrival of the woman is a painful reminder of what he left behind. The golden candelabra Rivka takes with her is his only reminder of the Old

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<sup>337</sup> Nehemías Zucker, *Fun alts tsu bislekh* (Buenos Aires: Ferlag "Kundas," 1935), 77-80. Nechemias Zucker was born in Kraków, Poland in 1896. After his debut in Kraków as a scriptwriter, Zucker immigrated to Argentina in 1923, where he served as an editor of a satiric weekly *Der Kundas* and a year-long secretary of *Yidishn Aktiorn Farayn*. Zucker adapted the texts of Y.L. Peretz and Mendele Moyher Sforim for theater production and wrote a number of dramas.

<sup>338</sup> Goldstein was born in 1900 in Łosice, 100 km east of Warsaw, immigrated to Argentina in 1923, and was forced to leave to the Soviet Union in 1932.

<sup>339</sup> Moshe Z. Goldstein, "Opgebrokhene tsvayg," originally 1935, *Antologye fun der yidisher literatur*, 137-142.

World. Yet, it seems to Volf that the precious object does not find a proper place in his poor Argentine home, “where instead of prayers, the candelabra heard only the monotonous knockings of the neighbor.” The candelabra seems to be miserable to Volf, even crying over its misfortunes. It is unable to provide enough light in the dark room of the *conventillo*. The candelabra functions in Zucker’s story as a personification of the very problems of Volf, a disillusioned, frustrated Jewish immigrant in Argentina. The candelabra brought from his hometown of Radomyśl, Poland, reminds him of where he grew up and where he actually belonged. This and other stories and poems touched upon the problem of social and cultural adaptation in Argentina, with the hardships and disappointments of reuniting with family members, but finally dealt with coming to terms with Argentina. In this case, the couple portrayed in “Shabes likhter” makes a drastic decision and returns to Poland.<sup>340</sup>

In Yiddish-Argentine texts from the late 1930s, we notice a tendency to portray the social progress of Jewish immigrants, mixed with doubts about their evolving Jewishness and weakening *yidishkayt*. The economic changes that immigrants experienced were often accompanied by social and cultural transformations. Berl Grinberg, born in 1906 in Warsaw, in a short story entitled “Senyorita esters shabesdike lichtlekh” (The Shabbat Lights of Miss Ester), depicted the family of Raquel Rozen, an old Jewish immigrant matron.<sup>341</sup> Four of her daughters marry Catholics and distance themselves from Jewishness. To Rozen’s great satisfaction, their assimilation by marriage is a part of the process of becoming Argentine. They not only marry Christians, but also the members of higher strata, elevating their own social status. Ester, the fifth daughter, is the family’s black sheep. She turns thirty and is still unmarried, is active on the job market and earns more than many men. To make things even worse, Ester returns to Judaism. On Friday evenings, she rushes to her religious aunt and is thrilled to participate in the *kabalat shabat* ceremony. To her mother, Ester’s behavior is crazy. She describes the daughter as “a narishe moyd” [stupid girl] and “a puste kop” [empty head]. Instead of following the example of her sisters, Ester seems willing to come back to the Jewish ghetto.<sup>342</sup> The figure of Ester is emblematic of many immigrant women. Although most of the immigrant Jewish women were until the 1950s confined to house chores, their daughters often entered the job market, with the most ambitious among them becoming

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<sup>340</sup> Nehemías Zucker, “Shabes likhter,” *Antologye fun der yidisher literatur*, 663.

<sup>341</sup> Berl Grinberg was born in Warsaw in 1906, where he studied both in a religious and an assimilationist school. From a young age, he worked as a shoemaker and hatter, involved early in the proletarian movement. In 1923 Grinberg immigrated to Argentina, lived for two years with his uncle in Cordoba and from 1925 in Buenos Aires. Grinberg worked as a linotypist in *Di Presse*, where he published most of his short stories. He was also an editor of almanacs of the Poylisher Farband and a regular contributor to Warsaw’s *Literarische Bleter*.

<sup>342</sup> Berl Grinberg, “Senyorita Esters shabatdike lichtlech,” *Argentinish*, vol. 2, 1939, 392-403.

teachers.<sup>343</sup> “Senyorida esters shabesdike lichtlekh” was an example of Berl Grinberg's growing sense of Argentineness. Whereas in his poems from the 1920s one sees a sense of isolation, misery and brutality of the world, his later texts showed that he firmly felt Argentina under his feet. As Yosef Horn put it: “Argentina penetrated his spinal cord.”<sup>344</sup> Yet in the case of Grinberg, the process of becoming Argentine was painful, if not tragic. After World War II, he worked in the Jewish Community (AMIA, Asociación Mutua Israelita Argentina), barely earning a living. After 38 years in Argentina, Grinberg committed suicide in 1961.<sup>345</sup>

The issue of cultural and religious changes is also traceable in “Opgezogt fun postn” (Fired from a Position) by Simkha Granievitch. Baylkin, a teacher in a Jewish school, is trapped between his progressive views on education and the demands of his students’ parents. He would like to become an educator, a “lerer,” but the parents of his students expect him to be like a shtetl *melamed*. Baylkin is fed up with the hypocrisy of the Jewish immigrants in Argentina. Many of them left Judaism, do not follow a traditional lifestyle and do not keep Shabbat. Yet they are much stricter with their children. Understanding their own acculturation, the parents want to prevent it in the case of their children. The conflict with the progressive teacher ends by him being fired from his position at the school.<sup>346</sup>

## 5.2. Argentine City, Poverty and Inequality

The bustling city life that immigrants from Poland encountered in Buenos Aires was a source of ambivalent feelings. Some were amazed by the modernity of Buenos Aires, by trams, the underground railway, the attractive night life or the wealth of upper-class neighborhoods. Yet many texts pointed out the poverty that defined the daily lives of immigrant Jews. Many of them lived in substandard, crowded apartments, in the so-called “conventillos,” comparable to New York's tenements.<sup>347</sup> Many new immigrants suffered from

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<sup>343</sup> Sandra McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880-1955* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 48.

<sup>344</sup> Horn, “Los nuevos escritores judíos de Argentina,” 126-129.

<sup>345</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, Archivo de la Palabra, no. 206, Simcha (Simja) Sneh.

<sup>346</sup> Simkha Granievitch, “Opgezogt fun postn,” 1929, *Argentinish*, vol. 2, 416-417. Simkha Granievitch was born in 1906 in Ostrów Mazowiecka, central Poland, and immigrated to Argentina in 1928, where he published his texts in *Di Presse*. He also lived in Brazil and Uruguay, teaching in Jewish schools and working for the local Jewish press. In 1936 he likely died by suicide in Tel Aviv.

<sup>347</sup> For a study of immigrant housing, see Leandro H. Gutiérrez and Juan Suriano, “Workers' Housing and Living Conditions in Buenos Aires, 1880-1930,” in *Essays in Argentine Labour History*, ed. Jeremy Adelman and Rosemary Thorp (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), 35-51. In 1909 only 9% of the city's population lived in *conventillos* and these were largely poor immigrants that inhabited these substandard spaces. Most of the

unemployment, felt frustrated by the unfulfilled American dream and separation from the familiarity of Eastern Europe. In Argentine, Yiddish literature even gave rise to a new genre, the “taller-sketch,” or texts that dealt with immigrants in working-class areas of Buenos Aires and their poverty, unemployment and unfulfilled hopes.<sup>348</sup>

Many Jewish-Polish immigrants from the 1920s turned to the so-called proletarian poetry, a “kampf-poezye” (poetry of struggle), and took sides in discussions on the rights of immigrant workers and the responsibility of poetry to be close to the folk. Among them were Hirsh Blostein<sup>349</sup> and Yankev Plafon.<sup>350</sup> A strong example of these sentiments is Blostein's story, “A lid fun a emigrant.” The narrator of the poem depicts his immigration to Argentina as a painful experience. His dreams of success and wealth prove to be a lie. He can barely handle the separation from his child. Dreaming on the steamship to Argentina, the emigrant sees the stretched out arms of his son calling him to return. Buenos Aires confuses him, he does not understand what people around him are saying, he suffers a lot while working as a *cuentenik* and feels humiliated knocking on the doors of the rich trying to sell his cheap merchandise. A *cuentenik* in Simkha Granievitch's short story is trapped in a similar situation. He is ashamed of being a peddler and feels like “a beaten-up dog.”

Whereas the New York peddler and the Buenos Aires *cuentenik* earned the respect of later generations, contemporaries hardly saw these professions as a “mythical threshold” to being American or Argentine.<sup>351</sup> Taking into account the personal and collective progress that became part of the second and third-generation Jewish-Argentine experience, it is tempting to imagine the *cuentenik* as a mythological figure, who through his suffering and hard work laid the foundations for the success of his children and grandchildren. Yet this angle ignores the experience of the immigrants themselves and attempts to reduce the importance of their experience, designating it as a necessary step for the success of the future generations. A

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*conventillos* were located in the neighborhoods *La Boca* and Jewish-populated *Balvanera*. The housing situation improved a lot in the 1920s as a result of government and private housing projects.

<sup>348</sup> Rollansky named Noah Vital as a pioneer of this genre. Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte*, 146.

<sup>349</sup> Hirsh Blostein was born in Kiejdany, Lithuania in 1895. He worked as a Hebrew teacher in the Caucasus and later moved to Minsk. Blostein immigrated to Argentina in 1925. In Buenos Aires, he worked for the journals *Di Presse* and *Nayvelt*. In 1931, following accusations of endorsing communism, Blostein was forced to leave for the Soviet Union. He was a major figure in the so-called “komlit” (communist literature) and attracted many other writers to working-class themes. His poems also featured the Jewish proletarian schools, their students and the parents of the immigrant generation (*Arbshulorg*, Buenos Aires, 1928). In his poetry, he was quick to react to developments in the proletarian world. For instance, when a strike in the clothing industry broke out, he quickly wrote a poem in its support.

<sup>350</sup> Yankev Plafon was born in Grodzisk Mazowiecki near Warsaw in 1897, spent his youth in Kovna, Lithuania, studied literature in Berlin for a year, before immigrating to Argentina in 1924. In Argentina, he was close to the proletarian publishing house *Nayvelt*. He died in 1936.

<sup>351</sup> See Hasia Diner, *Road Taken. The Great Jewish Migration and the New World and the Peddlers* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2015).



sense of humiliation, estrangement and despair shared by many immigrants was for many a part and parcel of Argentine reality in the 1920s and 1930s.

The intersection of Argentine misery, urban life and the first harbingers of Argentinization were often portrayed by Moisés David Guiser. His poems “Conventillo” and “Geyst fun oremkayt” (A Spirit of Poverty) offer the reader a glimpse into the daily life of a typical immigrant Jewish working-class house. The *conventillo* is pictured as a place of horror: constant shouting, conflicts with Italian neighbors, lice covering the beds and a courtyard covered in garbage. At the same time, Guiser showed the reader the social and cultural changes that the immigrants adopted. The Jewish men no longer put on *tephilin* or read holy books, but instead drink *mate*. Their daughters twirl their curls preparing for an evening walk with their boyfriends. The whole house is covered with the aroma of the quintessential Argentine *asado*. Guiser’s poem pointed to the hard conditions of life, yet at the same time pictured the willingness of immigrants to adapt certain aspects of the Argentine lifestyle. In a later (1931) poem “A briv” (A Letter), Guiser described the hard economic reality of Buenos Aires.<sup>352</sup> In curt and sharp words, he referred to starving immigrants and the Buenos Aires reality, “where no one could be bothered if you died in the street.” The author complained about the painful suggestions for their problems that immigrants often received from families back in Poland. For a jobless and hungering person receiving advice about “having two hands and being young and fit to work” was like salt on their wounds. The misery of immigrant life was also portrayed in “Vi orem ikh bin” (How Poor I Am) and “Foran aze ayner” (That One There). The first poem is narrated by a ruined immigrant, complaining about his fate in Buenos Aires, while the second one referred to the discrimination the poor immigrant experienced from the more successful ones.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Moisés David Guiser, “A briv,” *Argentinish*, vol. 2, 93.

<sup>353</sup> Moisés David Guiser, “Vi orem ikh bin,” “Foran aze ayner,” *Argentinish*, vol. 2, 155-156.



Illustration, no. 37. Conventillo in the first decades of the twentieth century, Archivo General de la Nación, reproduced in *Pioneros de la Argentina. Los inmigrantes judíos* (Buenos Aires: Manrique Zago Ediciones, 1998), 123.

As a fellow Jewish-Polish writer and Guiser's friend, Pinchas Bizberg noted in a posthumous anthology of Guiser's poems that "life did not smile upon him [Guiser] in Argentina [...] and his bitterness and disappointment were visible in his poems."<sup>354</sup> For Guiser, "the streets of Buenos Aires were a horrible labyrinth," "he could not enjoy the blue skies of Argentina and the hopeful language did not speak to him at all." As Bizberg continued, Guiser experienced poverty and the indifference of the Jewish community that did not consider poetry a decent occupation. Guiser, who finally left Argentina for Chile in 1933, bade the country farewell in a poem entitled "Argentina."<sup>355</sup> He accused Argentina of making his life bitter. Despite all the hopes he had for his life in the new country, "Argentina closed

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<sup>354</sup> Pinchas Bizberg, "Moisés David Guiser," in *Dos gezang fun a leb'n* Moisés David Guiser (Buenos Aires: Tsentral farband fun poylishe yidn in argentine, 1953), X-XVI.

<sup>355</sup> In Chile, Guiser owned a small print-house that provided him with some income and allowed him to focus on poetry.

its ears” to his complaints. Guiser felt the heavy ballast of Argentina on his shoulders, perceiving it as a “tough country.”<sup>356</sup>

Rollansky wrote that Guiser represented a whole generation of jobless Jews, searching for consolation in the proletarian struggle.<sup>357</sup> Moisés David Guiser saw himself as the voice of Argentine and Chilean Jewry, and wanted Latin American Yiddish literature to be noticed in Europe and North America.<sup>358</sup> The general impression of Guiser's poems was also symptomatic of other immigrants from Poland. Many were disappointed with the situation in their new country. David Szyszacki of IWO Institute wrote that unlike Spaniards or Italians, “[Jews] didn't come here to make money and come back home. They arrived here to build a home. Yet, many were not able to make a living in Argentina, or became sick, and were forced to go back. Many needed to ask the landmen for money to buy a return ticket.”<sup>359</sup> Jerzy Szeferblum, who immigrated to Argentina in 1935, recalled in an interview that his father Herman left to Buenos Aires in 1924 when Jerzy was only one year old. The suitcase factory that Herman Szeferblum opened in Buenos Aires burned down and the unfortunate immigrant had to return to Poland. Still, the economic crisis in Europe forced the family to try their luck in Argentina once again.<sup>360</sup> Likewise, León Menin recalled that his father was in Argentina between 1909 until 1914, but decided to return to Poland.<sup>361</sup> Lazaro Pinchuk said that in the first years he earned enough just to buy a loaf of bread a day. He was hungry and suffered for many years after arrival.<sup>362</sup> Yet, taken as whole, the rates of return migration from Argentina to Poland were relatively low, oscillating between 10-15%.<sup>363</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Moisés David Guiser, “Argentina,” from the poem “Der blonder gaicho,” originally 1933, in *Argentinish*, vol. 2, 200.

<sup>357</sup> Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte*, 155.

<sup>358</sup> Bizberg, “Moisés David Guiser,” XV; Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte*, 155.

<sup>359</sup> David Szyszacki, “Tsu di geshikhte fun di yidishe landsmanshaftn in argentine,” *Argentinier IWO Shriftn* 13 (1981): 137.

<sup>360</sup> Interview with Jerzy Szeferblum, Cyfrowe Archiwum Historii Lokalnej w Buenos Aires in cooperation with Biblioteka Domeyki w Buenos Aires: recorded by Fundacja Ośrodku Karta, sig. CATL 63 L / 8.2.3.

<sup>361</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, Archivo de la Palabra, no. 47, León Menin.

<sup>362</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, Archivo de la Palabra, no. 55, Lazaro Pinchuk.

<sup>363</sup> The 1931 report of the Polish Embassy specified that re-emigration from Argentina to Poland in the 1921-1937 period was at a 14.5% level. That figure included both Jewish and gentile immigrants. *Notatka w sprawie emigracji polskie j do Argentyny – 16.4.1938*, AAN 9621. The re-emigration of Jews was probably lower than for gentile Poles. Spanish or Italian immigrants to Argentina had much higher reemigration rates. Between 1916-1930, 1,140,000 Spaniards immigrated to Argentina and 787,000 returned (73%). In the crisis years of the 1930s, more Spaniards left Argentina than immigrated back. See Nicolás Sánchez Albornoz, “La emigración española a la América en medio milenio: Pautas sociales,” *Historia social* 42 (2002): 41-58, quoted in James A. Baer, *Anarchists Immigrants in Spain and Argentina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 62. The rates of re-emigration from Palestine were much higher, around 40% in the pre-1914 period. See Gur Alroey, *An Unpromising Land: Jewish Migration to Palestine in Early Twentieth Century* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 209-232.

A picture of the hardships of immigrant life in Argentina was portrayed in “Lirisher peizazh” by Moshe Kaufman.<sup>364</sup> The houses of the suburb (probably Villa Crespo in Buenos Aires) are gray, similar to the hearts of the hopeless immigrants. The streets, dotted with palm trees, are filled with the homeless at night. From this perspective, the rich center of Buenos Aires looks to Kaufman like a “made-up prostitute.” In a working-class neighborhood, there are no fancy boulevards, but muddy, uncobbled streets. Local children are hungry, their mothers pale-white and fathers ashamed of unfulfilled dreams that they had back in Poland. Kaufman summarizes the situation in Buenos Aires as “little hills of gold, and mountains of poverty.”

The poverty of immigrant life within the bustling city was also brought to life by Mendel Pschepiurka. Pschepiurka was born in Węgrów, central Poland and served as a year-long editor of *Dos Naye Vort*, a journal of the Poylisher Farband.<sup>365</sup> Pschepiurka, an outspoken communist, complained that in Buenos Aires one only heard the “rhythm of money.” He pointed to the enclaves of the rich, which were surrounded by hundreds of impoverished immigrants. According to Pschepiurka, city life had a terrible influence on the people. The poor men, instead of saving money, spent their last penny on the lottery.<sup>366</sup> The newspapers, instead of serving as a credible source of information, turned to yellow journalism. Pschepiurka also expressed his opinions in *Di Presse*, where he published articles regularly.<sup>367</sup> The problem of inequality in Buenos Aires is dealt with by Hirsh Blostein in “Oyfn Avenida Alvear.”<sup>368</sup> In the poem, a poor immigrant from Poland observes the wealth of neighborhoods such as Recoleta, with their magnificent palaces and spacious gardens. Understanding the contrast between Recoleta and poor immigrant districts, the immigrants learn about economic inequalities in Argentina and the meager chances for quick economic advancement. Blostein's depictions are similar to Schneur Wasserman's impressions of *calle Florida* in Buenos Aires.<sup>369</sup> The downtown street, a prestigious avenue of bohemians and “romantic women,” is full of flowers. Yet, it is also *calle Florida* on which stones are thrown by hungry proletarian protesters. For the new immigrants, who usually lived in extremely poor households, the exaggerated wealth of central Buenos Aires districts was a reminder of

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<sup>364</sup> Moshe Kaufman, “Lirisher peizazh,” *Argentinish*, 87-89.

<sup>365</sup> Pschepiurka's engagement in the landsman movement was criticized by Samuel Rollansky. He complained that Pschepiurka wasted his talent on writing for landsman journals.

<sup>366</sup> *Antologye fun der yidisher literatur*, 573-580.

<sup>367</sup> See, for example, his article on the perception of Jews as a radical ethnic group versus the reality of the conservative Jewish middle class: Mendel Pschepiurka, “Epes vegn der geystikn geshtaltung fun di yidishe masn,” *Di Presse*, 22.10.1928, page unknown.

<sup>368</sup> Hirsh Blostein, “Oyfn Avenida Alvear,” *Antologye fun der yidisher literatur*, 88.

<sup>369</sup> Schneur Wasserman, “Florida,” *Argentinish*, vol. 2, 77-78.

their precarious conditions. They were living in the same city as the rich men, but their lives hardly ever coincided.

Another well-known writer to describe the Jewish poverty of Buenos Aires was José (Yosef) Rabinovich. Born in Białystok in 1903, he arrived to Argentina in 1924 and soon afterwards began publishing his poems and short stories in the local Yiddish press. In 1937 he ceased to write in Yiddish and switched to Spanish. His short story “Unter rod” (1927) is a powerful description of the first days of the new immigrant in Buenos Aires. A character named Yelin is homeless and unemployed. He cannot express himself in Spanish and the people he meets make jokes about his miserable situation. In a moment of despair, Yellin starts to have hallucinations-remiscences of his family. In another text, “In der fremd” (In Foreignness), originally published in 1934 in *Di Presse*, Rabinovich depicts the Argentine lives of two immigrant brothers.<sup>370</sup> Whereas the family reunification was often pictured as one of the first ambitions of the new immigrants, the relations between family members in Argentina were often conflicting. The younger brother, who arrived to Argentina a few years earlier, welcomes Leyzer in his home, yet the new immigrant desperately wants to be independent. He is willing to do any job, just to become independent from his brother, who is the first to make a career in Argentina. Other texts by Rabinovich offer a glimpse into the interactions between Jewish and non-Jewish *porteños*. In the volume of poetry *Conventizhes* (“Conventillos,” 1928), we look at relations between neighbors, landlords and tenants, between Jewish and Catholic children. The early texts of Rabinovich represented questions shared by many Jewish-Polish immigrants of his generation: cultural-linguistic dilemmas, poverty and anti-Jewish prejudice.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> Yosef Rabinovich, “In der fremd,” *Antologye fun der yidisher literatur*, 753-756.

<sup>371</sup> Senkman, *La identidad judía*, 106-122.

## Chapter Four

### **Being a “Good Polish Jew” in Buenos Aires: Landsmanshaftn, Ethnicity and Transnational Solidarity**

*De los judíos del desierto, nuestros parientes que exasperaron a Moisés a los pies del Monte Sinaí, regreso a nuestra pequeña calle Pasteur, a mi barrio, el Once, a mi país, Argentina. Regreso sin pena porque sé que el Monte Sinaí es portátil: lo llevamos allí donde vayamos, lo sepamos o no, llevamos en nuestros ojos, en nuestra actitud y en nuestras ficciones.*

*From the Jews of the desert, from our ancestors who exhausted Moses at the foot of Mount Sinai, I return to our little Pasteur Street, to my neighborhood, el Once, to my country, Argentina. I return without sorrow because I know that Mount Sinai is portable: we take it wherever we go, no matter if we know it or not, we take it in our eyes, in our attitude and in our inventions.*

— Marcelo Birmajer, *Ser judío en el siglo XXI*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Milá, 2003

This chapter examines the role of Jewish ethnic associations (*landsmanshaftn*) in the development of a distinct Jewish-Polish identity among immigrants from Poland in Argentina and analyzes landsman involvement in the transnational politics of the Jewish-Polish diaspora worldwide.<sup>1</sup> My text echoes and reflects on the voices of Polish-Jewish *landslayt*, who formed an important subgroup of Argentine-Jewish life in the 1920s and 1930s. *Landsmanshaftn* formed a mesostructure, located somewhere between the official Jewish community and those unaffiliated with major Jewish organizations. It was a semi-private and semi-public ethnic space, satisfying both the specific cultural needs of the migrants as well as answering their desire for recognition via local and transnational engagement. The *landsmanshaftn*, especially the *Poylish yidisher farband in argentine* (Polish Jewish Union in Argentina, later abbreviated as *Poylisher Farband*) constructed and conveyed a specific narrative about Jewish immigration to Argentina throughout the interwar years. According to landsman discourse, immigrants were imagined as the “children” of Jewish Poland, implicitly responsible for improving the situation of Jews in their country of birth. Involved in transnational networks of ethnic solidarity, convinced about a specifically shared Jewish-Polish identity and global Jewish-Polish interests, they called for a popular commitment to their native land and argued for a transnational and interconnected global diaspora of Yiddish-speaking Polish Jews. Simultaneously, the *landslayt* did not perceive their involvement in local and transnational diasporic networks of Polish-Jews as an obstacle to being proud, committed and successful Argentines. On the contrary, in a society of immigrants like that of Argentina in the 1920s and 1930s, being ethnically-involved Polish Jews was for many a channel of inclusion in the Argentine immigrant mainstream. Similar tendencies of ethnic engagement could also be observed among other migrant groups. For instance, Jewish-Moroccan Zionism in Argentina focused less on the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine, but more on the status and identity of Jews as Argentines.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to Tobias Brinkman’s argument, I believe that many Jewish immigrants “had time to look back.”<sup>3</sup> The *landslayt* were a group of people who drew new lines of connection that stretched between Argentina and Poland. Their proclaimed devotion to Jewish Poland coincided and was induced by social and economic changes that

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<sup>1</sup> As Daniel Soyer explained, the Yiddish word *landsmán* denotes an immigrant from the same town, region or country as the speaker. The plural form is *landslayt*. *Landsmanshaft* is an organization of *landslayt*, or an informal community of *landslayt*. The plural form of *landsmanshaft* is *landsmanshaftn*. I also use the word *landsmán* as an adjective referring to the activity of the *landslayt*. See Daniel Soyer, *Jewish Immigrant Association and American Identity in New York, 1880-1939* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Raanan Rein and Mollie Lewis, “Judíos, árabes, sefardíes, sionistas y argentinos: el caso del periódico *Israel*,” in *Árabes y judíos en Iberoamérica. Similitudes, diferencias y tensiones*, ed. Raanan Rein (Sevilla: Tres Culturas, 2008), 83-115.

<sup>3</sup> Tobias Brinkman, “From Immigrants to Supranational Transmigrants and Refugees: Jewish Migrants in New York and Berlin Before and After the Great War,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 1 (2010): 51.

life in Argentina demanded. The landsman cultural activities fit the model of *ciudadano educado* and trained Jews to participate in the public sphere, which later transcended the borders of the ethnic community.<sup>4</sup> This complementarity of commitments to Argentina and to Jewish Poland was voiced not only by the landslayt, but also by a part of the acculturated argentinized circles, such as those gathered around the Spanish-language journals *Mundo Israelita*, *Judaica* or in *Sociedad Hebraica Argentina*.

Even though most of the immigrants from Poland did not join the landsmanshaftn and chose different ways of being Jewish and Argentine, landsmanshaftn were still an important component that shaped the character of the emerging Argentine Jewry in the 1920s and 1930s. The interwar landslayt history has largely been forgotten, as their engagement with the European *old countries*, Yiddish language and culture were overshadowed by the postwar supremacy of Zionism in the organized Argentine Jewish community of the post-World War II years.<sup>5</sup> In this regard, landsmanshaftn shared the fate of non-Zionist Jewish forms of ethno-nationalism that were analogically marginalized in the historiography.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, after 1945 the landsmanshaftn often limited their activities to commemorating the Old World destroyed by the Holocaust and were consequently later remembered mainly as “commemoration clubs.”<sup>7</sup> Their prewar ethnic discourses, engagement in Argentine placemaking and transnational networking were covered by oblivion, or were undermined as nostalgic and marginal.<sup>8</sup> This chapter is an attempt to reclaim the landsman history as a legitimate facet of the immigrant Jewish mosaic in Argentina.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Leandro H. Gutiérrez and Luis Alberto Romero, “La construcción de la ciudadanía 1912-1955,” in *Sectores populares, cultura y política. Buenos Aires en la entreguerra*, ed. Luis H. Gutiérrez and Luis Alberto Romero (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2007), 163.

<sup>5</sup> See Silvia Schenkolewski-Kroll, “The Influence of the Zionist Movement on the Organization of the Argentine Jewish Community: The Case of the DAIA 1933–1946,” *Studies in Zionism* 12, no. 1 (1991): 17-28; Silvia Schenkolewski-Kroll, *The Zionist Movement and the Zionist Parties in Argentina 1935-1948* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Prior to 1939, Eastern Europe and the new Jewish diasporas boasted many non-Zionist forms of national expression, including Territorialism, Autonomism, Diaspora Nationalism, Folkism and to some extent also Yiddishism. Joshua Shanes argued that the failure of Diaspora Nationalism to achieve a lasting cultural or political autonomy, combined with the subsequent success of Zionism, led historians to discount nationalist alternatives to Zionism. See Joshua Shanes, “Yiddish and Jewish Diaspora Nationalism,” *Monatshefte* 90, no. 2 (1998): 178-188.

<sup>7</sup> See Jan Schwarz, “A Library of Hope and Destruction: The Yiddish Book Series Dos polyishe yidntum, 1946-1966,” *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry. Volume 20: Making Holocaust Memory* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008), 173-196; Malena Chinski, “Ilustrar la memoria: las imágenes de tapa de la colección Dos polyishe yidntum (El judaísmo polaco), Buenos Aires, 1946- 1966,” *EIAL. Estudios Interdisciplinarios de America Latina y el Caribe*, no. 21, 11-33.

<sup>8</sup> The conservatism and isolationism of landsmanshaftn was suggested by Michael Weisser, *A Brotherhood of Memory: Jewish Landsmanshaftn in the New World* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); or Moses Rischin, *The Promised City: New York's Jews 1870-1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).

<sup>9</sup> The landsmanshaftn largely ceased to exist in the 1970s, with only a few still in existence in the 1980s and 1990s. As with other immigrant institutions, without being sustained by a new influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe, the landsmanshaftn had fulfilled their role and ceased to exist. There were also voices that linked the end of the landsmanshaft movement with their unsuccessful financial endeavors (banks, credit institutions). The last mention of Poylisher Farband I located is from 1983.



The first section presents the Polish-Jewish associations in the context of organizations formed by other ethnic groups. Similar institutions were formed by Spaniards, Poles, Italians, Germans and others. For newcomers of any country, involvement in ethnic societies was a source of empowerment and a space for redefining one's belonging and identity. Constructing these *surrogate communities*, as Eduardo José Míguez called the immigrant ethnic associations, was for many a way of reducing the sentimental costs of migration.<sup>10</sup> By referring to similarities between the experiences of Jews and non-Jews, I attempt to avoid an argument for "Jewish exceptionalism," which has characterized many studies on Jewish migration.<sup>11</sup>

The second section unveils the story of *Poylisher Farband*, the biggest and the most influential Jewish ethnic association in interwar Latin America. This section places the establishment of the Farband in a broader context, including the ethnic mobilization that took place following World War I and Poland's independence in 1918. I argue that after the Great War and the reappearance of an independent Polish state, Polish-Jewish immigrants in Argentina needed to re-conceptualize their relationship to Poland and the way they understood being Polish Jews in the diaspora. One answer was ethnic mobilization and transnational socio-cultural involvement.

The third section examines the social and cultural role of the landsmanshaftn in the Argentine context. For many newcomers, these organizations were a unique space of familiarity and inclusion. Through its network of libraries, journals, youth clubs, regular picnics and dance parties, the landsmanshaft brought together Jewish immigrants from Poland and helped them to develop a sense of a distinct diasporic Jewish-Polish subethnicity. To be sure, I understand Jewishness as an *ethnicity* and Jewish-Polish identification as a *subethnicity*. At the same time, landsman events served as a channel for becoming Argentine. Jewish and Argentine elements were smoothly combined and Yiddish songs could be sang to the melody of an Argentine tango. Throughout the 1930s, landsman events became a showcase for a developing middle-class Jewish *argentinidad*.

The last two sections deal with specific forms in which Argentine Jews of Polish origin expressed their involvement in transnational Jewish-Polish matters. By analyzing the landsman debates concerning fundraising aid for Poland's Jews and protesting against anti-Semitism in Poland, I reconstruct the paths through which Polish Jews in Argentina wished to define themselves as committed, supportive and successful. I show their fundraising efforts in

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<sup>10</sup> Eduardo Jose Míguez, "Introduction: Foreign Mass Migration to Latin America in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries - An Overview," in *Mass Migration to Modern Latin America*, ed. Samuel E. Baily and Eduardo Jose Míguez (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2003), XIX.

<sup>11</sup> Boleslao Lewin, *Cómo fue la inmigración judía en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 1983), José Libermann, *Los judíos en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Libra, 1966).

a context of global ethnic solidarity networks, but also on an internal Argentine level. The help-campaigns organized by the *landsmanshaftn* were supposed to raise the importance of the Argentine diaspora within a transnational Yiddishland, but at the same time they had a function of marking *landslayt's* middle-class aspirations and their growing sense of *argentinidad*.

## 1. Becoming a *Polaco* in Argentina: From Mutual Help to Articulating Subethnicity

Following the immigration of around 60,000 Polish Jews to Argentina during the interwar years (1918-1939), Buenos Aires became a home for a multitude of Jewish immigrant societies, the *landsmanshaftn*.<sup>12</sup> *Landsmanshaftn* were voluntary organizations that united Jewish immigrants originating from specific localities in Eastern Europe. They appeared in every country to which Eastern European Jews immigrated: the United States, Argentina, Canada, France, South Africa, Australia, Brazil, etc. At their initial stage, they could be labeled as “immigrant mutualist associations,” as their founders and members were indeed immigrants coming together to help each other in a foreign country. However, when referring to the later years of Jewish-Polish *landsmanshaftn* activism in Argentina (late 1920s and 1930s), the term “ethnic” or “subethnic” for the associations would be more apt, especially regarding the *Poylisher Farband* (established in 1916). At that point, most of the members were already veteran immigrants, relatively well-established in their new country and often with vague memories of their common place of origin. At this later stage, the *landsmanshaftn* members and their families were united by shared ethnic goals and memory of home, rather than by an actual need for mutual assistance.

The variety of Argentine *landsmanshaftn* organizations reflected the enormous diversity of immigrants’ experiences. Some *landsmanshaftn* grouped hundreds of members together, whereas others were semi-private clubs with only a few dozen active patrons. Many *landsmanshaftn* were related to a specific Eastern European place of origin, but other types of

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<sup>12</sup> Marta Kowalska, “La emigración judía de Polonia a la Argentina en los años 1918-1939,” *Estudios Latinoamericanos* 12 (1989): 248–72, 259. Kowalska based her estimations on data from the archives of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MSZ) and the Polish Embassy in Buenos Aires (*Migracja roczna do Argentyny 1939*, AAN MSZ 9871, 10; *Sprawozdanie roczne poselstwa w Buenos Aires za rok 1931*, AAN MSZ 9618, 31-32; two presentations for MSZ, AAN MSZ 9897, 142; AAN MSZ 2288, 74. This number constituted around 50% of all interwar Jewish immigrants to Argentina (according to the *American Jewish Yearbook*, between 1919-1938 Argentina received approximately 100,000 Jewish immigrants); *American Jewish Yearbook* 41 (1939-1940): 626. Yet as Victor A. Mirelman suggested (on the basis of JCA and HICEM records), the proportion of Jewish-Polish immigrants was at times much higher and in the years 1926-1930 occurred at a rate of around 70-80% of all Jewish immigration. Victor Mirelman, *En búsqueda de una identidad. Los inmigrantes judíos en Buenos Aires 1890-1930* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Milá, 1988), 14.

organizations were established, such as those affiliated with specific synagogues or certain professions. Within the regional associations, we find those that embraced a whole region, but also those that allowed only immigrants from a specific locality. Finally, there were *landsmanshaftn* that survived for decades, but also those that needed to be shut down only after a very brief period of existence.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, hometown immigrant societies were key institutions that accompanied European migrants who settled in the Americas. The decades between the 1880s and 1930s were a period of mass migration, when a broad stream of people relocated from Europe to North and South America. Millions of Spaniards, Italians, Poles, Frenchmen, Germans, Jews, and other nationalities departed for American coasts in search of a better future, including around 5.8 million to Argentina.<sup>13</sup> Unfamiliar with local customs and often initially finding it difficult to comfortably socialize with the dominant population, some immigrants preferred to build their social life within a community of their countrymen. Hometown societies were a product of this need, as they allowed the newcomers to communicate in their native language, discuss problems with fellow immigrants and, no less importantly, to preserve a linkage to their homeland “on the other side of the sea.”<sup>14</sup>

Of course, hometown societies were not a particularly Jewish phenomenon, but were characteristic of the majority of newly established immigrant communities. Similar ethnic organizations were formed by other groups of European immigrants: Poles had their *ziomkostwa*, Germans their *Vereine* and Spaniards their *Uniones de residentes*. In Argentina, Germans and Frenchmen, who arrived already in the first half of the nineteenth century, established their fraternal organization several decades earlier than the Jews, whereas Spaniards and Italians numerically outnumbered any other European immigrant group. The principles guiding the establishment and functioning of these associations were largely the same. First of all, they united mostly immigrant males, offering them various benefits (financial support in case of unemployment or need, medical assistance, cheap credit, assistance in issuing immigration invitations for family members). Second, ethnic organizations helped their members to progress economically by establishing credit institutions and cooperatives that offered financial support and security often unavailable

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<sup>13</sup> In Argentina, the share of the foreign-born population grew between 1895 and 1914 to 29.9%. In Buenos Aires, it was as high as 49.63%. The proportion of Ashkenazi Jews was then 8.82% of the immigrant population and 2.63% of the general population. Data taken from *Tercero Censo de la Republica Argentina*, quoted in Haim Avni, *Argentina y las migraciones judías: de la Inquisición al Holocausto y después* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Milá, AMIA, Universidad Hebrea de Jerusalem, 2005), 194, 199; *Resumen estadístico del movimiento migratorio en la República Argentina, años 1857–1924* (Buenos Aires, 1925), 3, quoted in José Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 56.

<sup>14</sup> The Yiddish expression “oyf yener zayt yam” (on that side of the sea) was popularly used in landsman discourse to refer to the overseas European homelands of Jewish immigrants.

elsewhere. Finally, the hometown societies nurtured and enforced the subethnic identification of the immigrants. Their “homey atmosphere” and “feeling of being among kin” was a key argument that hometown societies used to attract new members.

Jewish landsmanshaftn emerged in all countries of immigration and their members were often directly connected with a global transnational network of landsman institutions. This was visible both on the level of the local “hometown” and a broader Jewish-Polish level. The *Bialystoker landslayt* analyzed by Rebecca Kobrin had a common “Bialystoker agenda” that transcended political and geographical borders.<sup>15</sup> The conviction about common interests and responsibilities of Polish Jews was also shared by delegates of the Jewish-Polish diasporas, who congregated in international conferences, such as the World Congress of Polish Jews in London in 1935.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, the activities and functioning of the landsmanshaftn were often influenced externally and embraced the transnational character of a worldwide Jewish-Polish diaspora. The interwar years were the heyday of transnational Jewish networking, be it concerning emigration policies, combating anti-Semitism or offering financial assistance.

The Jewish landsmanshaftn in the Americas were often modeled on New York institutions.<sup>17</sup> In the early twentieth century, the metropolis on the East Coast of the United States had the largest Jewish population in the world, where local Jewish social life, including the landsmanshaftn, was blooming. The first Argentine landsmanshaftn, established several decades later, had a largely similar organizational structure and program. Although the Jewish community of Buenos Aires was several times smaller than its New York counterpart, its subdivisions along class, region, religion and politics were no less evident. Whereas many North American hometown associations of the 1920s and 1930s adopted English as their main language, in Argentina Yiddish remained the key language of discussions and publications, marking the involvement of Argentine Jews in the world of a transnational Yiddishland and their stronger rootedness in the Yiddish-speaking world.<sup>18</sup> The language chosen by the landslayt (at least in their publications and minutes) sheds light on the relevance of ethno-

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<sup>15</sup> Rebecca Kobrin, *Jewish Bialystok and Its Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> The First World Congress of Polish Jews took place in 1935 in London and included delegates from Poland and from the Polish Jewish diasporas worldwide. Argentina was represented by a leader of the Poylisher Farband, David Hirsch (executive committee member). The Congress was a biennial initiative: the second meeting was organized in Antwerp in 1937 (Argentina was represented by Boris Weinstok, also from Poylisher Farband) and the third in 1939 in New York.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Soyer, *Jewish Immigrant Associations and American Identity in New York, 1880-1939* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 2.

<sup>18</sup> That was probably related to later Jewish immigration to Argentine. Those who left in the 1920s and 1930s were often raised in ideologies of Jewish ethno-national revival. Most of the US landsmanshaftn were established between 1903-1909. Between 1928-1938 only six new ones appeared. In Argentina, Jewish landsmanshaftn appeared only during and after the Great War. See The WPA Yiddish Writers' Group Study, *Jewish Hometown Associations and Family Circles in New York*, ed. Hannah Kliger (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 35-38.

national Yiddish culture to landslayt identities and their embeddedness in the progressive *yidishkayt*-centered cultural projects.

Historians have usually examined and based their findings on bigger, formal associations, with written statutes, membership fees and regular minutes. Less formal structures, like that of organizations that held sporadic meetings and united a very limited number of people are hard to trace and are largely invisible in the scholarship.<sup>19</sup> Researchers have faced the difficulty of approaching and understanding this type of seemingly ephemeral and meaningless social clubs like the landsmanshaftn. This was also a challenge in my research on Argentina's Polish-Jewish landsmanshaftn. Although I located numerous small-scale institutions, most of the archival materials pertained to the Poylisher Farband, an umbrella organization uniting Jews of Polish origin. Smaller institutions like Kalushin un Minsk Mazovetsk Farayn or Brisker Farayn, rarely published their own journals or regular protocols, making their histories almost untraceable. Due to this obstacle, my research is based mostly on sources produced by big, long-lasting landsmanshaftn, such as Galitsianer Farband or Poylisher Farband. The issue gets even more complicated when we notice that even small organizations wanted to "appear big." In the Americas, a number of loose-knit immigrant organizations were in existence, whose formal structures belied their friendly informality.<sup>20</sup> For instance, the almanac summarizing twenty years of the Ostrog-Voliner Farayn, was full of name lists describing the exact functions and terms of office. Even though the organization was rather small and went defunct for more than seven years, for Michl Grines, who wrote its history, it was of crucial importance to emphasize the elaborate organizational structure of the Farayn. In fact, this institution that appeared so big was actually located in the private flat of its president, Shamai Rozenblat.<sup>21</sup>

I argue that the Argentine landsmanshaftn were spaces where new "dual" or "hyphenated" identities were formed. The landsmanshaftn allowed their members to smoothly integrate into the society of the new country, with respect to the old country habits and the new diasporic belongings. Landsmanshaftn were not insular spaces where the old country was fanatically worshiped, but a space for defining and formulating new kinds of identities, adjusted to the life of the new country. As Daniel Soyer emphasized, both continuation and transformation defined the immigrant experience in the New World.<sup>22</sup> Landsmanshaftn helped Jewish immigrants to find themselves in the new country, without renouncing their Eastern

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<sup>19</sup> José C. Moya, "Immigrants and Associations: A Global and Historical Perspective," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31, no. 5 (2005): 833- 835.

<sup>20</sup> Weisser, *A Brotherhood of Memory*, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Michl Grines, "In loyf fun zvantzik yor," in *Almanakh fun ostrog-voliner landslayt farayn un umgegent in argentine 1924-1944* (Buenos Aires, 1944), 12.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, 3.

European heritage. The democratic character of the landsmanshaftn helped their members to feel more secure in social and political activism. The landsmanshaftn served as an “ethnic training room” for social and economic engagement that was later, or simultaneously, used in the general Argentine public sphere. While they nurtured subethnic identities, they also enhanced the wider Jewish and Argentine identities of their members.

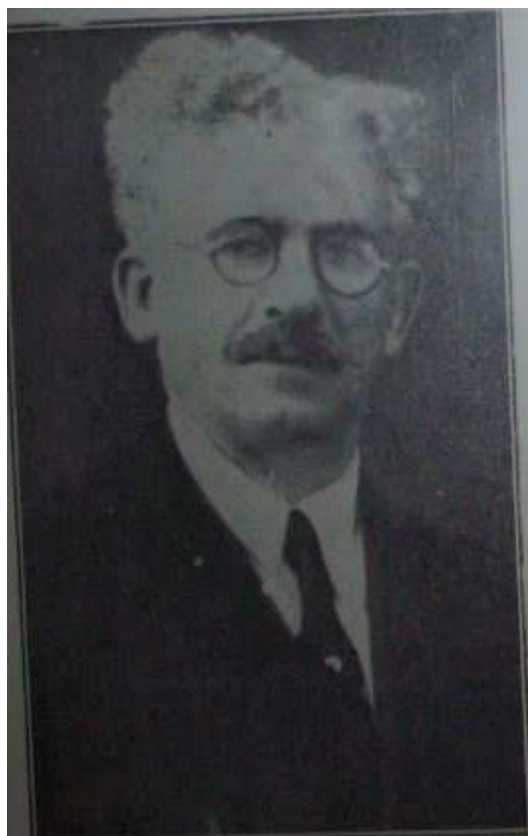


Illustration no. 38. Abraham Hersh Fridman (1877-1937), the first president of *Poylisher Farband*, *Dos Naye Vort*, March 1937, 1.

Fitting examples can be found in the biographies of the leaders of the Poylisher Farband.<sup>23</sup> Its president in the 1920s, Abraham Hersh Fridman, was a successful entrepreneur, an owner of a large hat factory named “Varsovia” on Avenida Boedo in Buenos Aires.<sup>24</sup> Another Farband president, Leyzer Shtokhammer, was an owner of a successful stationery company. Their economic prosperity as immigrant Jews in Argentina was unquestionable. They both led comfortable lives in Argentina, probably spoke good Spanish and could see themselves as part of an aspiring Buenos Aires entrepreneurial middle class. At the same time, Fridman and

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<sup>23</sup> The Polish Jewish Unión in Argentina; *Centralny Związek Żydów Polskich w Argentynie* (Polish); *Unión Central Israelita Polaca en la Argentina* (Spanish).

<sup>24</sup> “Der ershter president fun poylish-yidishn farband,” *Dos Naye Vort*, September 1925, 25. Abraham Fridman was born in 1877 in Lublin, Poland. For a few years, he worked in the textile industry in Łódź, before arriving to Buenos Aires in 1907. In 1915 he co-founded the Poylisher Farband “Agudas Ahim” and later worked in Soprotimis (Society for the Protection of Jewish Immigrants). For a detailed biography, see “Aynike biografishe shtikh fun abraham fridman, z”l,” *Dos Naye Vort*, March 1937, 1.

Shtokhammer stressed their Jewish-Polish origins and their commitment to less fortunate immigrants. They both joined Poylisher Farband and served as its presidents for many years. For Fridman and Shtokhammer, their success in Argentina also meant a sense of obligation to the social and cultural work of the local Jewish-Polish community. Their personas, and the landsman movement as such, embodied “the Jewish” and “the Argentine” that combined almost seamlessly.<sup>25</sup>

The first ethnic mutual help societies in Argentina were established by Spanish and Italian immigrants as early as the 1850s.<sup>26</sup> They united laborers and artisans working in the same trade or originating from the same towns or regions. The mutual benefit societies were hardly homogeneous. Many underlined their chiefly charitable character, others strongly expressed their political agendas. With the increased number of immigrants arriving in Argentina in the first decades of the twentieth century, combined with the growing industrialization of the country, the mutual aid societies emerged as *sui generis* “ethnic labor unions.” In 1914 they united 18% (160,000) and 13% (110,000) of Italian and Spanish immigrants respectively, becoming an important political and economic actor.<sup>27</sup> The mutualist societies (or MBS, Mutual Benefit Societies), played an active role not only in class mobilization, but were also an important factor in ethnic mobilization, allowing diverse immigrant groups to unite and to publicly claim their interests. Massive immigration, industrialization and the expansion of capitalism made way for the establishment of a vigorous MBS movement that complicated the relations between class, ethnicity and society.<sup>28</sup> As Marcel van der Linden noted, these organizations often had polymorphous structures, making the difference between mutual benefit societies and trade unions not immediately obvious.<sup>29</sup> The inclusion of the ethnic aspect of associational politics added another layer to the previously developed class struggles.

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<sup>25</sup> The complementarity of acculturation and Old Country commitments was also noticed in the North American context. The scholar Samuel Kenig commented in 1939 that the landsmanshaftn in the US in fact taught Jews how to navigate democratic institutions and were a space for Americanization. Samuel Kenig, “The Social Aspect of the Jewish Mutual Benefit Societies,” *Social Forces* 18, no. 2 (1939): 274, quoted in Kliger, *Jewish Hometown Associations*, 12.

<sup>26</sup> For more information on Italian immigrant associations, see: Fernando J. Devoto and Eduardo José Míguez *Asociacionismo, trabajo e identidad tnica: los italianos en América Latina en una perspectiva comparada* (Buenos Aires: CEMLA Centro de Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos, 1992); Samuel L. Baily, *Immigrants in the Lands of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City, 1870-1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> Fernando Devoto and Alejandro Fernandez, “Mutualismo étnico, liderazgo y participación política. Algunas hipótesis de trabajo,” in *Mundo urbano y cultura popular. Estudios de Historia Social Argentina*, ed. Diego Armus (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1990), 129-152.

<sup>28</sup> Ronaldo Munck, “Mutual Benefit Societies in Argentina: Workers, Nationality, Social Security and Trade Unionism,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30, no. 3 (1998): 579.

<sup>29</sup> Marcel van der Linden, “Introduction,” in *Social Security Mutualism: The Comparative History of Mutual Benefit Societies*, ed. Marcel van der Linden (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 20-21.

Both in Europe and in the emigration countries, the turn of the century saw a growing entanglement of ethnic and class consciousness.<sup>30</sup>

The fraternal immigrant societies around the world were based on the same principle of solidarity, and their initial activities concentrated on helping the sick, the poor and the new immigrants. During the first years of its existence, immigrant societies functioned largely like an “insurance company” (or “safety networks” as Tobias Brinkman called them) and provided their members with a sense of security in case of emergency.<sup>31</sup> They emerged from the developing proletarian culture, represented the interests of artisans and workers who made up the Argentine working class, and “aspired to be a space without the control of the powerful and rich.”<sup>32</sup> Mutualist societies aimed to prove that popular organizations could provide immigrants with what the Argentine state failed to offer them: security in case of accident, poverty or sickness.<sup>33</sup> The security and financial support they offered allowed members to make their life easier. Even small Jewish hometown societies decided very early to found their own credit institutions, so-called *lay-kases*, that offered members low or non-commission loans. The *lay-kases* helped immigrant Jews to establish their own shops and factories and consequently to leave the urban proletariat and move into the middle class. With time, the *lay-kases* also evolved into proper banks, like *Banco Israelita Polaco*, reflecting the general burgeoning of Jewish immigrants. Although the goals of the landsmanshaftn were community-oriented, the outcome also fostered a place for self-declared ethnic leaders, who used social welfare as a space to claim individual agendas.<sup>34</sup>

Although Jews could join professional mutual societies established by Christian immigrants (and often did join, sometimes as a separate Jewish section), they usually preferred to form specifically Jewish organizations. This was clearly visible in the tensions

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<sup>30</sup> For a study of working class movements in Jewish Eastern Europe, see: Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of Jewish Worker's Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>31</sup> Tobias Brinkmann, “We are Brothers! Let us Separate! Jews and Community Building in American Cities during the 19th Century,” *History Compass* 11/10 (2013): 869–79.

<sup>32</sup> Munck, “Mutual Benefit Societies in Argentina,” 580.

<sup>33</sup> In Argentina, social welfare was a patchwork system made up of the state, the Catholic church, private philanthropies and immigrant associations. Benjamin Bryce, “Paternal Communities: Social Welfare and Immigration in Argentina, 1880–1930,” *Journal of Social History* 49, no. 1 (2015): 216. See also Donna J. Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State: Performing Charity and Creating Rights in Argentina, 1880-1955* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>34</sup> Bryce, “Paternal Communities,” 214.



between the *Partido Socialista* and Jewish socialists.<sup>35</sup> Although Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants in Argentina had to struggle with many typical problems (finding jobs and housing, workplace exploitation, poverty, difficulties with the legalization of their stay), their experiences were not uniform. Argentina was a predominantly Catholic country and Christianity strongly influenced social norms, expectations and everyday life. In that respect, Spaniards and Italians did not encounter a situation much different than back home. Their religious affiliation placed them in the mainstream of Argentine society. However, the Jews, as an ethnic and religious minority, were located on its periphery. Although official policies might have proclaimed equality and democracy, the Catholicism of Argentina still pushed Jews to the margins of society.<sup>36</sup>

By establishing ethnic labor unions, Jews proved that the ethnic affiliations of minorities were compatible with class consciousness.<sup>37</sup> The first general (not limited to a specific profession) Jewish ethnic labor organization in Argentina was “Yidisher Arbeter Farayn,” established at the very beginning of the twentieth century by León Chazanovitch.<sup>38</sup> The “Hitmakher Farayn” (Hatmakers Union), which united only Jewish artisans, was formed in 1913.<sup>39</sup> The proletarian leader Pinie Wald remembered that the language issue often led to discrepancies between Jewish and non-Jewish activists.<sup>40</sup> Guitl Kanutsky, who arrived from Poland in 1924, recalled that she initially turned to a gentile tailors' syndicate, but could not communicate with Italian and Spanish colleagues. Kanutsky searched for other immigrant Jews with “class experience” and began to “organize” the proletarian immigrants and finally managed herself to found a Jewish organization.<sup>41</sup> Later, she wrote daily articles in the leftwing *Di Presse*, fought for security in working conditions and prepared several strikes. The ethnic dimension was of crucial importance for many immigrant Jewish workers,

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<sup>35</sup> Daniel Lvovich and Ernesto Bohoslavsky argued that only a fraction of Russian-speaking Jewish immigrants supported the all-Argentine *Partido Socialista*. The majority of Jewish left-wingers joined ethnic Jewish parties: the Argentine branch of Poaley Tsiyon (established in 1906), the Jewish anarchist *Grupo Arbayer Fraynd* (est. in 1906) and Bundists centered around *Avangard* (est. in 1907). Their relations with *Partido Socialista* were problematic, as the Bundist demanded Jewish autonomy and were not satisfied with the position of a linguistic minority. See Daniel Lvovich and Ernesto Bohoslavsky, “Los judíos en la política en Iberoamérica en el siglo XX,” in *El judaísmo en Iberoamérica*, ed. Reyes Mate and Ricardo Forster (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2007), 171-196.

<sup>36</sup> See *Ley Nacional de Inmigración y Colonización 1876* (“Ley Avallaneda, Ley No. 817); Constitution of 1853. See Graciela Ben Dror, *The Catholic Church and the Jews: Argentina 1933-1945* (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> Daniel Katz, *All Together Different: Yiddish Socialists, Garment Workers, and the Labor Roots of Multiculturalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 5-16.

<sup>38</sup> *Argentine: fuftsik yor yidisher yishev: tsvantsik yor ‘Di Presse’* (Buenos Aires: Di Presse, 1938), 25.

<sup>39</sup> David Szyszacki (Szyszatzki), “Tsu der geshikhte fun yidishe landslayt-faraynen in argentine,” *Argentine IWO Shriftn* 13 (1981): 136-137.

<sup>40</sup> Pinie Wald, “Der poylish-yidisher arbeter in argentine. Fun 1901 bis 1941,” in *Poylisher yidn in doyrem amerike. Zamlbukh tsum 25-yoriken yuvl fun organizirtin poylishin yidntum in argentine, 1916-1941* (Buenos Aires: Tsentral farband fun poylisher yidn in argentine, 1941), 160.

<sup>41</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, *Archivo de la Palabra*, no. 32 Guitl Kanutsky.

especially those who supported Bundism or Labor Zionism back in Europe and arrived to Argentine already “nationalized.”<sup>42</sup> Similarly, the concentration of Jews in specific sectors of the market (clothing industry, furniture industry) resulted in a preference for Jewish-only organizations. Although economic interests and revolutionary ideals to some extent united Jews with their gentile colleagues, ethnic and linguistic factors prompted the establishment of exclusively Jewish organizations. The issue of the Jewish presence in popular Argentine parties and unions was a controversial problem hotly debated in the first decades of the century.<sup>43</sup>

The ethnic Jewish workers’ organizations focused their efforts on fighting for fair wages and appropriate working conditions, while the town- or region-centered *landmanshaftn* had different agendas. Consequently, the relations between *landmanshaftn* and socialist groups were complex, yet less tense than their US counterparts. Whereas initially the US Jewish socialist groups criticized the *landmanshaftn* as they did not further the class struggle or were too religious, in Argentina it was slightly different.<sup>44</sup> Most of the *landmanshaftn* in Argentina developed only after the First World War, a decade after the heyday of anarcho-socialist upheavals. Polish immigrants, who established the Argentine *landmanshaftn* back home, had often been involved in leftwing politics. Religious norms were therefore less relevant for them, and even if not blue-collar workers themselves, they were aware of proletarian goals. In the post-1918 era, Argentine *landmanshaftn* and working-class organization often had coinciding agendas in regard to progressive Jewish politics and attitudes towards Argentina, the Old Home and the Yiddishland. Even though Argentine *landmanshaftn* were less involved in labor unions and quickly adopted a middle-class status, they were still to great extent based in leftwing Jewish ideals.

The *landman* needed to learn to balance not only the tensions within the Jewish immigrant population, but also to navigate their status in the broader society. Despite the official policy of supporting European immigration, conservative Argentine leaders often questioned Jewish “assimilability” into the Argentine nation, and even those Jews who tried

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<sup>42</sup> The importance of the ethnic dimension was also visible in the international arena, for example concerning the Spanish Civil War. Argentine Jews established their own ethnic and communist-leaning help-committee, *Comisión Israelita de Ayuda al Pueblo Español*. As argued by Raanan Rein, this was not only an expression of support for struggle with a rising fascist regime, but also a way by which the Jews defended their spaces in Argentina and fought for democracy, social justice and pluralism. Raanan Rein, “A Trans-National Struggle with National and Ethnic Goal: Jewish Argentines and Solidarity with the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War,” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 20, no. 2 (2014): 171-182.

<sup>43</sup> Lvovich and Bohoslavsky, “Los judíos en la política,” 171-176.

<sup>44</sup> Daniel Soyer, “*Landmanshaftn* and the Jewish Labor Movement: Cooperation, Conflict, and the Building of Community,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* VII, no. 2 (1988): 28.

to integrate themselves into the Argentine mainstream, were at times rejected as “outsiders.”<sup>45</sup> Until the Peronist era, the Argentine melting-pot assimilationist discourse largely discouraged any public manifestation of multiculturalism and of immigrant's distinct ethnic identities.<sup>46</sup> While some immigrants might have felt obliged to express loyalty to their adopted homeland, many did it out of their own conviction that Argentina offered them possibilities of individual and collective success. This was clearly visible in publications celebrating the anniversaries of ethnic communities. The Spanish foreword to a book commemorating twenty-five years of the existence of Poylisher Farband was full of expressions of gratitude and devotion to Argentina.<sup>47</sup> We read in them of Argentine hospitality, “breathing an air of liberty and equality” and a desire to see Argentina “great and powerful.” It assured readers that members of the Farband faithfully celebrate Argentine national holidays on May 25 and July 9. The Yiddish foreword bore an entirely different message and emphasized the progress of the Jewish-Polish community in Argentina, providing a historical summary of the last twenty-five years. The Yiddish texts praised Polish Jews as those who in fact built Jewish life in Argentina, starting from agricultural colonization, via the proletarian movement, to Yiddish theater. In the Yiddish introduction, there was no word about privileges that Argentina offered or any mention of proclaiming Jewish loyalty to the Republic. This showed that Polish Jews adopted specific (but complementary) strategies when it came to appearances in a gentile public sphere and in an internal Jewish world. Spanish was a language of a public appearances and a channel of Jewish inclusion to the Argentine nation, as well as a way of arguing for Jewish belonging in Argentina. Yiddish, on the other hand, was an intimate language that permitted articulating what was probably deemed inappropriate in Spanish, or what was meant for the Jewish public. The immigrants needed to learn how to navigate between languages, belongings and norms.

The members of the Argentine Jewish landsmanshaftn do not fit the simplistic classic story of immigration to the Americas. The paradigms of a US melting pot and Argentine *crisol de razas*, which saw immigrants as passive objects of assimilation, excluded the landslayt's multiple commitments and belongings. Most of the studies on the landsman

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<sup>45</sup> Judith Laikin Elkin, ed., *The Jews of Latin America* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1998), 215. See also the editorial of “La Nación,” 26.8.1881, quoted in Avni, *Argentina y las migraciones judías*, 79–81. We read there: “[...] the Jewish race maintains its nature, its genius, its faith since the times of Moses, almost without any modification, remaining in society without the coherence that produces the perfect assimilation.” Also, Ricardo Rojas in his *La restauración nacionalista* (Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Justicia é Instrucción Pública, 1909) questioned the willingness of immigrant Jews to become fully Argentine.

<sup>46</sup> Leonardo Senkman, “Klal Yisrael at the Frontiers: the Transnational Jewish Experience in Argentina,” in *Jewish Identities in an Era of Globalization and Multiculturalism: Latin America in the Jewish world*, eds. Judit Bokser de Liwerant et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 127.

<sup>47</sup> *Poylisher yidn in doyrem amerike*, pages 8, 9 in the Yiddish section and pages 6-8 in the Spanish section.

movement were reduced to a dichotomy between assimilation and cultural retention.<sup>48</sup> My study goes beyond this and includes the diasporic aspect of ethnic and political mobilization. Throughout the interwar period, the “looking back to Europe” *landslayt* (and their families) did form one of the many components of American and Argentine Jewish identities. Reducing immigrant Jewish experiences to the desire of embracing and succeeding in a new country is an oversimplification of this very complex story. Interwar Jewish Argentina was an extremely diverse and heterogeneous collective. This multiethnic country, although often attractive and promising individual liberties and rights, was at the periphery of the Jewish world.<sup>49</sup> In that context, the immigrants from Poland often related to their European homeland, that till 1939 remained the key vibrant center of Jewish life. Landsman organizations, underlining the importance of a common origin, which was supposed to function as a binding thread bringing together people of different class backgrounds, marked the central role of the Yiddish language and the Eastern European past.<sup>50</sup> Also, for those who already acculturated and preferred reading *Mundo Israelita* over *Di Presse*, Poland remained a significant reference point. Integration within Argentine society, becoming an Argentine Jew while maintaining a transnational conversation with Jewish Poland, was, despite the tensions, compatible and possible.<sup>51</sup> Poylisher Farband could both raise money for the Yiddish schools in Poland and buy the actions of *Fomento Agrario* to develop Argentine “national agriculture.” This chapter sheds light on the experiences of those who did not separate themselves from their Polish past with a thick line of oblivion, but rather drew new lines of connection that linked Jewish realities in Poland and in Argentina.

At the same time, the landsmanshaftn were spaces that witnessed the economic progress of Jewish immigrants and the subsequent evolution of their status in Argentina and their self-perception as new Jewish Argentines. Although Jewish landsmanshaftn initially included mostly skilled workers and artisans, it would be an exaggeration to say that they united working-class people. Especially in the 1930s, when the burgeoning immigrants began to play an increasingly important role in the movement, the landsmanshaftn adopted a more middle-class character, as many members were rich merchants or even worked in the free professions. Abraham Yitshok Bal, one of the founders of Poylisher Farband in 1916 and an ex-Farband

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<sup>48</sup> Ben Gidley, “Diasporic Memory and the Call to Identity: Yiddish Migrants in Early Twentieth Century East London,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 34, no. 6 (2013): 650-664.

<sup>49</sup> Senkman, “Klal Yisrael at the Frontiers,” 129-133.

<sup>50</sup> Rebecca Kobrin, “The Other Polonia: The Responses of Yiddish Immigrant Writers in New York and Buenos Aires to the New Polish State, 1920-1925,” in *Choosing Yiddish: New Frontiers of Language and Culture*, eds. Lara Rabinovitch, Shiri Goren and Hannah S. Pressman (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 103-105.

<sup>51</sup> Daniel Soyer, “Transnationalism and Americanization in East European Jewish Immigrant Public Life,” in *Imagining the American Jewish Community*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2007), 47.

president, co-owned a textile business with Berl Borenstein in the late 1930s and worked in *Nuevo Banco Argentino*. Abraham Feuerman, who was active in the Poylisher Farband for years, at the same time owned a shoe factory employing more than 160 people. The landsman Gustavo Zielony owned a company importing and selling wool and other fabrics.<sup>52</sup> Quite often Jewish merchants, who advertised their goods and services in landsman publications, only used Spanish, presenting themselves first and foremost as reliable Argentine businessmen who attracted not only Jewish, but also gentile customers. At the same time, some Argentine producers marketed their goods as a way for Jews to enter into Argentineness. An example can be found in a vermouth commercial of the “Cinzano” company. Drinking this alcohol, claimed the ad, “would bring luck and happiness” to the newcomers in Argentina. Also, General Motors specifically targeted upper-class Jewish readers.

The ethnic aspect of economic life was a powerful force in interwar Argentina. This was visible, for example, in regard to “architectural ethnic expansion.” In the early twentieth century, architecture and urban planning became a space for presenting the ethnic visibility of the community within the city’s architectural landscape. It was certainly true for Spanish and Italian immigrants, who wanted to mark their city apartment houses with what they perceived as their national flavor, chiefly an Art Nouveau style. The Jewish story was similar. It was made visible by landmark edifices build by Jewish architects and businessmen. For example, the Passage Teubal was built by Jaques Braguinsky and commissioned by the textile kings Taubal brothers.<sup>53</sup> Ethnic charity and welfare institutions had a similar function, as they became an arena for raising ethnic claims to an acknowledged presence in the city. The journalist Marcos Regalsky wrote that “charities and their facilities are witnesses of the creative impetus of the Jewish community.”<sup>54</sup> Many communities, including the German or the Italian, wanted to build their own hospitals, orphanages, and the like, which was often supported by rich patrons.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Jews opened their *Hospital Israelita* in 1921 and soon it became the apple of the community's eye and a symbol of ethnic pride.<sup>56</sup> By means of these public edifices, Jews built their sense of belonging in Buenos Aires and played the same ethnic card as other immigrant groups. Whereas the iconic big-scale endeavors were

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<sup>52</sup> Moisés David Guiser, ed., *Almanakh 1928. Ferter zamlbukh aroysgegebn fun poylish yidishn farband in argentine*, (Buenos Aires: Poylish yiddisher farband in argentine, 1928), 78.

<sup>53</sup> Marcelo Dimenstein, “The Building of the Once Neighborhood in Buenos Aires: Immigrant Bourgeoisie, Ethnic Architects and Jewish Elites (1900-1930),” *Perush: An Online Journal of Jewish Scholarship and Interpretation* 2 (2010): unpaginated.

<sup>54</sup> Marcos (Mordecai) Regalsky, “IWO” in *Tsvishn tsvey velt mikhomes. Di goyrl yorn 1918-1945* (Buenos Aires, 1946), 412.

<sup>55</sup> For an analysis of German migrants, see Bryce, “Paternal Communities.”

<sup>56</sup> It took more than twenty years to construct the first building of the Jewish hospital. Hospital Israelita “Ezrah” was already founded in 1900. See Jacob Shatzky, *Comunidades judías en Latinoamérica* (Buenos Aires: American Jewish Committee, 1952), 20.

organized by upper-class organizations like *Sociedad de Beneficencia de Damas Israelitas* or SOPROTIMIS (Society for the Protection of Jewish Immigrants), the borders between them and the *landsmanshaftn* were not always clear.<sup>57</sup> As the *landslayt* grew in wealth, many of them became involved with larger Jewish ethnic institutions and imagined themselves as Jewish Argentines. Pedro Chapow from Vengrover Faryan served as head of an old-age home *Moshav Zkenim* and orphanage – *Beit Yetomim*. Poylisher Farband, which could not fund its own hospital, was very proud of its *consultorio medico*, or drop-in clinic, that offered free medical services for Polish Jews and paid for services for those outside of the subethnic community. Both the *landsmanshaftn* and the larger welfare institutions were rooted in a sense of ethnic duty and responsibility.

These organizations aspired to provide the *greenhorn* and poor newcomers with a sense of communal empowerment, allowing those serving as ethnic communal leaders to present themselves as functionaries of powerful institutions. Argentine *landsmanshaftn*, even those who brought together fewer than 50 members, had an extended structure, with a president, several deputy presidents, an executive commission, a culture commission, an audit commission, a women's section, etc. Numerous posts allowed the *landslayt* to envision themselves as important figures, who could influence not only the situation of their *landslayt* in Argentina, but also generously help their hometowns in Eastern Europe. Natan Fruchter, writing in 1929 for the almanac of Galitsianer Farband, pointed out that although most of its members were workers, *petit* merchants or artisans, the more well-to-do members were also increasingly present (compare the table with the professional division of Poylisher Farband).<sup>58</sup> To the complaint and dismay of Fruchter, the successful *landslayt*, such as business and factory owners, did not support the *landsmanshaftn* enough.<sup>59</sup> The Yiddishist leader Pinie Katz added that the same was also true for Jewish professionals (doctors, lawyers, engineers).<sup>60</sup> For this group of people, the *landsmanshaftn* ceased to have the function of a mutual help society, but was rather a framework for showing their middle-class aspirations when serving in top *landsmanshaftn* positions. This was perfectly visible in the greetings from the *landslayt* printed in the 1941 jubilee publication of Poylisher Farband, where we see the

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<sup>57</sup> See Donna Guy, "Women's Organizations and Jewish Orphanages in Buenos Aires, 1918-1955," in *Rethinking Jewish-Latin Americans*, ed. Raanan Rein and Jeffrey Lesser (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 187-206.

<sup>58</sup> Next to some of the most successful immigrants, the majority of left-wing proletarian immigrants also did not join the *landsmanshaftn* because of their political convictions. Consequently, *landsmanshaftn* mirrored the Argentine experiences of only a fraction of Polish Jews. Despite their relative under-representativeness, *landsmanshaftn* involvement is a great lens for exploring the process of becoming Jewish-Argentine, while also negotiating the place of Argentina within the Yiddishland.

<sup>59</sup> Natan Fruchter, "Di galitsianer yidn in buenos aires," in *Tsvayter almanakh fun farband fun galitsianer yidn in buenos aires* (Buenos Aires, 1929), 11.

<sup>60</sup> Pinie Katz, "Der sotsyaler bashtand fun poylisher yidn in argentine," in *Almanakh 1928*, 55-56.

landslayt photographed as successful businessmen in their factories or stock-houses. Similar patterns were characteristic of other immigrant groups: the Japanese and Danish ethnic leaders in Latin America were often those who achieved financial fortune and social standing.<sup>61</sup>

**Table. 5. The Professional Structure of Poylisher Farband in 1924.**

<b>Number of members</b>	<b>Profession</b>
130	artisans (tailors, shoemakers, etc.)
39	workers
39	“cuenteniks” - peddlers
25	merchants

Table no. 5. The professional division of Poylisher Farband members (1924). Prepared by Pinie Katz for *Almanakh 1928. Aroysgegebn fun poylish yidishn farband in argentine*, ed. Moises David Guiser (Buenos Aires, 1928), 57.

The immigrant societies reinforced and channeled an earlier existing solidarity of national, regional and religious groups. As the immigrants were often in a weaker socio-economic position than the Argentine-born, the intra-communal solidarity proved to be a useful strategy. For instance, Fayvel Gross, who owned a restaurant on Guardia Vieja St. in Buenos Aires called on fellow Polish landslayt to dine and organize family parties at his venue.<sup>62</sup> In a joking way, Gross suggested that by visiting his restaurant the *poylishe* helped a landsman “to stand on his own feet.” Eating Polish food at a landsman-owned restaurant was imagined by Gross as a landsman obligation similar to publishing souvenir almanacs or joining a *farayn. Banco Israelita-Polaco*, for its part, promised to be the most reliable institution for all *poylishe komertsiantes, industrieln* and *talleristn* (Polish merchants, industrialists and workshop owners).<sup>63</sup> Consequently, the landsmanshaftn brought together the Argentine lives of immigrants and their Polish past and forged new subethnic commitments. The shared ethnic background was translated into a discourse and practice of ethnic solidarity.

The establishment of landsmanshaftn was not an easy endeavor. Although it might seem natural that immigrants from the same town decided to join forces and establish an institution of mutual help, the reality in early twentieth century Argentina was far more complex. Immigrants from big urban centers found it hard to start their institutions. Such was the case

<sup>61</sup> Míguez, “Introduction,” XX.

<sup>62</sup> Advertisement, *Almanakh 1924. Ershter zambukh aroysgegeben fun poylish yidisher farayn “agudas ahim,”* ed. Leyb Malach (Buenos Aires, 1924), 30.

<sup>63</sup> Advertisement, *Dos Naye Vort*, July 1933, 8.

with Warsaw, Łódź, Lublin or Lvov and pre-1918 initiatives to form a landsmanshaft were often unsuccessful. Some landsmanshaftn often functioned for only a few years, then went defunct and sometimes reappeared. The relatively late appearance of the landsmanshaftn uniting ex-residents of big Polish cities could be explained by the fact that the newcomers from big urban centers had rarely known each other before coming to Argentina. The situation was different in the case of shtetls and small towns of a few thousand residents. The pre-migration networks might have helped to build the communal, often informal, networks in Argentina. This was the case with Vengrover (from “Węgrów”) Landslayt Farayn, apparently the first hometown society established in Argentina.<sup>64</sup> Spatially broader countrywide landsmanshaftn were founded on the eve or during World War I: Austro-Hungarian in 1913 (transformed into Galitsianer Farband in 1925), Polish in 1916, Bessarabian in 1916.<sup>65</sup>

The landsmanshaftn were not always welcomed by the leaders of other Jewish institutions in Argentina. Struggling for power and the support of Jewish immigrants, other organizations, such as the official Jewish *kehilla* (AMIA from 1949, earlier Hevra Kadisha Ashkenazi), often dismissed landsmanshaftn as parochial and defunct. This echoed the voices of a number of North American Jewish intellectuals, such as Isaac (Yitshok) Rontch, who saw landsmanshaftn as “retarded,” “backward” and not forming a part of the “genuine Jewish community.”<sup>66</sup> Other US Jewish researchers wrote in 1939 that “instead of becoming a power that they easily might become in Jewish communal life, both here and abroad, these societies cling to needless isolation.”<sup>67</sup> Hasia Diner argued that the conflicts between landsmanshaftn and other institutions were fostering an ideological competition between various generations of Jews.<sup>68</sup>

According to the landslayt, the emphasis given to a distinct Polish origin was not intended to exclude non-Polish Jews. As Argentine landsman Meier Iagodinsky put it in 1941, “highlighting Polishness was not meant to draw borders, but to emphasize our contribution to

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<sup>64</sup> The Vengrover Farayn was established in 1906/1907, later it went defunct and was re-established in 1925. Pedro Chapow, “40 yor gezeshaflekhe tetigkayt fun di vengrover,” *Yuvl oysgabe tsu der 15 yoriker gezeshaflekher tetigkayt fun vengrover landslayt farayn in argentine* (Buenos Aires, 1940), 11. Another *vengrover*, Leizer Kochan argued that the first association of Węgrów Jews was formed in 1900 and in fact was the basis for Poylisher Farband “Agudas Ahim”. Leizer Kochan, “Tsu der geshikhte vengrover yidn in argentine,” *Yuvl oysgabe tsu der 15 yoriker gezeshaflekher tetigkayt fun vengrover landslayt farayn in Argentine* (Buenos Aires, 1940).

<sup>65</sup> Szyczacki, “Tsu der geshikhte fun yidishe landslayt-faraynen,” 132-133.

<sup>66</sup> See: I. E. Rontch, “The Present State of The Landsmanshaftn,” *The Jewish Social Service Quarterly* 4 (1939): 15, quoted in Rebecca Kobrin, “When a Jew was a Landsman,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 7, no. 3 (2008): 360. Rontch stood behind the landsmanshaft research group organized within the Federal Writers Project.

<sup>67</sup> The WPA Yiddish Writers' Group Study, *Jewish Hometown Associations*, 27.

<sup>68</sup> Hasia Diner, *Lower East Side Memories: A Jewish Place in America* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 139.



the new land.”<sup>69</sup> According to Marek Turkow, a writer and Jewish activist, the Jews in Poland expected the involvement of Jewish-Polish diasporas in Poland’s internal problems. In Turkow’s view, the landsmanshaftn needed to adjust to new conditions and reality. He suggested that they reinvent themselves from networks of immigrants to subethnic associations with a transnational agenda.<sup>70</sup> Writing in 1937, before his emigration from Poland to Argentina, Turkow stressed that in a period of growing anti-Semitism in Poland, Polish Jews abroad were obliged to build strong and popular organizations that would support Poland’s Jewish community. Turkow demanded both financial and “moral” support, which he understood as exercising external pressure on Polish authorities and local governments. Turkow attempted to bring forward his concepts during his later service in top positions of Argentine Jewish institutions. Despite all their deficiencies, the landsmanshaftn served as an important space where the connection between urban regionalism and Jewish identity was debated, re-imagined and discussed.<sup>71</sup> The landsman organizations were a space where the self-understanding of the Jewish-Polish immigrants in Argentina was being negotiated. Behind the facade of landsman nostalgias and seemingly unimportant and repetitious community events, the landsmanshaftn sources allow scholars to dig for traces of transnational Jewish engagement and the fluctuating collective and individual identities of the migrants.

## **2. Building a Jewish-Polish Framework: Immigrants in Argentina Respond to a Changing Europe**

The outbreak of the Great War brought insecurity to the Jewish towns and cities of partitioned Poland. As military conflicts in that part of Europe hardly ever left civilian populations intact, Jews correctly linked the impending war with the danger of pogroms, death and famine. These fears were shared not only by those residing in Russian or Austrian Poland, but also by the dispersed Jewish-Polish community worldwide. Those Jewish individuals, who left Poland between the 1890s and 1910s, looked at the developments in their native land with no lesser anxiety.<sup>72</sup> The Great War led to a political reconfiguration in

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<sup>69</sup> Meier Iagodinsky, “Di poylish-yidishe landslayt-faraynen un di gezeshaftelekhkayt,” *Poylishe yidn in doyrem amerike*, 223.

<sup>70</sup> Mark Turkow, “Tsi iz noytik a farband fun poylishe yidn?” *Dos Naye Vort*, August-September 1937, 5.

<sup>71</sup> Kobrin, “When a Jew was a Landsman,” 358.

<sup>72</sup> In the case of the US, the Great War, the subsequent destruction of many Jewish towns and numerous pogroms led to increased interest in the situation of Old Europe, including the sentimental and nostalgic attitudes. It was after World War I that the *shtetl* began to be mythologized in the Jewish North American context. See David G. Roskies, “The Shtetl in Jewish Collective Memory,” in his *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 57.

Central Europe. The Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires fell apart, the German *Keiserreich* was over and new nation-states appeared or reappeared on the continent's map. Newly drawn geographical borders signified numerous changes for the former subjects of the fallen empires. In 1918, Poland reemerged in its largely pre-partition borders, becoming a home to almost three million Jews.<sup>73</sup> The rebirth of Poland was accompanied by violent pogroms on the country's eastern borderlands. The Polish-Soviet (1919-1921) and Polish-Ukrainian (1918-1919) wars did not make the situation any easier. In the following years, many Jews decided to leave. Between 1920 and 1925, around 184,000 Jews left Poland, which was equivalent to approximately 40% of the overall emigration and a quadrupled Jewish share of the overall population.<sup>74</sup>

Poland's independence was without a doubt a factor that made emigrants, who left Polish lands before 1918, question their relationship to what was now independent Poland. The developments in his home country probably troubled Yankel Piotrovski, a tailor, an ex-resident of the industrial city of Łódź and founder of "Agudas Ahim" (Union of Brothers), the first Jewish-Polish organization in Argentina. Although it is hard to speculate about the exact motives of Piotrovski and his partners when they founded the "Agudas Ahim," it seems that the chaos of war and the new stabilization of the postwar period transformed the self-understanding of Jewish immigrants in Argentina.<sup>75</sup> They needed to re-conceptualize their attitude to their new-old homeland.<sup>76</sup> The approaches were ambiguous.

Some Polish Jews in Poland and abroad looked with a certain hope towards the newly independent Polish state.<sup>77</sup> Already during the war, in 1916 the Warsaw rabbinate supported the independence of Poland symbolically by taking part in the first legal celebration of the anniversary of the first Polish constitution of 1791.<sup>78</sup> A number of Polish Jews fought on the

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<sup>73</sup> According to the 1921 census, 2,855,318 Jews lived in Poland (10.5% of the general population), whereas in 1931 Jewish population grew to 3,113,933 (9.8% of the general population). Data from: Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 23.

<sup>74</sup> Arie Tartkower, *Emigracja żydowska z Polski* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Narodowościowych, 1939), 44.

<sup>75</sup> In 1935, *Dos Naye Vort*, the journal of the Poylisher Farband, published a quasi-mythological story that linked the establishment of "Agudas Ahim" with the treatment of Piotrovski by Russian Jews. As the journal stated, Piotrovski was refused medical treatment at a Russian "Linat Hatsedek," which later motivated him to build a separate Jewish-Polish organization. "Yankel piotrovski dertseylt a por verter," *Dos Naye Vort*, September 1935, 17.

<sup>76</sup> Compare to reactions of Christian Polish immigrants to the independence of Poland: Halina Florkowska-Frančić and Hieronim Kubiak, eds., *Polonia wobec niepodległości Polski w czasie I wojny światowej* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1977).

<sup>77</sup> These hopes for an improvement of the situation of Jews in Poland were exemplified, for instance, in published excerpts of the Polish democratic constitution of 1921 in the Farband's almanac; *Almanakh 1924*, 49–53.

<sup>78</sup> *1791-3 Maj-1916, uroczysty pochód w Warszawie: Rabinat warszawski ze 105-letnim rabinem Perlmutterem na czele*; photography by Marjan Fuks, Pocz. 20343, National Library in Warsaw.

battlefield for the independence of Poland.<sup>79</sup> After the Polish-Soviet War of 1919-1921, the Jews of East Galicia openly called for remaining in Poland versus land swapping with Soviet Russia.<sup>80</sup> Many believed that the national state of the Poles would be inclusive and respectful of minorities. When in June 1919 Poland signed the so-called Minority Treaty in Versailles, Jewish hopes for a better life in a democratic and liberal country reached their peak. The first months after the Great War were years of enthusiasm and some believed that even those who left would return to Poland.<sup>81</sup> Many dreamed of a free Jewish press, unrestricted Jewish political parties and unions, equality for all the citizens of the republic or even state support for Jewish cultural and educational establishments.<sup>82</sup> Already a day after the declaration of independence, Marshal Józef Piłsudski met a Jewish delegation that shared their hopes, fears and demands with him. *Żagiew*, the “Union of Polish Youth of Jewish Origin,” wrote in November 1918: “Polish Jews! We believe that from this day you will be able to prove with your deeds that you possess undeterred feelings of gratitude and affection to the land that for many centuries nurtured your ancestors [...].”<sup>83</sup> Three months later, during the so-called “Jewish debate” on February 24, 1919, rabbi Perlmutter declared the loyalty of orthodox Jews to the new Polish state and demanded full equality of rights, Jewish religious-cultural autonomy and state support for Jewish establishments.<sup>84</sup> Noah Prilutsky from the Folkist Party accused the government of not combating anti-Semitism and opposed the perception of Jews as a religious minority, demanding a recognition of their national minority status.<sup>85</sup> During the same session, the Zionist Yitshak Grünbaum said the following:

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<sup>79</sup> In 1916, Jews fighting in the Polish Legions called on Jewish youth to join the struggle of the Polish nation. The call was a reminder that only those who would personally fight for Poland could claim the right to full citizenship and emphasized the eight centuries of Polish-Jewish coexistence. Flyer *Do młodzieży żydowskiej! [Inc.:] Gdy wybiła godzina dziejowa dla Narodu Polskiego, gdy zaświtała jutrzienka swobody dla wszystkich mieszkańców ziem polskich bez różnicy stanu i wyznania [...]: Królestwo Polskie. W marcu 1915 r. / Żydzi-Legioniści*; DŻS IA 5 Cim., National Library in Warsaw.

<sup>80</sup> “Mizrah-galitsishe yidn far di feraynikung mit poyln?” *Di Presse*, 22.10.1920, page unknown.

<sup>81</sup> Arie Tartakower, *Emigracja żydowska*, 17-19. See also Tomasz Schramm, “Żydzi wobec odradzania się państwowości polskiej,” in *Przełomy Historii, XVI Powszechny Zjazd Historyków Polskich, Wrocław, 15-19 września 1999*, vol. II, part II (Toruń: Adam Marszałek, 2000), 223-243.

<sup>82</sup> Hopes for a better post-1918 Poland did not mean that Jews wanted to return. In 1919, a year directly after independence, the rate of Jewish re-emigration from the US to Poland was barely 2.5%. It was significantly lower than during the tsarist period (8% between 1908-1912). Among ethnic Poles, the situation was different. In 1919, only around 2,500 immigrated to the US and more than 18,000 came back to Poland. See Jakob Lestschinsky, *National Groups in Polish Emigration* (New York: Conference on Jewish Relations, 1943), 106. Adam Walaszek suggested a higher share of Jewish returns from the US to Poland. They formed 6.6% of all returning citizens between 1920-1923, which translated to 2,683 persons. See Adam Walaszek, *Reemigracja ze Stanów Zjednoczonych do Polski po I Wojnie Światowej* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1983), 38.

<sup>83</sup> A flyer of *Żagiew*, 1918, DU IV P.8[425] Warsaw University Library.

<sup>84</sup> Leopold Halpern, *Polityka żydowska w Sejmie i Senacie Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 1919-1933* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Spraw Narodowościowych, 1933), 9.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*, 9-10.

As citizens of the Polish state, equal in rights and obligations, we wish to work most zealously for the reconstruction of a free, powerful and happy Poland [...] We make up a national minority in Poland. On the day of redemption of oppressed nations, we Jews, also voice our right to independent life. This independence can be reached both by acknowledging our right to Palestine, and by granting us autonomy in the countries of the diaspora [...] Do not rebuff efforts of three million citizens to cooperate in the reconstruction of the Polish state! Give us such living conditions that a Polish Jew anywhere in the world may proudly proclaim [...] ‘I am a Polish citizen and nothing pertaining to the Polish state is foreign to me’ [...].<sup>86</sup>

These developments in Poland were followed with great interest in Argentina. *Yidische Zaitung* enthusiastically reported about the December 1918 conference of Polish Jews that channeled the future actions of Jewish activists in independent Poland.<sup>87</sup> Matias Stoliar of *Yidische Zaitung* argued that in terms of equal status for the Jews of Poland, Jewish national awareness and the democratization of Europe were more important than legal provisions.<sup>88</sup> Some Argentine Poland-born Jews had great expectations regarding the status of Jews in independent Poland. The shared experience of living under tsarist and German oppression, the shared experience of emigration was imagined by some Jews as a guarantee that Jews would be treated well in Poland.<sup>89</sup> Others saw the independence of Poland as a success of Polish nationalism and an example for Jewish national claims. These days were remembered by a member of Poylisher Farband in the following way:

The independence of Poland brought to each of us an internal happiness. We feel and all the time have felt, in spite of all the pain that separates us from Poland, the love of children for their home, from which they were torn away, and all the time are attracted to it [...].<sup>90</sup>

The majority of Argentine Jews feared about the situation of Jews in independent Poland. David Szyszacki of IWO pointed out that after 1918 many Galitsianer Jews in Buenos Aires did not welcome the fall of the Austro-Hungarian empire with joy, especially after the pogrom in Lemberg (Lvov) in which a number of Polish soldiers were involved. Many Galitsianers preferred to see their native Galicia as a part of a multinational empire, rather than subordinate to a Polish Republic.<sup>91</sup> The disappointment with the first months of Polish independence was visible in the letters the immigrants received from Poland. The mother of

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<sup>86</sup> Ibidem, 10.

<sup>87</sup> “Di farkonfernts tsum yidishn kongres in poyln,” *Yidische Zaitung*, undated newspaper clipping, late 1918.

<sup>88</sup> “Di rekht fun di minoriteten. Unzer doppelte befrayung,” *Yidische Zaitung*, undated clipping (around May-July 1919).

<sup>89</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>90</sup> “Di befrayung fun poyln,” *Dos Naye Vort*, September 1935, 20.

<sup>91</sup> Szyszacki, “Tsu der geshikhte fun yidishe landslayt-faraynen,” 134.

Buenos Aires-based Józef Śpiewak wrote a letter full of despair and hopelessness to him and his brother about the situation in her *shtetl* Działoszyce:

My dear children... with all my heart I would love for you to come home for Passover, to find your brides here. But the life of every Jew here is now in danger, I am forced to wish that you will be happy there [in Argentina] and that your eyes will never see this bloody land again.<sup>92</sup>

In 1919, Buenos Aires newspapers reported on the horrendous pogrom in Lvov (73 victims), where the Polish military assisted (or did not oppose) anti-Jewish violence. On another occasion, the Argentine Yiddish press reported on a pogrom in Vilna, where more than 60 Jews were murdered by Polish soldiers.<sup>93</sup> *Yidische Zaitung* also wrote about hundreds of starving Jews.<sup>94</sup> During the Polish-Soviet War, in May 1919, the newspaper wrote about ongoing anti-Semitic agitation in Poland and accused the Polish government of anti-Semitic policies. The daily reported on the pogrom in Pińsk (35 Jews shot by the military) and asked rhetorically: “Is it culture that Poland is bringing to Lithuania? It is a series of pogroms and mass murders that Poland introduces wherever it comes.”<sup>95</sup> The reports on pogroms conveyed a message of distrust and disappointment towards independent Poland. In July 1919 *Yidische Zaitung* wrote bluntly: “Jews live in fear of the Poles.”<sup>96</sup> The Argentine Jewish Committee of Help for War Victims wrote that independent Poland was “a studious disciple of tsarism,” explaining that pogroms against the Jews proved that Poland did not deserve its independence for which many Jewish fighters devoted their lives.<sup>97</sup> Similar attitudes were dominant in Jewish Poland itself. The Zionist politician Yitshak Grünbaum wrote in one of the Polish-language Jewish weeklies: “The Polish people will not stain their hands with Jewish blood shed innocently[...] This belief has been shattered [...] Following the bloody experience in towns of western Galicia, Kielce, Lwów, Lida, Vilna, Mińsk, Częstochowa, Kalisz, Zawiercie, Łódź, and many other towns in now independent and united Poland.”<sup>98</sup>

Jews in Argentina were moved by the painful events in Poland and Ukraine. As the situation in Eastern Europe was supposedly a “thousand times worse than a decade ago,” emigration was often seen as the only solution to improve the situation of the Jews in

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<sup>92</sup> “A brif fun poyln,” *Yidische Zaitung*, undated clipping, July 1919.

<sup>93</sup> “Der protest shtrom gegen di pogromen oyf yidn in poyln,” *Yidische Zaitung*, 2.7.1919, page unknown.

<sup>94</sup> “Hungerlaydn fun di yidn in poyln,” *Yidische Zaitung*, 9.5.1919, page unknown.

<sup>95</sup> “Protesten un yidische prese unterdrikt,” *Yidische Zaitung*, 28.5.1919, page unknown.

<sup>96</sup> “In der yidisher velt,” *Yidische Zaitung*, 6.7.1919, 5.

<sup>97</sup> *Balance General del Comité Central Pro-Victimias Israelitas de la Guerra, desde 1.12.1917 hasta 30.11.1918* (Buenos Aires, 1918), 5.

<sup>98</sup> Yitshak Grünbaum, *Tygodnik Żydowski*, January 1919. Quotation and its translation are taken from the interwar gallery in the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw.

Poland.<sup>99</sup> Jewish journals in Buenos Aires in almost every issue debated emigration possibilities and expected an intensified immigration stream to Argentina. Yet, Argentine Jews were aware that wide segments of the Argentine conservative ruling class were against receiving war refugees, seeing them as carriers of revolutionary thought. The dramatic situation in Europe and the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1919 only strengthened these attitudes.<sup>100</sup> With few options for active help, on July 29, 1919 Argentine Jews organized a mourning and protest ceremony in Buenos Aires. International support against the pogroms was also warmly welcomed in Argentina, such as a proletarian demonstration in London or condemnation of the pogroms in Poland by US president Woodrow Wilson.

## **2.1. Poylisher Farband and Its Relations with the Polish Embassy in Argentina**

The relations between Poylisher Farband and the Polish diplomatic mission in Buenos Aires can serve as a great lens for observing how Polish Jews in Argentina approached the representation of an independent Polish state. The embassy in Buenos Aires was opened in 1922 and Poylisher Farband quickly began regular working meetings with its officials. As the Farband claimed, the Embassy appreciated that Farband represented the entire (as the landslajt claimed) Jewish-Polish community in Argentina and was a reliable partner.<sup>101</sup> Thanks to that, the Farband was supposed to be effective in providing immigrant Polish Jews with much-needed assistance from the embassy.<sup>102</sup> Since its establishment, *Dos Naye Vort*, the official journal of the Farband, was known for its positive attitude towards the Polish state and taking pride in the shared Polish-Jewish past.<sup>103</sup> The leaders of the landsmanshaft often underlined their close and positive relations with the Polish Ambassador to Argentina, Władysław Mazurkiewicz.<sup>104</sup> The activists of Poylisher Farband manifested their belief that a good relationship with Polish authorities was beneficial to the Jewish community both in

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<sup>99</sup> “Der goyrl fun di yidn in mizrah-eyrope,” *Yidische Zaitung*, undated clipping, June 1919.

<sup>100</sup> “Di yidishe imigratsye fun mizrah-eyrope,” *Yidische Zaitung*, undated clipping, July 1919.

<sup>101</sup> That, of course, did not reflect the reality, as most Polish Jews in Argentina were not affiliated with the Poylisher Farband.

<sup>102</sup> *Almanakh 1928*, 11.

<sup>103</sup> *Dos Naye Vort* printed numerous texts about the influence of Jews in the development of Poland, including its struggle for liberation. See, for example, a reprint from the book by Poland’s national hero, Marshal Józef Piłsudski, who praised Jewish participation in the January Uprising of 1863 against Tsarist Russia: Józef Piłsudski, “Der ontayl fun yidn in poylishn opshtand fun 1863,” *Dos Naye Vort*, September 1935, 12.

<sup>104</sup> Władysław Piotr Mazurkiewicz (1887-1963) was the head of the Polish diplomatic mission in Argentina since its establishment in 1922 to 1936. He also represented Poland in Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile and Peru. After returning to Poland, he taught Spanish and Migration Studies at Studium Migracyjno-Kolonialne and was a vice president of the Polish-Latin American Chamber of Commerce. From 1940 to 1945, Mazurkiewicz served as Polish Ambassador to Chile, until he was dismissed from this post following Chile’s recognition of the Polish communist government. In the last decades of his life, he lived in Argentina and Uruguay as an active leader of the local Polish community. Mazurkiewicz died in Montevideo in 1963.

Poland and in Argentina, more than outward criticism of government policies. This stand was proclaimed by Leyb Schussheim, the first chief editor of *Dos Naye Vort*. Schussheim, who was born in Radymno in Galicia in 1878, was a prominent Yiddish journalist and Labor Zionist leader. Before immigrating to Argentina, he worked for Kraków's *Der Yudisher Arbeter* and Vienna's *Wiener Morgenzeitung*. Schussheim left for Argentina in 1926 and worked there for the local *Yidische Zaitung* until his death in 1955. In 1928 Schussheim argued that any "anti-Polish" actions would be harmful to the Jews of Poland and would make it more difficult for the Argentine diaspora to be involved in Jewish-Polish matters:

As an organization of Polish Jews in Argentina that wants to be in a close relationship with its brothers in the *alter heyim*, our Farband [...] is fully loyal to the Polish state and its legal representation [in Argentina]. We don't turn our eyes away from the political situation experienced by our brothers in the *alter heyim* [...] Yet, we don't want to stop believing that Poland is a country of religious tolerance and that, in the end, the reborn Polish Republic will find a way out of all political and economic hardships, and that Poland will fulfill its stately mission of being a home for all its citizens, regardless of differences of religion and nationality.<sup>105</sup>

The main points of this declaration were true for the official policy of the Poylisher Farband for the entire interwar period. On the other hand, the organization reported carefully and with preoccupation about anti-Jewish policies and incidents in Poland, about growing Jewish poverty and problems associated with educational and cultural establishments. During the 1930s the Farband engaged in help-actions for Poland's Jews and protested against the growing anti-Semitism in Poland.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, the Poylisher Farband kept warm relations with the Polish diplomatic mission in Argentina and Polish officials visiting the country. The organization was proud of its attitude. The anniversary publications featured photos from the festive banquets organized for its guests by the Farband.<sup>107</sup> In 1933 the Farband organized a gala dinner for the Marshall of the Polish Senate, Władysław Raczkiewicz, who visited Argentina during his research trip.<sup>108</sup> Since the 1930s the Farband used a trilingual name: in Yiddish, Spanish and Polish. The adoption of a Polish name, *Centralny Związek Żydów Polskich w Argentynie*, emphasized the specifically Polish character of the institution, its good relations with the Polish embassy and served as a possible sign of openness to cooperation with the Polish Catholic community in Argentina. It was also the ability to speak Polish that allowed Farband's leaders to strengthen friendly ties with the Polish ambassador. Speaking

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<sup>105</sup> Reprinted in *Poylishe yidn in doyrem amerike*, 60 from the first (5.10.1928) issue of *Dos Naye Vort*.

<sup>106</sup> In 1938, *Dos Naye Vort* published a letter congratulating Poland on the twentieth anniversary of its independence, *Dos Naye Vort*, November 1938, 9.

<sup>107</sup> "Delegaten farzamlung hayst gut di handlung fun poylishn farband vegen intsident mitn dom polski," *Dos Naye Vort*, August-September 1937, 15.

<sup>108</sup> "Di oyfname funem marshalek in poylish-yidishn farband," *Dos Naye Vort*, August 1933, 4.

Polish and referring to one's Polish background was a strategy used by the Farband for defending and articulating Jewish interests in Poland and abroad.

The representatives of Poylisher Farband were in regular contact with the veteran Polish ambassador in Buenos Aires, Władysław Mazurkiewicz. Through these meetings, they not only manifested their connection with the representatives of the Polish state, but also tried to defend the interests of Polish Jews in Argentina and in Poland. Farband members discussed with the ambassador problems of re-emigration to Poland or the issue of citizenship of those individuals who left Polish lands before 1918.<sup>109</sup> As *Dos Naye Vort* reported, the meetings were usually very friendly and the ambassador “heard their demands with interest and understanding.”<sup>110</sup> Direct relations with Polish officials gave the organization top-level recognition and allowed it to imagine itself as a quasi-embassy of Polish Jewry in Argentina. This echoed the “social prestige-hunger” that was prevalent among many landslayt. Both in Poland and in Argentina there was a number of Jews that saw more benefits to be gained from friendly relations with the Polish state than in straightforward criticism and accusations of anti-Semitism and discriminatory practices.<sup>111</sup>

Despite the landsman efforts, relations with the Polish Embassy and gentile Polish institutions in Argentina were not always smooth. Throughout the 1920s, numerous conflicts arose between the Embassy and the Poylisher Farband. The main source of conflict was the treatment of Jews by the embassy's officials. The Farband claimed that Jews were treated in an arrogant and impolite way, whereas the ambassador dismissed these accusations, explaining that all citizens were treated in the same form. In the late 1930s, following several pogroms in Poland, tensions rose significantly. In 1937 *Dos Naye Vort* reported about complaints surrounding “Dom Polski,” an Argentine organization of Polish Catholics that accused the Poylisher Farband of using the welcome gala for the new Polish consul as an occasion to protest the situation of the Jews in Poland. As “Dom Polski” argued, the intervention of the Poylisher Farband was exaggerated, did not reflect the real situation in

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<sup>109</sup> “Dos gezets vegn farlim di poylisher birgershaft,” *Dos Naye Vort*, May 1938, 6.

<sup>110</sup> *Dos Naye Vort*, May 1931, 22.

<sup>111</sup> The “Polish-patriotism” expressed by Poylisher Farband was not a new Jewish-Argentine invention. Similar attitudes were a strategy characteristic of many Jews living in Poland. A loyalist stand was typical of the leaders of Poland's orthodox Jewry, represented politically by *Agudas Yisroel*. Their press organ, *Dos Yudishe Togblat*, consistently underlined the obligations of Jews towards the state in which they lived, within a framework of *dina hamalkhuta dina* (from Aramaic: “The law of [a given] land is the law”). It was especially visible in the weeks preceding the outbreak of World War II, when the daily called for “solidarity with Poles” and a joint fight against Hitlerism. See Gershon C. Bacon, *The Politics of Tradition: Agudas Yisrael in Poland, 1916-1939* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1996).



Poland and was “impolite.” Afterwards, “Dom Polski” broke all relations with Poylisher Farband.<sup>112</sup>

There were hardly any public spaces that united both Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants from Poland. The only organization that united Christians and Jews was probably the Argentine-Polish Commerce Society (*Argentinish poylishe handels gezelshaft*), founded in 1931. The last names of its officials revealed their gentile and Jewish background: Salomon Diamant was the Society's president and among its members were Leyb Schussheim and Abraham Osterzon from Poylisher Farband.<sup>113</sup> The *Handels Gezelshaft* had its seat in Poylisher Farband, but a few meetings were also organized in the apartment of the Polish ambassador Władysław Mazurkiewicz. The *Gezelshaft* worked on strengthening the ties between Polish and Argentine markets and was focused on promoting the import of Polish textile products. Contacts between Poylisher Farband and Polish Catholic ethnic organizations such as “Dom Polski” (*Casa Polaca*) or “Wolna Polska” (*Polonia Libre*) were scarce. Official events at the Polish embassy were among the few occasions when Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants from Poland could interact. Yet, the reports of the Polish embassy suggest that Poylisher Farband invited both the Ambassador and Polish Christian organizations to celebrate the opening of the Farband’s new headquarters. As the Embassy reported, the gathered guests toasted in Polish and Yiddish: “Long live the harmonious collaboration of those who feel Polish! Long live the friendship between the Polish and Jewish nations! Long live the glorious Polish Republic! Long live President Mościcki! Long live Poland’s liberator and re-builder Marshal Piłsudski!”<sup>114</sup>

## **2.2. Jewish-Polish Brothers: Ethnic Mobilization and the Beginnings of Poylisher Farband**

After 1918 Jews in Poland ceased to be one of the many minorities merged together within multinational empires and found themselves in a new nation-state. In that context, the independence of Poland shattered the old geographies and belongings, while new questions appeared: What does it mean to be a Polish Jew in Argentina? Are Polish Jews different from other Eastern European Jewish newcomers? What is and what should be the relation between those who left Polish lands and the new Polish authorities? After emigration, the common

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<sup>112</sup> “Delegaten farzamlung hayst gut di handlung fun poylishn farband vegen intsident mitn dom polski,” *Dos Naye Vort*, August-September 1937, 15.

<sup>113</sup> “Poylish argentinishe handels gezelshaft,” *Dos Naye Vort*, December 1931, no. 130, 17. Also “Argentinish poylishe handels gezelshaft,” *Dos Naye Vort*, July 1931, 15. It is possible that the chamber of commerce was an entirely Jewish, not Jewish-Catholic, institution.

<sup>114</sup> XX-lecie Związku Żydów Polskich, Departament Konsularny, Wydział Polaków Zagranicą, 1-3, AAN, MSZ, B26751.



War I, which limited contacts with their hometowns and families in Europe.<sup>117</sup> Well aware of the dire situation in war-torn Europe, the landslats wanted to find ways of helping their families and communities in Poland. However, the establishment of a distinct Jewish-Polish relief subcommittee within the general Central Committee for Jewish War Victims (*Tsentral komitet far di yidishe milkhome laydende*) had additional motivations. As Rebecca Kobrin suggested, many Polish Jews aspired “to carve a niche” for themselves within Argentine Jewish society.<sup>118</sup> They did not want to be labeled as *rusos* (Russians), a popular moniker for all Ashkenazi immigrants, who were popularly linked with anarchism and revolutionism.<sup>119</sup> The same happened in Palestine when Russian Jews also occupied a dominant position in the *Yishuv*, defining its society and concepts of Jewish “nationhood.”<sup>120</sup> By emphasizing their distinct Jewish-Polish origins, the founders of *Agudas Ahim* began an emancipatory discussion about subethnic Polish-Jewish immigrant identities. My examination of Jewish-Polish subethnicity questions the often falsely monolithic visions of Argentine Ashkenazi Jews.

The Hebrew name of the newly founded organization marked its link to traditional Jewish charitable institutions like *hevra kadisha*, *linat hatsedek* and *bikur holim*. *Agudas Ahim* was, however, far removed from Jewish orthodoxy. In a photo showing its founders, we see a group of young, fashionably dressed, smoothly shaven men (except for one). Even though no one wore traditional Jewish garb, the members chose to emphasize the religious background of Jewish charity. The organization’s name was quickly lengthened to *Poylish Yidisher Farayn “Agudas Ahim”* (Polish Jewish Union of Brothers).<sup>121</sup> Marking the rising aspirations of association’s leaders, the name was changed to *Poylish Yidisher Farband in Argentine* (in 1925).<sup>122</sup> What might seem like an unimportant change of labels was in fact a sign of a meaningful transformation within the Farband. First of all, some progressive *poylishe*

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<sup>117</sup> The precise date of the establishment of *Agudas Ahim* is uncertain. Its establishment is confused (in landsman publications) with the establishment of their subcommittee of help for war victims in Europe (in 1916). Some sources mention 1.8.1916 as the day of the establishment, others list 1.10.1916.

<sup>118</sup> Kobrin, “When a Jew was a Landsman,” 111.

<sup>119</sup> Opinions regarding the problematic reputation of Polish Jews in Argentina also reached the Polish diplomatic mission in Argentina. In a 1938 note to MSZ in Warsaw, the Embassy stressed that negative opinions about Polish Jews led to a limitation of Poland’s immigration quotas to Argentina. *Notatka w sprawie wartosci migracji zydowskiej z Polski*, AAN, MSZ, 9915, 56-62. An earlier report, from 1931, stated that the bad reputation of Jewish immigrants from Poland also had an influence on the situation of gentile Polish workers, who were sometimes refused employment. The problem of prostitution and accusations of anarchism and communism allegedly discouraged employers. *Emigracja polska w Argentynie*. Sprawozdanie za 1931, 123, AAN, MSZ 9618.

<sup>120</sup> Helman, “Hues of Adjustment,” 55.

<sup>121</sup> This was true for 1924 when the name *Poylish yidisher farayn “Agudas Ahim”* appeared in the organization’s almanac. The words “Poylish yidisher” were added at the very beginning, probably in 1916.

<sup>122</sup> *Poylishe yidn in doyrem amerike*, 83; according to *Dos Naye Vort*, the name “Agudas Ahim” was considered “provincial” in 1925. See “Der ershter president fun poylish-yidishn farband,” *Dos Naye Vort*, September 1935, 25.

hesitated joining an institution with a quasi-religious name.<sup>123</sup> Secondly, it signified that an organization that was previously a classic landsmanshaft, assisting needy members and new immigrants, now sought to become the representative ethnic body of all Polish Jews in Argentina. Farband leaders saw the Poylisher Farband and Argentina's Jewish-Polish community as branches of a worldwide Polish diaspora, and the organization was increasingly interested in underlining its transnational engagement and permanent contact with Jewish Poland and other parts of the Yiddishland.<sup>124</sup>

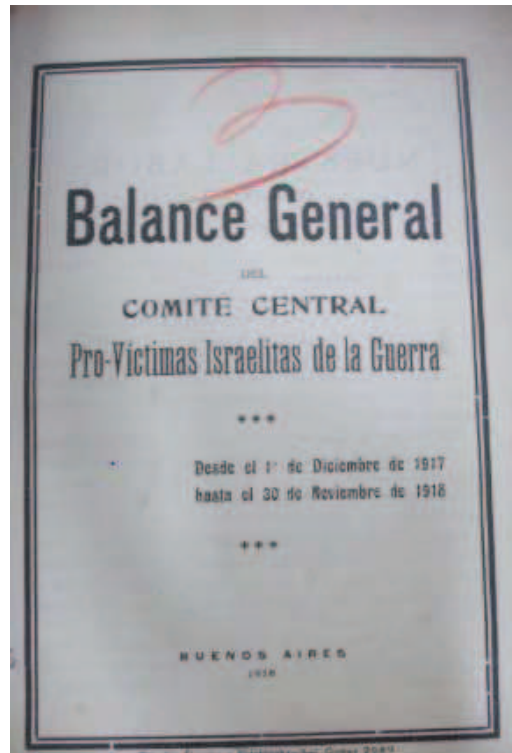


Illustration no. 40. The report of the Central Committee for the Jewish Victims of War, Buenos Aires, 1918.

The founders of the landsmanshaftn, including those of Poylisher Farband, were usually young males who had arrived to Argentina 5-10 years earlier, in the wake of Russia's revolution of 1905. They and many other immigrants belonged to a generation of young blue-collar workers from industrial centers, such as Łódź or Białystok, usually with some partisan and union experience.<sup>125</sup> Emblematic of this generation of immigrants was Abraham Fridman.

<sup>123</sup> "Der nomen," *Almanakh 1925. Tvayter almankh aroysgegeben fun poylish yidishen farband in argentine*, ed. Leib Malach (Buenos Aires, 1925), 10.

<sup>124</sup> A landsman leader, David Aizenberg, used the term "Argentine part of Polish Jewry" to describe the Jewish-Polish community in Argentina, see David Aizenberg, "A virdike matone tsum 20 yubileum fun poylish yidishn farband – di feraynikung fun poylishn yidntum in argentine," *Dos Naye Vort*, September 1935, 10.

<sup>125</sup> See *Belchatow. Memorias de residentes judíos en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Asociación Judeo Argentina de Estudios Históricos, 1986); Fiszal Trybiarz, *Villa Lynch en silencio: Inmigrantes judíos de Bialystok, Belchatow y Lodz y la industria textil* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Milá, 2006); Frank Wolff, "Eastern Europe Abroad: Exploring Actor-Networks in Transnational Movements and Migration History, The Case of the Bund," *International Review of Social History* 57, no. 2 (2012): 229–55.

He was born in 1877 in Lublin, Poland, but as a young man left to industrializing Łódź, where he worked in the textile industry. Fridman, who was close to leftwing *Poaley Tsiyon*, immigrated to Argentina in 1907. In 1916 he was one of the leading figures behind the establishment of *Agudas Ahim* and the landsmanshaft's president of many years.<sup>126</sup> More leftwing immigrants, often convinced of internationalism and the inevitable decline of nationalism, stood aside from the landsman movement.<sup>127</sup> Pinie (Pinye or Pedro) Wald (1886-1966) was a good example of this trend. Born in Tomaszów in central Poland, he moved to Łódź at the age of 13 and became a Bundist activist (the party was then illegal in Russian Poland). In 1906, following the persecution of the 1905 revolutionaries, he left for Argentina. Wald quickly and easily engaged in leftist Jewish politics in Buenos Aires, co-founding the socialist workers' organization *Vanguardia* and writing for the movement's paper *Der Avangard*. In the 1920s, he helped to establish the Argentine branch of YIVO (IWO) and for the rest of his life served as editor of the leftwing Yiddish daily *Di Presse*. Wald never joined the Poylisher Farband, declaring that he felt more Argentine than Polish, yet his journalistic texts often dealt with Jewish-Polish issues, including his engagement in help-campaigns for Bundist schools in Poland.<sup>128</sup>

It was largely the post-1918 immigration wave that gave an impulse to the development of the landsman movement. The Węgrów-landsman recalled that the socio-cultural changes in Poland also had an influence in Argentina. The new secular Yiddish culture was imported by migrants to Argentina, shaping the way that landsmanshaftn functioned. Whereas in New York many landsmanshaftn were initially centered around synagogues and prayer houses, from the very beginning landsmanshaftn had a more ethnic than religious character in Argentina. The *vengrover* landsman Leizer Kochan wrote:

[...] religious sentiments and Hassidic fanaticism have characterized the life of our town [Węgrów]. But the war [World War I] came, and afterwards a new refreshing breath of cultural activities that transformed the *shuln* and hassidic *shtibls* into libraries and secular schools. The traditional lifestyle of a shtetl got a new rhythm, one felt a new air. The youth grew in the spirit of secular culture, with interest in Yiddish literature and with social awareness. This new generation, which for various reasons, but mostly due to economic factors, was forced to emigrate, brought to Argentina cultural and social baggage that had a strong influence on the activities of your Farayn [...].<sup>129</sup>

<sup>126</sup> "Aynike biografishe shtikh fun abraham fridman z'l," *Dos Naye Vort*, March 1937, 1.

<sup>127</sup> In the case of New York, early anarchist and socialist societies opposed subethnic immigrant associations, as both types of institutions struggled for limited financial resources, political power and space. With time, mutual interests were largely recognized and political efforts were conceded. See Helman, "Hues of Adjustment," 50-51 and Daniel Soyer, "Landsmanshaftn and the Jewish Labor Movement," 22-45.

<sup>128</sup> Mollie Lewis Nouwen, *Oy, My Buenos Aires: Jewish Immigrants and the Creation of Argentine National Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), 118-20; Pinie Wald, "Der poylish-yidisher arbeter in argentine. Fun 1901 bis 1941," *Poylishe yidn in doyrem amerike*, 157.

<sup>129</sup> Leizer Kochan, "Tsu der geshikhte vengrover yidn in argentine," 8.

At the same time, the founding of an ethnic organization of Polish Jews was prompted by local Argentine phenomena. The establishment of formal Jewish-Polish representation was also an attempt to free the Jewish-Polish community from what they regarded as a shameful link between the community and Argentina's pimps and prostitutes, many of whom came from Poland. Meir Lerner remembered that when he came to Buenos Aires in 1921, he immediately felt like the "other" and "looked down from above" when he told people he came from Poland. Although he was convinced that there should be no geographical divisions between Jews, he believed that these were the internal dynamics of Buenos Aires Jewry that forced the *poylishes* to form a separate institution.<sup>130</sup> Although the immigrants from Poland constituted only a portion of Buenos Aires's sex underworld, Polish Jews became popularly associated with female trafficking.<sup>131</sup> It might only be a slight exaggeration to say that in early twentieth-century Buenos Aires, to be a *polaca* meant to be a prostitute, and to be a *polaco* meant to be a hustler. Sometimes the derogatory vocabulary was used to refer to Jews as such in general. Isaias Lerner recalled that in the late 1930s this manner of referring to Jews was often transformed into an insult when a *ruso* or *polaco* was embellished with adjectives like *sucio* (dirty).<sup>132</sup> This evoked concerns about the ethnic respectability of Polish Jews that the Poylisher Farband sought to address.

According to president Abraham Fridman, the Poylisher Farband was established in order to separate the respectable Polish Jewry from the "schvartze mishpokhe" ("black family," a Yiddish label for the sex underworld). Fridman lamented that the Jewish-Polish "families of honor" were insulted because of their Polish descent. In this situation, many Buenos Aires Polish Jews welcomed the establishment of Poylisher Farband. It was, as Fridman said, "the

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<sup>130</sup> Meir Lerner, "Di oyfagaben fun poylish-yidishn farband in itstikn moment," *Dos Naye Vort*, Oktober 1933, 3.

<sup>131</sup> As Mir Yarfitz showed, in 1924 Jewish prostitutes constituted 33.3% of all Buenos Aires registered prostitutes. The remaining 30.5% of them were French and 6.4% Italian, see Mir Yarfitz, *Polacos, White Slaves, and Stille Chuppahs: Organized Jewish Prostitution and the Jews of Buenos Aires, 1890-1939* (PhD. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2012), 92. See also the chapter "Not a novice: Prostitutes," in *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880-1955*, ed. Sandra McGee Deutsch (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Mir Yarfitz, "Uprooting the Seeds of Evil: Ezras Noschim, Morality Certificates, and Degenerated Prostitute Mothers in 1930s Buenos Aires," in *The New Jewish Argentina: Facets of Jewish Experience in the Southern Cone*, ed. Adriana Brodsky and Raanan Rein (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 55-80; Donna J. Guy, *Sex & Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family and Nation in Argentina*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991); Elisa Beatriz Cohen de Chervonagura, "Jewish Prostitution and Community Exclusion: Fissures and Undulations Through Testament Writing," *Journal of Jewish Identities* 5, no.1 (2012): 35-53; Yvette Trochon, *Las rutas de Eros: La trata de blancas en el Atlantico Sur: Argentina, Brasil y Uruguay* (Montevideo: Ediciones Sentillana/Taurus, 2006).

<sup>132</sup> Isaias Lerner, "A Half Century Ago: The Jewish Experience in Argentina," in *Identity in Dispersion: Selected Memoirs from Latin American Jews*, ed. Leon Klenicki (Cincinnati: The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of American Jewish Archives, 2000), 60.

first attempt to get rid of the dirt thrown on Polish Jews.”<sup>133</sup> Another Jewish-Polish landsman, Jacobo Pukach, recalled that the landsmanshaftn isolated the pimps and did not allow them to join the landsmanshaft. <sup>134</sup> The statute of the Poylisher Farband precisely required a good moral standing and “unmoral occupation” led to exclusion from the association.<sup>135</sup> At the beginning of the century, membership in a landsman organization was imagined as a guarantee of honesty and a symbolic defense shield of Polish Jews in Argentina.<sup>136</sup>

The foundation of the Poylisher Farband was to some extent successful in establishing a barrier between those involved in the sex underworld and the presumably honest rest of the immigrants. Félix Hershkovich, Farband's president in 1928, wrote that it was absurd to continue repeating the same story of Polish Jews involved in female trafficking.<sup>137</sup> He saw more than a decade of benevolent and honest activities of the Farband as sufficient proof of the virtue and integrity of Jewish-Polish immigrants. In 1933 an unnamed *poylisher* landsman argued that it was Jews from other regions who in his view formed racist stereotypes about the moral deficiencies of Polish Jews. Anti-Polish sentiments from the side of Bessarabian, Lithuanian or Russian Jews apparently regarded Polish immigrants to be of lower status and devoid of morality. The angry author counter-punched by stating that Polish Jews should be proud of their achievements in Argentina and use them as the basis for developing a positive Jewish-Polish identity in Argentina.<sup>138</sup> Meir Lerner believed that in the mid-1930 the discrimination of Polish Jews decreased, but it was still noticeable.

### 2.3. For a Unified Voice of Polish Jews in Argentina

Poylisher Farband was one of many Jewish-Polish landsmanshaftn active in Argentina. Other important ones included Galitsianer Farband (established in 1925), Bialystoker (1930), Lubliner (1927) and Lemberger (1933). Many societies were ephemeral and were in existence for only a brief period. The number of landsmanshaftn varied, making it virtually impossible to talk about their membership rates.<sup>139</sup> One of the few available sources mentions that in 1942 twenty-six landsmanshaftn operated in Buenos Aires with around 8,000

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<sup>133</sup> Abraham Fridman, “Di grindung fun agudas ahim un vaytere perspektiv,” in *Almanakh 1924*, 14-16. Fridman was then the president of the Farband. See also David Szyszacki, “Agudas ahim and dos poylishe agudas ahim,” *Argentinier IWO Shriftn* 14 (1988): 123-129.

<sup>134</sup> Jacobo Pukach, “Oyfbli un yerida fun landsmanshaftn,” *Argentinier IWO Shriftn* 15 (1989): 69.

<sup>135</sup> “Hoypt punktn fun di statutn,” par. 6, *Almanakh 1924*, 23.

<sup>136</sup> Pedro Chapow, “40 yor gezelshaftelekhete tetigkeyt fun di vengover.”

<sup>137</sup> Felix Hershkovich, “Vos der poylish yidisher farband hot durkhtsufirn un der hov fun poylishe yidn legabey dem zelbn,” *Almanakh 1928*, 14.

<sup>138</sup> “Yo defiando a sus polacas,” *Dos Naye Vort*, September 1933, 3.

<sup>139</sup> Hannah Kliger estimated that in the case of New York every fourth Jewish immigrant belonged to a landsmanshaft. The WPA Yiddish Writers' Group Study, *Jewish Hometown Associations and Family Circles in New York*, I.

members.<sup>140</sup> As Zhitnitsky admitted, the data presented in his article was far from complete. Only a few landsmanshaftn answered the survey conducted by IWO Institute. Another source stated that more than a hundred landsmanshaftn were in existence in the 1930s.<sup>141</sup> Poylisher Farband reported that it had 1,075 male members, while emphasizing that this number was imprecise. *Varshever Yidisher Klub* (Warsaw Jewish Club) alone reported 500 members in 1939. Landmanshaft statistics become even more complicated when we check the data provided by other sources. In its letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, the Polish Embassy in Buenos Aires claimed that in 1937 the membership in Poylisher Farband was as low as 120 persons,<sup>142</sup> whereas *Dos Naye Vort* wrote that in 1932 Poylisher Farband had around 2,000 members, and in 1933 the journal by then wrote about a “few thousand members.”<sup>143</sup> Farband's 1924 almanac listed 232 members; the 1928 issue spoke of more than 400 members. Poylisher Farband and Galitsianer Farband developed the most extensive structures and activities involved in both the process of building Jewish-Argentine life and being engaged in Yiddishland dialogue with and about Jews in Poland. The Argentine Yiddishist Pinie Katz praised Poylisher Farband as a key player in strengthening the *yidishkayt* in Argentina, though in its adapted Argentine version.<sup>144</sup> The members of Poylisher Farband and Galitsianer Farayn form a sample study group that I use to reflect on the place of Polish Jews in Argentina and their transformation into Jewish-Argentines.

When landsmanshaftn and other forms of ethnic voluntary associations grew stronger roots in the new country, their members realized that the relatively small size and fragmentation was an important obstacle. The hundreds of ethnic unions that dotted American and Argentine cities were able to offer basic medical help or to support their members in case of unemployment, but the slightest economic depression endangered their very existence. Smaller societies were usually unable to build long-lasting and successful institutions. Spectacular endeavors, such as building their own hospital or old-age home were out of the scope of small ethnic landsmanshaftn. Yet, owing to landsman separatism and the recognition needs of smaller landsmanshaftn, Poylisher Farband was unable to unite other organizations under its own banner. At the same time, the character of the Buenos Aires Jewish population of the 1930s was changing and calls for building larger ethnic institutions became more and more plausible. First, the flow of new Jewish immigration from Poland dropped from 7,455

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<sup>140</sup> Lazaro Zhitnitsky, “Landsmanshaftn in argentine,” *Argentiner Iwo Shriftn* 3 (1945): 155-161.

<sup>141</sup> “Oyftuen, dergraykhungen un begangene feler fun der landsmanshaftn bevegung in argentine,” *Argentiner IWO Shriftn* 15 (1989): 65-66.

<sup>142</sup> Poselstwo RP w Buenos Aires do MSZ, 13.11.1937, AAN MSZ 11497, 8.

<sup>143</sup> “Poylish yidisher farband in argentine. Zayn entshteyung un entwiklung,” *Dos Naye Vort*, September 1932, 19; “Oyfruf fun der komision direktiva tsu di mitglieder fun farband,” *Dos Naye Vort*, July 1933, 1.

<sup>144</sup> Pinie Katz, “Der sotsyal,” 57.



persons in 1923 to 1,335 in 1932. This was first and foremost the result of the economic crisis in 1929, which led to high unemployment, especially among the immigrant population working in light industry. The administration of José Félix Uriburu, which took power in 1930, imposed additional immigration restrictions.<sup>145</sup> At the same time, the core of landsmanshaft leaders, including that of Poylisher Farband, was becoming increasingly bourgeois and established. Consequently, calls for a strategic change and unification of Polish landsmanshaftn were repeated regularly.

Already in the late 1920s, a group of Polish Jews began to promote the unification of Jewish-Polish landsmanshaftn. The activists aspired to be able to conduct large-scale events, but their efforts to fund an all-Polish Jewish association signified “nationalizing” Jewish-Polish immigrants in Argentina, by suggesting to them the concept of a distinct Jewish-Polish subethnicity. This also came as a result of a presumed discrimination that Polish Jews suffered in general Jewish institutions. Félix Hershkovich, the then president of Poylisher Farband, argued that many powerful Jewish institutions in Buenos Aires ignored the voice of Polish Jews. The *establishment* of a unified Polish body was supposed to end that and to offer Polish Jews the place that they deserved due to their share in the Jewish population.<sup>146</sup> The issue of forming a federation of Polish Jews in Argentina was raised and widely discussed at the beginning of the 1930s. *Dos Naye Vort* published numerous articles calling for the unification of all Jewish-Polish institutions in Argentina. In spring issue of 1932, *Dos Naye Vort* called upon smaller landsmanshaftn to form an “unified body” (*aynhaytlekhe kerpershafft*) around Poylish Farband and stressed that only unified Polish Jews could exercise any influence and become a meaningful actor in Argentine society.<sup>147</sup> As the *poylishe* landslayt claimed, this fragmentation was an impediment to spectacular actions and did not enable any major improvements in the situation of the members. An umbrella organization of Polish Jews would become an institution that would provide its members with a new impulse for development and consequently move the whole Argentine Jewish-Polish community forward. The activists were thinking big, and dreamed of a level of involvement that exceeded the

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<sup>145</sup> Also, the Polish Yiddish press reported on the economic problems in Argentina, discouraging Jews from immigrating there. Poland’s Ambassador in Buenos Aires suggested that the authorities reduce the number of emigration permits given for Argentina, see Mirelman, *En búsqueda de una identidad*, 13-14; Kowalska, “La emigración judía,” 259.

<sup>146</sup> Felix Hershkovich, “Vos der poylish yidisher farband hot durkhtsufirn un der hov fun poylishe yidn legabey dem zelbn,” *Almanakh 1928*, 14-15.

<sup>147</sup> “Far a aynhaytlekhe kerpershafft fun di poylishe yidn in argentine,” *Dos Naye Vort*, May-June 1933, 5.

standard charity help for needy members.<sup>148</sup> As Poylisher Farband's leader David Aizenberg argued in 1935, the Jewish postulates were not heard enough in Argentina and only an influential Polish Jewish organization would be able to voice the interests of the community. Aizenberg complained about the low engagement in the landsman movement and the supposed passivity of Polish Jews, who "accepted world events as if they were falling from the sky."<sup>149</sup>

Following the outbreak of the world economic crisis in 1929, the Argentine landsmanshaftn also experienced difficulties. Many of their members became poorer, others decided to return to Poland, while many *faraynen* and other Jewish social and cultural institutions ceased to exist. Even with the assistance of the landsmanshaftn, a number of Polish Jews were unable to make a decent living in Argentina. Although precise data on re-migration to Poland is largely unavailable, we find information about members who left Argentina in the landsman press. Gad Zaklikowski, a Jewish-Polish writer and teacher, left Argentina in early 1933, after merely half a year in the country. Zaklikowski found it hard to *aynordenen zikh* (adapt, find a source of income). He himself did earn the respect and friendship of many landslayt, and published his texts in *Yidische Zaitung* and *Kundas*, but still decided to return to Poland. The term *aynordnen* had an additional meaning of "being able to integrate oneself, to fit in." It remains unclear whether these were financial or social problems that made Zaklikowski leave Buenos Aires.<sup>150</sup> Natan Fruchter from Lemberger Farayn described the first half of the 1930s as "social stagnation."<sup>151</sup> Answering these ever-growing problems, several big Polish Jewish landsmanshaftn indeed decided to unite and the Federation of Polish Jews in Argentina (*Di federatsye fun poylishye yidn in argentine*) was formed. The institution was officially established on May 29, 1932. It was centered around Poylisher Farband, but also included other sizable landsmanshaftn, like Lubliner Farayn or Galitsianer Farayn. Its founders emphasized that only big organizations had a chance of survival and criticized those *faraynen* that limited themselves to financial projects, rather than investing time and money in cultural activities. The Federation was supposed to balance the economic, social and cultural needs of the landslayt. Ultimately, the internal conflicts and

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<sup>148</sup> Yaakov Muszkat argued in 1939 that the tasks faced by the landsmanshaftn after 1931 were different from the tasks during the earlier era of intensive immigration. He called for the establishment of a strong and united Polish Jewish body that would be in fitting with the new times; Yaakov Muszkat, "Far a fulshtendike faraynikung. Ayn tsentrale organizatsye fun di poylishye yidn," in *Landsmanshaftn. Spetsyele oysgabe fun di tsentrale fun di faraynikte poylish-yidische landsmanshaftn in argentine tsum dritn zid amerikaner tsuzamenfor* (Buenos Aires, 1939), 16–17.

<sup>149</sup> David Aizenberg, "A virdike matone tsum 20 yubileum," 10.

<sup>150</sup> "Gad Zaklikowski," *Dos Naye Vort*, March 1933, 18.

<sup>151</sup> Natan Fruchter, "Gezelshaftlekher shtilshtand," *Ershter Almanakh fun hilfs farayn fun leMBERGER un umgegent* (Buenos Aires, 1934), 12.

problematic power relations led to the dissolution of the *Federatsye*.<sup>152</sup> One of the most difficult tasks that ethnic societies faced was finding ways to control individual self-interest and greed.<sup>153</sup>

The founding of the *Federatsye* was also prompted by similar initiatives among other Polish Jewish diasporic communities. Argentine Jews of Polish origins were in permanent contact not only with their compatriots in Poland, but also with fellow *poylishe* in other emigration countries, chiefly in the United States, Brazil and Uruguay. Some of their initiatives were organized in direct cooperation with the Federation of Polish Jews in America. Soon after the outbreak of World War II, Poylisher Farband used the channels of its US counterpart for sending food and clothes to occupied Poland. But the ties between diasporas existed already before 1939.<sup>154</sup> The activists of Poylisher Farband were involved in discussions concerning the formation of a world organization of Polish Jews and perceived themselves as important and influential global actors.<sup>155</sup> In the 1930s permanent working meetings were also held with the leaders of various South American landsmanshaftn. The organizers of the third congress of Polish Jewish landsmanshaftn in South America, held in Buenos Aires in May 1939, informed all major Jewish centers around the world about their gathering in Argentina. The post-congress publication featured greetings both from the Federation of Polish Jews in America, YIVO Institute in Vilna, Jewish members of the Polish parliament, the World Union of Polish Jews Abroad (*Velt farband fun poylishe yidn in oysland*). By publishing these greetings, the leaders of Poylisher Farband in Argentina again underlined the transnational reality in which Polish Jews lived in the 1930s. Reprinting letters from the US, Poland, Palestine and other countries, they manifested cross-border ties that united or at least were imagined to unite Polish Jews all over the world.<sup>156</sup>

The development of the landsman movement was not always warmly welcomed in Argentina, especially by the acculturationists, but also by left wing internationalist Jewish circles. Founding a specifically Jewish-Polish institution was regarded by some of its adversaries as endangering the project of building a new, specifically Argentine Jewry. Both

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<sup>152</sup> It is unclear how long the Federation was in existence. Certainly a few years later the unification efforts had to be repeated. On November 14, 1937, during the Second Congress of Polish Jewish Landsmanshaftn in South America, the *Tsentrale fun di faraynikte poylish-yidishe landsmanshaftn in argentine* was established, which was probably later identified with the Poylisher Farband as *Tsentral farband fun poylishe yidn in argentine*.

<sup>153</sup> Moya, "Immigrants and Associations: A Global and Historical Perspective," 843.

<sup>154</sup> Poylisher Farband was in permanent official contact with the American Federation of Polish Jews (later American Federation for Polish Jews) founded in 1908 in New York. Both organizations worked together for raising money during the "two (later changed to one) million-dollar campaign," proclaimed at the World Congress of Polish Jews in London in 1935. David Hirsch, "Undzer bashteyer in tsvey milion dolar kampeyn," *Dos Naye Vort*, April 1937, 13.

<sup>155</sup> Volf (Guillermo) Orzech, "Iz noytik a velt farband fun poylishe yidn?" *Dos Naye Vort*, August-September 1937, 9.

<sup>156</sup> The Poylisher Farband initiated regular conferences of South American landsmanshaftn of Polish Jews. The conferences were organized biannually in Buenos Aires (1935, 1937, 1939).

those who opted for quick Jewish inclusion in the Argentine nation and those who supported internationalist positions often saw landslayt as reactionary and isolationists. In 1928 the acculturationist *Mundo Israelita* published an article against the presumed *espíritu localista*, a localist spirit of the landslayt, an allusion to Polish Jews.<sup>157</sup> Its author rejected any significant differences between immigrants from various European countries, and similarly to those who supported the federalization of Jewish-Polish landsmanshaftn, referred to the infeasibility of conducting big scale projects by small landsmanshaftn. He supported the engagement with specific Jewish communities abroad, but only united, as Argentine Jews, rather than as separate Jewish-Polish groupings. He saw the fragmentation as an obstacle in institutional development and as a challenge endangering the formation of Argentine Jewry. This voice was typical for representatives of an earlier immigration wave, who arrived to Argentina as small children or were born there. From their perspective, the Polish Jews arriving in the 1920s were reminder of their own Eastern European roots and of their still unstable position in Argentine society. For many veteran Jews, the landsmanshaftn embodied the ethnic separatism that could hinder their efforts of being seen a part and parcel of Argentine nation.

#### **2.4. A Jewish Word: The Landsman Publications**

The landsman publications proclaimed the landslayt to be a tight-knit and supportive community. Both regular and ephemeral publications allowed Polish Jews in Argentina to come closer to each other, to cooperate, and to imagine themselves as a subethnic community with shared goals and problems. The memory of a home shared by the landslayt was an imaginative repository of otherness that helped to maintain a distinct identity in the new country.<sup>158</sup> The landsman publications were edited by the landslayt themselves. The process of collective writing, selecting and editing articles was also a way of defining the Farband's priorities and marking the community borders. These periodicals stressed the existence and vitality of the landsmanshaftn within Argentina's immigrant population. Jewish-Polish ethnic publications focused primarily on community issues and the situation in Poland. Landslayt's Argentine lives were portrayed in the economic and advertisement section of the journal, where the landsman promoted their businesses and boasted of their financial success. The landsman journals barely touched on general Argentine problems: those were rather covered by the daily press in Spanish and Yiddish.

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<sup>157</sup> "Espíritu localista," *Mundo Israelita*, no. 218, 6.8.1928, 1.

<sup>158</sup> Frank Wolff, "The Home that Never Was: Rethinking Space and Memory in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century," *Historical Social Research* 38, no. 3 (2013): 197-215.

Publishing a journal was seen as a sign of the ethnic success of the landslayt and proof of their high “cultural level.” Following the influx of new Jewish immigrants from Poland in the 1920s, including a number of professional journalists and writers, Polish Jewish landsmanshaftn in Argentina began to publish souvenir journals and more or less regular periodicals. These publications featured classic landsman pieces in which the landslayt expressed their longing for their hometown left behind in Eastern Europe, reprints of texts by famous Yiddish writers and social and political articles about Jewish-Polish problems. By keeping a pulse on the economic and political situation of Jews in Poland, the articles published in landsman periodicals signaled the transnational character of Polish Jewry. The landslayt insisted that one remained a Polish Jew even after immigration to Argentina. The landsman publications nurtured a reading public that sought to navigate a new, diasporic relationship to Poland and to other Polish Yiddish-speaking Jews scattered around the world.<sup>159</sup>

The first publication of the Poylisher Farband that I located, the 1924 almanac, was edited by Leib Malach. This Yiddish poet, playwright and novelist, was not a typical Jewish immigrant, but rather a transnational citizen of the Yiddishland. He would fit in a category of interwar Jewish globetrotters, such as Hirschbein and Nomberg. His literary career already started in Poland, later he traveled widely around Western Europe and the Middle East, settled for a longer period in Argentina, lived in the US for a few years, returned to Poland (probably in 1933) and died young in Paris in 1936. In Argentina Malach served as a co-editor of a popular Yiddish weekly *Far grois un klein* (associated with *Di Presse*).<sup>160</sup> It is unclear why Malach decided to edit the *Almanakh*. It is likely that his fellow Polish landslayt were searching for experienced authors to coordinate the editorial effort. Malach brought with him the charm of success from the Old Country and years of a promising literary career. The same was true with the 1928 almanac of Poylisher Farband, edited by another famous immigrant poet, Moises David Guiser.

The annual almanacs were published by the Farband from 1924 till 1928. Each issue included a wide selection of articles on social problems, Farband’s activities and literary pieces written by the landslayt or reprinted texts by famous Jewish-Polish writers. Some of the texts were expressions of landsman nostalgia about the lost world in Eastern Europe and their rootedness in the Polish social and political context. The 1924 issue featured a poem by Moises David Guiser entitled “Varshe” and an article about Warsaw’s market, “Wołówka.”<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Kobrin, “The Other Polonia,” 110.

<sup>160</sup> Alejandro Dujovne, *Una historia del libro judío. La cultura judía argentina a través de sus editores, libreros, traductores, imprentas y bibliotecas* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2014), 91.

<sup>161</sup> N. Kuper, “Oyf voluvke in varshe,” 86-89; Moises David Guiser, “Varshe,” 64. Both in *Almanakh 1924*.

The 1926 issue included “Poyln,” a narrative poem by Efraim Kleinman that pertained to the dilemmas of a young Polish Jew and Poland’s independence, a biographical article about the popular Polish writer Stefan Żeromski and an article praising the Polish political leader Józef Piłsudski.<sup>162</sup>

The almanacs were a first attempt at writing an ethnic history of the Polish Jews in Argentina. The 1924 almanac included a broad historical section describing the beginning of the Poylisher Farband. The process of joint editing the almanac shaped the framework of the Jewish-Polish community and strengthened its organizational structure. The almanacs celebrated the Argentine reality in which the contributors and readers lived. They included a number of commercial advertisements, showcasing the economic progress of Polish Jews and inviting the landslajt to support each other economically. The Yiddishist ethnic leader Pinie Katz praised the *Almanakh* as a source for exposing the Argentine-Yiddish writing.<sup>163</sup> Also, the editor of the 1928 issue, poet Moises David Guiser, took pride in the fact that most of the included literary texts were written by Argentina-based authors.

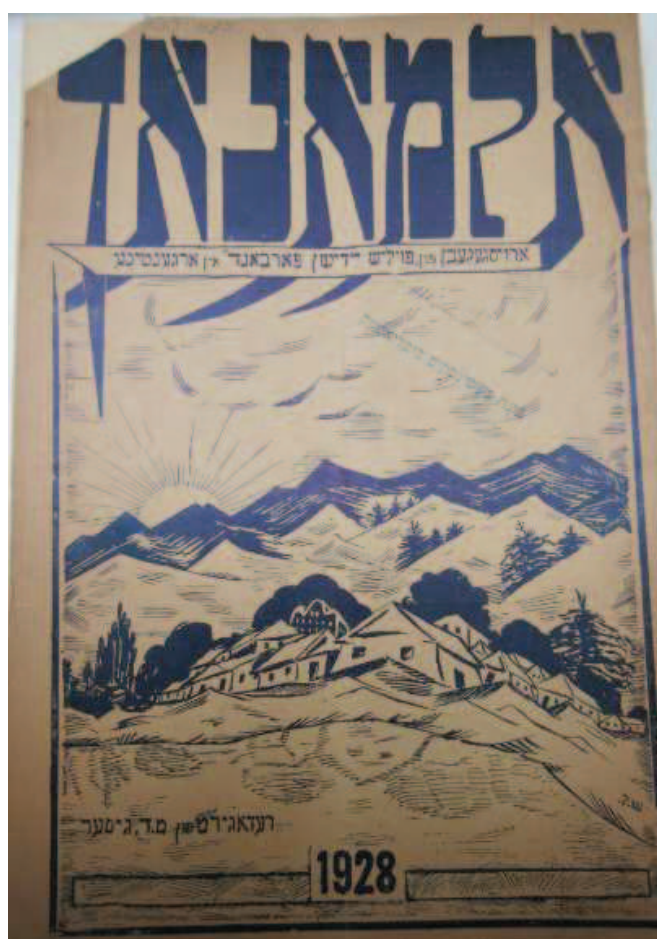


Illustration no. 41. The 1928 almanac of Poylisher Farband.

<sup>162</sup> Efraim Kleiman, “Poyln” in *Almanakh 1926. Driter zamlbukh aroysgegeben fun poylish yidisher farband in argentine* (Buenos Aires, 1926), 54–59.

<sup>163</sup> Pinie Katz, “Der sotsyaler,” 57.

In October 1928, the role of the official press channel of the Poylisher Farband was taken over by a newly established weekly (from March 1931, a monthly) journal *Dos Naye Vort*. The periodical, which appeared for roughly 10 years (with breaks), was sold in around 1,500 copies, and was the main tribune for articulating Polish Jewish interests at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>164</sup> *Dos Naye Vort* was a key tool for uniting and forming a self-aware Polish Jewish community. The journal published articles about political, social and cultural life of Jews in Poland and aspired to defend their interests.<sup>165</sup> Its authors believed that a regular publication would help to develop a strong Polish Jewish identity among the immigrants, or as they would phrase it, would facilitate in “organizing” them. *Dos Naye Vort* was for many years edited by a leftwing leader Mendel Pschepiurka, also active in the Vengrover Farayn, and in the second half of the 1930s by journalist Yosef Horn, recently arrived from Poland. Horn incorporated many issues of general Jewish interest into the journal and attempted to also attract non-landslayt.<sup>166</sup> In the 1920s, the editorial board included engaged and veteran Farband members, like Leybush Weisblat, David Hirsch or Yankev Fridman.

In 1930s Argentina, next to *Dos Naye Vort* there were other more or less regular landsman publications. Most of them began to appear at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s, when the Bialystoker and Lemberger landsmanshaftn were established.<sup>167</sup> In the texts of the smaller hometown societies, we notice fewer political texts than in *Dos Naye Vort*. Town-related landsmanshaftn did not share the cultural-political agenda of Poylisher Farband, which aspired to play a role in the transnational world of Polish Jewry. The Varshaver, Lubliner and Bialystoker landsmanshaftn shared many commonalities with their North American counterparts. Organizing landslayt parties, publishing often nostalgic texts written by their members, the smaller landsmanshaftn focused on comforting their members, who sometimes felt like outsiders in Argentine society. In their publications, the former hometowns were idealized, and as Rebecca Kobrin put it, were imagined as organic Jewish polities and as comforting alternative to their often unpleasant Argentine present. Through their publications, the landslayt not only expressed their yearning for a “more authentic” and “more Jewish” Eastern European hometown, but primarily articulated their sense of shared experience of “exile” in Argentina. In the landsman texts, Poland was often portrayed as very Jewish. A landsman writer Pinchas Bizberg claimed that “Jewishness grew into Polish nature, into the

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<sup>164</sup> Letter from the Polish Embassy in Buenos Aires to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw, 13.11.1931, AAN MSZ 11497, 9.

<sup>165</sup> Volf Orzech, “*Dos Naye Vort*,” *Dos Naye Vort*, January 1937, 4.

<sup>166</sup> Samuel Rollansky, *Dos yidishe gedrukte vort un teater in Argentine* (Buenos Aires, 1941), 119-121.

<sup>167</sup> Apart from the Poylisher Farband, which started to publish regular yearbooks in 1924, the Galitsianer Farband (established in 1925) was one of the first landsmanshaftn to print regular publications.

Polish climate.”<sup>168</sup> As Eastern Europe was becoming more and more distant, landsman organizations embraced a new diasporic identity with Poland as “Eastern European Zion.” The passage of time had overshadowed the motivations that pushed the immigrants to Argentina, while disillusionment with the local conditions of life often mobilized immigrants to imagine Jewish Poland as a better Ashkenazi Zion.



Illustration no. 42. The cover of *Dos Naye Vort* from May 1931.

This longing for the hometown that the immigrants had left behind was expressed in landsman poetry. The 1924 almanac of Poylisher Farband featured a poem entitled “Copernicus” written by Y.L. Kalushiner and “Varshe” by Moïses David Guiser. Both texts were expressions of longing for Warsaw, but their authors had different backgrounds. Guiser was not a simple landsman, but a well-known member of the Buenos Aires’s literary scene. He immigrated to Argentina in 1923, and prior to that he was a member of Yiddish avant-garde literary circles of Warsaw. Kalushiner was probably one of numerous landslayt, who contributed non-professional pieces. Kalushiner nostalgically recalled the monument of the

<sup>168</sup> Pinchas Bizberg, “Poylishe yidn in der heym, poylishe yidn in der fremd,” in *Poylishe yidn in doyrem amerike*, 195–202.



great astronomer Copernicus located in downtown Warsaw, whereas Guiser discussed the centuries-long history of the city, mentioned its emblem (the mermaid) and proudly discussed the city's heroism and suffering during numerous wars. By including both professional and amateur authors, the landsman almanacs formed a mix of popular and high Yiddish culture in a diaspora that shared the same sources: devotion to *yidishkayt* and nostalgia for the Eastern European *heyms*.

Publishing not only amateur texts written by the *amkho* (common people), but also pieces by popular Polish Yiddish authors, the landslayt emphasized their pride of the descendants of Jewish Poland, which they imagined as a key center of modern Yiddish culture. Texts by Nomberg, Schneiderman, or Warszawski presented Farband members as a "high society" well-read in Yiddish literature and remaining in permanent cultural dialogue with its Polish creators. By reprinting texts by successful Yiddish writers, the landslayt argued that geographical borders and migration did not separate Polish Jews scattered around the world. The printed word was a space that allowed them to reconnect with their native country. Writing, publishing and reading landsman publications was a process of collective reaffirmation of memory of the past. Their past in Jewish Poland was used as a basis for building an ethnic community in Argentina and imagining it as a part of a global community of Polish Jews.

The almanacs and anniversary publications served as a platform for creating a sense of shared goals among Polish Jews in the Argentine diaspora. The almanacs (1924-1928), followed by *Dos Naye Vort*, represented different stages of this process. The printed media was supposed to convince the landslayt that a shared ethnic origin had an importance in Argentina, too. The culmination of celebrating the Polish Jewish diasporic ethnicity was reached in 1941, when the Poylisher Farband published an almost 500-page memorial book (*Poylisher yidn in doyrem amerike. Zamlbukh tsum 25-yoriken yuvl fun organizirtn poylishin yidntum in argentine, 1916-1941*) commemorating twenty-five years of its existence. The publication established Polish Jews as both involved in the problems of the Old World and successful and devoted Argentines, who wholeheartedly contributed to their new homeland. Even though the foreword of the anniversary volume precisely rejected the presumed accusations of Jewish-Polish isolationism, the publication in fact underlined the presumed uniqueness (in the eyes of the landslayt) of the Jewish-Polish experience in Argentina.<sup>169</sup> The book served both the interest of building a subethnic community centered around a common place of origin and was evidence that the Old World divisions were not relinquished after emigration, or paradoxically, were even strengthened. Despite the fact that many complained

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<sup>169</sup> *Poylisher yidn in doyrem amerike*, 8-9.

about subethnic divisions within Argentine Jewry and as numerous occasion proved that cooperation was possible, the existence of separate subethnic structures responded to the needs of the landslayt: for recognition, social prestige and self-fulfillment.

*Poylishe yidn in doyrem amerike* was published in the midst of the Second World War, but the editorial efforts began much earlier. Consequently, there are few references to life in the ghettos and the war in Europe. Poylisher Farband invited Ignacy Schwartzbart (a parliamentarian associated with the Polish government-in-exile) to comment on the situation of Jews under the German occupation, but the rest of the book barely touched on the new situation.<sup>170</sup> The introduction of the book emphasized the new responsibilities that the war in Europe imposed on Polish Jews in Argentina, and suggested the need for an intensified solidarity and involvement in rebuilding Jewish life after the end of the war.

### **3. A Homey Environment: *Landsmanshaftn* and Argentine Placemaking**

For many immigrants, Jewish-Polish landsmanshaftn were a space of familiarity and intra-group closeness. As was stated in numerous press articles, memoirs and landsman publications, the landsmanshaftn were designed as a space of intimacy and inclusion, where Yiddish could be spoken and the problems of the immigrant Jewish community stood at the very center. A landsman from Ostróg recalled that after a day of hard work, the immigrants felt miserable and meeting a countryman at a landsmanshaft club was their biggest happiness.<sup>171</sup> The landslayt argued that one of their chief goals was to maintain traditional and comfortable social relations in the Old World milieu. In that sense, landsmanshaftn were an important space for Jewish immigrants in their Argentine placemaking.<sup>172</sup>

The national or ethnic kinship that connected the immigrants through their engagement in landsman organizations was transformed into a sense of unity and a sharing of common goals, both in Argentina and in relation to the Old Country. Consequently, landsmanshaftn functioned as spaces and mechanisms of ethnic and regional empowerment. The landsmanshaft organizations were crucial for supplying the newcomers with a basic cultural and psychic stability.<sup>173</sup> Polish Jews, experienced with social and cultural activism in the *alter heyim*, also took up building new Jewish social networks in Argentina. Landslayt

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<sup>170</sup> Ignacy Schwartzbart, "Leyden, kampf un retung fun poylishn yidntum," in *Poylishe yidn in doyrem amerike*, 15-16.

<sup>171</sup> Michl Grines, "In loyf fun zvariantsik yor," *Almanakh fun ostrog-voliner landslayt farayn un umgegent in argentine 1924-1944* (Buenos Aires, 1944), 10.

<sup>172</sup> Weisser, *A Brotherhood of Memory*, 13.

<sup>173</sup> Ibidem.

cultural activities, and attempts to attract the younger generations, were part and parcel of what the activists described as “organizing oneself.” In the eyes of the *landslayt*, it was only by “being organized” and by joining and participating in landsman activities that the heritage of Eastern European Jewry could be continued in Argentina. The *landslayt* believed that they could achieve their economic, social and cultural goals in the new country only if they were “organized” and united. A formal membership in *landsmanshaftn* was less important than active membership via participation. The *kehilla* of Buenos Aires (Hevra Kadisha Ashkenazi), did not appear in *landsmanshaftn* discourse on “ethnic self-organization.” It was probably too general in its scope of activities and membership, as well as often not overly enthusiastic about the Polish newcomers to appear in the eyes of the *landslayt* as a part of the “organizational efforts.”

In my view, the ethnic associations functioned as a platform for articulating shared Jewish ethnic interest, rather than a vaccine against assimilation. The problem of acculturation was discussed by the *landslayt*, and also in the Argentine Jewish press. But the emphasis was placed on preserving one’s own ethnic heritage, finding appropriate ways of transferring it to children, rather than fighting against acculturation to Argentine society. The fears of *landslayt* were strong concerning the decreasing number of Yiddish speakers and about the growing involvement in Argentine society, but there was a certain understanding for the occurring social and linguistic changes. Although many immigrant Jews in Buenos Aires did live in neighborhoods with a big Jewish presence and their life cycles were relatively Jewish-influenced, they never functioned in an exclusively Jewish world.<sup>174</sup> In that sense, I do not agree with Michael R. Weissner who, writing about Jewish immigrants in the US, claimed that the *landsmanshaftn* allowed the immigrants to remain outside of the American mainstream and minimize their encounter with change. Both *Villa Crespo* and *Once* in Buenos Aires were multicultural areas, although very Jewish when compared to other parts of Buenos Aires. In that sense, it allowed them to both articulate their ethnic identity as Jews and to “breathe in” the *argentinidad*.

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<sup>174</sup> The districts with the highest concentration of Jewish residents were *Once*, where 27.5% residents were Jewish, and *Villa Crespo* (*San Bernardo*), which was 16.5% Jewish and at the same time home to 20% of the city’s total Jewish population (120,195 in 1936). Data according to: Mirelman, *En búsqueda de una identidad*, 42–43. With almost 24,000 mostly foreign born Jewish residents, *Villa Crespo* was labeled by Argentine Jewish demographer Lazaro Zhitnitski as the “White Chapel” of Buenos Aires. For additional information on the Jewish population in the city see: Lazaro Zhitnitsky, “Yidn in buenos aires loyt der munitsipaler tseylung fun 1936,” *Argentiner IWO Shriftn* 3 (1945): 5-22; Raanan Rein, *Futbol, Jews and the Making of Argentina* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), chapter “Villa Crespo: The Promised Land,” 71-90.

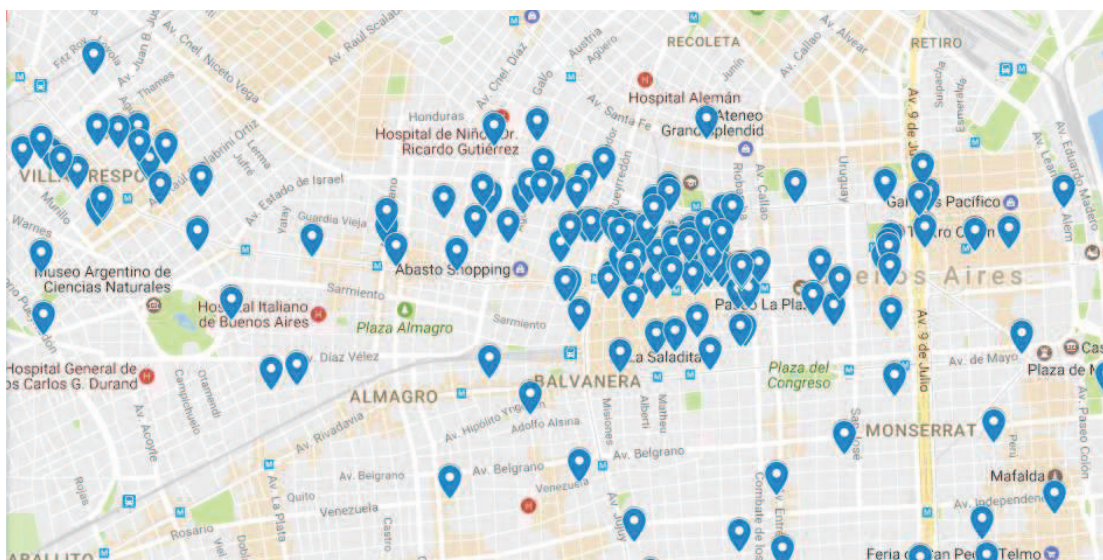


Illustration no. 43. Members of Poylish Farband according to their place of residence in Buenos Aires, 1928. Based on the addresses published in the 1928 almanac of the Farband. The map shows the concentration of the landslats in *Once*, a growing new center in the west in *Villa Crespo*, as well as some successful individuals who lived in the old core of the city.

The insularity and backwardness that Weisser ascribed to landsmanshaftn are not his only problematic argument. Writing about New York landsmanshaftn, Weisser noted that the landsman societies “were viewed as relics of the past,” claiming that the people who joined them were at the same time “rejecting the larger society and resisted the opportunities of assimilation.” This rather erroneous vision had little to do with Argentine reality. Jewish-Polish landsmanshaftn in Buenos Aires were not afraid of Argentina and its Spanish-speaking population. What is more, the societies themselves eagerly adopted a number of practices and customs characteristic of Spanish-speaking society. Argentine Jews of Polish origin tried to find ways that allowed them to be self-aware “Yiddish” Jews and successful Argentines. When Poylisher Farband inaugurated their Mutual Help Committee in 1933, Rene Weksman appeared as a star singer of the gala, described as a queen of “Spanish-Jewish recitation.”<sup>175</sup> To the applause of the gathered public, Weksman recited a Spanish poem by Rubén Darío, “Los motivos del lobo.” Weksman was a member of the women’s section of Poylisher Farband, who appeared at numerous Jewish events, but at the same time was successful in broader Argentine society and was fluent in Spanish literature. Her appearance represented the Jewish-Argentineness that many *poylishe* envisioned for themselves or their children. Another example of Jewish-Argentine spaces can be found in the regular picnics organized by landsmanshaftn, usually in the forests of the *Olivos* neighborhood. At the time, this pastime

<sup>175</sup> “Poylish yidisher farband,” *Dos Naye Vort*, September 1933, 4.

was increasingly common among all segments of Argentine society.<sup>176</sup> However, by organizing exclusively Jewish landsman picnics, immigrant Jews marked the boundaries of their own subethnic community and took care of fostering intra-communal bonds. The picnics allowed them to present themselves as middle-class Argentines, who simultaneously acknowledged the importance of a shared past in Poland and a shared ethno-national belonging.

### **3.1. Landsman Sociability and Making Home in Argentina**

The landsmanshaftn created by immigrants from Polish lands were a space of negotiating and forming transnational, but at the same time very Argentine, Jewish-Polish identities. Although these organizations might have presented themselves as very official and structured bodies, the landsmanshaftn were also a place of intimate discussions and interactions. Polish Jewishness in Argentina was articulated not only during congresses and journals, but also during landsman family parties and picnics that brought together a community that believed in the importance of time spent with fellow Polish Jews. The landsmanshaftn developed an extended system of libraries, youth clubs, women's sections, social and family events and periodicals, which served landslady social and cultural needs or interests. They promoted intra-group interactions and served as spaces offering specific cultural contents unavailable in gentile establishments, but with time became spaces where hyphenated Jewish-Argentineness was negotiated. Following landsman terminology, landsman "salons," libraries and clubs, allowed the patrons to immerse themselves in what was called a "haymische svive," a homey environment.<sup>177</sup> Landsman Borekh Ismach claimed that the atmosphere of familiarity and security that the landsmanshaftn offered helped immigrants to find their place in Argentina and to earn a living independently.<sup>178</sup>

*Haymische svive* is a key term for discussing the emotional meaning of the landsmanshaft for their members. It appeared over and over again in the landsmanshaft brochures inviting guests to events and in texts on Farband's history written by its members. *Haymische svive* was also used as a slogan for recruiting new members. The term defined landsmanshaftn as a space of intimacy and a *sui generis* extension of Eastern European "home." David Szyzacki, a secretary of IWO in the postwar period, recalled that new immigrants often turned to landsmanshaftn in order to talk about people and stories that the

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<sup>176</sup> Nouwen, *Oy, My Buenos Aires*, 90-106.

<sup>177</sup> The same was true for mutualist societies in other parts of the world. See van der Linden, "Introduction," 20.

<sup>178</sup> Borekh Ismach, "Vos hobn landsmanshaftn oyfgeton far di imigrantn in zayere naye heymer," *Argentineer IWO Shriftn* 15 (1989): 68.

landslayt coming from the same town knew.<sup>179</sup> In addition, Abraham Milberg remembered that even though he almost did not know anyone when he first came to the Vengrover Farayn, the conversations about his hometown created an atmosphere of intimacy and “haymishkayt” that allowed him to forget his economic problems.<sup>180</sup> Some opted to come first to the small town-*faraynen*, rather than to associate with bigger institutions like Poylisher Farband or Galitsianer Farband.

For example, *haymische svive* could be found in the headquarters of Poylisher Farband at Junin St. in *Once* neighborhood in Buenos Aires. The organization repeatedly invited new members with a promise of a “homey environment and warm relations.”<sup>181</sup> By “homey” the landslayt probably understood the possibility of spending time chatting in Yiddish with countrymen, playing chess or reading books and newspapers. The first almanac of Poylisher Farband in 1924 clearly pointed out that “every Polish Jew in Argentina should become a member of the Farband,” and those who would not help to establish the Farband “should feel ashamed.”<sup>182</sup> In the Ostrog-Voliner Farayn, everyone contributed something to the landsmanshaft club: some brought cakes, other renovation equipment. An *ostroger* landsman, Haim Glaizer, often gave musical performances.<sup>183</sup> The landsmanshaft “salon” was supposedly especially important for the new immigrants who were longed for a “Jewish book, a Jewish word, a Jewish song.”<sup>184</sup>

Another landsmanshaft, of the *Varshever Yidisher Klub*, described its salon in the following way:

Everyone who visited the Varshever Yiddisher Klub would confirm that the Klub is one big social home, where the members find an intimate, friendly, homey environment. Every evening the club is full with people. Old and young. Everyone finds something for himself. The young ones enjoy their sport games or just chat, others play board games like domino, chess or damka. Dozens of people occupy the reading room, immersed in interesting articles or books.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> David Szyszacki (Szyszatzki), “Tsu der geshikhte fun yidishe landslayt-faraynen in argentine,” 133.

<sup>180</sup> Abraham Milberg, “A por verter tsu unzer hayntigker yuvl,” *Yuvl oysgabe tsu der 15 yoriker gezelshaflekhher tetigkayt fun vengrover landslayt farayn in argentine* (Buenos Aires, 1940), 12.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibidem*, 6.

<sup>182</sup> *Almanakh 1925*, 152.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibidem*, 11.

<sup>184</sup> “Unzer kultur-arbet,” in *Poylishe yidn in doyrem amerike*, 58–59.

<sup>185</sup> “Der Varshever Yidisher Klub,” in *Landsmanshaftn. Spetsyele oysgabe*, 42.



Illustration no. 44. The reading room of Poylisher Farband in 1928, *Dos Naye Vort*, 30.11.1928.

In order to provide their members with cultural subjects, almost every landsmanshaft aspired to have its own *lokal* (landsmanshaft headquarters or club) that would host landsman meetings and serve as an ex-territorial substitute of the Eastern European hometown. Possessing one's own "lokal" was also a sign of the community's prosperity, stability and prestige within the landsman microcosm. Poylisher Farband had its first seat at Junin 447, but the *lokal* turned out to be insufficient for the growing needs and functions of the organizations. Raising money for the new *lokal* for Poylisher Farband in 1924, its leaders called upon all Polish Jews to buy the so-called "bricks" to help build Farband's headquarters. The contribution was seen as a communal and ethnic obligation, and those who refused to support the call were supposed to, again, "feel ashamed."<sup>186</sup> The *lokale* were usually rented in areas densely populated by Jews, like *Once* or *Villa Crespo* in Buenos Aires. For bigger events, more spacious venues needed to be acquired: in 1937 Galitsianer Farayn rented a salon of the *Unión de Tramviarios* to host its dance party.<sup>187</sup> Some of the events were held in theaters, such as *Ombú* or *Excelsior*. Cinema *Cataluña* at *Corrientes St.* even offered discounts for Jewish events.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> *Almanakh 1924*, 152–59.

<sup>187</sup> Flyer, Galitsianer Farband collection, documents no. 1053/82 and 1053/96, IWO Buenos Aires.

<sup>188</sup> *Almanakh 1924*, 110.

The landslayt *lokal* needed to be filled with cultural material. The landsmanshaft leaders highly praised both Jewish high culture and popular cultural events. Poylisher Farband claimed to be the “first on the Jewish street” to sport a bar that quickly became a popular venue. The Farband also had a library and a reading room with newspapers and magazines from Poland, the United States and Palestine. The library included books by Jewish authors, as well as general European literature. The library was supposed to elevate the cultural level of the immigrants, but also to allow them to remain up-to-date with cultural and social life in the *alter heyim*, with which, as the landslayt claimed, every member was strongly connected.<sup>189</sup> The libraries also had a local, Argentine focus. The recently arrived immigrants could learn Spanish in evening courses and everyone could find advice about migration and naturalization problems.<sup>190</sup> Galitsianer Farband had its own drama section that organized private performances of classic Yiddish theater pieces.<sup>191</sup> The Galitsianers regularly organized picnics, *matinéés danzantes* (dancing parties for the youth) and attracted their members with an extended cultural offer.<sup>192</sup>

Being proud of the recent cultural accomplishments of Jews in Poland, Jewish-Polish immigrants in Argentina aspired to imagine themselves as a continuation of this cultural tradition. In 1939 the construction of Central Jewish Library (*Tsentrale Yidische Bibliyotek*, coordinated by IWO) was initiated. Yosef Horn, a recent Yiddish journalist newcomer from Poland, calling for financial support for this initiative, wrote that “the Polish Jews in Argentina will not insult the honor of the cultural traditions of the Old Home.”<sup>193</sup> Access to books and newspapers in Yiddish was especially important for those who did not read Spanish.<sup>194</sup> As Alejandro Dujovne has shown, prior to 1939 most of the books available in Buenos Aires Yiddish libraries and bookstores were published in Poland.<sup>195</sup> For instance, the

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<sup>189</sup> *Almanakh 1928*, 9.

<sup>190</sup> “Poylish yidishn farband in argentine,” in *Landsmanshaftn. Spetsyele oysgabe*, 37-38; “Shpanishe ovnt kursn,” *Dos Naye Vort*, August 1933, 6.

<sup>191</sup> A number of actors from landslayt theaters united in 1928 in a group called “Yung Argentine,” which attained a professional level. Rollansky, *Dos yidische gedrukte*, 248-249. Nehamias Zucker, one of the activists of Galitsianer Farband, was also an important figure on the Argentine Yiddish scene. He established the “Artistishn vinkl” and in the 1930s edited the journal *Teater*. Zucker was also a secretary of *Yidishn artistn un aktyorn farayn* (Union of Jewish Artists and Actors).

<sup>192</sup> Flyer, Galitsianer Farband collection, document no. 43, IWO Buenos Aires.

<sup>193</sup> Y. Horn, “In a mazaldiker sho. Tsu der aktsye far tsentrale yidische bibliyotek in buenos aires,” in *ibid.*, 27. Yosef Horn was a Bundist journalist and writer, who immigrated to Argentina in 1936. He wrote for the local *Yidische Zaitung* and was editor of *Dos Naye Vort*.

<sup>194</sup> Between the 1920s and 1940s, Buenos Aires experienced a significant development of private and public libraries. Many of them were related to immigrant associations, others were cross-national. As Gutiérrez and Romero showed, the functions of the libraries were broad and were part of a process of the “social progress” and “enlightenment” of the working class. See Leandro H. Gutiérrez and Luis Alberto Romero, “Sociedades barriales, bibliotecas populares y cultura de los sectores populares: Buenos Aires 1920-1945,” *Desarrollo Economico* 29, no. 113 (1989): 33-62.

<sup>195</sup> Two private Jewish libraries examined by Dujovne, Biblioteca Vainstoc and Biblioteca Kamenszain, held 50.4% and 37.4% of books published in Poland (between 1910/1912-1938), respectively. Books published in



available books included those by renowned publishers like Kletskin Farlag from Vilna (later Warsaw) or Gitlin (Warsaw).<sup>196</sup> By reading the books imported from Poland, the landslayt participated in the circulation of Yiddish cultural contents between Poland and Argentina. This practice speaks to the deficiencies of the Argentine Yiddish book market, the domination of Old World cultural production in the “colonies of Yiddishland” and the interests and preferences of the landslayt. In landsmanshaftn reading rooms, the international Jewish press was also available. With time, the landsman libraries came to include books in Spanish, and Spanish translations of classic Yiddish texts began to be more available.<sup>197</sup>

Throughout the 1930s, *Kultur-tsender* “Moritz Minkovsky” was the main establishment of Poylisher Farband that served landsman social and cultural needs.<sup>198</sup> The earlier *kultur-sektsye* was transformed into a separate institution named after the famous Jewish-Polish painter Maurycy (Mauricio, Moritz) Minkowski (Minkovsky). In the mid-1920s, it was the future Argentine Yiddishist leader Samuel Rollansky, who coordinated the cultural program of Poylisher Farband.<sup>199</sup> *Centro Minkovsky* organized diverse cultural events that expressed the Argentine needs and preferences of the landslayt and their families. On September 25, 1937, it hosted a “Gran Velada Danzante,” where both younger and older members could dance to “continental jazz” and live music performed by a saxophone quartet. In the same year, the *Centro Minkovsky* purchased ping pong tables that were “enthusiastically welcomed” by members and associates. The *Centro* was also a venue where smaller banquets were hosted. *Centro Minkovsky* also coordinated the library of the Farband that in 1933 had around 300 regular readers.<sup>200</sup> In the late 1930s, *Centro* was Farband’s branch that reached out to the Argentina-born generation. In a 1938 issue of *Dos Naye Vort*, the text about the *Centro* was the only one written in Spanish, the first names of its activists

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Buenos Aires became dominant only after 1939; Alejandro Dujovne, “Buenos Aires en geografía de diáspora judía. Una aproximación desde la producción y circulación transnacional de libros entre 1900 y 1980,” unpublished, available at the website of Nucleo de Estudios Judios (IDES): [http://estudiosjudios.ides.org.ar/files/2012/02/bibliotecas\\_Buenos\\_Aires\\_en\\_la\\_geografia\\_de\\_la\\_diaspora\\_judia.pdf](http://estudiosjudios.ides.org.ar/files/2012/02/bibliotecas_Buenos_Aires_en_la_geografia_de_la_diaspora_judia.pdf), accessed on February 3, 2017.

<sup>196</sup> In 1924, almanac readers were invited to purchase books by the almanac’s editor, Leyb Malach. These included books published by Gitlin Farlag in Warsaw, *Almanakh 1924*, 124. In 1932, an exhibition was organized in Buenos Aires, which showcased Jewish publishing houses from Poland, for example Nayvelt. See: “Vegn der oysshtelung funem yidish bukh,” *Dos Naye Vort*, October 1932, 15.

<sup>197</sup> More information about Spanish translations of Yiddish books can be found in Alejandro Dujovne’s pioneering monograph, *Una historia del libro judío* and in his article, “‘The Books that Should Not Be Missing in Any Jewish Home’: Translation as a Cultural Policy in Argentina, 1919-1938,” in *Marginados y consagrados: Nuevos estudios sobre la vida judía en la Argentina*, ed. Emmanuel Nicolás Kahan et al. (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Lumiere, 2011), 159–77.

<sup>198</sup> Minkovsky-Bibliotek was opened on May 16, 1931. “In farband,” *Dos Naye Vort*, June 1931, 19.

<sup>199</sup> “Poylish-yidisher farband in argentine,” *Yidische Zaitung*, 5.10.1925, page unknown.

<sup>200</sup> “Kultur-tsender M. Minkovsky,” *Dos Naye Vort*, September 1933, 5.

were already typically Argentine rather than Jewish, and those in charge much younger than the Farband's authorities.<sup>201</sup>

In the 1930s *landsmanshaftn* played the role of ethnic social clubs, rather than mutual-help organizations. Most of their leadership achieved relative economic prosperity and belonged or aspired to a middle-class status. Jewish social and cultural life was born out of these middle-class aspirations. Samuel Blutrajt, who in the 1930s was a simple truck driver but in a few years became a *fabricante*, remembered going for regular picnics in a *quinta* (suburban mansion) in Vicente Lopez.<sup>202</sup> As one landsman remembered, the public in Yiddish theaters was composed of butchers, grocers and other merchants who aspired to economic and cultural progress. The evolution of their cultural interests went hand in hand with a higher economic position. The members of the Lemberger Farayn believed that the organization was responsible for "raising the cultural level" of its members.<sup>203</sup> In most of cases, the *landslayt* meant by that popularizing the high Yiddish culture. As many of the Farband members preferred to communicate in Yiddish, and were proud of the revival of Yiddish culture, the cultural offer of the *landsmanshaftn* was seen as a "geystiker heym" (spiritual home) for the immigrants.<sup>204</sup> This home was supposed to be filled with a high-quality *yidishkayt*, be it imported from the Old World or created in Argentina.

The luncheons, tea parties and dance balls organized by landsman organizations, were one of the few occasions where Jewish women and men could interact freely. As the moral ethic of the early twentieth century usually forbade casual interactions between men and women, only working-class women were active on the job market in Argentina. Middle-class Jewish women were usually confined to the home sphere. The landsman events were for them often one of the few spaces where they could socialize. Middle-class Jewish females gladly picked up on these social gatherings, and became their chief organizers and coordinators. The children and youth clubs, regular *té danzantes* (dance tea parties) were the domain of women.<sup>205</sup> Similar developments occurred in broader Argentine society. *Bibliotecas populares*, with their courses and lectures, were geared principally at the women of the neighborhood.<sup>206</sup> In the mid-1930s, *poylishe* women began to claim a more *prominent* role in the Farband. Ofelia Targovnik wrote that both men and women falsely believed that women had less interest in social activism, pointing out that numerous Argentine institutions had women's

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<sup>201</sup> "Centro Cultural y Deportivo M. Minkovsky," *Dos Naye Vort*, May 1938, 12.

<sup>202</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, Archivo de Palabra no. 6, Samuel Blutrajt.

<sup>203</sup> "Landsmanshaftn un zayere oyfagaben," *Ershter Almanakh fun hilfs farayn fun leemberger un umgegent* (Buenos Aires, 1934), 7.

<sup>204</sup> "Unzer kultur-arbet," in *Landsmanshaftn. Spetsyele oysgabe*, 24–25.

<sup>205</sup> Nouwen, *Oy, My Buenos Aires*, 90–98.

<sup>206</sup> Leandro H. Gutiérrez and Luis Alberto Romero, "La construcción de la ciudadanía 1912-1955," 82-89.

sections and claimed that Poylisher Farband should also establish one. She suggested that women could take care of the medical consulting room and assured that Jewish-Polish women were talented, hard-working and willing to contribute to Jewish-Polish community.<sup>207</sup> Her call for democratization and inclusiveness was later openly supported by Farband's president Félix Hershkovich, and a women's section was indeed created and presided over by Ofelia Targovnik.<sup>208</sup> The relative ease with which a women's section was established is somewhat surprising concerning the paternalistic or patriarchal character of other immigrant societies.<sup>209</sup>

In 1920s and 1930s Argentina, there were several other types of semi-public/semi-private spaces, where patrons could speak freely in their native language and eat their favorite foods. The *landsmanshaftn* were similar to *sociedades barriales* that were initially supposed to develop new neighborhoods, but later also focused on raising the cultural level of the working class to build a *ciudadano educado*, an educated citizen. For instance, *Partido Socialista* had 268 *centros criollistas* between 1899-1914, which targeted the immigrant public. In order to do so, the socialists maintained a network of libraries that rose from 46 in 1924 to around 200 in 1947.<sup>210</sup> In the Jewish case, one of the first kinds of this establishment was *Biblioteca Rusa* that opened already in 1905.<sup>211</sup> These might have been landsman clubs, where the members could play chess or dominos, but also less formal establishments, like Bar Palestina, managed by Rosa Weisberg de Feldman, that advertised itself in the landsman press for having the best *comidas israelitas* (Jewish food) in Buenos Aires.<sup>212</sup>

Big *landsmanshaftn*, such as Poylisher Farband, Galitsianer Farband or Lubliner Farband organized regular family dance balls in the winter and picnics in the summer. These regular events were followed by a number of “welcome” or “goodbye” *bailés* organized for visitors from Europe and by banquets organized within the framework of one of the “*akstyes*” (fundraising campaigns). In 1938 Galitsianer Farband organized a *gran camping* in suburban Vicente López. The participants ate beef grilled on *gran parilla criolla*, danced and sang Jewish songs together with a singer named Genia Pasternak. Trying to attract children to the landsman events, the Galitsianer prepared children's games and an athletic show, organized by its youngest members.<sup>213</sup> Fancying Argentine foods and adopting essentially Argentine

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<sup>207</sup> Ofelia Targovnik, “S'iz noytik a damen-komisyey baym farband,” *Dos Naye Vort*, September 1933, 3.

<sup>208</sup> Felix Hershkovich, “A vort vegen a damen-komisyey baym farband,” *Dos Naye Vort*, October 1933, 4.

<sup>209</sup> Bryce, “Paternal Communities,” 220-223.

<sup>210</sup> Leandro H. Gutiérrez and Luis Alberto Romero, “La construcción de la ciudadanía 1912-1955,” 162.

<sup>211</sup> The “Russian Library” was opened on 43 La Paz St. after the first wave of secular, urban immigrants arrived to the city. The library attracted all kinds of socialist-leaning immigrants and sported theater shows, debates and discussions. The library was closed and its book collection was burned in 1910, after the authorities put down the anarcho-socialist groups following the assassination of police chief Ramón Falcon in 1910. See Lewin, *Cómo fue la inmigración judía*, 168.

<sup>212</sup> *Almanakh 1924*, 44.

<sup>213</sup> Flyer, Galitsianer Farband collection, document no. 56, IWO Buenos Aires.

forms of leisure marked the growing sense of *argentinidad* of Jewish immigrants. The landsman outings were both Jewish and Argentine in their form and content and reflected the identitarian changes that the immigrant population experienced.

Dance parties organized by the Poylisher Farband and smaller landsmanshaftn easily combined the Argentine entertainment needs of an aspiring middle class with building a sense of Jewish-Polish subethnicity and helping their Jewish *madre patria* in Eastern Europe. Argentina, similarly to Poland, was experiencing a transition to new forms of tourism and leisure. Since the end of the nineteenth century, horse races were very popular and *porteños* searched for refuge in the green *quintas* on the outskirts of the city or on the beaches of Mar de Plata.<sup>214</sup> Often the outings and entertainment were merged with ethnic activism. When in 1931 money was raised for the Yiddishist TSYSHO schools in Poland, the local fundraising committee in Villa Crespo published a flyer inviting guests to a “big family party” (*groysn familien bal*).<sup>215</sup> The party that took place on October 24, 1931 in “Salon Nordau,” featured games, a beauty contest and a concert of “the best Buenos Aires orchestra.”<sup>216</sup> A similar program was organized for an event on behalf of the same cause in La Plata on August 22, 1931. After the welcome speech of the TSYSHO emissary Boris (Beniamin) Tabaczyński, the patrons enjoyed a comedy evening featuring theater stand-up by M. Auerbach, a show by Misha Schwartz, a violin concert by E. Novarra and songs performed by opera singer Estela Budman.<sup>217</sup>

The program of the La Plata event shows that in the world of Polish Jews in Argentina there was little contradiction between living an Argentine life and remaining committed to Jewish Poland. By raising money for the TSYSHO schools, they acknowledged their responsibility for the *alter heym*, whereas choosing an Argentine, probably of a Spanish origin violin player to perform on the TSYSHO event, La Plata Jews manifested their involvement in the gentile world of Argentina. The same was also true for the events held by Poylisher Farband. The Gran Velada Danzante of 1937 featured both Italian saxophone quartet of Vincente Tagliacozzo and a Jewish jazz quartet Leo Feidman.<sup>218</sup> The combination of Jewish and non-Jewish artists, of European and Yiddishist goals of the TSYSHO action with Argentine entertainment practices, was proof of the heterogeneous and transnational lives of Polish Jews in Argentina.

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<sup>214</sup> See Adrian Gorelik, *La grilla y el parque: Espació publico y cultura urbana en Buenos Aires, 1887-1936* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 2010); Ana Cecchi, *La timba como rito de pasaje. La narrativa del juego en la construcción de la modernidad porteña* (Buenos Aires 1900-1935) (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Biblioteca Nacional, Teseo, 2012).

<sup>215</sup> *Tsentrale yidishe shul organizatsye*, Central Jewish School Organization.

<sup>216</sup> Flyer, TSYSHO campaign materials, document no. 1036/64, IWO Buenos Aires.

<sup>217</sup> Flyer, TSYSHO campaign materials, document no. 1036/6, IWO Buenos Aires.

<sup>218</sup> Invitation, *Dos Naye Vort*, August-September 1937, 16.

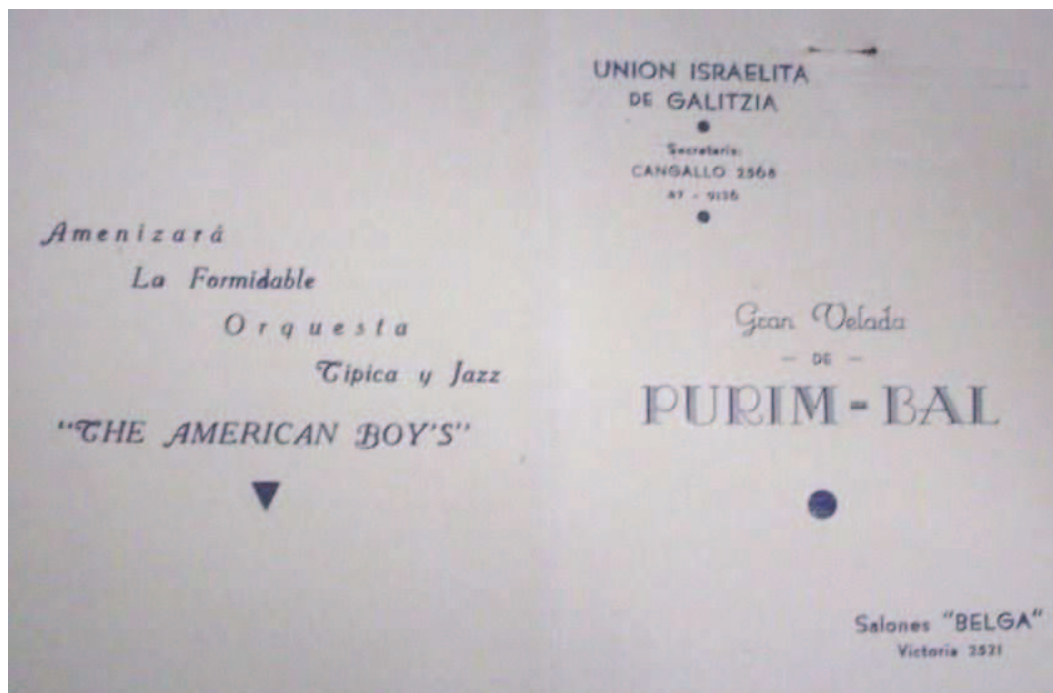
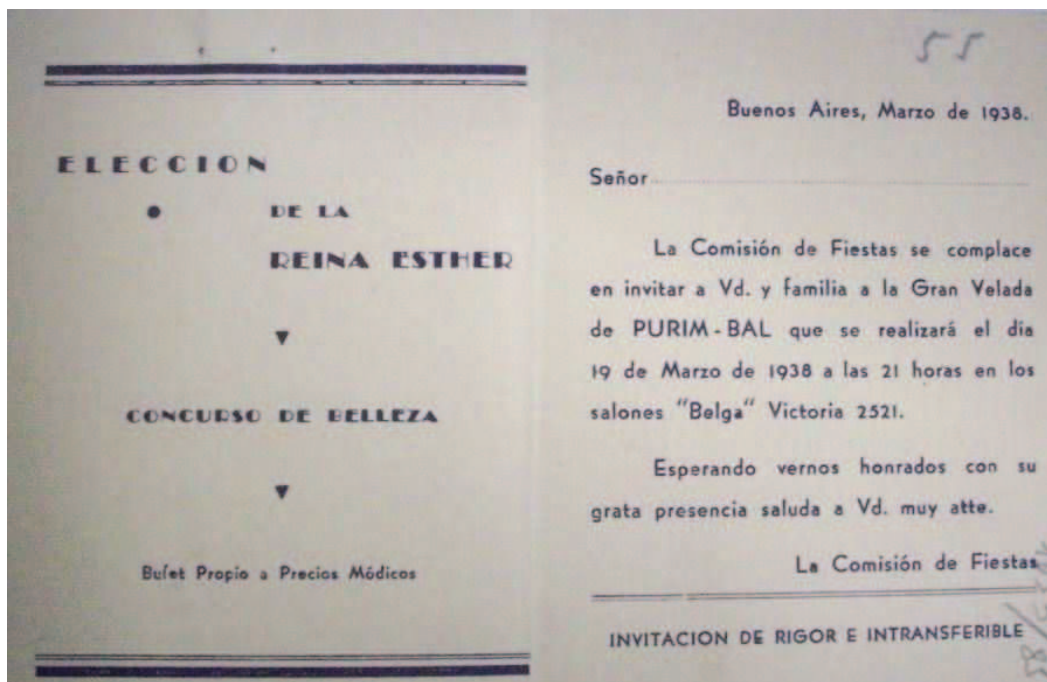


Illustration no. 45. Invitation to a party of Galitsonianer Farband in 1938 (front and back), IWO Buenos Aires.

The landsman entertainment events were always meticulously covered in the landsman publications. Reporting about banquets and picnics, the landslayt were highlighting their middle-class aspirations, if not belonging. In the 1930s, when most of the landsmanshaftn were already far away from the initial mutual help associations, they functioned as Jewish ethnic clubs, frequented mostly by the members of the middle class. This is clearly visible in the photos found in the landsman souvenir journals, where we see fashionably dressed men and women in elegant outfits and hats. In that era, landsman events

became an arena for manifesting one's economic success, belonging to the middle class and recognition of one's (sub)ethnicity. However, the cultural goods on offer at the landsmanshaftn were not appreciated by everyone. In 1939 an anonymous contributor denounced the low level of Jewish culture in Argentina. Complaining about the unwillingness of Argentina's Polish Jews to invest and participate in high culture, he wrote that he envied the Jews in the *alter heym*. According to him, Polish Jews in Argentina had "bread, meat and wine," but were unable to support Jewish cultural establishments.<sup>219</sup> The cultural activities of the Poylisher Farband and smaller landsmanshaftn remained controversial and disputed for most of the interwar years.

A key phrase used in the context of the social and psychological role of the landsman meetings was "oysleben zikh," which roughly translates to "live out," to fulfill one's cultural and social needs. The youth centers and clubs run by the landsmanshaftn were supposed to allow Jewish youth to enjoy their desired cultural activities within a Jewish framework. As a landsman and textile factory owner Simcha Lande wrote, this was especially true about the youngsters who recently came from Poland and searched for the kind of youth and cultural institutions in Argentina that they had known in Poland.<sup>220</sup> According to Lande, the lack of suitable youth institutions led to a "disorganization" of the recently arrived Polish Jewish youth and to its "senility."

In order to attract younger members, Jewish-Polish landsmanshaftn founded youth and/or children's sections. The Galitsianer Farband opened its Youth Circle (*yugent krayz*) in 1932.<sup>221</sup> The establishment invited young *galitsianers* for regular concerts, dance parties with cotillions or singing together. By attracting young people to the landsmanshaftn, the older generation hoped to guarantee the continuation of Eastern European Jewishness. Further, a part of the Jewish youth seemed to support the idea of ethnic youth clubs. I. Singer, a member of Galitsianer *yugent-krayz*, wrote that young galitsianers were in a good situation, because their parents "took care of the cultural needs of the youth" and opened the landsmanshaft.<sup>222</sup> For young Singer, the landsmanshaft was a cultural home "that we missed so much in this country." The activities offered by the Farband were supposedly so attractive that non-galitsianers also joined the Youth Circle. According to Singer, the Circle's offer was much better than the activities in the political youth movements. Another young landsman, Marcos

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<sup>219</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>220</sup> Simcha Lande, "Der poylisher yid in argentine un zayn kultur-arbet," in *Landsmanshaftn. Spetsyele oysgabe*, 23.

<sup>221</sup> Flyer, Galitsianer Farband collection, document no. 1053/83, IWO Buenos Aires.

<sup>222</sup> I. Singer, "Di yugnt in galitsianer farband," *Driter almanakh*, June 1933 (Buenos Aires: Farband fun galitsianer yidn in buenos aires, 1933), 32.

Gottdenker, appreciated the newly formed sport section, which included tennis, dance and football subgroups.<sup>223</sup>

However, as A. Pinsker of Poylisher Farband lamented in 1932, Jewish youth was already “on the path of foreign [meaning Argentine] culture.” He complained that through public schooling young Jews were losing their connection with Jewishness and Yiddish language and culture. Pinsker thought that the landsman initiatives to attract the youth were doomed to fail. The youngsters were establishing their own “argentinized” organizations and cared only for “horse races, football or tango.”<sup>224</sup> These forms of entertainment were becoming typical for Argentine youth in general. The fact that young Jews shared these passions plainly shows that second-generation migrants saw themselves as firmly embedded in Argentine national culture. The landsmanshaftn that incorporated typical Argentine forms of entertainment and leisure, such as dances, picnics or beauty contests, tried to attract the Argentine-born generation to the ethnic Polish-Jewish events. Some landslayt argued that the efforts to attract the youth were inappropriate, because, for example, the program of the events did not fit the interests of the young ones.<sup>225</sup>

The youth clubs of the landsmanshaftn were spaces where Jewish-Argentineness was created and where the new hyphenated identities were conceived. Time has shown that the tango could also be danced in the “salon” of a landsmanshaft. Leon Menin recalled that before the football games of Racing, around 300-400 Jewish youths came for the *kabalat shabbat* ceremony in Avallaneda.<sup>226</sup> The older landslayt of Poylisher Farband and Galitsianer Farayn largely acknowledged these new developments and adjusted the landsman activities to the new times, but still looked with hope towards the recently arrived teenage immigrants from Poland who could in their opinion revive and “re-yiddishize” the community.<sup>227</sup> Yet, for some new immigrants who arrived in the 1920s or 1930s, the landsman picnics and dance parties were seen as activities for the argentinized *señoritas* and their middle-class parents, certainly not for the *grine* immigrants who struggled with making ends meet.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Marcos Gottdenker, “Sport als optsvayg fun galitsianer farband,” *ibidem*.

<sup>224</sup> “Di yidishe yugent un yidishe kultur,” *Dos Naye Vort*, October 1932, 17.

<sup>225</sup> S. R. “Vos hoben di landsmanshaftn oyfgeton far sharias haplitim,” *Argentinier IWO Shriftn* 15 (1989): 76. S. R. argued that the Eastern European Jewish landsmanshaftn did not do enough to attract the youth (in comparison with other ethnic groups).

<sup>226</sup> Centro Mark Turkow, Archivo de Palabra, no. 47 León Menin

<sup>227</sup> “Naye mitglider farn farband,” *Dos Naye Vort*, September 1932, 6.

<sup>228</sup> The new immigrant, who goes to a Jewish-Argentine picnic for the very first time, was pictured by M. Vlodayer in a short story “A Pik nik,” *Penimer un penimlekh*, no. 124, 24.12.1926, 21-22.

#### 4. *Aktsyes, Protest-aktn* and Helping the Old Home

The development of the landsmanshaft movement was influenced not only by the needs of immigrants in Argentina, but also by their attachment and sense of obligation towards the Old Home.<sup>229</sup> The long-lasting war in Europe, the emergence of new nation-states on the ruins of the great empires, the dire situation of the civil population were all an impulse that allowed the immigrants from Polish lands to enter into a discussion about what it means to be a Polish Jew in Argentina. Forming a landsmanshaft was only one of many options available. Some devoted themselves to economic activities, working in or opening workshops and factories, some quickly acculturated and became involved outside of the Jewish immigrant community, others contributed to the development of “organized Polish Jewry in Argentine.” To be “organized” meant to be a part of a landsmanshaft or of any other immigrant institutions. It meant adopting an active stand concerning Jewish-Polish problems and being an ethnically active Polish Jew. Whereas the “non-organized” probably did not consider their Polish Jewishness as a decisive element, the “organized” Polish Jews shared a belief that only by being “organized” could one truly express one’s distinct ethnic identity and ethnic interests. Poylisher Farband aspired to be the main voice of the “organized” Polish Jewry in Argentina, as well as concerning the situation of Jews in Poland. The Argentine landslajt demanded international recognition for the Jewish diaspora in Argentina and presented themselves as ready to get involved in improving the Jewish situation in Poland. This was clearly visible, for instance, in the Poylisher Farband report summarizing the 1935 World Congress of Polish Jewry:

At the Congress, the bridges connected Polish Jews in South America and in other countries. Our delegate, David Hirsch, argued there that the new Polish Jewish *yishevim* are willing and ready to invest all their strength to help our brothers in Poland.<sup>230</sup>

The 1930s were a period that showed that this declaration was indeed implemented in a manifold way. Argentine Jews engaged in a number of causes in Jewish Poland, from educational projects, protesting against anti-Semitism to offering direct financial assistance.<sup>231</sup> Quickly it turned out that Jewish hopes for Poland’s state support for Jewish educational and cultural institutions proved unrealistic. Although interwar Jewish Poland did experience a period of journalistic, social, cultural and political flowering, most of the Jewish population

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<sup>229</sup> A similar discourse was visible among other ethnic communities. Benjamin Bryce argued that German immigrants, in their fundraising efforts, likewise often referred to a sense of honor and solidarity with less fortunate fellow Germans. See Bryce, “Paternal Communities,” 224.

<sup>230</sup> “Tsuzamenfor un kongres fun poylishe yidn,” in *Poylishe yidn in doyrem amerike*, 75–79.

<sup>231</sup> Similar transnational solidarity networks developed between Poland and Palestine. See Nahum Karlinsky, “Jewish Philanthropy and Jewish Credit Cooperatives in Eastern Europe and Palestine up to 1939: A Transnational Phenomenon?” *Journal of Israeli History, Politics, Society and Culture* 28, no.2 (2008): 149-170.



struggled with poverty and economic instability. Even landmark institutions like YIVO in Vilna heavily relied on foreign aid.<sup>232</sup> The Argentine Jewish press and landsmanshaftn kept Polish Jewish immigrants up-to-date about the challenges that faced their “brothers in Poland” (*brider in poyln*), while activists of the Poylisher Farband regularly called for solidarity with the unfortunate and the discriminated,<sup>233</sup> both in the form of financial help (“actions” or fundraising campaigns) and “moral support” (public expressions of empathy, open letters).<sup>234</sup> These transnational solidarity networks had clear ethnic and national goals, but they also served to defend the Jewish position in Argentina. Some campaigns voiced the economic success of Jewish Argentines (and consequently their economic contribution to Argentina). Others (especially those focused on combating anti-Semitism in Poland) showed that Jews stood up for democracy and pluralism both in Poland and in their new Argentine home. Transnational solidarity networks were also characteristic of other diasporic communities and especially visible in times of distress and crisis.<sup>235</sup>

The system of communal engagement and mutual support that the landsmanshaftn previously developed on a mutual help level was exercised on transnational level of “Poland campaigns” in the 1930s. In 1920 the Farband debated sending an envoy to Poland, who would bring the gathered funds and packages to the needy and letters to families.<sup>236</sup> The issue was controversial and some community members criticized the need for such travel.<sup>237</sup> *Di Presse* editors suggested that it was cheaper and wiser to do it via US relief institutions. Yet, the delegation of the Popular Committee for National Help (*Folkskomite far folkshilf*), and delegations from Polish and Ukrainian *farayns*, had additional goals: to mark their responsibility for the welfare of the Jews in the *alter heym* and to boast about their Argentine success. The same was visible during the TSYSHO campaign at the turn of 1927/1928. Polish

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<sup>232</sup> Compare Szyja Bronsztejn's study of Jewish economic life in interwar Poland, Szyja Bronsztejn, *Ludność żydowska w Polsce w okresie międzywojennym (studium statystyczne)* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1963).

<sup>233</sup> Sh. Freilech, “Di tragedye fun 3 milion yidn,” in *Almanakh 1926*, 15-16. In the same volume: Y. Okon, “Di ekonomishe lage fun yidn in poyln,” 9-14; *Dos Naye Vort* published a regular column entitled “Letters from Poland” (Briv fun poyln) or “What’s Going on in Poland” (Vos hert zikh in poyln?), which featured descriptions of the Jewish situation in Poland.

<sup>234</sup> David Aizenberg, “Hilf un solidaritet,” *Dos Naye Vort*, August-September 1937, 13.

<sup>235</sup> Uzi Rebhun and Lilach Lev Ari, *American Israelis: Migration, Transnationalism, and Diasporic Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 10-12.

<sup>236</sup> It is unclear if Poylisher Farband sent an envoy to Poland. *Di Presse* from (“In poylish yidishen agudas ahim,” *Di Presse*, 24.10.1920, 5) wrote about a meeting of the Farayn, in which delegate who would travel to Poland was supposed to be chosen. Some ethnic activists, like Marcos Regalsky, believed that Argentine Jews themselves were unable to coordinate the help action. See Marcos Regalsky, “Tsum ershtn hilfs-tsuzamenfor in argentine,” *Tsvishn zvey velt milkhomes. Di goyrl yorn 1918-1945* (Buenos Aires, 1946), 402-403. First published on May 1, 1920.

<sup>237</sup> “Vegn di delegatsyes keyn mizrah eyrope,” *Di Presse*, 18.11.1920, 4.

Farband argued that the money they gathered placed them in the first place among the collaborating institutions, including those with much bigger budgets.<sup>238</sup>

The support for the Jews of Poland was based on a system of individual and collective solidarity. The work of the landslayt was exclusively voluntary and not remunerated. The members built their sense of pride on ethnic involvement and working “for the cause.” The benevolent functionaries of the landsmanshaftn were praised in the landsmanshaftn and at cultural or social events. This was true both for internal engagement in Argentina and for the assistance offered the Jews in Poland. The landslayt from Węgrów were proud that many of their members served in top positions or founded the key general Jewish institutions, like *Beit Yetomim* or League Against Tuberculosis.<sup>239</sup> Argentine landsmanshaftn and the local Jewish press seemed to agree that voluntary work for the community should be respected and given credit for. The words of gratitude for those who financially supported the acquisition of new books for a Yiddish library or co-organized a picnic for fellow landslayt, were almost obligatory. Consequently, remuneration for community involvement was communal prestige. This mechanism was not without its critics. Pinie Katz argued that Jewish merchants and professionals treated their social activities within the Jewish realm as an addition to their career and were not motivated by the importance of the cause or by benevolence.<sup>240</sup> Appreciation for efforts of the individuals and institutions supporting the fundraising was no less important than the financial outcome. The “celebration of achievement,” as Michael Humphrey put it, that was performed during the campaigns, was not just a question of personal pride for a fundraiser, but a demand for the social recognition of these achievements.<sup>241</sup> Words of appreciation published in the community media, often together with precise information about the donated funds, raised the individual and the collective prestige.

Oftentimes the organizers of charity campaigns applied pressure to individuals and Jewish institutions. Insufficient financial support or low turnout at events, such as anniversaries of famous Yiddish writers and farewell dinners for those departing to Europe, were often publicly condemned in the community press. When only a small number of landslayt joined an event commemorating the sixtieth birthday of Peretz Hirschbein, Nehemías Fruchter blatantly condemned the landsman leaders who ignored the celebration.<sup>242</sup> Public expressions

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<sup>238</sup> *Almanakh 1928*, 11.

<sup>239</sup> Leizer Kochan, “Tsu der geshikhte vengrover yidn in argentine,” 8.

<sup>240</sup> Pinie Katz, “Der sotsyaler,” 55.

<sup>241</sup> Michael Humphrey, “Ethnic History, Nationalism and Transnationalism in Argentine Arab and Jewish Cultures,” *Immigrants & Minorities* 16, no. 1-2 (2010): 167.

<sup>242</sup> Natan Fruchter, “Ver iz shuldik? A nokhvort tsum durkhgefirten peretz hirschbein yovl-akt,” *Di Presse*, 18.10.1941, unknown page; IWO, collection of Hersh Dovid Nomberg Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists in Argentina.

of dissatisfaction were supposed to invoke a feeling of shame and boost the campaign. No one wanted to be publicly condemned and singled out as uninvolved or unengaged with the community. The transparency was also extremely important for the organizers of the support campaigns for Polish Jews. After every “aktsye,” a detailed report was published. It specified not only the overall incomes and outcomes, but even provided information about specific donors or fundraisers. The supporters liked to picture themselves as devoted, generous and altruistic. The reports (*barikhtn*) published by the fundraisers, but also jubilee publications of the *landsmanshaftn*, narrated a story of social ascent and Jewish-Polish and Jewish-Argentine ethnic triumph. They served the immigrants as a platform, showing both their Argentine success and transnational responsibility for brethren in Poland.

The assistance offered to hometowns or institutions in Poland was organized in a twofold way. Small *landsmanshaftn* often were in direct contact with specific institutions in their hometown and sent money directly. *Węgrów Farayn* supported local *Gmilat Hased*, a children summer camp and evening schools run by the Bund and Poaley Tsiyon.<sup>243</sup> Big events, or so-called “aktsyes” (actions), were considered more prestigious, requiring a lot of logistical work and a months-long collection of money throughout all of Argentina. This was visible particularly (but not exclusively) in fundraising for Poland, such as campaigns supporting secular Jewish schools in Poland or one organized for the benefit of YIVO Yiddish Scientific Institute in Vilna. Some campaigns, like the campaign for the victims of floods, were organized individually by Poylisher Farband. In this case, the fundraising was coordinated by Abraham Shimshelevich, Yankev Vengrover and Boris Knobel.<sup>244</sup> Other campaigns were often organized by a broader coalition of Jewish institutions, not only by Polish Jews. Then their activities were marked as “Argentine help” and served as a manifestation of generosity of the entire Argentine Jewry.<sup>245</sup> Yet, the leaders of Poylisher Farband were usually key personas behind the help campaigns. In the late 1930s, Jewish Argentine Social Committee of Help for the Jews in Poland (*Gezelshaftlikher hilfs-komitet le-toyves di yidn in poyln*) was headed by Moisés Elisabetsky, a president of Poylisher Farband and administrated by Boris Knobel and Guillermo (Volf) Orzech, who were also active members of the *landsmanshaft*.<sup>246</sup> The joint efforts to help the Jews in Europe were already initiated during World War I. The Central Committee for the Jewish War Victims (*Tsentral komite far di yidishe milkhome*

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<sup>243</sup>“15 yor tetigkeyt fun vengrover landslayt ferayn,” in *Yuvl oysgabe tsu der 15 yoriker gezelshaftlekher tetigkayt fun vengrover landslayt farayn in Argentine* (Buenos Aires, 1940), 9.

<sup>244</sup> *Poylishe yidn in doyrem amerike*, 69. Yankev Vengrover, Boris Knobel and Gregorio Pachter later served as representatives of the World Union of Polish Jews for South America.

<sup>245</sup> In the campaign call, published in Yiddish and Spanish, we read about “judaísmo argentino” – Argentine Jewry. “A los judios de Argentina,” IWO, help campaign materials 1035/2.

<sup>246</sup> In Spanish: *Comité de las Sociedades Israelitas Argentinas Pro-Ayuda a los Israelitas en Polonia*

laydende), grouped together a number of institutions.<sup>247</sup> A later example of an Argentina-wide campaign was the *One Million Campaign* of 1938. The campaign was supposed to raise one million pesos for the needs of refugees from Germany and Austria, as well as investments in Palestine. The goal was not met (a mere sum of 851,000 pesos), but the money was indeed distributed among different organizations involved abroad (a quarter for *Keren Hayesod*).<sup>248</sup> The *One Million Campaign* allowed the often divided groups – Polish Jews (Poylisher Farband), German Jews (*Hilfsverein Deutsch-sprechender Juden*) and Zionists – to cooperate in a shared cause and underlined the unity of Argentine Jewry. The executive committee included members of Poylisher Farband (Gregorio Pachter, Moisés Elisabetsky and Boris Knobel), but also well-known personas, such as film pioneer Max Glücksman and journalist Marcos Regalsky. Mrs. Schussheim, wife of a former president of the Poylisher Farband, coordinated the collection by the women’s committee.

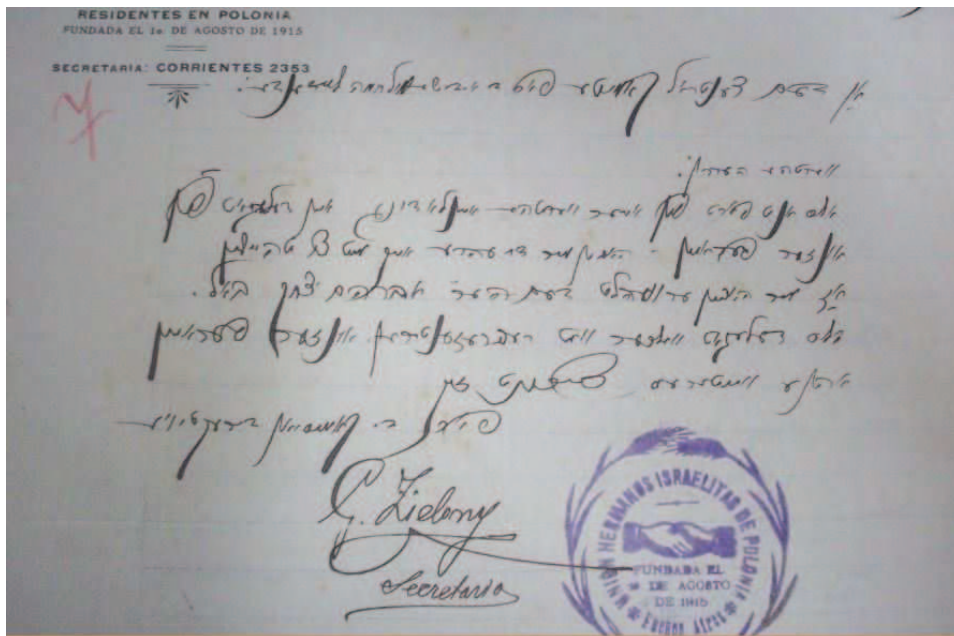


Illustration no. 46. A letter written by Gustavo Zielony, secretary of Poylisher Farband, about joining the Central Committee of the War Victims, c. 1916. Materials of Poylisher Farband, uncatalogued, IWO Institute in Buenos Aires.

The *aktsyes* were usually organized by a relatively narrow group, but targeted the larger Polish Jewish community in Argentina. People who stood behind them were often landsmanshaft members, but many others were Jewish journalists or cultural activists (*kultur-tuers*). Some Yiddishists, like Marcos Regalsky, saw international cooperation “of national-progressive Jews” as the only option, rejecting cooperation with what he regarded as

<sup>247</sup> Poylisher Farband was one of the biggest contributors to the fundraising campaigns of the Committee.

<sup>248</sup> *Memoria de gran campaña del millon en Republica Argentina, 1939*, help-campaigns collection, IWO Buenos Aires.

“assimilationist-bourgeois” charities.<sup>249</sup> Whereas the regular activities of the landsmanshaftn were financed from the monthly dues paid by members, the external involvement, such as organizing help actions for Jews in Poland, required special strategies and additional funding. In order to gain public support, the *aktyes* were broadly advertised in the Yiddish press, especially in the landsman press. Fundraising events often took the form of parties and luncheons, which sometimes included artistic or musical performances. For instance, a 1927 letter from the Help Committee for the Jewish Secular Schools in Poland (*Hilfs-komite far di yidishe veltlekh shuln in poyln*) expressed gratitude to the famous actor, Morris Schwartz, who organized a morning show (*kinsterishn frimorgn*) and donated his income to the TSYSHO schools in Poland.<sup>250</sup>

Throughout the 1920s, before the world economic crisis that also hit the Argentine economy, Polish Jews in Argentina did not perceive the situation in Poland as desperate, and help actions were less advertised and less present in community activities. At the time, Poylisher Farband was not that involved in assisting Jews in Poland and anti-Semitism became more poignant in the late 1930s.<sup>251</sup> The first half of the 1920s was largely a period of mass immigration and assistance to Poland did not reach the importance that it would gain in the coming years. In the 1930s, despite the fact that poverty and unemployment also grew in Argentina, the situation in Poland was perceived as urgent and necessitating help from Jewish-Polish diasporas abroad.<sup>252</sup> Landsman Borekh Ismach recalled that the 1930s were a period of stabilization and a “blooming” of the landsmanshaftn, and the associations were crucial for bringing help to the families living in Poland.<sup>253</sup> The help actions for the Jews in Poland had various specific goals. In 1916 money was raised for the war victims; in the late 1920s, for the hungry Jews in various localities in Poland. At the turn of the 1920s and 1930s, money was collected several times for the TSYSHO schools, which were Poland’s secular-Yiddishist schools. In 1932 Zalmen Reyzen, special envoy from Vilna, helped to

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<sup>249</sup> Marcos Regalsky, “Tsum ershtn hilfs-tsuzamenfor in argentine,” *Tsvishn tsvey velt milkhomes. Di goyrl yorn 1918-1945* (Buenos Aires, 1946), 402-403. First published on May 1, 1920.

<sup>250</sup> Letter from 5.7.1927, no. 1036/14, help-campaigns collection, IWO Buenos Aires.

<sup>251</sup> *Di Presse*, 5.3.1922, 7.3.1922.

<sup>252</sup> For information on anti-Semitism in Poland in the late 1930s, see: Emanuel Melzer, “Antisemitism in the Last Years of the Second Polish Republic,” in *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars*, ed. Yisrael Gutman et al., 126-140; Monika Natkowska, *Numerus clausus, getto lawkowe, numerus nullus, “paragraf aryjski”*: *Antysemitizm na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim 1931-1939* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1999); Victor Alter, *Tsu den yidn frage in poyln* (Warsaw, 1937).

<sup>253</sup> Borekh Ismach, “Oyftuen, dergraykhungen un begangene feler fun der landsmanshaftn bevegung in argentine,” *Argentiner IWO Shrifn*, no. 15, 1989, 70.

develop a fundraising campaign for the YIVO Institute.<sup>254</sup> In 1934 the Farband organized a fundraising campaign for those who suffered as a result of flooding in eastern Poland. In 1937 Farband co-organized a “campaign of constructive help for the Jews of Poland,” when money was raised for establishing artisan and industrial Jewish cooperatives, a future solution to the increasing problem of the boycott of Jewish labor in Poland.<sup>255</sup>

In 1930s Argentina, supporting an *aktsye* was equivalent to supporting Jews in Poland. Local social and cultural leaders worked to establish a sense of responsibility among Polish Jews for the situation of Jews in Poland. It was poignantly visible during the campaigns, when in highly emotional calls the *tuers* (activists) linked financial support for the campaign with being a good Polish Jew. Arguments about shared responsibility for the well-being of Jews in Poland were especially used during the campaigns, but also on a daily basis. The Poland’s problems were often described as “our Argentine Jewish problems.” The campaigners argued for the existence of “closeness” and unity between Polish Jewry worldwide. Emphasizing the diasporic ties between them, campaigners cut across the power of the nation-state.<sup>256</sup> In its propaganda materials, Jews in Poland were called “our brothers and sisters” and these “familial relations” supposedly obliged Polish Jews in Argentina to answer the calls of their impoverished “family members” in Poland. This was evident in 1937 in the Argentine Jewish Campaign for the Jews in Poland (*Argentiner yidishn kampeyn letoyves di yidn in poyln*).

The language used in this campaign by Poylisher Farband was full of emotions. The key argument used by numerous contributors to the special issue of *Dos Naye Vort* concerned the “national debt” that the Argentine Jewish-Polish community was obliged to pay through their financial support for impoverished Polish Jews. This argument was based on a sense of belonging to the same subethnic category of dispersed Polish Jews. Within this paradigm, Poland functioned as a Jewish *madre patria* for Argentine Jews of Polish ancestry. Independently of whether or not they were born there, they were imagined as the symbolic children of Jewish Poland, belonging to the same transnational extended family. Following this reasoning, living in Argentina, a country with broader democratic liberties and relative economic stability, Polish Jews should be responsible for taking care of their “old and weakly mother” (Jewish Poland), torn by the diseases of popular anti-Semitism, economic crisis and

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<sup>254</sup> The report from this campaign was published in Vilnius in 1934: *Argentine un uruguay far dem YIVO. Barikht fun der aktsye far dem yidishn visenshaflekh institut* (Vilna: YIVO 1934). During this campaign, money was raised both for the YIVO in Vilna and for the building of its Argentine branch (transliterated as IWO) opened in 1928 in Buenos Aires. In 1934 a second YIVO campaign was organized in Argentina, with Herts Gilishanski as a delegate.

<sup>255</sup> “Dos Naye Vort,” *Spetsyeler numer gevidmet dem argentinier yidishn kampeyn-komitet letoyves di yidn in poyln*, April 1937.

<sup>256</sup> Gidley, “Diasporic Memory,” 658.

state discrimination.<sup>257</sup> Even though the 1930s in Argentina were a time of short-lived fascist-like upheavals, the Jews of Argentina still enjoyed more freedoms and privileges than those living in Poland.

The slogan of “repaying the national debt” was conspicuous in the April 1937 edition of *Dos Naye Vort*. Moisés Elizabetsky declared that “Argentine Jews need to repay their national debt.” Chaim Brusilovsky, a landsman and an owner of catering business, had a similar attitude: “Helping Jews in Poland is now a national obligation!”<sup>258</sup> Gregorio Pachter, a landsman and successful cashmere merchant, was sure that the “national debt” of Polish Jews in Argentina towards their fellow Polish Jews would be paid off. Wolf Bressler wrote about “our brotherly help for Polish Jewry.”<sup>259</sup> Similar calls for international Jewish solidarity also appeared in the campaigns not focused on Poland. During the *One Million Campaign* in 1938, a similar rhetoric was used. The campaigners talked about the fear and hunger that were prevalent in Europe, about the happy situation of Argentine Jews, who “are not in the hell that Europe recently turned into,” about Germany Jewry whom “Nazi barbarians want to turn into ashes.” Argentine Jews were called to express their brotherly solidarity as they were morally responsible “before history and Judaism.”<sup>260</sup>

#### 4.1. The TSYSHO Campaign and Transnational Solidarity Networks

The TSYSHO campaigns were emblematic of the diasporic engagement of Polish Jews from Argentina.<sup>261</sup> The campaigns were embedded in a vision of a global, committed *yidishkayt* imagined to link together a community of secular, progressive Jews from major diaspora centers, who supported cultural and ethno-national revival in Yiddish. Bundists and other secular leftwing Yiddishists believed that only Yiddish secular schooling could secure the rights of Jews as a national minority and form the basis of modern national and cultural revival in Yiddish. The Bundist vision of the world rejected both the complete assimilation and abstract internationalism by linking progressive and ethno-national messages. The Argentine TSYSHO campaigns reflected the political and social choices of many Yiddish-speaking, secular and usually leftwing Argentine Jews of Polish origin. The intellectual foundation of TSYSHO schools was similar to the educational system that secularist

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<sup>257</sup> A. Schleien, “Unzere pflikhten in dozikh moment,” in *Landsmanshaftn. Spetsyele oysgabe*, 23.

<sup>258</sup> *Dos Naye Vort*, April 1937, 5, 13, 14.

<sup>259</sup> Pachter was then president of Poylish Yidishen Farband. Wolf Bressler, born in Łódź in 1892, was a Yiddishist cultural activist and journalist. Bressler immigrated to Argentina in 1933 and since the mid-1930s was an editor of a popular weekly *Penimer un penimlekh*. In 1944, together with Abraham Mittelberg, Bressler established the publishing house “Idisch.”

<sup>260</sup> “A los Judíos de la Argentina,” flyer, help-campaigns collection, IWO Buenos Aires, document no. 1035/2.

<sup>261</sup> CISZO is a Polish transliteration from Yiddish, TSYSHO is the English transliteration.

Argentine-Yiddishist leaders of Polish origin, such as Pinie Wald or Samuel Rollansky, were trying to push forward Argentina.<sup>262</sup> As Rollansky put it, the schools “transmitted secular-Jewish culture in Eastern European form.”<sup>263</sup> The TSYSHO was founded in Poland in 1921 by Bund and Poaley Tsiyon activists, who wished to strengthen secular Jewish schooling in the Yiddish language, combining it with a socialist ideology. TSYSHO leaders, such as Beynish Mihalevitch or education theoretician Malka Frumkin, saw their school network as a tool for promoting ethno-national Jewish revival, symbolized by the YIVO Institute in Vilna and high Yiddish literary culture. Students in TSYSHO schools learned all secular courses in Yiddish, whereas Polish literature and Poland's history were taught in Polish.<sup>264</sup>

Yiddishist and Bundist values were shared by a number of Jewish-Polish landsman leaders in Argentina. Bundism, as Frank Wolff claimed, developed into a transnational network of socialist activism.<sup>265</sup> Jewish migrants and emissaries visiting Argentina were messengers of Bundist thought into new diaspora countries.<sup>266</sup> Some of them perceived the TSYSHO campaigns as a momentum to start talking about Jewish secular schooling also in Argentina.<sup>267</sup> In the mid-1930s, secular schools modeled on TSYSHO in Poland were established in Argentina. The schools were a place of “lived yidishkayt” and cultural centers rather than simple educational institutions.<sup>268</sup> Supporting TSYSHO campaigns did not only mean backing the cause, but was also a space of experiencing a secular *yidishkayt* that the Bund and other progressive Yiddishist movements envisioned.<sup>269</sup> The campaigns helped to organize Polish Jews in Argentina as a subethnic community, yet allowed those living in Argentina to emancipate as an independent part of Yiddishland. By extending a helping hand

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<sup>262</sup> The supporters of TSYSHO schools came from various groups within progressive Jewry: some were Bundist, others socialist, communist or represented Labor Zionism.

<sup>263</sup> Samuel Rollansky, “100 yor yidishe kolonizatsye un der yishev in argentine,” *Argentiner IWO Shriftn* 15 (1989): 5.

<sup>264</sup> For an extensive look into the Bund's educational policies, see: Jack Jacobs, *Bundist Counterculture in Interwar Poland* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009); Daniel Blatman, “National-Minority Policy, Bundist Social Organizations, and Jewish Women in Interwar Poland,” in *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Zvi Gitelman, (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 54-70.

<sup>265</sup> Frank Wolff, “Eastern Europe Abroad: Exploring Actor-Networks in Transnational Movements and Migration History. The Case of the Bund,” *International Review of Social Sciences* 57 (2012): 236.

<sup>266</sup> For Bundist history in Argentina, see: Nerina Visacovsky, *Argentinos, judíos y camaradas. Tras la utopía socialista* (Buenos Aires: Ed. Biblos, 2015); Israel Laubstein, *Bund: Historia del movimiento obero judío* (Buenos Aires: Memoria Acervo Cultural, 1997).

<sup>267</sup> “Hilfs-kampeyn far di yidishe shuln in poyln,” *Penimer un penimlekh*, no. 145 (1927), 17.

<sup>268</sup> In the 1920s, progressive Jewish schools in Argentina were affiliated with various political movements: Bundism, communism, anarchism and Labor Zionism, combined with differing attitudes to linguistic and social problems. The 1930s brought a structural change and stabilization inspired by the TSYSHO schools in Poland. In 1931/33, the *Gezelshaft far yidish-veltliche shuln in argentine* school was founded, and in 1934 the TSVYSHO (*Tsetrale veltliche yidishe shul organizatsye*), which together educated around 1,000 students. See Frank Wolff, “Als Wilna neben Buenos Aires lag: die Transnationalität jüdischen Lebens am Rio de La Plata, 1904-1939,” in *Migration – Religion – Identität. Aspekte transkultureller Prozesse*, ed. Kerstin Kazzazi et al. (Springer Fachmedien: Wiesbaden, 2016), 53-74.

<sup>269</sup> Wolff, *Neue Welten in der neuen*, 442-443.



to Jews in Poland, those residing in Argentina labeled themselves *folks-kibutz*, a national Jewish subgroup that maintained transnational ties with the Jewish communities in the Old World.<sup>270</sup> The campaigns centered around the Yiddishist enterprise emphasized the “national unity of a diasporic Jewish nation.”<sup>271</sup> By supporting TSYSHO schools or the YIVO Institute, Argentine Jews enscribed themselves into a “Yiddish nation” and perceived their help as an entry criterion to collective prestige within Yiddishland hierarchies.

A good example of a Polish Jew, who transmitted Bundist ideals directly to Argentina, was S. Freilaj (Freilach). Born as Litman Geltman in Międzyrzecz [Mezrich] in Podlasie, Poland in 1898, Freilach served in the Polish army during the Polish-Soviet War. Afterwards he finished the TSYSHO teachers' course in Warsaw and continued to teach in TSYSHO schools. After immigrating to Argentina in 1924, he continued to be active in the cause of Jewish secular schools. When the Zionists and *Haynt* launched a campaign against TSYSHO in Poland, he wrote a sharp article denouncing the Zionists as provocateurs and crazy.<sup>272</sup> Freilach argued that the Zionists always wanted to destroy the very concept of Yiddish secular schooling and described Warsaw's Zionist-backing *Haynt* as reactionary chauvinists. The heated debate concerning TSYSHO schools epitomized the fact that education always stood at the very center of political and cultural struggles that characterized Jewish Poland in the interwar period. Through messengers like Freilach, the issue was internationalized and Zionism was also forced to compete with the Yiddishist progressive movement in Argentina.<sup>273</sup> Freilach's calls were quickly followed by a “proklarmirungs-akt” in support of TSYSHO schools in Poland. On November 5, 1929, various renown figures spoke in *Salon Italia Unida* on Congallo St. in Buenos Aires: the poet Moisés David Guiser, the journalists and activists Lazaro Zhitnitsky and Marcos Regalsky, the Jewish-Polish veteran of the proletarian movement Pinie Wald, while Rita Kiten sang. Regalsky said that despite being a socialist Zionist, he believed that Yiddish Bundist schools were the foundation of Yiddish culture and deserved support and protection.<sup>274</sup> Participants of the event had to pay entrance fees and the income was devoted to the schools in Poland.<sup>275</sup> *Di Presse* wrote that financial support for the secular schools was “ammunition” to defend the [Yiddishist] cultural space

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<sup>270</sup> Aharon Leyb Schussheim, *Tsu der geshikhte fun yidishn yishev in argentine* (Buenos Aires, 1954), 60.

<sup>271</sup> “Dos poylish-argentiner yidntum hot dos vort,” *Dos Naye Vort*, June 1934, 1.

<sup>272</sup> Zionists called for renouncing the subsidies for TSYSHO schools from municipalities and the *kehilla* following the article by Yosef Chmurner in the Bundist *Folks-tsaytung*, where he “improperly” referred to Palestinian riots.

<sup>273</sup> In the same issue of *Di Presse*, the 1929 affair was followed by B. Abramson, who reported on the issue directly from Warsaw. Abramson called the anti-TSYSHO efforts of the Zionists “a pogrom.” See B. Abramson, “A haylike milkhome kegn 20 toysend yidisher kinder,” *Di Presse*, 3.11.1929, 8.

<sup>274</sup> “Der proklamirungs-akt funem hilfs-komitet far yidishe shuln in poyln,” *Di Presse*, 7.11.1929, 6.

<sup>275</sup> “Morgn der proklamirungs akt (...),” *Di Presse*, 4.11.1929, 4.

and to defeat the [Zionist] enemy.<sup>276</sup> The anti-TSYSHO campaign was depicted as a campaign of “assimilators, nationalist Zionists, enemies of the Yiddish national language and Yiddish culture.”

Volf (Guillermo) Orzech, future secretary of the Poylisher Farband, argued that the responsibility of Argentine Jewry for Jewish schooling in Poland was part of a broader program of solidarity between secular Yiddishists worldwide. Orzech was one of the most prominent figures in providing financial assistance to Jews in Poland. He served as secretary of Social Help-Committee to Help the Jews in Poland (*Gezelshaftlikher hilfs-komitet letoyves di yidn in poyln*) and later secretary of Farband's cultural center. In a September 1931 article, Volf Orzech wrote that TSYSHO schools were “a bright point on the clouded horizons” of Jews in Poland. He praised the schools that “continue the fight for a better tomorrow” and “prepared a new generation of physically and spiritually fit Jewish children.”<sup>277</sup> Orzech and other progressive Jewish ethnic leaders feared that the financial collapse of TSYSHO in Poland would endanger the Yiddish national project in the Old Country, Argentina and elsewhere. Orzech called upon Polish Jews in Argentina to “save the educational edifice that we built with our blood and sweat,” arguing that learning in Polish state-run schools would lead to Polonization and would be “an insult” to the national culture of Polish Jews.<sup>278</sup> Orzech stressed that in a situation when the Polish government limited the subsidies for Jewish educational institutions, Polish Jews living abroad must take upon themselves the responsibility of financially supporting the TSYSHO schools in Poland.

The common origin of Poland was often not enough to secure stable relations between the immigrant community in the Americas and their compatriots in Poland. Consequently, strong and permanent links and alliances were often built both around ethnicity and common political outlooks.<sup>279</sup> Jewish institutions in Poland often searched for financial help from the branches of a given party or movement in other parts of the world.<sup>280</sup> The Yiddishist ethno-nationalism of TSYSHO fell close to the ideals of many Polish Jews in Argentina. Many leftwing Jews, who supported Bundist goals lived in Buenos Aires. Thousands of Jewish blue-collar workers were members of trade unions and backed the local *Partido Socialista* and

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<sup>276</sup> “Shtitst di yidishe veltlekhe shuln in poyln,” *Di Presse*, 5.11.1929, 6.

<sup>277</sup> Volf Orzech, “Mir, un der yidisher shul-vezn in poyln,” *Dos Naye Vort*, September 1931, 22.

<sup>278</sup> Education in Polish state schools was free. Bundist and other private Jewish schools had to arrange for their own funding, as states and municipalities rarely offered any financial support.

<sup>279</sup> As Raanan Rein argued, based on the example of Jewish Argentines supporting the Spanish Republicans during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939, transnational solidarity movements were built not only along ethnic lines, but were often based on shared political and social identities, see Raanan Rein, “A Transnational Struggle with National and Ethnic Goals: Jewish Argentines and the Solidarity with the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War,” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 20, no. 2 (2012): 171-182.

<sup>280</sup> This is true in terms of almost every political movement in interwar Poland. Bundists, Zionists, Labor Zionist and Orthodox parties in Poland maintained contacts with their counterparts in countries where Jewish-Polish diasporas lived.

*Unión Cívica Radical*, while others supported the illegal communist party.<sup>281</sup> Also, TSYSHO found numerous supporters in organizations more removed from leftwing politics. Although in the 1930s landsmanshaftn had convened social elements of the rising middle class, proletarian traditions were well-remembered.<sup>282</sup> In the language used by landslajt in their publications one sees clear leftwing influences. Thus, we read about “Jewish working masses,” about “blood and sweat” and class struggle. Poylisher Farband, which still contained many laborers, underlined the importance of Yiddish and secular schooling in Yiddish on numerous occasions, debating even opening its own educational institutions. Jewish left-wingers in Argentina were largely centered around Yiddish institutions and media. *Di Presse*, a leading Argentine Yiddish daily, had a clear leftist stand.



Illustration no. 47. Telegram from the Warsaw head-office of TSYSHO to Buenos Aires campaigners asking for an intensification of fundraising efforts, December 10, 1929. Help campaigns collection, IWO Buenos Aires.

The fundraising efforts for the TSYSHO schools in Poland were coordinated since the mid-1920s by the Argentine Help Committee for the Yiddish Secular Schools in Poland (*Hilfs-komitet far di yidish veltlekhe shuln in poyln*). The *Hilfs-komitet* included a number of activists of workers’ libraries, workers’ associations and a few landsmanshaftn (Bialystoker

<sup>281</sup> However, only a fraction of Jews were naturalized and could vote. In 1914, Enrique Dickmann was elected as the first Jewish parliamentarian in Argentina (as a member of *Partido Socialista*).

<sup>282</sup> The president of Galitsianer Farband, Natan Fruchter, pointed out that only a few members were industrialists or worked in the free professions. Most of the Galitsianers worked as “loyn-arbeter,” which meant that they were workers paid per day, Natan Fruchter, “Galitsianer yidn in buenos aires,” in *Tsvayter almanakh fun farband fun galitsianer yidn in buenos aires* (Buenos Aires, 1929), 10.

Farband, Vengrover Ferayn, Poylisher Farband, Galitsianer Farband).<sup>283</sup> The committee organized meetings informed about the situation of secular-Yiddish schools in Poland and began the fundraising. The authorities of the *Yidishe shul-organizatsye* in Warsaw were in permanent contact with Argentine campaigners, and Warsaw-based activists Jakob Lestschinsky and Yaakov Zerubavel sent regular telegrams to the editors of *Di Presse*.<sup>284</sup> In November 1929 they thanked “in the name of 25 thousand children” for a recent money transfer. But just a month later, a telegram warned about the increasing financial difficulties of the TSYSHO schools in Poland and rushed the Argentine supporters to send more money.

The leftwing *Di Presse* did the propaganda work for the campaign. The daily published numerous articles discussing the work of TSYSHO schools in Poland, presented its modern methods and commitment to educating a generation of secular, Yiddish-speaking, nationally conscious Jews. The landsmanshaftn determined the specific financial goals of the help-campaign. In a letter from August 15, 1931, Poylisher Farband informed the *Folks-komitet* that they already collected 414 pesos of the planned 1,000.<sup>285</sup> The *Peretz Hirschbein Bibliyotek* of Buenos Aires allowed the *Hilfs-komitet* to use its premises for the entire month of November 1929.<sup>286</sup> The Poylisher Farband assigned a room in its headquarters for use by the TSYSHO-committee.<sup>287</sup> Farband's paper *Dos Naye Vort*, partook in the campaign, offering its readers overviews about the situation of Jewish schooling in Poland, reporting about its financial misery, and encouraged support for the campaign. The Farband also took part in a *protest-akt* against the persecution of TSYSHO schools organized in Buenos Aires on September 20, 1931.<sup>288</sup> Yet not every institution answered positively. The Galitsianer Farband informed that due to a financial deficit and a high number of other campaigns conducted in the previous weeks, they were unable to offer more than 20 pesos.<sup>289</sup> *Unión Israelita de Residentes de Polonia* from Tucumán replied that currently no campaign could be

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<sup>283</sup> A letter from *Farband fun bialistoker landslayt un umgegent in argentine* to the *Folks-komitet far die yidishe veltlekhe shuln in poyln*, 21.6.1933, signed by Farband's secretary Borejsza, help-campaign collection, IWO Buenos Aires.

<sup>284</sup> Collection of TSYSHO campaign, uncatalogued letters, telegrams, IWO Buenos Aires.

<sup>285</sup> A letter from Poylisher Farband, signed by president Abraham Fridman, 15.8.1931, unnumbered, help-campaigns collection, IWO Buenos Aires.

<sup>286</sup> Letter from the *Peretz Hirschbein Bibliyotek*, 19.11.1929, unnumbered, help-campaigns collection, IWO Buenos Aires.

<sup>287</sup> Letter from Poylisher Farband, signed by president Abraham Fridman, 19.8.1931, unnumbered, help-campaigns collection, IWO Buenos Aires.

<sup>288</sup> Letter from Poylisher Farband, signed by president Abraham Fridman, 18.9.1931, unnumbered, help-campaigns collection, IWO Buenos Aires.

<sup>289</sup> Letter from Galitsianer Farband, 29.11.1929, unnumbered, help-campaigns collection, IWO Buenos Aires.

conducted and that support would be weak.<sup>290</sup> Yet, they stated that they passed a resolution condemning the measures against the TSYSHO schools taken by the Polish government.<sup>291</sup>

Understanding that often these were women who oversaw the education of their children, Poylisher Farband specifically approached the immigrant females during the 1931 TSYSHO campaign. The poster, announcing a women-only meeting, wrote that thousands of Jewish parents “lead a brave fight in order to save their children from moral enslavement and assimilation.” It suggested that Jewish women in Poland and Argentina shared (or should share) similar attitudes about the national meaning of Yiddish and progressive schooling. Those living in Buenos Aires were prompted to express their solidarity with fellow Jewish mothers in Poland. The poster read:

Could Jewish mothers and sisters remain passive and distant? Not contribute to this holly work? To remain indifferent when thousands of our brothers and sisters are desperately fighting for the maintenance of schools, when they are sacrificing themselves?<sup>292</sup>

As in the case of other campaigns, the TSYSHO campaigners presented their fundraising activities as a noble and extremely difficult task. Their charity involvement was presented as a virtue that demanded coping with numerous disadvantages or hardships. When Pinie Wald reported about the TSYSHO action, he departed from describing the difficult life of Argentine Jewish workers, who lost their jobs and any other source of income due to the world financial crisis of 1929.<sup>293</sup> Wald drew a picture of impoverished Argentine Jews, who not only were hardly in the position of helping their Polish compatriots, but were also unable to financially support their own families. The journalist added that numerous “elements” of the Argentine Jewish public decided to fight against the TSYSHO campaign. The fact that the beneficiaries were linked to the Bund supposedly made it a goal of Zionist and communist defamation campaigns. The obstacles presented by Wald, combined with the financial support that the Jews of Argentina did offer despite their own poverty, presented the fundraising campaign and its participants as exceptionally committed and devoted. The report summarizing the 1931 TSYSHO campaign primarily emphasized those who supported the cause with voluntary work.<sup>294</sup> On the first page of the brochure, the bold text emphasized the names of respected

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<sup>290</sup> Letter from Unión Israelita de Residentes de Polonia en Tucumán, 20.10.1931, unnumbered, help-campaigns collection, IWO Buenos Aires.

<sup>291</sup> Letter from Unión Israelita de Residentes de Polonia en Tucumán, 23.10.1931, unnumbered, help-campaigns collection, IWO Buenos Aires.

<sup>292</sup> Flyer, 1931, “A las masas populares y a la mujer israelita,” help campaigns-collection, document no. 62, IWO Buenos Aires.

<sup>293</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>294</sup> Pinie Wald, “Di aktsye vos mir hoben durkhgefirt,” in *Barikht fun der aktsye durkhgefirt in argentine fun sof may biz november* (Buenos Aires: Hilfs komite far di yidish veltlekhe shuln in poyln, 1931), 1-7.

Buenos Aires Yiddishist activists: Pinie Wald, Pinie Katz and Samuel Rollansky. The backing of the ethnic leaders helped to gain popular support for the cause and increased the prestige of the action. The organizers appreciated not only the big personalities who “donated” their name for the campaign, but also those who had less prestigious, though no less important tasks, including children’s and women’s committees that also raised funds for the *aktsye*. The TSYSHO campaign was defined as a popular effort, and each contribution and sacrifice were appreciated and praised.

The landsman Volf Orzech was disappointed with the low support during the first three months of the TSYSHO *aktsye* in 1931 and accused Polish Jews in Argentina of being “indifferent” towards the problem of Jewish schooling in Poland. He argued that despite the fact that a number of Polish Jewish institutions existed in Buenos Aires, many of them did not answer the calls of the committee coordinating the help-action. Although it is hard to specify which societies refused to support the *aktsye*, it is easier to locate those that did it: Bialystoker Farband, Galitsianer Farband, Hevra Kadisha Ashkenazi, Centro Literario Israelita “Max Nordau” from La Plata and Landslayt Farayn fun Vengrov un Umgegent. Others, like Siedlce Landslayt Farayn, decided to decry the difficult situation in Poland in the form of a resolution, but claimed that they did not have any funds to donate.<sup>295</sup> Referring to a feeling of guilt and responsibility, Orzech tried to exercise pressure on Polish Jews in Argentina. He presented the possibility of closing TSYSHO schools in very emotional terms – as a tragedy for every Polish Jew, including those living abroad. In his tirade, TSYSHO was portrayed as a shining example of creativity and progress that every Polish Jew should be proud of and support.

The strategy of engaging respected personalities from Argentina’s Jewish world, which was used in the TSYSHO *aktsye* in 1931, was also applied in the next campaign in 1937. The special issue of *Dos Naye Vort* featured articles of personalities such as Pinie Katz, Yankev Botoshansky, Lazaro Zhitnitsky, Leyb Schussheim. Each of these personalities supported the campaign not only by writing a text for the special issue of *Dos Naye Vort*, but in the big Jewish dailies they edited. Schussheim, himself a Polish Jew born in Galicia in 1879, immigrated to Argentina at the age of 47, after a successful journalistic career in Kraków and Poaley Tsiyon activism. In Buenos Aires, he worked for the Yiddish daily *Yidische Zaitung*. In his text in *Dos Naye Vort*, he specifically turned to the more well-to-do Jews. Appealing to their generosity, he argued that the wealthier members of the community had a bigger obligation, that one expected more from them when it came to social engagement like the TSYSHO campaign. Rich Argentine Jews who did not support the help-action were supposed to “stain their name.” For Schussheim, those who refused to help were simply “bad Jews.”

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<sup>295</sup> Help-campaigns collection, uncatalogued documents, IWO Buenos Aires.

The journalist equated their success in Argentina with an obligation of substantial financial involvement in helping the Jews of Poland.<sup>296</sup>

The TSYSHO campaigns were supported by emissaries sent from Poland. The Bundist activists from Poland were “cart-horses” of these campaigns.<sup>297</sup> In Argentina they represented both the traditions of the “Old Home” and the charm of a new progressive Jewish life developing in Eastern Europe. This dual character of the emissaries facilitated gaining the support both from those who felt obliged to take care of the well-being of their brothers in the *alter heym*, but also those who looked to the future, living a new secular, progressive Jewishness. In 1931, Borys (Beniamin) Tabaczyński arrived in Argentina from Białystok. He stayed in Argentina for several months and gave numerous public talks in hotels or “salons.” Although the financial success of Tabaczyński's visit might have been limited, the campaign brought the problems of *yidishkayt* and Yiddish schooling to the center of Jewish debates in Argentina. Soon after Tabaczyński's visit, Marcos Regalsky, Samuel Rollansky and Guitl Kanutsky formed a A Society for the Yiddish Secular Schools in Argentina (*Gezelshaft far yidishe veltlekeh shuln in argentine*) largely based on Poland's TSYSHO concepts and pedagogical methods.<sup>298</sup> In 1936 the TSYSHO head-office sent to Argentina a well-known writer and journalist, Borekh Schefner, head of the Union of Jewish Writers and Journalists in Warsaw. Schefner spoke in numerous venues in Buenos Aires and in the provinces. Also, this time the campaign was a joint effort of various groups that labeled themselves as the “progressive elements” of Argentine Jewry. Among the most active leaders were Yankev Botoshansky and Pinie Wald, and both communist and Zionists groups joined the campaign. Collecting money for TSYSHO schools in Poland combined transnational Yiddishist progressive activism with a local “kultur-arbayt” (cultural work) in Argentina. As Frank Wolff wrote, TSYSHO campaigns were *Vergemeinschaftungsprozessen* (processes of community building) that constructed a secular, progressive Argentine Jewry.<sup>299</sup> The campaigns allowed Argentine Jews to unite around a certain goal and were an opportunity for creating Jewish-Argentines identifications. By uniting diverse groups, the campaigns helped to define the shared goals and priorities on the local Argentine level. The impulse that the campaigns gave to the Argentine Yiddishist schooling broke the dichotomy that saw the Old World as the destination of help efforts and the new diasporas as a base of resources. TSYSHO campaigns constructed a new transnational space centered around the ethno-national importance of secular-Yiddish schooling. Progressive Jewishness was imagined as a

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<sup>296</sup> Leyb (Aaron Leyb) Schussheim, “A vort tsu di raykhe yidn,” *Dos Naye Vort*, April 1937, 5.

<sup>297</sup> Wolff, *Neue Welten in der neuen*, 441

<sup>298</sup> *Ibidem*, 385-389

<sup>299</sup> *Ibidem*, 445-451.

global phenomenon that needed to be developed on the local level. In the 1930s, the transnational solidarity networks were focused not only on material help, but witnessed the emergence of imagined global Yiddishland society: a secular diaspora Jewry that lived in a reality of a transnational *doikait* (hereness).

## 5. We Condemn! Protesting Anti-Semitism in Poland

Another aspect of transnational outreach and interest of Poylisher Farband (and of many non-affiliated immigrants) were protest gatherings against anti-Semitism in Poland, conducted throughout the entire interwar period. Solidarity with the “brothers in Poland” in the context of anti-Semitism could be traced to the very beginning of Poylisher Farband’s existence. Even though most of the landsmanshaftn in North and South America were formed in order to help the newcomers, the origin of the Poylisher Farband could be located in the initiatives to help the Jews who fell victim to World War I and subsequent pogroms in independent Poland. Writing the history of the Farband in 1941, its members stressed that Poylisher Farband was founded in order to reestablish contact with family members who remained in Europe, to acquire information about developments in war-torn Poland and to examine the possibilities of help. A few months earlier in April 1916, they established a Polish Jewish Help-Committee for the War Victims.<sup>300</sup> This engagement continued after the war. Following a bloody pogrom on Polish-Ukrainian borderlands, a Jewish Protest Committee against the Pogroms in Poland (*Comité Israelita de Protesta contra los Pogroms de Polonia*) organized in Buenos Aires a day of mourning on July 29, 1919. Poylisher Farband sent delegates to the event, including its president Abraham Fridman.<sup>301</sup> In March 1922, *Di Presse* reported on a visit to Poland by L. Maas’s, a representative of Central Committee of Help to the Victims of Pogroms and of Immigrants’ Protection (*Comité Central de Socorro a las Victimas Israelitas de los Pogroms y de Proteccion a los Inmigrantes*). The daily printed his reports from various Polish cities, in which he described the situation of the Jewish population and their economic and social problems. Maas’s visit was principally focused on the Ukrainian Jews, who suffered from pogroms during the Russo-Ukrainian war of 1917-1921, and often fled westwards to Poland. Maas himself described his visit and help-campaign precisely as a “hilfs-aktsye far ukrainishe yidn” (help actions for Ukrainian Jews), rather than those of Poland. Anti-Semitic incidents in other countries were also followed. In 1928, a protest against pogroms in Romania was

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<sup>300</sup> *Poylishe yidn in doyrem amerike*, 50–52.

<sup>301</sup> Letter from 19.7.1919 from Poylish Yidisher “Agudas Ahim,” no. 1036/14, unit 19, Help campaigns collection, IWO Buenos Aires.



organized in Buenos Aires.<sup>302</sup> In the 1930s, numerous protests were organized condemning the anti-Jewish policies of Nazi Germany.

The first protests against anti-Semitism were organized in Argentina after a wave of pogroms that occurred in Poland and Ukraine between 1918-1921. *Comité Israelita de Protesta contra los Pogroms de Polonia* was established in 1919 and Poylisher Farband was affiliated with this committee from the very beginning.<sup>303</sup> The committee's activists understood the pogroms in Poland largely as a contradiction of Argentine liberal values that Jewish immigrants often quickly internalized. The situation in Eastern Europe was seen as the negation of a civilized world. A 1919 a Spanish-language poster condemned Poland as ungrateful for its new independence. It wrote:

[...] the new nations that emerged after the peace treaty, inaugurated their existence with massacres of Jews [...] thousands of people were murdered or buried alive, women were raped and children tortured, thousands of houses are destroyed. This is what Europe's East looks like in this hour of universal joy [...] in order to understand what is happening in Poland, one would need to come back to the most barbaric era of persecution [...].<sup>304</sup>

Some Jews in Argentina expected that a country partitioned for more than a century would place more value in democratic and liberal standards. The protesters suggested that “the Argentine voice should be heard among the protests of other free nations” and consequently make clear to Poland that the crimes against the Jews would always be met with condemnation. The protests constructed immigrant Jews as Argentines, who used their democratic privileges to condemn the events in their home country. This helped to define the Jews of Poland as the victims of barbarism, and those living in Argentina as preoccupied, but lucky to live in a freer world.

The issue of minority rights in Eastern Europe was carefully followed in Argentina in later years. Polish Jews in Argentina quickly understood that the situation of the Jewish minority in Poland would be far from rosy. In 1926 *Yidische Zaitung* reprinted a speech by Jewish-Polish parliamentarian and journalist Noah Prilutsky given at the Minorities' Conference in Geneva.<sup>305</sup> In 1925 Zvi Cohen of the Poylisher Farband complained that Jews in Poland did not enjoy national minority rights as proclaimed by the Versailles treaty and were an object of increasing Polonization.<sup>306</sup> Hundreds of articles described the deteriorating economic situation

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<sup>302</sup> A letter from the Committee Against the Pogroms in Romania to the president of *Liga de Maestros Israelitas*, 3.2.1928, protest.

<sup>303</sup> A letter of Jacobo Setton, Poylisher Farband's secretary to the Committee president, protest materials, document no. 1036/75, IWO Buenos Aires.

<sup>304</sup> Poster, protest campaigns collection, document no. 236/42, IWO Bueno Aires.

<sup>305</sup> “Rede fun dep. noah prilutsky,” *Yidische Zaitung*, 22.11.1925, page unknown.

<sup>306</sup> Zvi Cohen, “Di poylisher regirung un di yidn baym itstigen moment,” *Almanakh 1925*, 16.

in Poland and the rise of anti-Semitism in the late 1930s. The issue of Jewish discrimination in Poland was also followed by the Jewish press in Spanish.<sup>307</sup> In 1925 *Mundo Israelita* described the situation in Poland in the following way:

In Europe, there is a half-Asian, half-Balkan country called Poland. It shares so many commonalities with Asia and the Balkans, especially concerning barbarism [...] The redeemed Poles began to celebrate their independence with Jewish blood. This led to international condemnation, even by those who fought for Poland's independence. [...] Yet later Mr. Grabski [Poland's prime minister] found a bloodless way to strangle the Jews. The excessive taxes hit the Jews only and kill them without spilling their blood [...] There is no day when we don't hear about aggression against the Jews [...] The Constitution that provides Jews with equal rights is a fifth wheel in the policies of the Polish government.<sup>308</sup>

The article concluded with a desired reaction of Argentine Jews:

We Jews, who have the luck to live outside of this barbaric country, we can't do anything but to voice our protests and condemnations of the recent pogroms again and again. Let the innocent blood remain on the executioners!

In the 1930s, especially after 1935, following the death of Poland's respected leader Józef Piłsudski and in accordance with general European tendencies, the anti-Semitic rightwing organizations began to be increasingly influential in Poland. The nationalist party of the National Democrats (*endecja*) and smaller radical groups emphasized the alleged existence of a "Jewish problem," which claimed that Poland's economic hardships were the result of Jewish "anti-Polish" activities. Anti-Semitic campaigns called for a boycott of Jewish businesses. The already uneasy situation of three million Polish Jews worsened even further. TSYSHO schools were deprived of municipal subsidies. Jewish ritual slaughter was limited in 1936.<sup>309</sup> As a result of anti-Semitic student demands, so-called "bench ghettos" that separated Jews and non-Jews were introduced at many universities. The 1930s were a decade of numerous anti-Jewish incidents, sometimes leading to bloody pogroms. Polish Jews in Argentina were well-aware of the deteriorating economic and political situation of Jews in Poland. Dozens of articles covered the anti-Semitic attacks and pogroms that occurred after 1935. The reports and letters from Poland that described the contemporary reality appeared in

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<sup>307</sup> The status of Jews in interwar Poland was in constant negotiation between inclusion and exclusion in the nation. Jews were recognized as citizens and entitled to participate in the political struggle, yet excluded from ethno-national community. See Marcos Silber, "Ambivalent Citizenship-The Construction of Jewish Belonging in Emergent Poland, 1915-1918," *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook* 10 (2011): 161-183.

<sup>308</sup> "Otra vez Polonia," *Mundo Israelita*, 7.2.1925, page unknown.

<sup>309</sup> Przemysław Różański, "The Attitude of American Jews and American Diplomacy towards the Bill Banning *Shehitah* in Poland in the Second Half of the 1930s," in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 24 *Jews and Their Neighbours in Eastern Europe since 1750*, ed. Israel Bartal, Antony Polonsky and Scott Ury (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), 342-362.

the general and landsman press. Columns entitled “From the Old Home” (*Fun der alten heym*) or “Letters from Poland” (*Brif fun poyln*) kept Jews in Argentina up-to-date about the most recent developments in their native country.

Subethnic solidarity, transnational involvement and sheer empathy pushed many to actively protest anti-Semitism in Poland. The leaders of Poylisher Farband believed that even living abroad, they shared a responsibility for the well-being of Jews in Poland, and the fact that they lived in a relative free and democratic country obliged them to react to injustices against the Jews in their home country.<sup>310</sup> Although it is hard to assess to what extent the protests of the Poylisher Farband had any influence on changing the situation of Jews in Poland, for the landsman it was clear that they had to react to the increasing anti-Semitism in Poland. Mordechai Vengrover of the Poylisher Farband argued that it was solidarity and a wish to “internationalize” the problem of anti-Semitic violence that pushed the international Jewish protests further.<sup>311</sup> A librarian of the Farband, Leyzer Stokhammer, writing for the 1924 almanac argued that presenting the harsh situation of Polish Jews to foreign public opinion was the only way for Poland-born Argentine Jews to influence the situation. As Stokhammer stressed, Poland feared for its good image abroad and was truly interested in reducing the tensions with Jewish-Polish diasporas abroad, including the Argentine one. In Stokhammer’s opinion, Argentine Jewish protests could indirectly influence the policies of the Polish government. His reasoning shows that for members of the Farband it was of great importance to have a sense of being influential, a sense of having agency in Jewish-Polish problems worldwide.<sup>312</sup>

Following the bloody anti-Jewish events of November 1932 (in Vilna, Warsaw, Kraków, Lwów, etc.), a group of Farband members visited the Polish ambassador Władysław Mazurkiewicz and handed him a note of protest to be sent through him to the Polish government. As *Dos Naye Vort* reported, Mazurkiewicz, consul Kicki and migration attaché Pankiewicz “expressed their sadness about the recent anti-Jewish incidents in Poland and joined the protest.”<sup>313</sup> Mazurkiewicz, however empathetic with the protests taking place in Argentina, asked the Farband to also publish his response, which in a way questioned the harsh accusations of Farband's delegates. Mazurkiewicz wrote that the anti-Jewish attacks were always prosecuted by state officials, and that these incidents were in fact against Polish

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<sup>310</sup> Although the protest propaganda materials presented the situation in Poland as horrible (phrases like “Jews are expelled,” “Jews are hunted”) the Jews of Poland were not presented as passive victims. See “Barikht fun solidaritets manifestatsye in teater excelsior,” *Dos Naye Vort* August-September 1937, 20.

<sup>311</sup> Mordechai Vengrover, “Di geshenishn in poyln un di yidische protest in argentine,” *Dos Naye Vort*, January 1931, 13.

<sup>312</sup> Leyzer Stokhammer, “Vi azoy reagirn mir oyf di antiyudishe oystretungen in poyln,” in *Almanakh 1924*, 129.

<sup>313</sup> “Protest note fun poylish yidishn farband kegen di onfalen oyf yidn in poyln,” *Dos Naye Vort*, December 1932, 14.

interests, as they harmed Poland's "good name" abroad.<sup>314</sup> The Federation of Jewish-Polish Landsmanshaftn also sent a telegram to the Polish president (see below) demanding an active stand against the anti-Jewish violence perpetrated by the right wing, again referring to the problems that Poland's reputation would suffer. Telegrams demanding intervention were also sent to the president of the League of Nations and the Human Rights League.<sup>315</sup>

### **Démarche [protest note] to the Polish Government:**

The Jews grouped in the Poylisher Farband and in other associated organizations, thousands of Jews altogether, are protesting against the recent indescribable hooligan events against our brothers in Poland.

Every other year in Poland attacks are repeated on the peaceful Jewish population, attacks that one politely calls "extsesn" [excesses], that leave hundreds of victims and wounded [...] This does not bring Poland any honor and harms Poland's reputation abroad. The reputation of a nation that was enslaved for 150 years, a nation that is the cultural wall of the East, a land with a constitution that grants its citizens all freedoms.

The systematic and planned discrimination of the Jewish population in all branches of the country's economy, but also in regard to cultural and political life, is a bloody insult to us, Jews, who are spiritually connected with our brothers in Poland. The shameful tools of inquisition, like throwing out of trains or beating innocent citizens, that are not (till now) prosecuted, makes us feel that the government is very passive concerning these incidents, despite the fact that the government has all the means to react [...].

Deeply saddened, we demand that the government intervene, and in a spirit of human rights, put an end to the shameful hooligan attacks. The hooligans break the constitution that promises "freedom, equality and brotherhood" to all of Poland's citizens.<sup>316</sup>

The protest continued beyond the meeting with the Polish ambassador. The Farband members, claiming a "spiritual connection with our brothers in Poland," together with other Polish-Jewish landsmanshaftn, organized public protest gatherings.<sup>317</sup> These meetings allowed a "collective outrage" and were an expression of emotions shared by Polish Jews in Argentina. Protesting against anti-Semitism in Poland *en masse*, the protesters defined themselves as empathetic, sympathetic and committed members of a worldwide Jewish-Polish diaspora, as those who react when their "Polish brothers" suffer and are discriminated against.

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<sup>314</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>315</sup> *Barikht un balans fun protest-akt kegn pogromen oyfn yidn in poyln durkhgefirt 15.12.1932 in salon prince george hall* (Buenos Aires, 1933), 17.

<sup>316</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>317</sup> Polish-Jewish organizations in Argentina established a committee that coordinated the protests (in Spanish: *Comité de las Sociedades Israelitas Argentinas Pro Ayuda a los Israelitas en Polonia*, in Yiddish: *Gezelschafteker hilf-komitet letoyves di yidn in poyln*).

Similar protest gatherings were also organized in other centers of the Jewish-Polish diaspora. In the US, the Federation of Polish Jews in America issued a formal letter of protest.<sup>318</sup>

On December 15, 1932, an “imposing *protest-akt*” against the pogroms of Jews in Poland took place in *Prince George Hall* in Buenos Aires. The Jewish press reported that the Hall was “overfilled with thousands of protesters.”<sup>319</sup> The event was organized by the recently established Federation of Jewish-Polish Landsmanshaftn in Argentina, but it attracted broader support from Jewish Buenos Aires. The *protest-akt* was supported by *Sociedad Hebraica*, *Hevra Kadisha Ashkenazi*, IWO Institute, TSVISHO schools, the Zionist Federation, several landsmanshaftn and Jewish financial institutions. The organizers were proud of the massive mobilization of Argentine Jews, quite uncommon for this highly divided group. *Dos Naye Vort* reported that the president of the committee organizing the ceremony, Dr. Bergman, spoke about how “moved and outraged were the Argentine Jews hearing about the incidents in Poland.” Dr. Lazaro Zhitnitsky touched upon the consequences of anti-Semitism for Jewish economic life in Poland. Whereas those two spoke in Yiddish, another member of a protest committee, a lawyer by the name of Steinberg, spoke in Spanish. The language in which Steinberg spoke showed that acculturated Jews, including those who probably belonged to second-generation immigrants and identified primarily as Argentines, likewise maintained a certain commitment to Jewish Poland. The *protest-akt* served as a way of manifesting the power of Argentine Jewry and its desire to be involved in the problems of the Old World. The identification with the experiences back home were articulated in and impacted on Argentine dynamics.<sup>320</sup> The 1932 protests were still remembered in 1941 when they were prominently featured in a jubilee publication.<sup>321</sup>

The protesters, gathered in Prince George Hall, unanimously agreed on the following declaration:

The Jewish masses of Buenos Aires, together with the delegates of the Argentine Jewish institutions, protest against the constant incidents of violence against the Jews in Poland. Referring to the consciousness of the Polish nation, and to its traditions of freedom, we demand a stop to the hooligan attacks on Jewish citizens, who have lived on Polish lands for generations, and have participated in all fights for Polish national liberation.

We condemn the unjust anti-Jewish economic policy and the passivity of the Polish government in combating the anti-Jewish incidents. We demand that the government fulfill the obligation of the state to protect the Jewish citizens, rescuing

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<sup>318</sup> *The New York Protest Meeting Called by Federation of Polish Jews in America (...)*, JTA, December 2, 1931. A similar protest was also held in New York on January 8, 1933; *To Protest Pogroms in Poland on January 8<sup>th</sup>*, JTA, January 3, 1933. For a panoramic study of Jewish-American involvement in the situation of Jews in post-1918 Poland, see Przemysław Różański, *Stany Zjednoczone wobec kwestii żydowskiej w Polsce 1918–1921* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2007).

<sup>319</sup> “Der impozanter protest miting kegn di ekstsesn oyf yidn in poyln,” *Dos Naye Vort*, December 1932, 14-15.

<sup>320</sup> Gidley, “Diasporic Memory,” 654.

<sup>321</sup> “Protestn un politishe aktsyes,” *Poylishe yidn in doyrem amerike*, 72–75.

the sagging prestige of liberated Poland in the eyes of the honest and civilized world [...].<sup>322</sup>

The declaration was largely based on Marcos Regalsky's speech given during the ceremony in Price George Hall. He alluded to Jewish support for the independence of Poland, which in his view was all too often challenged by anti-Jewish policies and pogroms.<sup>323</sup> The declaration showed that the loyalty of Jews to Poland, as well as their engagement in Poland's struggles for independence, was used as an argument against anti-Jewish policies and incidents. By emphasizing this, the organizers of the protest acts were touching on a very sensitive point. No one could question the centuries of Jewish life on Polish lands, the Jewish contribution to the development of the Polish economy and the involvement of Jewish soldiers in World War I and earlier uprisings. This point of view presented Jews as an integral part of Polish society that deserved equal rights and respect.

This logic was also apparent in an editorial of *Dos Naye Vort* from December 1932. Its authors wrote about the shared experiences of Jewish and non-Jewish Poles, who were "connected by the same destiny, same suffering, same happiness" and together struggled for their bread. The landslayt underlined the "love of Polish Jews for Poland," a country where they were born, whose "fruits they ate," and whose character, culture and life they knew the best. For Farband members, loyalty and commitment to Poland was the ultimate argument that proved that Poland's Jews deserved respect, instead of persecution and discrimination.<sup>324</sup> The landslayt dismissed the accusations of making "anti-Polish" propaganda (the way that their protests were often described in Poland). They pointed out that they protested "against anti-Semitic hooligans and *pogromshtchikes*," against the "anti-Jewish intelligentsia that regards anti-Semitism as a virtue," against the "passive and indifferent" Polish government, and not the Polish nation as such. Underlining the shared experiences with Catholic Poles, Polish Jews in Argentina identified anti-Semitism as an exception and a form of anti-Polish activity that destroyed Polish prestige abroad.

Polish Jews in Argentina tried to interest the gentile population in their protest. One of the 1931 posters, shouting "*Argentinos!*" in bold font, tried to attract non-Jewish support for the protests organized by the Buenos Aires Jewish institutions.<sup>325</sup> Underlining the liberalism and freedoms of Argentina and praising the presumed devotion of Argentines to justice and equality, the Jewish protesters called for universal participation in the protest. Even though

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<sup>322</sup> Ibidem, 15.

<sup>323</sup> *Barikht un balans fun protest-akt kegn pogromen oyfn idn in poyln durkhgefit 15.12.1932 in salon prince george hall* (Buenos Aires, 1933), 10-12.

<sup>324</sup> "For vos un kegn vos protestirn mir?" *Dos Naye Vort*, December 1932, 3.

<sup>325</sup> Document no. 236/42, protest campaigns collection, IWO Buenos Aires.

the 1930s were a time of a rightwing backlash in Argentina, the guiding principles of Argentine democracy were still applied as a rhetorical tool in the case of anti-Semitism in Poland. For the Jewish-Polish community, liberal Argentina appeared as an anti-thesis of oppressive Poland. The attempt to attract the interest of non-Jewish Argentines was to internationalize the narrative about anti-Semitism in Poland. By spreading the Jewish-Argentine position on this issue, the protesters hoped that it would result in official condemnations on the side of Argentine authorities (something the Polish government wanted to avoid).

The protest gatherings against anti-Semitism in Poland, organized by the Federation of Jewish-Polish Landsmanshaftn in Argentina, had a dual identitarian meaning. First, by referring to the broader Jewish public living in Argentina, the organizers defined themselves as *argentinier yidn*, Argentine Jews. The assistance and support offered to their brothers in Poland was defined as *hilf fun oysland*, foreign help. Precisely by living abroad and enjoying more freedom and better economic chances, Argentine Jews were called upon to help the less fortunate Jews in Poland. At the same time, the *protest-aktn* situated “Jewish brotherhood” within the Yiddishland. The campaign was imagined by Argentine Jews less as an internal Jewish-Polish problem, than a Yiddishland problem. The *poylishe* landsmanshaftn, as the most informed about the situation in Poland, took a leading role and managed to transnationalize the problem and give it broader scope. Even if the origin of the *protest-akt* was an ethnic sympathy felt by the landslajt, its outcome was a Jewish-Argentine phenomenon.

## Conclusions

The framework of Jewish migration from Poland to Argentina demonstrates the evolution of ethno-national belonging and identity shaped both by the powers of diasporism and by competing nationalisms. Migration had an immense influence on how individuals and collectives defined their place in the nation(s) and fostered the emergence of transnational social and cultural processes. The identities of Jewish-Polish migrants were shaped by the powers of acculturation and nationalization in their immediate Argentine environment, but also in relation to the cultural and national ideology of Yiddishism. Using the framework of an imagined global entity of the Yiddishland, the migrating Jews negotiated their status in the nation-states and promoted their interests and narratives in the collective process of identity formation. In fact, multiple platforms emerged across the Atlantic that allowed Jewish migrants to remain in conversation with their land of origin and to foster new arenas of cultural, social and discursive exchange. Ties between Jewish Poland and Jewish Argentina were characterized by a center-periphery relationship, with Jews in Argentina constantly concerned about the respectability and status of their community in the broader Jewish context. In addition, the memory of the homeland was transformed into a useful cultural resource allowing the migrants to stabilize their position in Argentine society.

The impact of pre-emigration imaginaries of Argentina in Poland played a role in the formulation of transnational Jewish identities. By looking at Jewish-Polish discourse on Argentina, we can better understand future cultural and social developments among immigrants in Latin America. How Jews in Argentina defined their identities was partly conditioned and nurtured by Old World conceptualizations of Argentina. The fact that Argentine Yiddish literature was discussed in Warsaw's *Literarische Bleter*, that Argentine themes appeared in novels and dramas published in Poland, that dailies regularly mentioned Argentina in their news coverage, were all signs that the Jewish worlds of Poland and Argentina were in constant dialogue. Jewish-Polish discourse on Argentina was a polyphonic and complex amalgam of stories, opinions, gossip and policies. Argentine narratives that developed in Poland were a sign of the transformation that Polish and world Jewry were undergoing. Migration, industrialization and secularization changed Jewish lives and the geographies of Jewish possibilities. This process was far from smooth, filled rather with tensions and fears, but also hope for a better future. Unsurprisingly, Jewish-Polish Argentine narratives reflected the conflicting interests of the young generation and of the religious or



assimilationist establishment. For many Jews of Poland, Argentina was indeed a promise for a better tomorrow. It was a chance to escape poverty and anti-Semitism, and often an opportunity to leave behind a family that did not understand the worldview of the young. In the Polish-Jewish imaginary, Argentina was not a real country, but an imagined space, a mix of gossip, newspapers news and emigration guidebooks. At the very beginning of the 20th century, Polish Jews had little knowledge about Argentina and could hardly tell the difference between the USA – the “classic America” – and other countries located south of it. Throughout the interbellum, however, this imagined entity was becoming increasingly Jewish and familiar.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the images of Argentina became much more nuanced. Argentina was seen not only as a potential emigration destination, but was popularly identified as a hotbed of international Jewish prostitution. In articles published in Poland's Yiddish dailies, we find hope and great expectations regarding immigration to Argentina, but also a clear articulation of anxiety and fear. This ambiguity defined the portrayal of Argentina in Jewish Poland. On the one hand, we find competent information about favorable immigration possibilities. On the other hand, numerous articles described unsuccessful emigrants who decided to return to Poland, not to mention reports on trafficking in Jewish women. Poland's Yiddish press adopted the role of “emigration adviser” – a channel that helped the impoverished Polish Jews to comfortably settle down in developing Argentina. Simultaneously, by constantly informing readers about the alleged dangers awaiting immigrants in this country (like Jewish female trafficking), the Yiddish press reflected the position of emigration opponents and debated the negative consequences that it could have on Jewish life in Poland. This was reinforced by depictions in popular culture, contributing to the exoticization of Argentina in Jewish Poland.

Yiddish travel writing and travel to Argentina was a space that both fostered and reflected a cultural, social and national interconnectedness between Jewish Poland and Argentina. Yiddish travel writing appeared as an important mechanism that helped to construct individual and collective imageries of Argentina. Peretz Hirschbein and Hersh Dovid Nomberg adopted the role of cultural mediators that explained Argentina to their Jewish-Polish readers, who either sought accurate information on emigration or had a desire for sheer entertainment in the form of a good travel book. Jewish migration coincided favorably with the development of other forms of Jewish mobility and sightseeing: trekking and traveling became more and more popular, especially among the younger generation of Polish Jews. In this context, travel writers like Peretz Hirschbein and Hersh Dovid Nomberg emerged as powerful figures who, benefitting from the new Jewish

diasporism, played an important role in its development. Their Argentine travelogues responded to the needs of Eastern European Jews, who searched for first-hand accounts about Jewish life in the new centers of Ashkenazi diaspora, but at the same time nurtured the very development of these needs. The fact that *Fun vayte lender* and *Argentinishe rayze* were read and known both in Poland and Argentina (as well as other Jewish centers) defined travel writing as a new and important transnational platform that allowed dispersed Polish Jews to reconnect and join a discussion.

Nomberg and Hirschbein not only described Jewish Argentina, but they appeared as cultural activists who perceived Argentina as a field for cultural work, especially concerning the Yiddish language and Yiddishist schooling. They fit well the Saidian type of intellectual, who actively shapes reality and popular worldview by being personally involved in a certain cause.<sup>1</sup> Knowing both Eastern Europe and Argentina, they showed that the distance between the exoticism and familiarity is shorter than commonly believed. Their interest in the problems of Jewish immigrants elevated them to the level of celebrities and respected friends of Argentine Jewry. The special status they achieved was clearly connected with the identitarian and ideological proximity between the political views of many Jewish-Polish immigrants to Argentina and those of the travelers. Their social progressivism and “love for Yiddish” found a liking among many newcomers from Poland. Their travels and travel writing bridged both countries as they touched upon the issues relevant both in Poland and in Argentina: Jewish education, the relationship to the state, the future of the younger generation and, most importantly, migration and its repercussion. For some Argentine Jews, the travelers embodied the glorious memory of Jewish Eastern Europe and a high Yiddish culture. Some Argentine Jews formed their identities around what they imagined as Eastern European Jewish heritage, and perceived the visits of Nomberg and Hirschbein as a unique chance of reconnecting with their native land and manifesting their strong attachment to the Old Homeland. Although in some cases this identification was probably rooted in usual nostalgia, in fact it also marked the emergence of Jewish-Argentine identities. Many saw the visits of these travel writers as a good opportunity to emphasize the vitality of the Argentine Jewish community and a chance to inform European and American Jews that the Argentine diaspora was “normal”: that local Jews worked hard for their bread and that Jewish female trafficking and prostitution were already becoming marginal. Boasting in front of foreign visitors about the vitality of progressive Yiddish life in

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994).

Argentina, immigrant Jews simultaneously claimed their belonging to the imagined polity of Yiddishland and to Argentina, which allowed Yiddish culture to flourish.

Argentine-Jewish identities were formed in relation to diasporic visions of Jewish peoplehood and Yiddishist ethno-cultural nationalism. These concepts developed in Eastern Europe at the beginning of the 20th century and gained a stronger resonance during the post-World War I Yiddish cultural revival. The immigration of Polish Jews to Argentina after 1918 contributed to the transnationalization and expansion of Yiddishist ideology and to a symbolic inclusion of Argentina into the imagined Yiddishland. Jewish-Polish immigration brought to Argentina a new generation of those who grew up with socialist, Zionist or Bundist ideologies that (to various extents) recognized the national and cultural meaning of Yiddish. The arrival of new immigrants, among them some partisan activists, writers and journalists, invigorated Jewish-Argentine discussions on ethnicity, belonging and transnational solidarity. Also, the more veteran ethnic Jewish Argentine leaders, like Yosef Mendelson, Salomón Resnick and Pinie Katz, felt prompted to respond to the new intellectual ferment, be it in the press, literature or public meetings.

I believe it is apt to use the term “reyiddishization” here to define a temporary return to Yiddish in post-1918 Argentina, especially on the part of the earlier argentinized generation. The political, national and cultural unrest that Polish Jews brought to Argentina helped shape the character of the community, converting it into an aspiring actor on the map of the Yiddishland. The Yiddish language was a tool that allowed the transmission not only of cultural, but also of political and social contents across the borders. Yiddish became the *lingua franca* of most Polish Jews around the world, and thus a tool that allowed the circulation of cultural contents and ideas, which afterwards began to also sprout in Argentina. Above all, cultural Yiddishism started to play an increasing role and some Argentine Jews considered their new homeland as a part of something bigger – a transnational Yiddishland. New bonds of intellectual, cultural and discursive exchange and dialogue made the connection between both diasporas even stronger. This change was visible in the heated intellectual discussions about the place of Jews in Argentina and their relations with the Old World. Interbellum Argentina experienced both the development of Yiddish print culture and schooling, while witnessing the growing inclusion of Jews into the nation. Argentine Jews sought ways of combining Jewishness with Argentineness. For instance, Pinie Katz translated into Yiddish the Spanish classic *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, while Samuel Rollansky attempted to use the figure of exile as something that connected both Jewish immigrants and Argentine national

heroes like Martin Fierro.<sup>2</sup> Taken as a whole, the 1920s and 1930s proved compatibility with and complementary to Jewish diasporic-national and Argentine belonging. In the 1920s and 1930s, discussions on the future character of Argentine Jewishness were shaped by a variety of actors with diverse positions (liberal-acculturationist, Yiddishist, Zionist), who searched for ways of building an identitarian foundation of their liking.

The transnational engagement with Poland was used by Jewish-Polish immigrants to argue in favor of their belonging to Argentina. On the local Argentine level, the wealthier Jews who sponsored Jewish charities presented themselves as preoccupied with the fate of their working-class co-nationals, and raised their own social status within Argentine social matrix by establishing the landmarks of *Hospital Israelita* or *Beit Yetomim*. Ethnic engagement was used for building ethnic empowerment, which was supposed to stabilize the position of Jewish immigrants in Argentina. At the same time, the issue of a Jewish-Argentine ethnic image and respectability entered a transnational dimension. For instance, the financial assistance offered to Jews in Poland, or more precisely the publicity about this support, placed the Argentine fundraisers higher on the local Argentine social ladder. Contributing to and taking responsibility for Jews in Poland was a commonly accepted way of showing one's middle class status and elevating the social prestige of the entire Jewish community in Argentina. In addition, solidarity and commitment to Poland, imagined as the Jewish center in Eastern Europe, both moved Argentine Jews out of the periphery of the Jewish world and placed them at the center of a burgeoning multiethnic Buenos Aires society. The leaders of the Poylisher Farband argued that Argentine Jewry was mature and developed sufficiently enough to become an active global actor, rather than a peripheral, still "green" *yishev*. By organizing campaigns to help the Jews in Poland and by protesting against Poland's anti-Semitism, the Argentine landslayt presented themselves as meaningful, powerful branches of a Jewish-Polish diaspora. They perceived transnational engagement as a source of pride, prestige and social capital.<sup>3</sup> The claims of the landslayt were more and more acknowledged as Jewish institutions in Poland, such as TSYSHO schools, were in true need for Argentine money and international support.

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<sup>2</sup> Perla Sneh, "Polin Down South: Among Mysteries and Silences. On Polish Jewish Literary Legacies in Argentina," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry, Volume 28: Jewish Writing in Poland* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2016), 519.

<sup>3</sup> Luis Roniger, "Latin American Jews and Processes of Legitimization and De-Legitimization," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 9, no. 2 (2010): 185.

This coincided with the narrative promoted by Argentine Yiddishists (like Pinie Wald, Yankev Botoshansky, Pinie Katz, Marcos Regalsky) and landsman leaders who saw Jews in Argentina as a part of a transnational Jewish nation.<sup>4</sup> Throughout the interwar years, but especially in the 1930s, Jewish-Polish landsmanshaftn began to claim recognition in the Yiddishland in general and in the Jewish-Polish world in particular. By underlining their commitment to the Jewish *madre patria* in Eastern Europe, the landslayt claimed the existence of a community of interests between Polish Jews scattered around the world. Polish Jews in Argentina developed a new form of diasporic belonging that was rooted in a shared memory of home and a sense of collective ethnic responsibility. The Jewish-Argentine involvement was not based on a Zionist-like nationalism, but rather a transnationalized *doikayt* (hereness) that stressed the ethnic aspect of Jewishness, yet simultaneously acknowledged Jewish diasporism as a productive value. The kinship connecting the migrants and their relatives in Poland was transformed into a diasporic ethnic network during the interwar years. According to landsman discourse, those living in Argentina, as “children of Jewish Poland,” were responsible for the wellbeing of their “brothers” in the *alter heym*. Several Jews in Poland, like Arie Tartakower, also pointed out that the immigrants involved on behalf of Jews in their homeland represented important outposts of struggle for a better Jewish future.<sup>5</sup> Jewish-Polish landslayt in Argentina were one of the many faces of Argentine Jewish life in the 1920s and 1930s. Most of the immigrants from Poland did not join the landsmanshaftn and chose different ways of being Jewish and/or Argentine. To the disappointment of landsmanshaft leaders, most of the immigrants remained, as the landslayt saw it, “passive and uninvolved.” But even those who never officially registered as members often manifested their Jewish-Polish ethnicity in Farband’s parties or by supporting fundraising campaigns for the benefit of Jews in Poland. The landsman welfare initiatives and their cultural offer built an ethnic network that also encompassed many unaffiliated Jews.

The landsman movements, chiefly the Poylisher Farband, played a crucial role in forming a Jewish-Polish diasporic subethnicity. I believe that the experience of emigration, the prevalent role of Poland as a post-1918 successor of the tradition of Eastern European Jewry, the transnational Yiddishist ideology, as well as the multiethnic character of Buenos Aires, all contributed to the emergence of a specific Jewish-Polish self-understanding. Initially, by forming an ethnic organization, immigrant Jews initiated a certain kind of security network that helped them

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<sup>4</sup> Marcos Regalsky, “Konstituirung fun der yidisher natsye,” in Marcos Regalsky, *Tsvishn tsvey velt milkhomes. Di goyrl yorn 1918-1945* (Buenos Aires, 1946), 403-408.

<sup>5</sup> Arie Tartakower, *Emigracja żydowska z Polski* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Narodowościowych, 1939), 51.

in the event of sickness or unemployment. Yet, as the Poylisher Farband adopted a more middle-class character, issues of communal prestige and ethnic respectability gained in importance. The landsmen cared about their Polishness as it had a function in their Argentine lives. The discourse of the Polish landsmen imagined Polish Jewry as a national body: scattered between new diasporic centers, yet connected by a shared past, a narrative of secular Yiddishist commitment and networks of transnational solidarity.

Belonging to a Jewish-Polish landsmanshaft and highlighting one's ethnic background did not signify voluntary exclusion from Argentine society, ethnic isolationism or refusal to acculturate. As Raanan Rein argued, the dichotomy “to assimilate or to separate from surrounding world” was simply false in the Argentine context.<sup>6</sup> The Yiddishist Pinie Wald wrote that no one could question the Argentineness of the Jewish generations born in Argentina and that their rootedness in Argentina did not contradict the need for *Yiddishness*.<sup>7</sup> A wide “in-between” space had existed. For many Jewish immigrants from Poland, their belongingness to Argentina was as clear as their real or desired commitment to the Old Home. In fact, the landsmanshaftn became a space that facilitated the social integration into the Argentine mainstream. In the multi-ethnic and immigrant society that Argentina undoubtedly was in the interwar years, the mainstream was defined by immigrant experiences. Articulating one's (sub)ethnicity was thus a channel, not an obstacle, for inclusion into what was understood as “the Argentine.” As Ben Gidley aptly put it, the relationship between *home roots* and *rootedness in the new land* was the main defining feature of the landsmanshaftn.<sup>8</sup> Although it was Jewish-Polish ethnicity that the Poylisher Farband emphasized, in the long-term it was their Argentine Jewishness that the landsmanshaft demarcated.

Finally, the development of networks within the Yiddishland was performed in complementarity with constructing Jewish-Argentine identities under the influence of the unifying power of Argentine nationalism. For immigrant Jews, Argentina offered the promise of secular citizenship and inclusive national ethnos. In particular, the 1920s and the rule of the *Unión Cívica Radical* were a period of growing democratization and relative economic prosperity that helped many Jews to construct strong Argentine identities. To a great extent, the Argentine nationalism of

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<sup>6</sup> Raanan Rein, *Argentine Jews or Jewish Argentines? Essays on Ethnicity, Identity, and Diaspora* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 3–4.

<sup>7</sup> Pinie Wald, “Argentinish-yidishe interesn un problemem,” in *Yor-bukh fun yidishn yishuv in argentine 1945-1946*, ed. Nehemías Zucker and Volf Bressler (Buenos Aires, 1946), 29.

<sup>8</sup> Ben Gidley, “Diasporic Memory and the Call to Identity: Yiddish Migrants in Early Twentieth Century East London,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 34, no. 6 (2013): 654-655.

the *centenario* (before and after 1910) demanded from immigrants to resign from their European sense of belonging and to devote themselves to building an Argentine nation. This process was largely successful. The devotion of immigrants to the new homeland was visible in the communal narratives that emphasized Jewish belonging and gratitude to Argentina for the freedoms and chances it offered. It was also visible in the efforts and agendas of the first argentinized Jewish generation centered around the *Asociación Hebraica Argentina* and searched for cultural ways of combining Jewishness with Argentine belonging. The 1920s and 1930s, which brought a huge contingent of 50-60 thousand Polish Jews to Argentina, were a period that significantly reshaped the dominant identities in the community. In the Argentina of the 1920s the debates about Jewish belonging to Argentina coincided with the ideologies of Yiddishist cultural nationalism arriving from Europe. In the early 1920s diverse secular Yiddishist schools were created and in 1928 the Argentine branch of the Yiddishist authority –Yiddish Scientific Institute, the IWO (YIVO), opened. The 1930s were in Argentina a time of a renewed and intensified suspicion towards immigrants and left-wing politics, a time of growing anti-Semitism and of a certain Jewish disillusionment with the liberal-integrationist ethos. Following the right-wing take-over of September 1930, Argentina limited the immigration quotas, there was less new immigrants from Poland. In 1938 the authorities did not allow more than 10 Yiddishist schools to begin a school year.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, the 1930s were a period of Jews striking roots in Argentina, with linguistic and cultural argentinization becoming clearly more and more visible. It was when the journal *Judaica* of Salomón Resnick argued for an Argentine-Jewish culture in Spanish that a need for translations from Yiddish to Spanish appeared and landsmanshaftn engaged in typically Argentine activities as *bailes* and outings in *quintas*. This argentinization was obviously true for the generation of Argentina-born Jews, but the Polish immigrants from the 1920s also became increasingly Argentine. Importantly, argentinization and *re-yiddishization* were not contradictory. The debates about the meaning of the Old Home, the responsibilities of Jewish Argentina towards other parts of Yiddishland, and the situation of Jews in Argentina continued in the 1930s and took place simultaneously in Yiddish and Spanish. Local and transnational belonging coincided and the fault lines between the two were rather blurred. Yiddishist figures like Pinie Katz voiced Jewish belonging and rootedness in Argentina, whereas many acculturated *israelitas argentinos* acknowledged the need for a broader, global approach towards the Jewish future. In this way the hybridity of the Argentine Jewish experiences and identities in the 1920s and 1930s became

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<sup>9</sup> Mendel Meiern-Laser, *Dos yidishe shulvezn in argentine* (Buenos Aires, 1948), 168.

noticeable. I understand it as the emergence of a hybrid Jewish-Argentine culture that appeared as a synthesis of Argentine and Jewish Eastern European elements, as well as a development of political belonging both to the Argentine *patria* and an identification with the fate of Jews in Eastern Europe.

### **Looking Back, Looking Ahead: Jewish Argentina after 1939**

The war of 1939-1945 brought about the complete reconfiguration of the Jewish world. Nazi Germany annihilated six million Jews, including three million Polish Jews. In Argentina the Holocaust was described as a national catastrophe. In 1945 all major Jewish periodicals in Buenos Aires were busy publishing lists of survivors.<sup>10</sup> The testimonies of those Argentine Jews who had relatives in Poland reveal that the Shoah dramatically influenced their daily lives and individual and collective priorities. After communist rule had become firmly established in Poland in 1947, the country fell into the Soviet sphere of influence and Argentina quickly (1946) recognized the new government in Poland. Around 350,000 Polish Jews survived the Holocaust (most of them in the Soviet Union) and around 280,000 temporarily returned to Poland after 1945. Most of them quickly decided to leave to Palestine/Israel, the US or Canada, but in 1947 around 90,000 Jews continued to live in Poland. Around 30,000 of the Jewish-Polish survivors left for Latin America, yet as Argentina and Brazil continued their immigration restrictions, most of them departed to smaller countries in the region. Many of those who managed to obtain Bolivian or Paraguayan visas, ultimately crossed into Argentina illegally. The new political order in Poland, Argentina's lack of interest in admitting Holocaust survivors and new options that appeared in Palestine did not allow Jewish Polish-Argentine relations to return to its prewar level. The Shoah was a transformative point in Jewish-Argentine history, influencing individual and collective priorities. This refers particularly to the social and cultural status of Yiddish in the post-Holocaust era, as well as to the role that Argentine Jews envisioned for themselves both in their country and within a broader Jewish world.

Already prior to World War II, the growing acculturation into Spanish raised a certain discomfort and uncertainty in Argentine Yiddishist circles. Aware of the growing Americanization in the USA and Polonization in Poland, some Argentine Yiddishists did not see a bright future ahead. The Polish case in particular seemed like a dangerous precedent, as a crisis in the Jewish

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<sup>10</sup> Malena Chinski, "Incertidumbre, búsqueda y duelo: la Shoá desde la perspectiva de los familiares de las víctimas en Argentina," *Temas de Nuestra América* 32, no. 60 (2016): 187-202.



heartland seemed like a bad prediction for smaller diasporas. In the 1930s the situation of the Yiddishist project in Poland became increasingly precarious. The economic crisis hit Jewish livelihood and Jewish cultural endeavors, while intensifying Polish nationalism began to aggressively question the rights of the Jewish minority in Poland. At the same time, the Polonization of the young generation was progressing and even the most fervent proponents of Yiddishism noticed that their enterprise was bound to be unsuccessful. Zionism also gained in significance, especially after Hitler's rise to power and a fascist direction that Poland adopted in the late 1930s. Zionism was particularly on the rise in the early to mid-1930s, when immigration to Palestine skyrocketed. In the last years before the outbreak of the Second World War, Zionism somewhat lost its power, especially in the big cities. According to one estimate in the municipal elections of 1938/1939, the Bund gained 38% of votes, Zionists 36%, while 26% went to other groupings (including Agudas Israel). The inability to immigrate to Palestine led less radical Zionists to abandon the idea of Zionism in the belief that it was impossible to implement in real life.<sup>11</sup>

These changes were abundantly visible in Jewish schooling. Only around 34% of Jewish children in Poland attended any type of Jewish school in the late 1930s. Following the Great Depression, the Yiddishist schooling network TSYSHO entered a period of permanent financial misery. These schools derived only around 30% of their income from tuition fees, while in the case of the more middle-class Tarbut school network of the Zionists, it was around 86%.<sup>12</sup> In the 1937/1938 school year, Tarbut had ten secondary schools, while TSYSHO only two. In 1932 TSYSHO needed to permanently close their Teachers Seminary in Vilna. Even in the pearl of Polish Yiddishism, Vilna, almost 70% of Jewish high-schoolers attended Polish tuition-free high schools that (still) gave a promise of professional success and social mobility.<sup>13</sup> In 1937 the library of the local Central Jewish Education Committee noted a 76% demand for book borrowing in Polish, versus 20.8% in Yiddish.<sup>14</sup> The writer and activist from Palestine, Alter Droyanov, visiting

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<sup>11</sup> See Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia, Volume III: 1914 to 2008* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), 56-97; Bernard Wasserstein, *On the Eve: The Jews of Europe Before the Second World War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 409-414. Yet in Poland as a whole, Bundist support was lower than that of Zionism or the Orthodox. In 1936, kehilla elections in 45 major communities, Orthodox and Agudas Israel took 32% of votes, various Zionists 29%, whereas the Bund and Folkists took 13%. See Robert Moses Shapiro, "The Polish Kehillah Elections of 1936. A Revolution Re-examined," in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry, Volume 8: Jews in Independent Poland 1918-1939* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1994), 217.

<sup>12</sup> Wasserstein, 324.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, 325.

<sup>14</sup> Nathan Cohen, "Reading Polish among Young Jewish People," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry, Volume 28: Jewish Writing in Poland* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2016), 186. In 1923 more than 61% of children wanted to borrow books in Yiddish, 27% in Russian and a mere 3.5% in Polish.

Poland in 1932, wrote: “the linguistic assimilation among Polish Jews is increasing so much that it appears that the language they spoke for hundreds of years is being forgotten before our eyes [...] the youth know little Yiddish, some know none, and most speak Polish... This is a norm in the big cities, and for the most part in the medium-size cities.”<sup>15</sup>

Similar challenges were faced by Argentine Yiddishism. Although the immigration of Polish Jews reinvigorated Yiddish culture, journalism and education, the tendency toward argentinization was unmistakable. In the early 1930s, the first efforts to modernize and financially secure the Jewish educational establishments appeared. A non-partisan central Jewish educational institution *Vaad Hakhinukh* was founded in 1935, which united schools of diverse political profiles (including a part of secular Yiddishists) in a matter of a few years and secured financial subsidies for them. In the late 1930s, the economic recuperation of the Jewish community, mixed with fear of the growing sense of detachment from the Yiddish heritage, prompted many Argentine Jews to invest more money and time in Yiddishist schooling, especially its infrastructure. The secular-progressive Sholem Aleichem school opened Villa Crespo in 1934, but already a year later two additional branches in Buenos Aires (Villa Crespo and Matadores) were added, and in 1936 three more schools followed.<sup>16</sup> These fears came to fruition especially during and after World War II, and the Holocaust paradoxically temporarily strengthened Argentine Yiddishism. Between 1940 and 1945, the number of those attending Jewish schools rose by 57%.<sup>17</sup>

Voices that spoke about the redefined geographies of the postwar Jewish world, combined with the new tasks facing Argentine Jews, were underscored by local ethnic leaders. The journalist Marcos Regalsky complained in 1940 that Yiddish cultural life in Argentina was an effort undertaken by individuals; Argentine Jews were collectively not contributing enough. He pointed out that the charity givers built “houses for our sick and for our orphans,” but did not manage to erect a Jewish library. In 1940 he wrote that although the focus on economic progress and consolidation might have initially been more important, it was now high time to turn to cultural needs. At the turn of the 1930s and 1940s, the visible decline of Yiddish in Argentine Jewish life and the ongoing war in Europe prompted Regalsky to take action regarding popular attitudes towards Yiddish. Referring to the destruction of Jewish material heritage in Eastern Europe, he described the Yiddish library that IWO decided to establish in Buenos Aires as a marvelous idea.

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<sup>15</sup> Alter Droyanov, “Tsiyonut bepolanyah: rishmei masa,” *Moznayim* 9, no. 159 (1932): 9, quoted in *ibidem*, 178.

<sup>16</sup> Meiern-Laser, *Dos yidishe shulvezn in argentine*, 129.

<sup>17</sup> Efraim Zadoff, *Historia de la educaccción judía en Buenos Aires (1935-1957)* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Milá, 1994), 331.

Regalsky hoped that Argentine Yiddish culture could compensate for what was destroyed in Europe. He believed that this could not only have a crucial local Argentine meaning, but could be “a manifestation of our national liveliness” and a sign of “our creativity under any circumstances.”<sup>18</sup> Already after the war, in 1947, another activist, a Yiddishist communist Pinie Wald called for a new Jewish immigration to Argentina (of Holocaust survivors), seeing Argentina as a place where “the existence of a national spirit” could be preserved. He considered the immigration of Yiddish-speaking survivors as a tool for preserving Yiddish culture in Argentina, which in his eyes embodied “the essence of national unity.” Wald complained that a few previous decades of Argentine educational efforts did not result in masses of Yiddish-speaking youth and he did not see a continuity of a Yiddish-speaking generation of immigrants. Although he was convinced that schools with Yiddish as the language of instruction would be the best way of preserving the ethno-cultural heritage, he was equally certain that in the 1940s it was already relatively difficult. Acknowledging the linguistic evolution, he accepted Spanish as a tool for transmitting Jewish contents and saw it as representing a Jewish national spirit. Instead of negating the growing prevalence of Spanish, he wanted to see it as useful for Jewish national interests in Argentina.

Realizing that the Eastern European center of Yiddish civilization was destroyed, some Argentine Yiddishists saw a prominent role for Argentina in the postwar order and perceived the development of Jewish schooling as a form of compensation for the largely wiped out Eastern European Jewish heritage. In 1941 a Yiddish Teachers’ Seminary was opened in Buenos Aires. In 1942 a little more than 3,000 children attended Jewish schools and kindergartens in Buenos Aires, and in 1946 it rose to more than 4,800, who studied in 60 schools with 120 teachers.<sup>19</sup> The post-Holocaust revival of Yiddish schooling and publishing in Buenos Aires was noticed by Yankev Shatzky, who visited Argentina in the late 1940s and wrote:

This generation, born in Argentina, reads Yiddish newspapers, visits Yiddish lectures, goes to Yiddish theater, although they speak Spanish between themselves. Despite limited Jewish religious knowledge, these people are Jews of the national-secular type. In Argentina, Jewish clergy have generally not played the same role as they have in the United States. One does not find Orthodox or Reform rabbis among the community leaders. Their Jewishness consists of [...] the Yiddish language and everything connected to it: theater,

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<sup>18</sup> Marcos Regalsky, “IWO” in Marcos Regalsky, *Tsvishn tsvey velt milkhomes. Do goyrl yorn 1918-1945* (Buenos Aires 1946), 412-413. Published also in *Judaica* 68-69 (1939), 49-50.

<sup>19</sup> Meier-Laser, *Dos yidishe shulvezn in argentine*, 178.

book, lecture, etc. Because they are strongly secular they fully understand the language nationalism.<sup>20</sup>

For about two post-Holocaust decades Argentina managed, to a certain extent, to recreate and safeguard the idea of a secular Yiddish culture. The cornerstone for the new Yiddishist TSVISHO Sholem Aleichem school in Villa Crespo (on Serrano St.) in Buenos Aires, opened two years later, was laid in 1940. The money to erect the building was raised all over Argentina and a fundraising effort was supposed to inform the community about the value of *yidishkayt* for Argentine Jews. The impressive two-story building was imagined as embodying the existential powers of Argentine Jewry and its willingness to continue the cultural tradition of European Jewry that the Nazis destroyed. The call to support the construction of the building read:

Our community [...] needs now, more than ever, to assume responsibility for the development of Jewish culture. When the Jewish cultural center in Europe is destroyed, when the heart of Jewish cultural life is torn out, when our existence as a nation is in danger, this is our obligation, the Jews of countries free from a devastating war, to receive from our brothers from the other side of the ocean the luminous cultural heritage [...] we were called to preserve the holy fire of Jewish national culture. [...] In order to save this culture, to continue shaping it, we ought to do it from the foundations, that is, starting from the school.<sup>21</sup>

The modern secular-Yiddishist TSVISHO school was also supposed to attract children, who earlier felt too embarrassed to attend Jewish schools located in provisional buildings. The new school also attracted those parents who had previously never thought about sending their children to a Jewish educational establishment. The number of students tripled from 590 in 1942 to 1606 in 1947.<sup>22</sup> The school lessons were taught in Yiddish and focused on Argentine and Eastern European Jewish heritage, but following the Poaley Tsiyon influences in the TSVISHO, the curriculum also included Hebrew literature and classes on the history of Tel Aviv. Simultaneously, the program of the school was unambiguously Argentine: it taught Argentine history in Yiddish, while national Argentine holidays as well Jewish Passover and Hannukah were jointly combined as “holidays of liberation.”<sup>23</sup> The graduates were supposed “to identify with the destiny of the Jews around the

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Jan Schwartz, *Survivors and Exiles: Yiddish Culture after the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015), 97.

<sup>21</sup> Flyer, “Boy komitet farn aygenem binyen fun der sholem aleichem shul,” Laser collection, folder TSVISHO, Central Archive for the History of Jewish People, quoted in Zadoff, *Historia de la educación judía*, 329-330.

<sup>22</sup> Meiern-Laser, *Dos yidishe shulvezn in argentine*, 130-133.

<sup>23</sup> Chaim Finkelstein, *Egalitische lern-program far zeks-klasiker tsugab-shul* (Buenos Aires: Tsentrale veltleke yidishe shul-organizatsye in argentine, 1943), reprinted 1985 and edited by Barnardo Danker.

whole world.” The school approached Jews as a diasporic nation and called for a “national solidarity” with Jews in other countries, which cast Argentina’s hesitation in admitting Jewish refugees from war-torn Europe in a very problematic light.<sup>24</sup> Later, acknowledging the post-World War II shifts in the Jewish world, the school also taught Hebrew and was proud about the development of the Land of Israel.

Calls for the rebuilding of and investing in Jewish life in Argentina even strengthened during and after the end World War II when the demise of the European center of Yiddish culture allowed the growth of new centers in Buenos Aires, Montreal and Tel Aviv. Yiddishist propaganda suggested an increased responsibility on the part of Argentine Jews for Jewish continuity and the preservation of Yiddish. The Holocaust and the anti-Semitic tendencies in Argentina at the turn of the 1930s and 1940s gave an additional impulse to Yiddishist activism. In 1945 Yankev Vengrover, a leader of Poylisher Farband and AMIA’s (Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina) secretary general, argued that mourning the victims of the war in Europe was not enough and in fact paralyzed creativity. He argued for the existence of Jewish and Yiddish life in the diaspora, envisioning Argentine Jews as fighters for Jewish national and cultural continuity. Vengrover stressed the need for Argentina-produced and Argentina-inspired Jewish culture. The ethnic leader argued that as Jewish life in Poland lay in ruins, Jewish Argentina needed to stand on its own legs and grow mature into its new role in a postwar order.<sup>25</sup>

The late 1940s and 1950s proved that Argentine Yiddishism was in relatively good shape. Prior to 1939 Buenos Aires was largely a receiver of cultural content produced in Europe or the USA, whereas in the 1940s and 1950s it emerged as a producer of this content. This was visible not only in the expansion of Yiddish schooling, but also in the development of Yiddish publishing. Several new Yiddish publishers appeared in the late 1940s and 1950s (Idisch, ICUF, Idubuj, Altveltlekher Yidisher Kultur-Kongres, IWO). Even though more and more Jews preferred to speak Spanish on a daily basis, the community was strikingly secular and thus linked to prewar concepts of Yiddishist cultural and national progress. This was done thanks to a generation of devoted ethnic leaders like Marek Turkow, Abraham Mitelberg or Samuel Rollansky, as well as to the support of the landsmanshaftn. The Poylisher Farband took upon itself the task of publishing 175 Yiddish

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<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, 138-139.

<sup>25</sup> Nehemías Zucker (ed), *Yor-bukh fun yidishn yishev in argentine 5706* (Yearbook of the Argentine Jewry 1945-1946), vol. 1 (Buenos Aires, 1946), quoted in Leonardo Senkman, “Los sobrevivientes de la Shoa en Argentina: su imagen y memoria en la sociedad general y judía: 1945-1950”, *Arquivo Maaravi: Revista Digital de Estudos Judaicos da UFMG*, vol. 1, 1(2007), 68-70.

books within their book series *Dos poylishe yidntum* (The Polish Jewry, 1946-1966).<sup>26</sup> In sponsoring the book series and drawing on its prewar activism, the Poylisher Farband saw its role in assisting the survivors economically, but also in maintenance of what they imagined as Jewish-Polish culture. Publishing in Yiddish after 1945 was considered an obligation of Argentine Jewry towards the memory of the destroyed Polish Jewry. Wolf Bressler and Abraham Mittelberg, both members of Poylisher Farband and the founders of “Idisch” publishing house wrote: “The world Jewish catastrophe elevated our *yishev* and appointed us with a tragic and great privilege [...] Via the Idisch Publishers the Argentine *yishev* is starting to rebuild what the enemy had destroyed.”<sup>27</sup> By publishing the collected works of Y.L. Peretz, the newly established publishing house drew on a tradition of cultural life in Poland and seemed to argue that the cultural treasures could be recreated and made useful in a postwar time. The case of *Dos poylishe yidntum* is especially informative for my study of transnational Jewish-Polish identities. By collectively mourning the Holocaust and the destruction of Jewish Poland, the Polish landslajt referred to the prewar transnational discourses that imagined Poland as the heartland of Yiddish nation. In the initial years, the income from the book sales was to be directed to the Holocaust survivors (though it soon turned out that the profits were not high enough to secure a perfect publishing cycle). The publishing endeavor was sponsored by the community institutions (Poylisher Farband, *Folks-bank* of Buenos Aires) and the editors relied on a network of contributors around the world (including Jewish-Polish landsman organizations in the US).<sup>28</sup> For its part, *Dos poylishe yidntum* helped to establish Argentina as the central point on the Jewish world map.<sup>29</sup>

A Buenos Aires-born scholar Abraham Nowersztern mentioned that in the 1950s “in hundreds of homes in Argentina one would recognize the black covers of *Dos poylishe yidntum* volumes.”<sup>30</sup> Many books were quickly sold out and reprinted in new editions. After establishing the cooperation with survivors in Poland, hundreds of books were shipped to Europe and many were translated into Polish. Another Argentine Poland-born Yiddishist, Samuel Rollansky published a book series *Musterverk fun der yidisher literatur* (Masterpieces of Yiddish Literature) between 1957 and 1984. Rollansky relied in his efforts on the heritage and Yiddishist legacy of

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<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, 92-117.

<sup>27</sup> Alejandro Dujovne, *Una historia del libro judío. La cultura judía argentina a través de sus editores, libreros, traductores, imprentas y bibliotecas* (Buenos Aires: Siglno Veintiuno Editores, 2014), 96-100.

<sup>28</sup> Alejandro Dujovne, “The Book as a Combat Weapon: Intellectuals, Patronage and Institutions in the Establishment of the Argentine Jewish Publishing Field, 1920-1980,” *Perush: Online Journal of Jewish Scholarship and Interpretation*, vol. 2 (2010).

<sup>29</sup> Schwartz, 93.

<sup>30</sup> Abraham Nowersztern, “Dos poylishe yidntum,” *The Book Peddler: Newsletter of the National Yiddish Book Exchange* 15 (1993): 18.

Argentine IWO that he headed. He was successful in recruiting philanthropists and individual subscribers, which allowed him to publish 100 titles, including anthologies and works of fiction. The *Musterverk* was sponsored by a South-African philanthropist Yosef Lifshitz, which again underscored the transnational networking of the Yiddishists, both before and after the Holocaust. Novels, memoirs of the prewar life in Poland and Holocaust narratives were to bear witness to unspeakable crimes perpetrated against the Jews.<sup>31</sup> In 1955, when the 100<sup>th</sup> volume of *Dos poylishe yidntum* was published, its editors and Poylisher Farband began to consider their project as “erecting an eternal monument to Polish Jewry.”<sup>32</sup> In this way the book series became a *lieux de memoire*, a portable site of remembrance that mourned the destroyed Polish Jewry, yet attempted to envision a bright future for Yiddish culture in a post-1945 world, or Argentina specifically. Both Argentine memorial series were a secular endeavor and served the ethnic leaders as proof that Yiddish peoplehood and their progressive national ideals had the power of rebirth. In the late 1940s, this was still considered an option.

If the Holocaust and the annihilation of Eastern European Jewry redefined the dynamics within the Argentine Jewish community and its perception within world Jewry, this was further strengthened by the establishment of the State of Israel. Book publishing, schooling and power relations in Jewish institutions witnessed a new cultural and identitarian re-orientation, in accordance with the vision of ethnic leaders, publishers and educators. This was also linked to the political transformation in Argentina, the rise of Juan Domingo Perón to power in 1943 and his pro-Israel attitude.<sup>33</sup> In the 1950s Hebrew became more and more present in the school curricula, and some schools defined earlier as Yiddishist even supported Zionism. The Argentine Jewish school system at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s experienced a period of hebraization. The director of Yiddishist TSVISHO schools, Chaim Finkelstein, wrote in 1947: “Jewish education needs to develop in children an awareness that the idea of [national] redemption is concrete and near to them, and not something abstract... In the diaspora, there is a need to enjoy the power of Israel, the spirit of the State and its national content, in order to fill them with Jewish life.”<sup>34</sup> In 1950 the

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<sup>31</sup> Schwartz, *Survivors and Exiles*, 116.

<sup>32</sup> For the broader meaning of Holocaust literature, see David Roskies, *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

<sup>33</sup> See Raanan Rein, *Los muchachos peronistas judíos: los argentinos judíos y el apoyo a justicialismo* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2015); Raanan Rein, *Argentina, Israel y los judíos: encuentros y desencuentros mitos y realidades* (Buenos Aires: Lumière, 2001), chapters 2 and 3; Lawrence D. Bell, “The Jews and Perón. Communal Politics and National Identity in Peronist Argentina, 1946-1955” (unpublished PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2002).

<sup>34</sup> Zadoff, *Historia de la educación judía*, 391-392.

TSVISHO opened a Hebrew course for adults, while Sholem Aleichem schools reduced the number of Yiddish classes in order to make room for Hebrew. After the establishment of the state of Israel, Argentine Yiddishists seemed to increasingly acknowledge that both languages needed to be taught in Argentina. Similarly, celebrations of Jewish religious holidays were included in the TSVISHO curriculum for the first time in the mid-1950s. From the mid-1950s, *Vaad Hahinukh* promoted a Zionist ideology in the Teachers Seminary and in the schools under its supervision. In fact, the schools that decided to remain outside the *Vaad*'s framework faced financial difficulties, which made their Yiddishist socio-cultural stance much weaker.

Even the Yiddishist Y.L. Peretz school of the *Gezelshaft far yidishe veltlekhe shuln* decided to sing *Hatikvah* when the UN voted on the partition of Palestine and the establishment of the state of Israel, and incorporated religious elements into their curricula. In the late 1940s, Zionism was combined with Argentine patriotism in many Jewish schools. Further, emphasis was placed on similarities between Jewish and Argentine history in Yiddishist schools by focusing on heroism and the national struggle, which was taught both in the Jewish and Argentine context (*temas patrias* like: "Sacrifice for the homeland" or "Conduct of a good citizen and national greatness").<sup>35</sup> The changes in the Zionist direction were also visible on the publishing market. *Editorial Israel* was launched as early as 1938, which advocated a pro-Zionist transition in Argentina's cultural arena. It published in Spanish works by the founding fathers of Zionism like Herzl, Żabotyński, Ahad Haam (and excluded socialist Zionists like Borokhov or Syrkin), as well as a number of fiction translations from Hebrew.<sup>36</sup> *Editorial Israel*, like the tendencies found in Argentine Jewish schooling, drew on historical and religious aspects of Jewishness, presenting them as an alternative to a narrative centered around Yiddish and secularism. Its editors Maximo Yagupsky and José Mirelman envisioned the State of Israel as a sign of Jewish national revival and took a pride in the victories of the young state after 1948. This was reflected in the books they published that praised militant Jewishness and Jewish heroism (for instance *La guerra de los judíos* by Leon Feuchtwanger and *La Legión Judía en la guerra del 14* by Żabotyński).<sup>37</sup> The Hebrew-Zionist tendencies in Jewish book culture were strengthened after the establishment of Israel. In 1953 *Editorial Candelabro* was founded, which published a so-called "Zionist Library" and cooperated with the Jewish Agency.<sup>38</sup> Most of the pro-Zionist books were published in accessible Spanish

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<sup>35</sup> Chaim Finkelstein, *Egalitische lern-program far zeks-klasiker tsugab-shul* (Buenos Aires: Tsentrale veltlekhe yidishe shul-organizatsye in argentine, 1943), reprinted in 1985 in Buenos Aires and edited by Barnardo Danker, 286.

<sup>36</sup> Dujovne, *Una historia del libro judío*, 172-177.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, 229-232.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, 177-182.



rather than in Hebrew. For the first time, in the mid-1950s the sales of the books “of Jewish interest” in Spanish exceeded those in Yiddish.<sup>39</sup> The Hebrew and Zionist turn in Argentine reflected the developments in Israel where Yiddish was largely separated from notions of Jewishness.<sup>40</sup>

The strongest opposition to the linguistic and ideological evolution was adopted by Yidisher Kultur Farband (ICUF). ICUF, based on the ideals of secular progressive Jewishness and social justice was established in Argentina in 1941, which grouped a number of local communist organizations and sported its own publishing house between 1946 and 1967.<sup>41</sup> One of its leaders was the veteran ethnic activist and journalist Pinie Wald. In fact, only in ICUF-run schools did Zionism not find a favorable climate. These schools were often accused of “being foreign to the national spirit” by Jewish educational authorities. The *progresistas*, the nickname of ICUF supporters, were an important political power at the turn of the century. They opposed what they saw as Zionist homogenization of Argentine Jewish schooling and defended the value of social and political diversity.<sup>42</sup> In the 1940s, at the elections to AMIA (the kehilla of Buenos Aires), they still received around 30% of the votes and were definitely far from marginal. In the AMIA elections of 1949, the pro-communist progressives won an impressive share of 40% of the votes. Their opposition to Zionism and support for communist regimes in Eastern Europe led to a direct conflict with DAIA (Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas), AMIA and *Vaad Hakhinukh*. Tensions between communist and Zionist Jews were extremely high and the Zionist supremacy was stabilized only around 1955, especially after the communists were boycotted in AMIA and DAIA.<sup>43</sup> Yet the ICUF school continued to work even without the financial support of the community (and was rather successful until the 1960s). In the 1950s, the ICUF school continued to teach according to the ideals of secularism and Yiddishism, placing strong emphasis on the value of Jewish rootedness in the diaspora – that is, in Argentina.<sup>44</sup> On the other side of the Jewish

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<sup>39</sup> Ibidem, 271.

<sup>40</sup> Jeffrey Shandler, *Adventures in the Yiddishland: Postvernacular Language and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 48.

<sup>41</sup> See Nerina Visacovsky’s works: *Argentinos, judíos y las camaradas. Tras la utopía socialista* (Buenos Aires: Ed. Biblos, 2015); “La organización femenina del ICUF (OFI),” *Arenal. Revista de Historia de las Mujeres* 22, no. 1 (2015): 49-65; “Una historia antifascista: Argentina, Brasil y la identidad icufista,” *Travesía. Revista de Historia Económica y Social* 17, no. 1 (2015): 79-103.

<sup>42</sup> Zadoff, *Historia de la educación*, 446.

<sup>43</sup> Lawrence D. Bell, “Bitter conquest: Zionists against Progressive Jews and the Making of the Post-War Jewish Politics in Argentina,” *Jewish History* 17 (2003): 285-308.

<sup>44</sup> See an article about ICUF school I.L. Peretz in Villa Lynch, Nerina Visacovsky, “Los judíos textiles de Villa Lynch y el I.L.Peretz. Síntesis de institución judía, club de barrio y centro cultural1,” unpublished text, presented at I Jornadas Historia Política del Gran Buenos Aires en el siglo XX, Centro de Estudios de Historia Política (CEHP), Buenos Aires, 22-23 June 2006, available on the website of the CEHP. In 1955 ICUF school had around 20,000 students. See Visacovsky, *Argentinos, judíos*, 23.

political spectrum were Zionists, who welcomed Israeli educational instructors in Argentina and often supported immigration to Israel.<sup>45</sup>

The Holocaust and its aftermath spelled the end of an era in Jewish-Argentine history. Debates surrounding Jewish peoplehood, ethnicity and Yiddish culture that spanned the Atlantic until 1939 were brutally interrupted. The transnational ethno-national linkages that emerged following the immigration of Polish Jews to Argentina were largely dismantled. Similarly, the imagined polity of Yiddishland was shattered into pieces, as the commemorative projects that appeared in Argentina and other countries in the 1940s and 1950s were but a distant memory of the formerly intensive cultural dialogue between Argentina and Jewish Poland. After 1945, the geographies of the Jewish world were redefined and the Jewish *polacos* of Argentina were compelled to search for new axes of individual and collective identity.

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<sup>45</sup> Zadoff, *Historia de la educación*, 412-416

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