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**Four Jews, Five Identities: Representation, Popular Culture, and Language Politics
in the Making of Jewish-Argentines (Buenos Aires, 1930-1945)**

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Abstract

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By Ariel Svarch

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, mass transoceanic migration radically altered the social, cultural, and economic features of Latin America. The ruling elites of these young nations faced the changing demographics with both high expectations and existential dread. In Argentina, the country with the highest non-native population immigrant population in the region, immigrants played a central role in the struggle to define national identity.

This study analyzes the creation of public representations of Jewish-Argentineness as part of the contested process of establishing Argentine identity. The purported Otherness of Jewish immigrants – defined through language, religion, and both ancient and modern prejudice – as well as their place as the largest non-Catholic minority group established them as the symbolic battlefield where liberal and nativist factions of the country's elite fought to determine the boundaries of the nation.

Jewish artists, radio show producers, and translators and publishers of Yiddish literature produced narratives of social and cultural integration and even redefined the meaning of Argentineness to construct xenophobia and anti-Semitism as incompatible, foreign forces. Language – Yiddish, Spanish, or a combination of both – acted as their preferred codification device to address their target audience. These efforts sought to reinforce the identity construction of immigrants, incentivize their local-born children to resist assimilation and maintain their hyphenated identities, and convince the national elites of the productivity and patriotism of the Jewish-Argentine population. Representations of Jews in the non-Jewish liberal media similarly portrayed members of this ethnic group in a positive light, and argued for the success of trans-generational assimilation.

Drawing on extensive archival research and audiovisual records, this study examines representations of Jewish-Argentines in popular culture, produced by both Jewish and non-Jewish cultural agents, to show the power of these public constructions to shape external understandings of minority identity. Analyzing these images and their reliance on constructions of the immigrant's accent, this dissertation highlights the relationship between language and ethnic identity. By comparing representations made by elite and minority cultural producers, this dissertation uncovers ideological and communicational chasms between social groups, and reveals shared underlying understandings between social center and periphery.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AMIA: Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (Jewish Argentine Mutual Aid Society).

FI/CJK: Fundación IWO/Colección Jevl Katz.

FI/CSG: Fundación IWO/Colección Samuel Glasserman.

IFT: Yiddishe Folks Teater (Jewish Popular Theater).

Inadi: Instituto Nacional contra la Discriminación, la Xenofobia y el Racismo (National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism).

INTRODUCTION

Ricardo Carotenuto debuted on TV in September of 2013. Back then, I was writing the second chapter of this dissertation, confused about how my project had moved away from an analysis of Jewish identity based on material consumption and everyday practices. A character of Argentine comedian Diego Capusotto, part of his hit show *Peter Capusotto y sus videos* (a show with an online YouTube channel that has amassed over 400,000 subscribers, and a combined 100 million views), Carotenuto suffered from a very unusual form of discrimination. He talked in a strangely accented Spanish that, despite his big mustache and Italian surname, resulted in both acquaintances and strangers wrongly assuming he was a Jew. The comedic sketch labeled him “the man with a Jewish accent, but who is not Jewish.”¹

The show represented these episodes of ethnic misunderstanding as a mostly benign phenomenon. Carotenuto’s off-screen conversation partners chastised him for being a Jew who worked on Saturdays, and understood his need to visit his mother because, as they told him, she was surely “the Yiddishe mame that makes your life impossible, because you are Jewish.” Carotenuto’s frustrated insistence that he was not Jewish was met with merry disbelief: “Come on, it is perfectly fine if you are Jewish.”²

Peter Capusotto y sus videos portrayed these exchanges as part of a mock advertisement for the National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism

¹ Diego Capusotto and Pedro Saborido, “Ricardo Carotenuto. El hombre con acento judío pero que no es judío,” in *Peter Capusotto y sus videos*, 8th season (September, 2013). YouTube video, posted by “Peter Capusotto y sus Videos,” September 17, 2013. https://youtu.be/Gb0MB_IS50Q (accessed December 3, 2015).

² Capusotto and Saborido, “Ricardo Carotenuto,” 01:34-02:02. My translation from the original Spanish.

(*Instituto Nacional contra la Discriminación, la Xenofobia, y el Racismo*), or *Inadi*. This federal organism receives complaints from minorities, provides protection and legal assistance, and presses charges against xenophobic harassers and attackers. In the sketch, the organism celebrated how “the times of discrimination had been left behind,” replaced by a new era of tolerance. However, the fake ad warned, Argentines had to be more aware of where, when, and who they should tolerate.

The voiceover narrator explained that Carotenuto was the *Inadi*'s case study for “misguided tolerance.” The innocent, benevolent, and eventually coercive confusion of his conversation partners drove the seemingly-Jewish-but-not-really-Jewish Ricardo to frustration. As the ad explained, tongue-in-cheek, the man was “a human being who receives all manners of friendliness because he is mistaken for a member of the Jewish community.”³

In one example of “misguided tolerance” shown in the sketch, his acquaintances presented Carotenuto with a banner of *Club Atlético Atlanta*, a soccer team tied in Argentine public imagination to the Jewish community of Buenos Aires.⁴ Carotenuto refused it, and produced the coat of arms of another club, *Argentinos Juniors*, which he followed. His acquaintances, incredulous, took away his insignia and pressed *Atlanta*'s banner into his hands. “You are not from *Argentinos Juniors*. You are a fan of *Atlanta*, because you are Jewish. You cannot be a fan of another club if you are Jewish; if you are Jewish, you root for *Atlanta*,” the others insisted.⁵ “That is right,” the fake ad finished,

³ Capusotto and Saborido, “Ricardo Carotenuto,” 01:27-01:32. My translation from the original Spanish.

⁴ For a study on Atlanta's history and its status as an ethnic soccer team, see Raanan Rein, *Los Bohemios de Villa Crespo: Judíos y fútbol en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2012).

⁵ Capusotto and Saborido, “Ricardo Carotenuto,” 02:04-02:44. My translation from the original Spanish.

“the *Inadi* has no clue what to do [about this case].”⁶

As I struggled with my chapter and the shifting theme of my dissertation, the parodic lens of this sketch unexpectedly underlined central aspects of ethnic and national identity, representation, and the relationship between society and minorities. First, it illustrated how stereotypes (or public representations) of ethnic groups can be eminently local, exemplified in the sketch through the importance of a Buenos Aires soccer team. His conversation partners did not confuse Carotenuto with a Jew, but rather with a Jew who was also an Argentine, a Jewish-Argentine. Representations, then, are constructed in a local (or national) context, for local consumption, and thus are a window into local beliefs, habits, and worldviews.

Second, Capusotto’s piece highlighted how popular beliefs identified certain ethnic and immigrant groups primarily through linguistic characteristics: in the case of Jewish-Argentines, the accent of those who spoke Yiddish as their mother tongue. Speech was the defining feature of this ethnic stereotype, underscored in this case by how Carotenuto’s acquaintances refused to believe that the “Jewish-sounding” man was not, in fact, Jewish. The deployment of the accent as the main identifier of Jewishness was not an original creation of this comedic sketch; theater playwrights and comic-strip translators from the interwar period relied on similar memes, but the 2012 sketch was the first to place such an accent on a non-Jew, and take that development to its absurd consequences. That non-Jewish entertainers with mainstream audiences could rely on a linguistic-based marker of Jewishness over a span of 80 years (a span in which Jewish-Argentines went from being an immigrant group to a native-born, Spanish-speaking

⁶ Capusotto and Saborido, “Ricardo Carotenuto,” 02:44-02:49. My translation from the original Spanish.

ethnic minority) showed the enduring character of prejudice, and its power to affect or hinder social transformations.

Third, the sketch highlighted the importance of popular representations in shaping external understandings of minority identities. In the case of Carotenuto's fictional experience, these stereotypes were relatively benign: religious practice ("Jews don't work on Saturday"), family ("all Jews have burdensome *Yiddishe mames*"), and social behavior ("Atlanta is the Jewish soccer club"/ "All Argentine Jews are Atlanta fans"). They seemed harmless compared with older, more traditional tropes, such as a Jew's untrustworthiness, avarice, and parasitic relationship with Christians.

However, the fictional case of Carotenuto also emphasized how even benign, "tolerant" representations, can become coercive through social power differentials between minorities and majorities. The ridiculous and unlikely scenario of two or more men forcing soccer fandom upon another regardless of his preference, based exclusively on an ethnic stereotype regardless of whether the victim was Jewish, sheds light on the impact that public representations of identity can have on the lives and experiences of minority populations and individuals. The logics of stereotypes can impose homogeneity upon a heterogeneous population, just like Carotenuto's friends could insist, against his own preference and desire, that his Jewishness obliged him to root for *Atlanta*.

Historically, social actors have understood these public representations of minority identity to be powerful rhetorical tools for constructing not only the public perception of certain groups, but also the character and boundaries of the nation itself. Hence, the makeup of these representations has often been contested, as various factions – both inside and outside the minority in question – publicize diverse and often

oppositional constructions. These conflicts have become particularly intense, and the stakes particularly high, during moments of nation-building and profound social transformation.

This dissertation analyzes the role of representations of minority groups in the contested making of identities. Ethnic, immigrant, racial, class, gender, sexual, and age groups participate both as active agents and as symbolic constructions in the struggles to define their own character, that of their native and adopted nations, and their place within it. Different factions within a nation's political, cultural, and intellectual elites promoted diverse, often oppositional representations of minority groups that went from worthy, potentially assimilable members of the national community to nefarious, incompatible Others that had to be expelled from the social body.

The stakes of these conflicts were high. Minority groups led both external struggles—with society and the State—and internal ones--between ideological opponents inside each group-- to redefine their collective identities as part of the nation while retaining their cultural specificity. National elites, on the other hand, deployed representations of the Jew, the Black, or the Armenian (to name a few examples) in order to define the nation in cultural terms either as liberal, pluralistic, and inclusive, or as nativist, monolithic, and homogeneous.

By comparing representations made by elite cultural producers with those of the minorities, this study shows ideological and communicational chasms between social groups, while revealing shared underlying understandings between them. These similarities work as windows into common societal prejudice and habit, and signal the broad appeal of class, generation, and gender roles. Further, the representational chasms

highlight the importance as well as the limitations of language as a sociocultural insulator.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the Americas, immigrants became lightning rods for representational conflicts aiming to define the nation. The influx of millions of immigrants into the region from Europe, the Middle East, East Asia, and Northern Africa radically altered the demographics and cultural and linguistic makeup of the American countries. This was the case especially for Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, the United States, and Uruguay, and to a lesser degree Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and Peru.

These changes led to fractures within the countries' ruling and intellectual elites, and a re-litigation of the role of immigration – defining which immigrants, if any, were “desirable” and which were not – and the character of the nations' identities. In their struggles to define the nation and its boundaries, these factions and their allies in the worlds of entertainment and letters disseminated oppositional representations of immigrant and ethnic groups through mass media and popular culture, in order to win over public opinion. The affected minorities, in turn, also attempted to influence the general public as well as the members of the elite that they perceived to be more sympathetic.

In order to study the role of minority representations in the making of ethnic and national identities, this dissertation analyzes the case of Jewish-Argentines of Eastern European ancestry in the city of Buenos Aires, from 1930 to 1945. Ethnic activists, artists, and intellectuals as well as (non-Jewish) liberal cultural agents contested the meaning of Jewish-Argentineness against the advocates of the Argentine Right. These

nativist groups espoused negative representations of Jews as quintessential outsiders and an *a priori* example of the evils of immigration and the impossibility of assimilation.

Liberal opinion-makers pushed back with their own symbolic constructions, representing Jews as enthusiastic – yet sometimes quirky – members of the Buenos Aires society.

The factions involved in this conflict sought to establish specific boundaries to the Argentine nation in order to define the character of the country and its citizens. Jewish-Argentine artists, intellectuals, and cultural entrepreneurs produced their own representations of themselves as part of the Argentine nation. Language – Yiddish, Spanish, or a combination of both – acted as their preferred codification device to target immigrant Jewish-Argentines, their local-born descendants, or the general public.

While most foreigners in the nation's capital were Spaniards and Italians, there were several reasons why the presence of Jewish immigrants from the Russian Empire, Poland, and the Baltic States attracted media and governmental attention disproportionate to their demographic weight. First, Jewish migratory waves, particularly in the twentieth century, adopted an increasingly urban pattern, concentrating for the most part in a few central neighborhoods of Buenos Aires. Second, unlike the case of Spanish and Italian foreigners, the native tongue of Jews from Eastern Europe (visible in their shops, theaters, and periodicals in Argentina) was not a familiar Romance language, but Yiddish: a language related to medieval German and written in Hebrew characters. Third, while the largest immigrant groups practiced the same religion as the locals (Roman Catholicism), Jews brought with them a different set of beliefs and rituals. Fourth, Catholics in Argentina were already acquainted with negative religious and literary representations of “the Jew” before the first boat carrying Jewish immigrants had docked.

The meaning of Jewish-Argentineness became especially contested in the interwar period. Nativist right-wing Catholic groups were challenging the order that the liberal elites had established in the second half of the nineteenth century. The character of the Jew and the group's future in Argentina became the battleground for a conflict fought through mass media and popular culture.

The place of Jewish-Argentines in the struggle to define Argentine identity illustrates the ambiguous and uneasy relationship between minorities and the nation: ruling elites and state apparatuses see the mixture of sameness and difference intrinsic to hyphenated identities such as "Jewish-Argentines," "Japanese-Brazilians," or "Arab-Americans," as a threat to the construction of a homogenous national self. Latin American states, elites, and intellectuals established ideologies and institutions to indoctrinate the children of immigrants and other local minorities into proper citizens. Members of these communities struggled to maintain group cohesiveness against these assimilatory influences while stating their virtuous belonging to the nation.

Although the existing scholarship has analyzed how Argentine nativists produced negative characterizations of Jews, academics have not shown a similar interest in the role of Jewish-Argentine representations in the strategies of liberal actors.⁷ As a result, these texts have overlooked the contested character of ethnic identity and its relevance in the debates about the nation and overemphasized anti-Jewish persecution. This research understands the question of representations of Jewish-Argentineness as a lens into the

⁷ Leonardo Senkman and Saúl Sosnowski, *Fascismo y nazismo en las letras argentinas* (Buenos Aires: Lumière, 2009). Daniel Lvovich, *Nacionalismo y antisemitismo en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Javier Vergara, Grupo Zeta, 2003).

broader debate of ethnic and national identity, and the political role of popular culture and mass media in these symbolic conflicts.

Jewish Studies scholarship about the Americas has often expressed a greater concern for the transnational ethnic dimension than for the national contexts. Analyses of intra-ethnic constructions of Jewish identity, thus, were decoupled from the dynamic relationship between external and internal representations, and between Jewish citizens and their nations. This research underlines how the broader social context influenced Jewish-Argentine artists, cultural entrepreneurs, and intellectuals in their own ethno-national constructions of identity. Following recent scholarship, I conceive the “Jewish” to be inseparable from the “Argentine” and the ethnic and the national to be equally important, focusing on the relationship between the two dimensions.⁸

This study begins in 1930, with economic and political crises, and concludes in 1945, with the end of a global war and the arrival of political transformations. The Great Depression, which spread across the globe in 1930, coincided with the first successful Argentine military coup of the twentieth century. The philo-fascist and short-lived *de facto* government of General José Félix Uriburu empowered xenophobic nativist groups and intellectuals. This new regime, along with the growing unemployment and poverty in and around Buenos Aires made immigration both more difficult and less desirable. Our study closes with the end of the Second World War and the destruction of Jewish life in continental Europe, right before Juan Domingo Perón’s ascension to the Argentine

⁸ Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein, “New Approaches to Ethnicity and Diaspora in Twentieth-Century Latin America,” in *Rethinking Jewish-Latin Americans*, eds. Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein, 23-40 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008).

presidency – a development that radically altered the country’s political and social structure.

In this analysis, the term “Jews” (and its derived adjective “Jewish”) works as shorthand for “Jews from Eastern European origin.” Such a decision is not meant to erase the experiences of Jewish-Argentines from other origins, such as Jews of German, Sephardic, or Mizrahi ancestry, nor does it assume a lack of difference between Jewish identity and practice in Russia, Poland, and other Eastern European regions. Rather, it reflects how public representations of Jewish-Argentines were based on Eastern European stereotypes and characteristics. Chiefly among these traits was language: Argentine artists, propagandists, and entertainers (Jewish as well as non-Jewish) often equated Yiddish and Yiddish accents with Jewishness. Considering that Yiddish-speaking Jews were the most numerous and visible Jewish group in interwar Argentina, and that the Jewish-Argentine men and women studied in this work were of Eastern European origins, such a simplification was a matter of practicality and made for a more fluid text.

Scholars rely on specialized terminology that can have multiple meanings for different disciplines. This study is not an exception: its main questions are tied to theoretical concepts that have a specific meaning in this context. In order for the reader to make sense of the analysis, these terms require a clear definition.

First among these ideas is “nation.” This work follows the classic conceptualizations of scholars such as Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm, who understood the modern nation as well as its traditions as recent constructions designed to foster feelings of collective belonging, shared interest and culture, and patriotism.⁹

⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (Revised Edition)* (London and New York: Verso, 1991). Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing

“National identity” refers to the constructed characteristics of the imagined nation, as well as to the outlook of its ideal or stereotypical members/citizens. Although states attempt to establish a hegemonic construction of the nation, this meaning is often contested and in fluctuation.

The term “minorities” in this text refers to perceived subgroups and collectives within a given society that share a common characteristic or identity. Scholars can identify minorities through different categories, such as race, ethnicity, class, religion, language, gender, sex, age, income, or education. “Minorities” is a general term for these different groups, constructed in opposition to a larger, usually more powerful “majority.”

“Ethnicity” is a system of social categories for identification and belonging that is different yet complementary to identification and belonging to the broader (national) community. “Ethnic” individuals are part of “ethnic groups,” and see themselves and/or are seen by others as having a unique culture, language, religion, ancestry, and/or identity.¹⁰ This does not mean that members of an ethnicity conceptualize the identity and culture of their group in an identical fashion. That is to say, ethnic identities (like national identities) are contested, not only between an ethnicity’s members, but also between insiders and outsiders. An ethnic group is one possible type of minority group.

For this study, the term “hyphenated identity” refers to an individual or group’s identity that incorporates minority and national belonging. The central group analyzed here is Jewish-Argentines, which diverse actors conceived of at different historical

Tradition,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, 1-14 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, 263-308.

¹⁰ Santiago Bastos, “Judíos, indios y catalanes: algunas propuestas para estudiar la etnicidad,” *Estudios sobre las Culturas Contemporáneas* 3, no. 6 (1997): 71-100.

periods as an ethnic group, an immigrant group, or both. A hyphenated identity is more than the sum of both sides of the hyphen: the “Jewish” dimension alters and shapes the “Argentine” one, and vice versa. By studying Jewish-Argentines, we also learn about other minorities in Argentina and Latin America, about Jewish groups in the Diaspora, and about collectives with hyphenated identities in general.

This research is an analysis of “representations” of hyphenated identities. The representations studied in the following chapters are portrayals, constructions that Argentine intellectuals, artists, journalists, entertainers, and cultural entrepreneurs (Jewish as well as non-Jewish) built for public consumption. By their very nature, these representations are generalizations, and readers should not confuse them with the Jewish-Argentines and Jewish-Argentine identities that they claim to portray. Despite that, representations could have immense social power, as a popular, successful representation could influence the public’s understanding of minority and national identity.

How did the artists, journalists, intellectuals, and cultural entrepreneurs disseminate these representations of Jewish-Argentine identity? They relied on popular culture and mass culture. Although popular culture is discussed in more detail later in the introduction, a simple definition consists of forms of culture and entertainment that target a large audience rather than an elite public.

By mass culture, this study refers to a subgroup of popular culture that, through technological means, was capable of reaching a mass audience simultaneously. Printed journals, film, and radio are typical examples. Representations disseminated through mass media could reach a much larger public, but could not refine its message for each specific demographic as easily as, for example, live comedic performances.

This dissertation engages with three topics in the historiography of modern Latin America: the relationship between ethnic and minority identities and the symbolic construction of the nation; the construction of hyphenated identities and representation; and the role of popular culture in urbanized, heterogeneous societies. The initial scholarship on Latin American nation-building – particularly the structural approaches – focused on the actions and ideologies of each country’s elites.¹¹ Later histories deconstructed the “elite” category to show that it was not monolithic, but rather divided according to economic interests and diverse and even antagonistic visions of the country’s future.¹² More recent works have challenged the assumption that elite groups were the sole actors in the struggles to define the character of the nation. These authors have highlighted the impact of cultural phenomena such as soccer or music (and their appropriation) on national identity; and brought to the fore the role of women, popular classes, and ethnic minorities in re-signifying the nation from below.¹³

I examine how a numerically small (compared with Italians and Spaniards) yet highly visible immigrant group, codified by nationalist and liberal intellectuals as particularly exotic (because of their migratory origins, ethnic language, religious practices, and racial and religious myths) became both a symbolic weapon and the very

¹¹ Tulio Halperín Donghi, *Historia Contemporánea de América Latina* (Madrid: Alianza, 1969).

¹² Jacques Lafaye, *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, 1531-1813* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

¹³ For literature on soccer, see: Gregg Bocketti, “Italian Immigrants, Brazilian Football, and the Dilemma of National Identity,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 40 (2008): 275-302. Brenda Elsey, *Citizens and Sportsmen. Fútbol and Politics in Twentieth-Century Chile* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011). Edison Luis Gastaldo and Simoni Lahud Guedes, eds., *Nações em Campo: Copa do Mundo e identidade nacional* (Niterói: Intertexto, 2006). For the “nationalization,” appropriation, and “whitening” of popular music from marginal regional and racial groups, see: Peter Wade, *Music, Race, and Nation: Música Tropical in Colombia* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000). For an account of feminist activists challenging the state and social order of Ecuador in the 1990s, see: Amy Lind, “Gender and Neoliberal States: Feminists Remake the Nation in Ecuador,” *Latin American Perspectives* 30, no. 1 (2003): 181-207.

battleground in the struggles to establish the character of the Argentine nation. The antagonistic projects of nationalists and liberals re-centered the debate on Jewish-Argentines as a result of the purportedly extreme Otherness of the group. My analysis of this operation reexamines the relationship between the social spaces of center and margin.

Regarding the production of hyphenated identity representations in Latin America, this work follows a scholarship that stresses the importance of culture, both elite and popular, in the processes of identity creation.¹⁴ Jewish-Argentines constructed various public images of themselves, strategically produced for exclusive intra-ethnic consumption, for the general public, and also for mixed audiences. The analysis of shared characteristics between Jewish and non-Jewish cultural representations – such as a similar understanding of assimilation as an intergenerational, gendered phenomenon and the use of language as a defining factor of ethnicity – points towards understated ideological connections between the “ethnic” and the “nation,” and between “popular” and “elite” cultures. The commonalities also speak of the ease with which patriarchal notions of gender expand across ethnic and class boundaries.

Finally, my analysis contributes to a growing historiography on the transformative power of popular and mass culture, and how they relate to elite and state culture. This sociocultural phenomenon has received increasing attention by social scientists and scholars of the humanities.¹⁵ By centering the focus on the relationship between ethnic

¹⁴ Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California, 1991). Erin Graff Zivin, *The Wandering Signifier: Rhetoric of Jewishness in the Latin American Imaginary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). Matthew Karush, *Culture of Class: Radio and Cinema in the Making of a Divided Argentina, 1920-1946* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

¹⁵ William H. Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004). Karush, *Culture of Class*. Wade, *Music, Race, and Nation*.

cultural “margins” and influential cultural “centers,” this work considers how representations of ethnic minorities in popular and mass culture shaped but also reflected the construction of a diverse and heterogeneous society.

Setting the Stage: Nation-Building, Mass Migration, and its Consequences

The arrival of Eastern European Jews to the Americas in general and Argentina in particular took place in a context of intense social, cultural, political, and technological transformations. Between 1846 and 1940, at least 55 million Europeans and 2.5 million Asians crossed the oceans to live in the Americas.¹⁶ Some of these men, women, and children were refugees fleeing persecution, while others were economic immigrants, escaping hunger or looking for commercial opportunity. New transport and information technologies contributed to this massive population transfer: the transatlantic voyage, which lasted five weeks in the eighteenth century, required only one week in 1900. The telegraph allowed for quick communication between distant countries, carrying the myth of “America” to newsrooms around the world.¹⁷

From the last quarter of the nineteenth century until the Second World War, the social character of Latin America suffered dramatic changes: mass migration and a rapid urbanization changed the face of cities and countryside alike. The expanding reach of capitalism and global market fluctuations incentivized quick and unpredictable cycles of wealth and scarcity for the countries’ primary goods export economies. Alternating waves of laissez faire and protectionist policies led to accelerated – and often

¹⁶ Adam McKeown, “Global Migration, 1846-1940,” *Journal of World History* 15, No. 2 (2004): 155-189.

¹⁷ Robin Cohen, ed., *The Cambridge Survey of World Migration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Lydia Potts, *The World Labor Market: A History of Migration* (London and Atlantic Highland, NJ: Zed Books, 1990).

unsustainable – industrialization, which in turn resulted in growing working classes and social and political conflict. The rise of consumer society and cultural industries like radio and cinema – also aspects of a globalized economy – brought mass-produced goods and entertainment to all strata of society, imposing, altering, and subverting national myths and cultural traditions.

These transformations did not take place simultaneously in all of Latin America, nor to the same degree. Each nation's specific social and political dynamic affected and shaped these developments. Countries with large indigenous and mestizo populations, like Bolivia, received a smaller flow of immigrants (especially relative to their total population), yet still faced new challenges and opportunities from an increased participation in the global socioeconomic system. Those located on the Pacific coast received less immigrants from Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, but more from East Asia (this was the case for Peru and Panama, for example). Emergent urban centers like Buenos Aires and São Paulo developed large industrial areas (even though the large majority was light industry for domestic consumption), while Central American cities hardly showed any industrial growth.

The social, political, and cultural transformations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries coincided with the ongoing tumultuous nation-building processes of the Latin American nations. Ruling elites were creating institutional frameworks and national identities (national symbols, myths, and traditions) as the countries underwent alterations to their socioeconomic structure and demographic makeup. As post-modern critics of Benedict Anderson have suggested, the creation of myths and symbols is never complete and their canonical status is not permanently fixed. Rather, they are open-

ended, contested processes, which involve both intra-elite struggles and conflicts between the local ruling factions, subaltern historical actors, and (neo) colonial and global interests.¹⁸ However, as scholars like John Charles Chasteen have argued, successful states were in a stronger position to enforce their preferred canon and official identity than younger countries still struggling to impose state authority, institute hegemony, and establish functioning bureaucracies as well as state-regulated indoctrinating and educational institutions.¹⁹

Immigration, Ideological Conflict, and the Challenges of Cosmopolitanism in Modern Argentina

The politics of immigration and the social and political change that Argentina – and especially the port city of Buenos Aires – underwent from the 1880s to 1947 set the stage for the study of representations of Jewish-Argentine identities. The country’s population at the beginning of this period barely reached two million people. Before the turn of the century, it had climbed to four million. By 1947, the number of inhabitants exceeded sixteen million, an eightfold increase. In that same year, the capital city alone housed three million *porteños* (the term for residents of Buenos Aires), thirteen times as much as in 1779. This demographic increase was for the most part the result of a massive influx of transatlantic immigrants. Jews, whose numbers were estimated at 250,000 by

¹⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, “DissemiNation,” in *The Location of Culture*, by Homi K. Bhabha, 139-170 (London: Routledge, 1994). Julio Ortega, *Crítica de la identidad: La pregunta por el Perú en su literatura* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1988).

¹⁹ John Charles Chasteen, “Introduction: Beyond Imagined Communities,” in *Beyond Imagined Communities: Reading and Writing the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*, eds. Sara Castro-Klarén and John Charles Chasteen, ix-xv (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003).

the early 1930s, were the third largest immigrant group, behind Italians and Spaniards.²⁰ Eastern European Jews – by far the most numerous Jewish subgroup – were the largest non-Catholic ethnic minority in the nation and the largest that spoke a non-Latin language (and written in a non-Latin alphabet). These qualities, along with what David Nirenberg has described as the historical role of “the Jew” as the central “Other” in Catholic tradition and identity, defined Eastern European Jewish immigrants as “exotic” and highly visible.²¹

At the beginning of the mass migratory process, Argentine elites conceived of a broad, expansive national identity, open to “all men in the world who want to inhabit the Argentine land,” echoing the Constitution’s preamble.²² The country’s liberal, pro-immigration policies from the last decades of the nineteenth century reflected these beliefs. Argentine ruling classes saw white European immigrants as the best possible labor force to establish a profitable agricultural export economy. From the 1880s, after a campaign of ethnic cleansing that almost eradicated the indigenous inhabitants of Patagonia and “freed” vast expanses of land, until the global economic crisis of the 1930s, the country experienced an enormous influx of transatlantic immigration. Although the government had hoped for rural immigrants from northern and central Europe, the majority of newcomers came from poor areas in Spain and Italy, and most of them stayed in the Argentine cities.²³

By the turn of the century, immigrants made up a quarter of the country’s

²⁰ *Primer Censo Nacional Argentino*, 1869. *Segundo Censo Nacional Argentino*, 1895. *Cuarto Censo Nacional Argentino*, 1947.

²¹ David Nirenberg, “Enmity and Assimilation: Jews, Christians, and Converts in Medieval Spain,” *Common Knowledge* 9, no. 1 (2003): 137-155.

²² Preamble of the Argentine Constitution. My translation from the original Spanish.

²³ Fernando Devoto, *Historia de la inmigración en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2004).

population, a million out of close to four million.²⁴ By 1930, the proportion had increased to a third. Foreign men outnumbered foreign women in a two-to-one margin, as most arrivals were young single men or heads of family looking to establish themselves before bringing over their spouses and children. In the city of Buenos Aires, between the 1910s and the 1930s, half of the population was foreign-born.²⁵

The unprecedented influx of immigrants, the presence of workers with union as well as leftist political experience – not particularly numerous, but highly visible – and the perception that the newcomers resisted assimilation spawned a “nationalist reaction”²⁶ by the end of the nineteenth century. A fraction of the elite abandoned the liberal consensus about nationhood and immigration. Although this movement was originally small and marginal, it slowly gained strength and support as the decades passed, particularly as liberal democracy and republicanism came under attack in central Europe. Nationalist intellectuals wrote editorials in magazines and newspapers and published books decrying the loss of the true Argentine “essence” and lamenting the corrupting influence of European cosmopolitanism. They identified Buenos Aires as the epicenter of this nefarious social malady.

In 1902, the government agreed to the demands of Argentine industrial leaders and enacted the first piece of anti-immigrant legislation, the *Ley de Residencia*, which granted the Executive the authority to send troublesome and “subversive” immigrants back to their countries of origin. Its supporters had conceived of the law as a tool to

²⁴ *Segundo Censo Nacional Argentino*, 1895.

²⁵ *Segundo Censo Nacional Argentino*, 1895. *Tercer Censo Nacional Argentino*, 1914. *Cuarto Censo Municipal, Ciudad de Buenos Aires*, 1936.

²⁶ Fernando Devoto, *Nacionalismo, fascismo y tradicionalismo en la Argentina moderna. Una historia* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2003).

thwart the growing unionization of the working classes, which were for the most part composed of foreign-born men.²⁷

Nationalist leaders demanded immediate solutions to what they saw as a demographic and cultural threat of existential proportions. The more moderate among them, such as renowned intellectual Ricardo Rojas (president of the *Universidad de Buenos Aires* between 1926 and 1930), did not call for an end to immigration. Instead, his 1909 best-seller, *La restauración nacionalista*, argued for a suppression of ethnic schools – particularly Jewish schools, – mandatory state education for the children of immigrants to create “full” (that is, non-ethnic) Argentines, and the development of stronger cultural institutions to reinforce native values against foreign influences.²⁸

The most extremist nationalists incorporated the racial principles of eugenics and later on, in the 1920s and 1930s, also borrowed from the anti-liberal and corporatist ideas of the fascist Italian regime and the Spanish Falangist and anti-liberal Catholic movements.²⁹ They called for curbing immigration and a closer relationship between the State and the Catholic Church. Where moderates demanded the forced assimilation of ethnic minorities into non-hyphenated Argentines, radicals defined the national identity in such a way that excluded anyone who was not a Catholic with a Hispanic cultural background.³⁰

With the economic crisis of the 1930s and the growth of the extreme, anti-liberal and anti-democratic Right in Europe, the anti-immigrant nationalist movement proposed

²⁷ Devoto, *Nacionalismo, fascismo y tradicionalismo*. Sandra McGee-Deutsch, *Las Derechas: The Extreme Right in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, 1890-1939* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

²⁸ Devoto, *Nacionalismo, fascismo y tradicionalismo*. McGee-Deutsch, *Las Derechas*, 28-29.

²⁹ Devoto, *Nacionalismo, fascismo y tradicionalismo*. Sandra McGee-Deutsch, *Counterrevolution in Argentina, 1900-1932: The Argentine Patriotic League* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

³⁰ McGee-Deutsch, *Las Derechas*.

a narrow, strict vision of the ideal Argentine: deeply Catholic, rooted in a Hispanic cultural heritage that went back to an imagined colonial past, and tied to the rural world – an idealized space of nature, tradition, and “purity,” the polar opposite to the corrupt city, the locus of contagion.³¹ Immigrants – not only Jews, but also Arabs, Japanese, Eastern Europeans, and even Italians – could only damage, contaminate, and corrupt the Argentine spirit. From the perspective of the movement’s propagandists, liberal democracy, pro-immigration policies, and the secret, universal ballot were failed, regrettable missteps that had turned out terribly, if not outright anti-Argentine conspiracies unleashed by dark, outside forces.

Although the nationalist movement was far from homogeneous, by the end of the 1920s most factions and leaders favored a regime change in favor of a neo-corporatist state inspired by Benito Mussolini’s Italy, but with a stronger connection to Catholicism. Its main proponents managed to organize such an experiment – however short-lived – with the coup d’état that overthrew Hipólito Yrigoyen in 1930. The pro-fascist dictatorship of General José Félix Uriburu lasted less than two years, but provided valuable experience and lessons that nationalists applied in the following decades.³²

The nationalist movement gathered its own intellectual cadre, populated with figures like brothers Julio and Rodolfo Irazusta, socialist-turned-fascist and award-winning author Leopoldo Lugones, writer and historian Manuel Gálvez, former anarchists Juan Carulla and Ernesto Palacio, best-selling novelist and anti-Semite (and

³¹ Fernando Aínsa, “The Antinomies of Latin American Discourses of Identity and their Fictional Representation,” in *Latin American Identity and Constructions of Difference*, ed. Amaryll Chanady, 1-25 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 13.

³² Lvovich, *Nacionalismo y antisemitismo en la Argentina*. Loris Zanatta, *Del estado liberal a la nación católica: Iglesia y ejército en los orígenes del peronismo: 1930-1943* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 1996). Devoto, *Nacionalismo, fascismo y tradicionalismo*. McGee-Deutsch, *Counterrevolution in Argentina*.

director of the National Library) Gustavo Martínez Zuviría, anti-Semitic theocratic philosopher and Catholic priest Julio Meinvielle, aristocrat Roberto de Laferrère, disenchanted liberal Carlos Ibarguren, and revisionist historian and son of Italian immigrants Pedro de Paoli. Although most of these men never achieved immense popularity, they were nonetheless influential with a faction of the national elite, the Catholic Church, and the armed forces. These men founded and wrote for several nationalist movement periodicals such as *La Nueva República*, *Bandera Argentina*, *Combate*, *Pampero*, *Clarínada*, and the long-lived cultural Catholic weekly *Criterio*.

Despite their rejection of foreigners and cosmopolitanism, most nationalist thinkers were inspired by the works of European nationalists, such as Charles Maurras, founder of *Action Française*, and Ramiro de Maetzu, founder of monarchist *Acción Española* and fervent defender of Miguel Primo de Rivera's dictatorship. Most of them were enthusiastic supporters of Benito Mussolini's corporatist regime and, later on, several expressed admiration for Adolf Hitler. While some, like Lugones, were opposed to immigration as a general principle, other thinkers, like Martínez Zuviría and Meinvielle, promoted a virulent anti-Semitism.³³

Because of the nationalist movement's general rejection of liberal republicanism, representative democracy, and universal suffrage, as well as their limited electoral appeal, nationalist political parties were uncommon. Instead, nationalists created militias, often called "leagues" or "legions." The most influential were the *Liga Patriótica Argentina*,

³³ Lvovich, *Nacionalismo y antisemitismo en la Argentina*. Zanatta, *Del estado liberal a la nación católica*, Eduardo Zimmerman, "El orden y la libertad. Una historia intelectual de Criterio. 1928-1968," in *Cuando opinar es actuar. Revistas argentinas del siglo XX*, ed. Noemí Girbal-Blacha and Diana Quatrocchi-Woisson, 151-191 (Buenos Aires: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 1999). María E. Rapalo, "La Iglesia Católica y el autoritarismo político: la revista Criterio (1928-1931)," *Anuario IEHS* 5 (1990):51-69.

founded in 1919 during a “red scare” riot; the rabidly anti-Semitic *Legión Cívica Argentina*; and the *Legión Republicana*, modeled after Charles Maurras’s *Action Française*.³⁴

Fortunately for Jewish-Argentines and other minorities, the nationalist movement never achieved political supremacy. Although some groups engaged in minor acts of organized vandalism and violence, the sociopolitical climate of the interwar period never came close to the xenophobia of continental Europe. Nationalist did not achieve enough control over the state apparatus to pose an actual threat to Jews and other groups even in the 1930-1932 dictatorship. They did, however, aggressively push their negative representations of Jewish-Argentines and their construction of Argentine identity.

Eastern European Jews Join the Argentine Nation

The first Russian Jews arrived in Argentina in 1889, a group of 824 people who crossed the ocean aboard the German steamer S.S. *Weser*. After a trouble-laden voyage, they wound up stranded, penniless, and without resources in abandoned train cars in the Santa Fe province, in the fertile area known as the *Litoral*. Due to famine, bad weather, and worse hygiene conditions, sixty-four of the would-be colonists perished. When news of their state reached the Parisian *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, the central institution of the French Jewry, the community leaders devised a plan. They convinced Baron Maurice de Hirsch, a Jewish-German magnate, to establish and fund the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA). This organization assumed the task of resettling in Argentina poor and persecuted Eastern European Jews, most of them from the Pale of Settlement (the

³⁴ Lvovich, *Nacionalismo y antisemitismo en la Argentina*. Zanatta, *Del estado liberal a la nación católica*. Devoto, *Nacionalismo, fascismo y tradicionalismo*. McGee-Deutsch, *Counterrevolution in Argentina*.

area of the Russian Empire where Jews were allowed to live, which included parts of modern-day Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, Moldova, Ukraine, and western Russia). To this goal, the JCA established Jewish agricultural colonies in the region known as the Pampas. Later on, the organization expanded its operations to other countries in the Americas, creating and supporting colonies in Brazil, Canada, and the United States, and also in Cyprus and Turkey.³⁵

The immigrants who arrived on the S.S. *Weser* formed the first colony, which they named *Moisés Ville* in honor of Baron Hirsch, whose Hebrew name was Moshe (Moses). Over the course of four decades, the JCA established 26 agricultural colonies in Argentina, although many were short-lived. The most successful, prosperous, and populated colonies were concentrated in the fertile rural areas in the northern part of Buenos Aires province and the southern stretches of Entre Ríos and Santa Fe provinces. Through large human and material investment, the JCA helped approximately ten thousand Russian Jews cross the Atlantic from 1889 to 1896. By 1913 the number of settlers had grown to 18,900, with an additional number of 7,748 Jewish immigrants who worked in the colonies as merchants, artisans, or field hands. These numbers fell short of the JCA's initial plans, but their high recruiting standards (demanding large families with young, fit members, extensive farming experience, and at least some savings) greatly complicated the task of finding acceptable colonist families in Eastern Europe.³⁶

The organization's micromanagement of the colonies and its mortgage-based system of land tenure sparked conflicts between its bureaucrats and colonists. These

³⁵ Haim Avni, *Argentina and the Jews: A History of Jewish immigration* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991), 27-32.

³⁶ Victor Mirelman, *Jewish Buenos Aires, 1890-1930: In Search of an Identity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990). Avni, *Argentina and the Jews*, 37-44.

frictions, together with natural disasters, lack of advanced education, and the increasing difficulty of purchasing new land pushed the local-born children of immigrant colonists towards large cities, such as Rosario and Buenos Aires. This process of demographic attrition began in the final years of the nineteenth century. Following the large waves of spontaneous (that is, not organized by the JCA) migration that began in 1905, a preponderantly urban process, the agricultural colonies became numerically marginal. According to the 1914 census, 57 percent of all “Russians” (immigrants with passports from the Russian Empire, the majority of whom were Jews) already lived in cities.³⁷ Even so, the agricultural colonies remained important symbols for Jewish-Argentines, as they were integral to the narrative of integration and counteracted negative stereotypes of Jews as declassed, unproductive leeches who only dealt in petty trade and usury.³⁸

A worsening situation for Jews in Eastern Europe – particularly in the Russian Empire – as well as domestic developments in Argentina altered the nature of Jewish transoceanic immigration in the first decades of the twentieth century. New waves of *pogroms* (publically sanctioned and informally endorsed riots that attacked and pillaged Jewish villages or neighborhoods) racked the Russian Empire from 1903 to 1905.³⁹ This persecution intensified with the violent repression of the failed 1905 revolution, following Russia’s defeat in its war against Japan. During the following years, reactionary groups in league with the tsarist police forces assaulted 660 towns in the Pale of Settlement. The dislocation, fear of further violence, and sense of insecurity that arose from these pervasive attacks prompted widespread emigration.

³⁷ *Tercer Censo Nacional Argentino, 1914*. Mirelman, *Jewish Buenos Aires*.

³⁸ Judith Noemí Freidenberg, *The Invention of the Jewish Gaucho: Villa Clara and the Construction of Argentine Identity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 143-150.

³⁹ Avni, *Argentina and the Jews*, 67-69.

This migratory “push” factor coincided with an era of economic growth and prosperity in Argentina – called the *Belle Époque* by the Francophile national elites – stretching from the last years of the nineteenth century to 1914 and serving as a powerful “pull” factor for immigration. A network of European and local institutions helped immigrants solve bureaucratic and financial difficulties like obtaining passports, visas, and transportation. From 1905 to the eve of the Great War, the number of Jews in Argentina leaped from around 10,000 to 110,000. Of this latter figure, 85 percent were Eastern European Jews, and over 50 percent (65,000) lived in the city of Buenos Aires.⁴⁰

By 1914 Eastern European Jews had become the third largest immigrant group and the largest non-Catholic population in the country.⁴¹ Many among these new arrivals stayed in cities, where they became peddlers, merchants, artisans, and factory workers, and began to prosper.⁴² Jews from Romania, Poland and Lithuania looking for a new home joined this established Russian migratory flow as the conditions in other areas of Eastern Europe deteriorated during the interwar period.

These “push” and “pull” factors cannot, on their own, explain the character and scale of Jewish immigration to the country. Jews learned about Argentina from letters and news reports from growing ethnic linkages that stretched across the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. The growing myth of “America” and exaggerated success stories spread across Eastern Europe through periodicals, personal letters, and gossip. As José Moya has noted in the case of Spanish immigration to Argentina, kin and ethnic transoceanic networks spread the news of a land of economic opportunity and personal safety. These informal

⁴⁰ Avni, *Argentina and the Jews*. Mirelman, *Jewish Buenos Aires*.

⁴¹ Devoto, *Historia de la inmigración en la Argentina*.

⁴² Ricardo Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 2006).

connections generated a chain migration by easing the burden of buying expensive tickets, providing know-how and decreasing uncertainty, and helping new arrivals adapt to the new social and cultural context of Latin America.⁴³

The ubiquity of immigrants in general, and of Jews in particular, in the city of Buenos Aires disturbed the local nationalist groups. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Argentine politicians, police forces, and entrepreneurs, fearful of “contagion,” panicked at the idea of unionized workers and secret communist conspiracies that sought to establish a local soviet government. This Argentine “red scare” further fanned the flames of nationalist anti-Semitism. The term *ruso* meant both “Russian” and “Jew/Jewish” in the slang of the city, because a majority of Jewish-Argentines had arrived with passports from the Russian Empire. This slippery meaning allowed nationalist groups (whether purposefully or out of ignorance) to collapse Jews, Russians, and Communists into one category. The ideology of the Argentine Right already conflated opposition to leftist ideas and hatred of Jews: the emergence of the USSR only reinforced these beliefs.⁴⁴

The tensions in Buenos Aires came to a head in January, 1919. A strike in the *Vasena e Hijos* metal works turned into violent confrontations between striking workers (many of them immigrants) and the police, leaving five strikers and one officer dead. The police and armed right-wing gangs ambushed the funeral procession for the union members, killing at least a dozen workers and activists. In response to this attack, union leaders declared a general strike. The conflict escalated as workers clashed with groups of

⁴³ José Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1998).

⁴⁴ McGee-Deutsch, *Las Derechas*, 27-29, 82-83.

nationalist civilians and police, and the national government declared a state of emergency and asked the armed forces to intervene.

During the rioting, right-wing bands, with the support of patrician families and the Navy unified as the *Liga Patriótica Argentina* – the first organized nation-wide militia of the Argentine Right. Admiral Manuel Domecq García, acting as the league’s provisional president, provided weapons and training to the eager “patriots.” They organized violent raids against the *rusos* in the central and heavily Jewish Buenos Aires neighborhood of Once, attacking shops, homes, synagogues, community organizations, and anyone out on the streets who looked “Jewish.” Ironically, this meant that the *Liga* targeted above all Orthodox and Hasidic men – the groups least likely to be Communist sympathizers.⁴⁵

This episode had no impact on transatlantic immigration, which continued and even increased its pace. In 1921, the United States instituted a draconian quota system that excluded most Southern and Eastern European potential immigrants. This sudden closure redirected the flow of Italians, Spaniards, and Jews to other American countries, especially to Argentina, Brazil, and Canada. However, the increasing nationalism of members of the Argentine bureaucracy created obstacles to mass migration. Jewish-Argentines launched lobbying efforts and created new local organizations, such as the *Sociedad Protectora de Inmigrantes Israelitas* (Society for the Protection of Jewish Immigrants – SOPROTIMIS), to overcome these hurdles.⁴⁶

The Great Depression, which hit the Argentine economy in 1930, and the establishment of a nationalist right-wing dictatorship in the same year, effectively ended

⁴⁵ Lvovich, *Nacionalismo y antisemitismo en la Argentina*. McGee-Deutsch, *Counterrevolution in Argentina*.

⁴⁶ Avni, *Argentina and the Jews*, 108-114.

the country's policy of unrestricted immigration. From new restrictions established in 1932 until the end of the Second World War, the only legal ways to enter the nation were through the *llamada* system, in which immigrants already in Argentina could request permits for their relatives in Europe; or through the intervention of international organizations and influential men. As the threats of Nazism and fascism in Europe became direr in the late 1930s, thousands of Jewish immigrants entered Argentina illegally, smuggled from neighboring countries such as Paraguay or by bribing immigration and customs agents. Although official records speak of 24,000 Jews entering the country between 1932 and 1945, Jewish-Argentine organizations devoted to helping immigrants estimated the real number to be closer to 40,000 people.⁴⁷

Until 1932, the government established restrictions to immigration through administrative measures, not legislation. The orders often gave leeway to the enforcement agents, some of whom were particularly focused on curbing the arrival of Jews, while others turned their position into an opportunity for profit. According to scholar of Jewish immigration Haim Avni, the main reasons for a decrease in immigration can be found in the worldwide economic crisis and a global trend to close national borders, even in the case of refugees. The growth of the Jewish-Argentine population in the second half of the 1930s slowed considerably, as biological reproduction became the main driving force. The relative decrease of immigrant vis-à-vis local-born Jewish-Argentines ushered cultural and linguistic changes that affected identity representations and the main concerns of community activists and institutional leaders.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Avni, *Argentina and the Jews*, 170.

⁴⁸ Avni, *Argentina and the Jews*.

The Many Constructions of Jewish-Argentines: Institutional Bias, Popular Culture, and the Polysemy of Ethnicity

Jewish-Argentines were prolific creators of institutions: in the first decades of the twentieth century, they established organizations to tackle social concerns such as white slavery, hygiene and health, religious service and ritual burial, and even lack of local unionization. The burial society of Buenos Aires, the only entity able to amass a budgetary surplus, eventually assumed the role – first *de facto*, and officially in 1949 – of central institution of Jewish-Argentine life, becoming AMIA (*Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina*).⁴⁹ Their institutional life multiplied further as ideological quarrels between Zionists and Communists led to splits and the establishment of competing organizations with similar goals.⁵⁰

Community institutions had an important social role: they provided material assistance and cultural goods, created spaces of ethnic sociability, and often represented Jewish-Argentines as interlocutors to non-Jewish organizations and the national state. However, there was more to Jewish-Argentine life than institutional life. A large majority of the ethnic population had no institutional affiliation or participated in non-Jewish organizations (such as soccer clubs, public schools, political parties, and neighborhood libraries). Until the last ten years, these people – a clear demographic majority – were all but absent from the academic histories. Their erasure created a slanted perspective, and produced a historiography not of Jewish-Argentines, but rather of how the central community institutions understood and portrayed them.

⁴⁹ Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos*, 242-249.

⁵⁰ Ariel Svarch, “El comunista sobre el tejado: Historia de la militancia comunista en la calle judía (Buenos Aires, 1920-1950)” (Licenciatura thesis., Universidad Torcuato Di Tella, 2005).

For several reasons, the historiography of Jewish-Argentines (and, more broadly, of Jewish-Latin Americans) has emphasized, until recently, a historical analysis that prioritizes institutional and state actors and sources. Among other motives, scholars have taken this approach because of the availability of sources: governments and organizations produce documents as part of their regular affairs, and their written and audiovisual output usually ends up in the archive. The lives, practices, behaviors, and identities of unaffiliated Jewish-Argentines (and many groups within the general population) leave fainter, more immaterial traces. Their histories are inevitably fragmentary: individuals and small groups rarely call for meetings to define their behaviors, and they do not often write detailed, careful minutes describing their day, thoughts, and interests (with the clear and rare exceptions of individuals who keep a diary or write their memoirs). When they appear in official sources, such as newspaper articles or trial records, their stories are mediated by the gaze of government officials or newspaper editors.

Academics interested in this type of scholarly pursuit found their subjects in alternative sources, following the lead of historians of “private lives,” of the lower and popular classes, and of researchers from Cultural Studies. Mollie Lewis Nouwen looked at the “police stories” section of newspapers to find criminal Jewish-Argentines (and analyze how the media and police represented them), while Alejandro Dujovne retraced the book publishing networks that Jewish-Argentines built and how it connected with the Argentine and diasporic Jewish markets.⁵¹

Another reason why the pioneering generation of academics with a scholarly

⁵¹ Mollie Lewis Nouwen, *Oy, My Buenos Aires: Jewish Immigrants and the Creation of Argentine National Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013). Alejandro Dujovne, *Una historia del libro judío: la cultura judía a través de sus editores, librerías, traductores, imprentas y bibliotecas* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2014).

interest that intersected the Jewish and Argentine (or, more broadly, Latin American) axes wrote institutional histories is that there was nothing written. Haim Avni's foundational history of Jewish immigration to Argentina, a work that analyzed the role of Argentine and European Jewish institutions, was a necessary first step in the field. However, the author's overreliance on institutional sources led him to reproduce the narrative of the main Jewish-Argentine organizations about the central role of the agrarian colonies and the JCA.⁵² His work devoted more space and attention to the orchestrated arrival of colonists than to the much larger, yet "spontaneous" (that is, not led by Jewish institutions) urban migration.

Similarly, Víctor Mirelman undertook one of the first analyses of the development and maturation of Jewish-Argentine institutions, but described his work as a study of "Jewish Buenos Aires." This equivocally insinuated completeness, which by omission operated as an erasure.⁵³ Other historians who followed in the footsteps of these scholarly pioneers replicated their premises and methodologies, hence reproducing the institutional slant.⁵⁴

In the last decade and a half, new academic works have subverted these institutional teleologies by rescuing the histories of conveniently forgotten Jewish-Argentine actors. Several researchers have revisited the presence, influence, and activism of Jewish-Argentine Communists, both within community activism and in the broader

⁵² Avni, *Argentina and the Jews*.

⁵³ Mirelman, *Jewish Buenos Aires*.

⁵⁴ Sofer, *From Pale to Pampa*. Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos*. Efraim Zadoff, *Historia de la educación judía en Buenos Aires, 1935-1957* (Buenos Aires: Milá, 1994). Silvia Schenkolewski-Kroll, "La conquista de las comunidades: el movimiento sionista y la comunidad Ashkenazi de Buenos Aires (1935-1949)," in *Judaica Latinoamericana: Estudios Histórico-Sociales II*, ed. Amilat, 191-202 (Jerusalem: Magna Press, 1993).

national and international politics.⁵⁵ More recently, Raanan Rein has challenged both institutional history and collective memory by reconstructing the participation of Jewish-Argentines in the first Peronist regime (1945-1955) and reassessing the influence of the *Organización Israelita Argentina*.⁵⁶

A history of Jewish-Argentines that prioritized the unaffiliated population and non-institutional sources became a priority to correct the institutional slant. The study of these historical actors was integral to produce a holistic understanding of the Jewish-Argentine experience (and, more broadly, the experience of other minorities in Latin America). A young generation of scholars has begun to uncover the untold lives of Jewish-Argentines. The above mentioned work of Lewis Nouwen researched their contribution to the urban culture of Buenos Aires, while Dujovne has revisited Jewish-Argentine literary culture from the perspective of the Yiddish and Spanish publishing industry.⁵⁷ Sandra McGee-Deutsch further contributed to recovering the lives and histories of underrepresented Jewish-Argentines: her work added gender to the identity equation in her book about Jewish-Argentine women.⁵⁸

Other scholars of ethnicity in Latin America have also produced new academic works exploring new facets of minority life and identity in the region. John Tofik Karam undertook an ethnographic history of Arab-Brazilians (specifically, the Syrian-Lebanese)

⁵⁵ Daniel Kerssfield, *Rusos y rojos: Judíos comunistas en los tiempos de la Comintern* (Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual, 2012). Nerina Visacovsky, *Argentinos, judíos y camaradas: Tras la utopía socialista* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2015). Israel Lotersztain, “La historia de un fracaso: la religión judeo comunista en los tiempos de la URSS (La prensa del ICUF en Argentina entre 1946 y 1957)” (PhD diss., UNGS-IDES, 2014). Svarch, “El comunista sobre el tejado.”

⁵⁶ Raanan Rein, *Los muchachos peronistas judíos: Los argentinos judíos y el apoyo al Justicialismo* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2014).

⁵⁷ Lewis Nouwen, *Oy, my Buenos Aires*. Dujovne, *Una historia del libro judío*.

⁵⁸ Sandra McGee-Deutsch, *Crossing Boundaries, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880-1955* (Dunham: Duke University Press, 2010).

and their relationship with the neo-liberal economic system. The literary history of Christina Civantos researched the representations of Arab-Argentines in hyphenated and non-hyphenated Argentine fiction.⁵⁹

The new wave of scholarship also shifted the analytical perspective. The first generations of scholars studied Jewish-Latin Americans (as Latin American Jews) through an approach based on Jewish Studies. They focused on highlighting common characteristics of organized Jewish life within the region and with Israel and other Diasporic communities, overemphasizing the ethnic dimension in detriment to the local and the national. As a result, their comparative analyses highlighted parallels between Jews in Argentina and Mexico or Brazil, but neglected to consider the potential in contrasting the experience of Jews, Armenians, and Arabs in Chile, for example.⁶⁰

Jeffery Lesser and Raanan Rein codified this critique of Jewish-Latin American historiography in 2008. These scholars rejected the concept of a “Latin American Jewry,” which implies that all Jews in the region share a hemispheric identity due to their status as minorities in a Spanish – and Portuguese – speaking continent. They argued that the construction “Latin American Jewry” has a pretension of neutrality, but denotes that the subjects are and consider themselves “first and foremost Jews,” a premise that their research finds to be flawed. Other historical works echoed the epistemological shift from ethnic exceptionalism to an increased emphasis on the national sociopolitical and cultural

⁵⁹ John Tofik Karam, *Another Arabesque: Syrian-Lebanese Ethnicity in Neoliberal Brazil* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007). Christina Civantos, *Between Argentine and Arab: Argentine Orientalism, Arab Immigrants, and the Writing of Identity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

⁶⁰ For an account of Jews in Latin America, see: Judith Laikin Elkin, *The Jews of Latin America* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1998). For an example of inter-ethnic analysis, see: Ignacio Klich and Jeffrey Lesser, eds., *Arabs and Jews in Latin America: Images and Realities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

context.⁶¹

The notion of the hyphen proposed by Lesser and Rein does not negate the importance of the ethnic, but rather balances the ethnic and national components. It allows historians to move beyond previous understandings of identity as zero-sum to instead understand it as a space where even apparently contradictory senses of self and belonging coexist and hybridize. I understand hyphenated identities not as two distinct, coexisting identities but as a mutual interaction and influencing of both elements to form new identitary constructions.⁶²

New studies on Argentina and the rest of Latin America have shifted the focus to the relationship between Jews and the nation, moving into the realms of political, cultural and social discourse and the contested nature of images and stereotypes of Jews.⁶³ The work of Erin Graff Zivin analyzed the role of representations of “Jewishness” in Latin American fiction. She argued that authors resorted to the “Jew” as a malleable category that stood for all the “other others,” and their relationship to national identity.⁶⁴

For the case of Argentina, most academic studies of representations of Jewish-Argentines in mainstream national cultural have focused on anti-Semitism. Scholars like Leonardo Senkman, Saúl Sosnowski, and Daniel Lvovich examined the negative and

⁶¹ Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein, “New Approaches to Ethnicity and Diaspora in Twentieth-Century Latin America”, in Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein, eds., *Rethinking Jewish-Latin Americans* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008): 23-40. Adriana Brodsky and Raanan Rein, eds., *The New Jewish Argentina: Facets of Jewish Experience in the Southern Cone* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013). Amalia Ran and Jean Axelrad Cahan, eds., *Returning to Babel: Jewish Latin American Experiences, Representation, and Identity* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

⁶² Lesser and Rein, “New Approaches to Ethnicity and Diaspora.”

⁶³ For an earlier work on Brazil based on governmental sources, see Jeffrey Lesser, *Welcoming the Undesirables: Brazil and the Jewish Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). For Argentina, see: Raanan Rein, *Argentina, Israel and the Jews: Peron, the Eichmann Capture and After* (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2003).

⁶⁴ Graff Zivin, *The Wandering Signifier*.

often hateful portrayals of Jews in Argentine literature.⁶⁵ While these are well-researched and valid contributions, the dearth of cultural-historical analyses of positive (or at least not anti-Jewish) representations of Jewish-Argentines have created an imbalance that led to a flawed understanding of Argentine culture and literature as eminently anti-Semitic. Although this work does not examine literary sources, it includes portrayals of Jews in popular culture that challenge these assumptions.

The scholarly work on Jewish constructions of Jewish-Argentine identity has concentrated mostly around the myth of the “Jewish gaucho,” a representation central to the Jewish-Argentine efforts to legitimize their national belonging. Alberto Gerchunoff first developed the image of the “Jewish gauchos” in his book of stories about life in the Jewish agricultural colonies, published to coincide with the centennial of the country’s independence.⁶⁶ Edna Aizenberg performed a literary analysis of the role of this myth in Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jewish-Argentine literature. Through an ethnographic account, Judith Noemí Freidenberg investigated the social conditions behind the invention of the “Jewish gaucho.” In his PhD dissertation, James Hussar situated Gerchunoff’s influence in a regional context, and compared how Jewish-Argentine and Jewish-Brazilian authors modified and redeployed the myth and their interventions in hyphenated identity-making.⁶⁷

My dissertation shares Lesser and Rein’s preference for the term “Jewish-Latin Americans,” which underscores national identity without negating a diasporic

⁶⁵ Senkman and Sosnowski, *Fascismo y nazismo en las letras argentinas*. Lvovich, *Nacionalismo y antisemitismo en la Argentina*.

⁶⁶ Alberto Gerchunoff, *Los gauchos judíos* (La Plata: Talleres Gráficos Joaquín Sesé, 1910).

⁶⁷ Freidenberg, *The Invention of the Jewish Gaucho*. Edna Aizenberg, *Books and Bombs in Buenos Aires: Borges, Gerchunoff, and Argentine-Jewish Writing* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2002). James A. Hussar, “Cycling through the Pampas: Fictionalized Accounts of Jewish Agricultural Colonization in Argentina and Brazil” (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2008).

component. I follow a scholarly position that aims to balance the historiographical skew generated by an excessive focus on the uniqueness of the Jewish experience and an over-reliance on elite and institutional sources. In order to achieve that, I emphasize the national dimension, a preference for underanalyzed or ignored non-institutional sources, and an understanding of identity (minority or otherwise) as constructed representations contested in the public sphere.

Language, Identity, Representation, and Cultural History as a Methodological Toolbox

Historians, “pop” intellectuals, and minority activists have often abused the concept of “identity.” Academics have argued for re-defining or jettisoning the term altogether because, the argument states, scholars have stretched it to the point of amorphousness.⁶⁸ Others have objected to “identity” as a term that leads inevitably to essentialism,⁶⁹ or denounced it as a construction of “neoliberal power and cosmology” that must be studied as a hostile colonial construction.⁷⁰ Stuart Hall provided a compelling response to these objections: the concept has not been “dialectically superseded.” That is to say, despite the ambiguity and problems of “identity,” there is no better alternative with which to replace it, and “without [it,] certain key questions cannot be thought at all.”⁷¹

Drawing on Hall’s insights, my analysis rejects the essentialist character of

⁶⁸ Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond Identity,” *Theory & Society* 29, no. 1 (February 2000): 1-47. Richard Handler, “Is “Identity” a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?,” in *Commemorations. The Politics of National Identity*, ed. J. Gillis, 27-40 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁶⁹ Walter Benn Michaels, “Race into Culture: A Critical Genealogy of Cultural Identity,” *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 4 (1992): 655-685.

⁷⁰ Lauren Leve, “Identity,” *Current Anthropology* 52, no. 4 (2011): 513-535, 514-515.

⁷¹ Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs Identity?,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, 1-17 (London: Sage, 1996), 1-2.

identity common to old histories and traditional understandings of Self and Other. My study conceives of the concept as “a strategic and positional one”⁷² and, following Margaret Somers’s contribution, focuses on the importance of “narratives” of identity.⁷³ This understanding follows post-structuralist and post-modernist approaches, where identity is never fixed or “finalized.” rather, it is an unstable sociocultural construction being continuously refashioned, a story – that is, a narrative or discursive practice – or representation of the collective and individual Self that changes according to the relative position of the interlocutors.

Subjects with diverse or antagonistic agendas contest the character and meaning of public identity representations. When these oppositional – or, at times, merely different – constructions of identity compete in the public sphere, they often do it through cultural production, although the reach of diverse cultural products is by no means equal. In this context, public sphere refers to Jürgen Habermas’s concept of a symbolic space where public ideas, news, and narratives are shared, disputed, and negotiated, but with the understanding that these space falls short of being universal, and that there are important power and access differentials regulating the voices of the actors.⁷⁴

Due to the polysemic character of identity and representation, the situational logic of cultural consumption, and the active interpretive role of the decoding agents, the end result of these contests between representations is a hybrid construction. Unfortunately, in most – but not all – of the examined case studies, the available sources are insufficient

⁷² Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs Identity?,” 3.

⁷³ Margaret R. Somers, “The Narrative Constitution of Identity,” *Theory and Society* 23, No. 5 (1994): 605-649.

⁷⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991). Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

for a thorough study of reception. However, the archive does retain certain clues and fragmentary evidence that, analyzed carefully, speak of popular and elite reactions to certain cultural products and representations.

Representation is another slippery, ambiguous term. This concept has a broad range of meanings: from linguistics (how letters represent specific sounds and phonemes in different languages) to how we conceive the world (the correspondence between a word, its constructed meaning, and the object, person, emotion, or abstract idea).⁷⁵ This study understands representation in a narrower fashion: as a cultural construction designed to convey a specific meaning in a specific way. That meaning, however, is not fixed, but rather subject to interpretation. Reception is mediated by the receivers' own context and preexisting information, prejudices, ideologies, and values. That is, the recipients or consumers of representations are not blank slates, nor do they consume passively. Representations can use any "language:" words, images, movement, sounds, music, or a combination thereof. Popular culture is the main type of source of representations that this study analyzes.

Although "popular culture" provides rich, meaning-heavy sources to researches, the concept of "popular culture" itself is not self-evident, and needs problematizing. Like "identity" and "representation," it forms yet another category with a broad, unclear meaning. This study does not seek to solve the debates around "popular culture," but rather to provide a clear, working definition. For the context of this work, culture must be understood in a broad manner, as a set of collective practices or representations. Popular culture can mean a culture produced "by the people for the people," a cultural production

⁷⁵ Stuart Hall, *The Work of Representation* (London: Sage, 1997).

that is consumed widely, one that is purposefully manufactured to satisfy the largest possible audience (often identical to “mass culture”), or that portion of a society’s culture that is not “high culture.”⁷⁶

The above meanings are interrelated to some degree. The establishment of boundaries between a “high culture” and a “popular culture” – a fluid historical process – requires the appropriation of certain practices as exclusive to the wealthy, educated classes, both discursively and by limiting access through obstacles and thresholds (such as expensive season tickets and the creation of obscure, complicated, or costly dress and behavioral codes).⁷⁷ This operation is accompanied by an arbitrary differentiation that declares those practices now labeled as “popular culture” to provide only “entertainment,” and “high culture” to provide spiritual, educational, and intellectual improvement.

Cultural practices that are widely enjoyed, and therefore attract performers and producers eager to capitalize on their popularity, also tend to fall under the umbrella of “popular culture.” Some of these, like film, books (although certain types of literature are elevated to “high culture” status), and recorded music can be mass-produced to maximize scale and profits. Others, like theater, can only be scaled so far (for example, by using large venues and selling live TV feeds or recorded versions).

For the context of this study, “popular culture” refers to those practices excluded from “high culture” status, but without attaching any stigma to the definition. Most of the sources for this dissertation (except for Chapter 3) fit in this definition: these include

⁷⁶ John Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture: From Folklore to Globalization* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003).

⁷⁷ Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture*.

cultural goods that could not be easily mass produced, such as short, comedic plays of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s that targeted the least-refined theater-goers, as well as ethnic cabaret acts that were widely popular within the small niche of Yiddish-speaking Argentines. Other sources of this research – analyzed Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 – were part of mass culture – such as newspapers and radio shows (which, uniquely, enabled mass reproduction of live theater and music performances).

The specific trend within popular culture that is “mass culture” requires some historical clarification. Mass culture was integral to a new consumer society that developed in the early decades of the twentieth century along with modernization and the increasingly global character of the economy. Although certain mass cultural products such as newspapers were already widely consumed in the 1900s and 1910s, radio did not become a profitable business until home radio-receivers became affordable for middle and even lower classes in the 1920s and 1930s.⁷⁸ What sets mass cultural products apart from other cultural expressions is their reproducibility (and, relatedly, their scale), as well as a spatial and temporal separation between production and consumption. Once a movie has been shot and edited, the work of the artists is over: they are not required for the production, distribution, and consumption of the film. Similarly, when the journalists, photographers, artists, editors, and designers have prepared the day’s newspaper; their work is done. What comes next, the mass production, shipment, and selling of identical newspapers is a matter of manpower, paper and ink, technology and machinery, logistics, and marketing strategy: an industrial-capitalist endeavor. There is no “original” version of the newspaper worth more than the copies.

⁷⁸ Karush, *Culture of Class*.

Before the development of the “New Cultural Studies” in the last decades of the twentieth-century, researchers as well as media critics frowned upon mass culture. They considered it an artificial expression aimed exclusively at making a profit, an imposition from above that had nothing to do with the “true” cultural expressions and tastes of people. For example, the cultural analysis of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer understood mass culture as a manipulative tool designed to depoliticize the proletariat and prevent it from thinking for itself. Their view assumed that spectators, audiences, or readers were passive, obedient consumers of whatever was marketed at them.⁷⁹ The scholarship of New Cultural Studies has shown that these critiques were based on an essentialist differentiation that assumed that other, non-mass produced cultural practices and goods were not invented.⁸⁰

Consumers, however, have agency, both in what they choose to consume and in how they understand and interpret their cultural consumption. John Storey has argued that mass culture is a contested space. Audiences are shaped by the representations and meanings they consume, but they also repurpose and reshape them for their own uses and according to their own culture and ideology.⁸¹

My examination of popular culture and mass culture sources follows the methodologies of Cultural Studies with attention to historical context and processes. My focus is not on mass culture as a reflection of the values or ideology of consumers; but

⁷⁹ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 2001).

⁸⁰ For the first generation of New Cultural Studies, the Birmingham schools, see: Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs Identity?” Hall, *The Work of Representation*. Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working Class Life* (London: Penguin Classics, 2009). Paul Willis, *Profane Culture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

⁸¹ Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture*. Stuart Hall, “Encoding/Decoding,” in *Media and Cultural Studies. Revised Edition*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Keller, 163-173 (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

rather on a study of the production of representations and the contents of their narratives.⁸² Combining this approach with social and cultural history, I contextualize the cultural analysis within the local and national historical context of the subjects.⁸³

That producers of mass culture did not represent consumers does not preclude the possibility of examining reception. While large corporations were clearly detached from their worldwide consumers, some local ventures, like local periodicals and ethnic radio shows, established connections and feedback mechanisms to get to know their audiences. Additionally, the choices of mass culture producers, such as the decision of a Buenos Aires newspaper to signal the immigrant status of a comic-strip character exclusively through his accent, hint that the men and women behind the periodical – who might not have reflected the values of the consumers, but certainly thought they knew what these were – considered the accent sufficient for most of the readers to decode “immigrant” from it. By attending to these choices, my analysis explores how producers of popular culture understood their public, and the mechanisms they had in place to receive feedback and adapt to it.

The Ideology of Language and the Language of Gender Dynamics

Analysis of language politics and language ideologies plays a central role in this dissertation. This research engages with the theoretical and methodological developments of linguistic anthropology, which conceives of language as a human construct linked to

⁸² Stuart Hall, “Culture, Media, and the Ideological Effect,” in *Mass Communication and Society*, ed. James Curran, Michael Gurevitch, and Janet Wallacot, 315-348 (London: Arnold, 1977).

⁸³ Karush, *Culture of Class*.

group and personal identity, aesthetics, morality, and epistemology.⁸⁴ The study of language ideologies – ideas about the relationship between language and society -- adds power relations and political, social, and racial beliefs to our understanding of linguistic cultural production and the social conditions of this kind of production. In the last decades, a growing corpus of historical works has incorporated the insights of this discipline.⁸⁵

Language politics – how linguistic difference shapes and is shaped by the political arena -- represents the concrete application of language ideologies. Different human groups strategically deployed language for specific goals, according to their social circumstances. In a multilingual society, members of minority groups had to determine which language to use in different contexts, and these decisions were hardly unanimous. In multilingual interwar Buenos Aires, linguistic ideology worked as an interpretive filter in the relationship between language and society.⁸⁶ Where, when, and with whom to speak Yiddish or Spanish (or a mixture of both) became a matter of language politics, indexing socio-economic hierarchy, group belonging, and hegemonic ideas about national identity. Language use and linguistic choice thus triggered intra-ethnic debates.

The insights of linguistic anthropology also illuminate the study of the social and

⁸⁴ Kathryn A. Woolard and Bambi B. Schieffelin, "Language Ideology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994): 55-82, 55-56. For innovative works on linguistic anthropology focusing on language ideology and language politics, see: Paul Kroskrity, *Language, History, and Identity: Ethnolinguistic Studies of the Arizona Tewa* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993). Michael Silverstein, "'Cultural' Concepts and the Language-Culture Nexus," *Current Anthropology* 45, no. 5 (2004): 621-652. Bambi Schieffelin, Kathryn A. Woolard, and Paul Kroskrity, eds., *Language Ideologies: Practice and Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁸⁵ See Robert King, *Nehru and the Language Politics of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997). Michael P. Kramer, *Imagining Language in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). Benjamin Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

⁸⁶ Woolard and Schieffelin, "Language Ideology," 62.

cultural meaning of accents. How campaigning American politicians rely on fake Southern accents to pander to Georgia or Alabama voters highlights the links between language (and pronunciation) and regional and political identity. Likewise, the decision to incorporate Spanish words and concepts to Yiddish could reflect a recently-immigrated performer's attempt to bond with his Buenos Aires audience, as well as his increasing familiarity with local hyphenated culture and language.

For all immigrant populations in Buenos Aires (except, for obvious reasons, Spaniards), language operated as a boundary-setting device that determined the target of their narratives, as a vehicle for cultural dissemination, and as a marker of ethnicity in identity constructions. Jewish-Argentines strategically deployed language to establish semi-private representations for intra-ethnic consumptions – by limiting the audience to Yiddish-speakers, for example – and to address the general population – by adopting Spanish. Ethnic intellectuals translated Yiddish literature in order to combat negative stereotypes and foster positive images about “the Jew.” The lyrics of immigrant artists incorporated expressions from the local urban slang called *lunfardo* to reflect the lively Yiddish of Buenos Aires. Non-Jewish playwrights and newspaper editors had their fictional characters speak in fabricated foreign accents to signal “Jewishness.” Language, and the ideologies of language, were central devices in the constructions of Jewish-Argentineness for Jewish and non-Jewish cultural agents.

The representations of Jewish-Argentineness by Jews and non-Jews also shared a concern for assimilation. Specifically, they conceived of assimilation as a trans-generational phenomenon: the immigrant fathers integrated into *porteño* (from Buenos Aires) society, but retained their cultural specificity, which they expressed publically in a

linguistic fashion. Their children – the narratives continued – accustomed to the country and having undergone its citizen-making institutions (such as mandatory state education and military service), lost the ethnic language in the process of shedding their hyphenated identities to become regular Argentines. Jewish and non-Jewish agents, however, disagreed in their reaction to assimilation: the former considered it a potential threat that they had to address, while the latter portrayed it as an unambiguously positive development.

The similar construction of assimilation in Jewish and non-Jewish liberal representations of Jewish-Argentines involved specific gender roles. Non-Jewish plays and comic-strips constructed women – and particularly daughters – as those most susceptible or vulnerable to assimilation, expressed as unhyphenated Spanish language and culture or incarnated as romantic attraction to *criollo* men. Similarly, Lithuanian-born cabaret artist Jevl Katz complained, in his Yiddish lyrics, that his wife cooked him *milanesas* (an Italian-Argentine dish similar to chicken-fried steak), which did not agree with his stomach, and that his daughter got angry at him because he did not speak Spanish. Several of his songs also warned of the dangers of local women, always capable of bringing moral ruination to Jewish immigrants.

These various representations, from diverse authors and for different audiences, portrayed women as the locus or agent of assimilation, either as victims or as temptresses. The coincidences – a consequence of shared patriarchal conceptions of society and gender roles – reflect an understanding of assimilation as feminine, linked to weakness. Manhood was linked to strength, and depicted as the resilience of tradition. For Jewish-Argentines, assimilation was a threat to be feared, which made women in particular (and

young Jewish-Argentines in general) the weak-point of ethnic boundaries. Although non-Jewish cultural actors expressed assimilation as a clear positive development, their representations also conceived of Jewish women as more eager than the men to abandon their hyphenated identities.

The gendered character of these constructions was not exclusive to Argentina. In her analysis of the impact of modernity for Jewish Europeans, Paula Hyman traced the specific connections between representations of gender and assimilation. Her work examined the thought of Orthodox, leftist, and Zionist Jewish thinkers, and established the widespread occurrence of these conceptions of men and women vis-à-vis emancipation and assimilation.⁸⁷

The Sources of Popular Culture: People of the Book, the Newspaper, and the Radio

Like other Argentines, Jewish-Argentines eagerly participated in the cultural dimension of a consumer society.⁸⁸ Men and women from all origins waited in line at the cinema; Austrian-born Max Glücksmann even became a pioneer filmmaker and cinema owner.⁸⁹ *Porteños* from all walks of life saved every month in order to acquire a radio apparatus; impoverished new arrivals living in tenant houses often listened to the radio collectively, establishing new sociabilities.⁹⁰ Actors who still carried a foreign accent

⁸⁷ Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1995).

⁸⁸ Eduardo Elena, *Dignifying Argentina: Peronism, Citizenship, and Mass Consumption* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), 21-34.

⁸⁹ Mollie Lewis Nouwen, "Con Men, Cooks, and Cinema Kings: Popular Culture and Jewish Identities in Buenos Aires, 1905-1930" (PhD diss., Emory University, 2008). Karush, *Culture of Class*. For an analysis of the Jewish influence in Hollywood, see: Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). For a historical study of the movie-going experience in São Paulo, see: Lena Oak Suk, "Becoming Modern at the Movies: Gender, Class, and Urban Space in Twentieth-Century Brazil" (PhD diss., Emory University, 2014).

⁹⁰ Matthew Karush, *Culture of Class*.

delighted all sorts of audiences in the popular *sainetes* (a type of short comedy) in the theaters that lined the central Corrientes Avenue.⁹¹ Most Jewish-Argentines consumed cultural products in Spanish, created or modified for local audiences. They picked and chose according to their personal tastes and values, political orientation and religious beliefs, and actual or desired social status.⁹²

Sometimes, however, immigrant Argentines wanted culture and entertainment in their mother tongue. In the 1930s, there were more than a dozen ethnic and minority radio shows in Buenos Aires, trying to capitalize on the half of the city's population that had been born abroad. Most of these shows broadcasted – at least in part – in foreign languages, such as German, Italian, and Yiddish. Besides regular programming, Jewish-Argentines could listen to two daily shows that alternated Spanish and Yiddish. The scripts and transcripts of one of them, *Matinee Radial Hebrea*, provide primary sources for this dissertation.

Jewish-Argentines founded ethnic theaters with plays in Yiddish (and, after the 1950s, in Spanish as well).⁹³ While most producers brought Jewish European and American plays and stars for the high season, local writers developed a new and local Jewish-Argentine dramaturgy in both languages, and immigrant entertainers earned the love of the ethnic masses.⁹⁴ Many actors, such as Berta and Paulina Singerman, went on

⁹¹ Oscar Pellettieri, *Historia del teatro argentino en Buenos Aires: La emancipación cultural (1884-1930)* (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 2002).

⁹² Fernando Rocchi, *Chimneys in the Desert: Industrialization in Argentina During the Export Boom Years, 1870-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006). Fernando Rocchi, "Consumir es un placer: La industria y la expansión de la demanda en Buenos Aires a la vuelta del siglo pasado," *Desarrollo Económico* 33, no. 148 (1998): 533-558. Ezequiel Adamovsky, *Historia de la clase media argentina: Apogeo y decadencia de una ilusión* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2009).

⁹³ Silvia Hansman, Gabriela Kogan, and Susana Skura, *Oysfarkoyft, localidades agotadas: Afiches del teatro idish en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Del Nuevo Extremo, 2006). Svarch, "El comunista sobre el tejado."

⁹⁴ See Chapter 2.

to act and even lead their own companies in the non-Jewish Argentine stage. The *oeuvre* and career of an immigrant singer, parodist, and cabaret performer, and the cultural entrepreneurship of Jewish-Argentine theater producer Samuel Glasserman inform this study.

Jews from Eastern Europe were one of the immigrant minorities of Argentina with the highest literacy rate: even poor farmers from small rural towns could read Yiddish and Hebrew.⁹⁵ The only exception was Orthodox Hasidic women, many of whom were barred from learning their letters by the patriarchal rule of their fathers, husbands, and *Rebbes* (the *rebbe* is the supreme authority for each Hasidic sect).⁹⁶ Contrariwise, many Spanish- and Italian-Argentines with a rural background were illiterate. While the exceptional literate status of Jewish-Argentine immigrants was short-lived (all children in the city attended mandatory public education, so literacy levels equalized within one generation), this minority still created an outstanding number of periodicals as well as printing and publishing ventures that was unmatched by other groups.⁹⁷

The first three Jewish-Argentine periodicals – all published in Yiddish – appeared in 1898. *Vider Kol* (The Echo) and *Der Yiddisher Fonograf* (The Jewish Phonograph), which the editors mimeographed rather than published, folded in less than a year. *Di Yiddishe Folksstime* (The Voice of the Jewish People), a leftist publication, lasted until 1914. Many newspapers and journals were short-lived; others, like dailies *Di Yiddishe*

⁹⁵ Bernard Wasserstein, *On The Eve: The Jews of Europe Before the Second World War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 263-264. Stephen Corsin, “‘The City of Illiterates’? Levels of Literacy Among Poles and Jews in Warsaw, 1882-1914,” *Polin* 12 (1999): 221-241.

⁹⁶ Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation*.

⁹⁷ Dujovne, *Una historia del libro judío*.

Tsaytung and *Di Presse*, lasted over half a century.

The history of Jewish-Argentine publications in Spanish, which started in 1911, is particularly relevant to this study. The pioneer magazine was called *Israel: órgano de los israelitas en Argentina* (Israel: periodical of the Jews in Argentina), a short-lived Zionist journal launched by J. Liachovitzky. The publication lasted little more than a year.⁹⁸ This first foray into publishing in Spanish showed that there was a readership for Jewish-Argentine periodicals in the local language.

A year later, a group of young writers raised in the agricultural colonies launched *Juventud* (Youth). More newsletter than magazine, it was only a few pages long and came out of the press at irregular intervals. The journal's writers became engaged in an intense debate about the character of Jewish life in the new host country: the disagreement between those in favor of an integrationist approach and those who saw a need for total assimilation and the abandonment of all markers of otherness proved to be unbridgeable, and led to the end of the publication.⁹⁹ The former founded integrationist institutions that in 1926 fused into the *Sociedad Hebraica Argentina* (SHA), an influential, polymorphic, Spanish-language organization that was at the same time library, sports and social club, cultural association (Albert Einstein gave his lecture there during his 1925 visit to Argentina), and publishing house.

After the end of *Juventud*, the SHA established *Vida Nuestra* (Our Life), a literary magazine in Spanish with a considerably higher production value than its predecessor. In this periodical, novice as well as established Jewish-Argentine writers shared space with

⁹⁸ Lazaro Liacho, "Peretz visto por un argentino," *JUDAICA* 80-81, (February-March 1940). Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos*, 329, 411.

⁹⁹ Dujovne, *Una historia del libro judío*.

their non-Jewish peers. This monthly periodical, artistically produced and profusely illustrated, saw the light between 1917 and 1923, an unusually long life for literary magazines of the period. *Vida Nuestra* was the first Jewish-Argentine magazine that attracted famous non-Jewish contributors and readers in the national literary and intellectual elite.

Many regular contributors of *Vida Nuestra* were part of the clique of Jewish-Argentine intellectuals that had founded the SHA. The group included Alberto Gerchunoff, the award winning writer of the groundbreaking “Los gauchos judíos” (The Jewish Gauchos), affiliated with the “Florida” *avant-garde* literary group; Julio Fingerit, author, editor, and member of the Socialist-leaning “Boedo” literary group; Samuel Eichelbaum, award-winning playwright of the non-Jewish theater scene. They all wrote in Spanish for the general (both Jewish and non-Jewish) Argentine public, and had found a place in the liberal faction of the Argentine intelligentsia. The presence of these authors, as well as the rest of its contributing talent and its thematic range, placed *Vida Nuestra* in conversation with other literary and cultural Argentine periodicals in Spanish, such as *Hebe* (1918-1920) and *Proa* (1922-1923).¹⁰⁰ *Vida Nuestra* found its place in the –in Pierre Bourdieu’s term – intellectual field of literary magazines, critics, and writers.¹⁰¹

Due to the personal contacts of its most famous writers, *Vida Nuestra* attracted the signatures of renowned Argentine authors and thinkers. Ricardo Rojas, prolific fiction writer and essayist, and one of the founding influences of twentieth century Argentine nationalism with “*La restauración nacionalista*”(1909), contributed to the magazine.

¹⁰⁰ Héctor René Lafleur, Sergio D. Provenzano, and Fernando Alonso, *Las revistas literarias argentinas, 1893-1967* (Buenos Aires: El 8vo Loco, 2006), 84, 92, 95.

¹⁰¹ Pierre Bourdieu, “Intellectual Field and Creative Project,” *Social Science Information* 8 (1969): 89-119.

Likewise, novelist and essayist Leopoldo Lugones, whose vigorous political participation took him from anarchism, across socialism, through nationalism, and into fascism in 1930, wrote for *Vida Nuestra* before his most extreme rightward turn. This author's national fame followed a series of conferences where he shared his interpretation of the centrality of the epic poem *El Gaucho Martín Fierro*, by José Hernández, in the Argentine literary canon. His conferences helped establish this poem as the center of the national letters, and reinforced the privileged position of the myth of the gaucho as the heart of the country's cultural identity.¹⁰² José Ingenieros, an Italian-Argentine “renaissance man” (professor of medicine, psychiatrist, criminologist, early introducer of Freud in Argentina, mason and theosophist, writer and sociologist) and an influential figure of the university reform movement, also wrote for *Vida Nuestra*. The magazine, thanks in part to its high production value, but especially to its star-studded roster of contributors, was highly visible and influential among the Argentine intellectual elites despite a modest circulation.¹⁰³ These contributors provided visibility and legitimacy to the journal, and helped it transcend all ethnic boundaries to establish it as an important reference in the Argentine literary scene. A descendant of this periodical, *JUDAICA* – founded and directed by Salomón Resnick, member of the SHA and contributor to *Vida Nuestra* – forms the case study for the third chapter of this dissertation.

Jewish-Argentine Representation, From the Inside to the Outside: Chapter Order and

¹⁰² Diana Sorensen Goodrich, “La construcción de los mitos nacionales en la Argentina del Centenario,” *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 24, no. 47 (1998): 147-166. Patricia Friedrich, Andrés Hatum, and Luiz Mesquita, “Cultural Mythology and Global Leadership in Argentina,” in *Cultural Mythology and Global Leadership*, ed. Eric H. Kessler and Diana J. Wong-Mingji, 79-92 (Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2009).

¹⁰³ Lafleur, Provenzano, Alonso, *Las revistas literarias argentinas*, 84.

Content

This study examines representations of Jewish-Argentines from 1930 to 1945, produced by both Jews and non-Jews and aimed at specific audiences. The organizing principle is not chronological, but thematic: language use. Each chapter encompasses cultural expressions with a particular linguistic strategy, which defined the audience as well as the character of the representations of Jewish-Argentine identity. The first chapter engages with a cultural product (parodic songs) created exclusively in the Yiddish of Buenos Aires, and thus limited to a Yiddish-speaking Jewish-Argentine public. The second chapter studies the transcripts of a Jewish-Argentine radio show that strategically switched between Yiddish and Spanish. This allowed the show host and his on-air team to target all or part of their audience either for broad, general cultural content, or narrower ethnic messages. The third chapter analyzes a Jewish-Argentine literary journal produced entirely in Spanish, designed to reach non-Jewish readers as well as the native-born children of immigrants who no longer read Yiddish. Finally, chapter 4 examines the representations of Jewish-Argentines produced by non-Jewish liberal playwrights and newspaper editors, who established language – expressed in the form of Spanish with “Yiddish accents” – as ethnic markers of Jewish-Argentineness.

Chapter 1 analyzes the *oeuvre* and career of Lithuanian-born Jewish-Argentine Jevl Katz, from his arrival in 1930 to his sudden death and massive public burial in 1940. This comedian and author of musical parodies became, in only a few years, the favorite local entertainer of the Yiddish-speaking Jewish-Argentine public. His songs about the hardships of immigrant life resonated with his audience: Katz humorously contrasted the mythical America of unending richness and opportunity with the difficult process of

adapting to Argentine culture, language, and society. The lyrics of his songs, written in the rich, hybrid Yiddish of Buenos Aires, represented a wide range of Jewish-Argentine experience, from its ethnic enclaves – such as institutional banquets and Jewish cafes – to the shared multicultural spaces of tenant houses, where multiple languages intertwined. Through his music, Katz reimagined the urban geography of the city in the cultural and moral codes of the hard-working immigrant. The Jewish-Argentines of the Jewish Colonization Agency's agricultural colonies were a favored theme and audience for this artists: aware of the symbolic importance of the myth of the Jewish gaucho, Katz painted an image of limited integration, where the young, local-born “gauchos” adopted the local customs and traditions while remaining Jewish.

During the 1930s, the number of radio stations and home radio apparatuses exploded. Like other *porteños*, Jewish immigrants and their local-born descendants eagerly joined the radio craze, as both audience and producers. Chapter 2 analyzes the broadcasts of *Matinee Radial Hebrea* (Jewish Radio Matinee), one of two daily Jewish-Argentine shows that aired in Buenos Aires in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Host and producer (and theater entrepreneur) Samuel Glasserman defended the hyphenated character of identity and the compatibility of Jewishness and Argentineness.

Although Glasserman courted different Jewish-Argentine and non-Jewish demographics by strategically broadcasting content in Spanish and Yiddish, his main target was the local-born Jewish-Argentine youth. The show host, concerned about the risk of total assimilation, devised strategies to keep the young men and women engaged with their Jewishness. *Matinee Radial Hebrea's* solution was to advertise youth associations and events to foster intra-ethnic spaces of sociability, as well as reinforce the

ethnic boundaries through the relationship advice of match-maker Rive Roje, a diehard opponent of intermarriage.

The third chapter explores an alternative representation of Jewish-Argentine identity built around literary translation. Based on a firm belief that literature and culture played a central role in fostering a positive image of Jewish-Argentines, the publishing project of Salomón Resnick curated, translated, and published Jewish fiction and essays from Yiddish and other foreign languages into Spanish. *JUDAICA*, the name of his journal, sought to win over the “hearts and minds” of the non-Jewish intellectual and political elite through positive representations of Jewish-Argentines and historical Jewish culture. Resnick’s literary project gained unexpected urgency as the rise of Nazism threatened the survival of Jewish European life.

Finally, chapter 4 examines representations of Jewish-Argentines by non-Jewish, liberal cultural producers. A comparative analysis of the comical fictional characters present in the national press and the national theater stage identifies common tropes and stereotypes (and their subversion) in the public construction of Jewish-Argentineness. The editors of *Crítica*, the country’s largest newspaper in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and the playwrights who specialized in *sainete* (short, three-act comedies) portrayed Jewishness through linguistic markers, mainly the construction of “Yiddish” accents. In newspaper comic-strips and in plays, the heavily accented speech of Eastern European immigrants contrasted with the smooth *porteño* Spanish of their local-born children. Through these portrayals, the authors represented a phenomenon of trans-generational assimilation, where the loss of ethnic identity coincided with the loss of ethnic language. Comic-strips and theater scripts depicted women – particularly daughters – as those most

susceptible to assimilation through romantic involvement with *criollo* (non-Jewish) men. *Crítica* deployed these representations in the newspaper's struggle against nationalist factions to define the Argentine nation: through its fictional Jewish-Argentines, the periodical argued for an inclusive, expanding Argentineness, where immigrants contributed to national progress and joined seamlessly with the country's social body.

CHAPTER 1

Jevl Katz, Lithuanian-born Jewish-Argentine Bard: Hybrid Popular Culture and the Intricacies of Belonging

On the morning of March 10th, 1940, a crowd of twenty thousand men and women gathered at the offices of the *Sociedad de Escritores y Actores Israelitas* for the largest Jewish funeral in Argentine history. The building in the Once neighborhood in the geographical center of Buenos Aires was so packed that the throng spilt out into the streets, blocking the traffic for several blocks between the avenues Corrientes and Córdoba. An aerial view of the streets around the building around 9 o'clock would have shown a mass of funeral black, punctuated here and there white where mourners had donned a kerchief or held open a newspaper to shield their heads from the late summer heat.¹⁰⁴

According to the Jewish-Argentine newspaper *Di Presse*, over twenty thousand people had gone into the building to say their final goodbyes to Lithuanian-born musician and parodist Jevl Katz in the previous 48 hours. The artist's body arrived to the *Sociedad* offices after he passed away in the early hours of Friday. From that moment on, a sad flood of people had walked by to take one final look at their artist; family, friends and activists had arrived to plan the funeral; and Jewish journalists dropped by to take pictures and write their columns.¹⁰⁵

Early on Sunday morning, the main hall of the building was packed with Katz's friends and family, the organizers of the funeral, reporters and those mourners that

¹⁰⁴ *Di Presse*, March 9, 1940, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵ *Di Presse*, March 9, 1940, p. 1. *Di Presse*, March 10, 1940.

managed to push their way inside. A tight group of actors, musicians, and entertainment businessmen had formed up as an impromptu honor guard around the coffin. The space not crowded by people was crammed with sympathy wreathes of all sizes. The sharp scent of the flowers made the air even stuffier.¹⁰⁶

The ceremonies began right on schedule. It was 9:30 when composer Kalmele Weitz launched into a first recitation of the *mole* – “El male rachanim,” the Ashkenazi funeral prayer. Right after him, cantor Pinchas Borgstein sang a few psalms together with a synagogue choir. They finished with a second intonation of the *mole*.

At 10 in the morning, the mass of people slowly parted to let the few chosen bearers carry the earthly remains of Jevl Katz into a motorized hearse. Since it was surrounded by pedestrians on all sides, the motorcade drove at a snail’s pace for a few blocks and made a first stop in front of the building where the grieving family lived. After a moment of silence, punctuated by sobs, it moved on.

The hearse reached the recently broadened Avenida Corrientes¹⁰⁷ and drove slowly north, gathering a trail of cars and pedestrians several blocks long and effectively blocking traffic. It stopped briefly at the *Mitre*, *Ombú*, *Excelsior* and *Soleil*, the main Jewish theatres of Buenos Aires where Katz had often performed.¹⁰⁸ The theatres became impromptu gathering points, where small crowds awaited the motorcade; some to say their goodbyes, others to join the caravan. According to a reporter,

There were no speeches; the Jewish theaters said their farewells silently.
But there was crying. Strangers who had only seen Jevl on the stage, and

¹⁰⁶ *Di Presse*, March 9, 1940, p. 1. *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung*, March 11, 1940. *Di Presse*, March 11, 1940, p.4.

¹⁰⁷ Corrientes, like most avenues in Buenos Aires, was a two-way street until 1967, when a new municipal ordinance rearranged the city traffic.

¹⁰⁸ The procession did not pass near the Olimpo theatre, in Pueyrredon and Santa Fe, and apparently did not stop at the Communist-leaning IFT (Jewish People’s Theatre), then on Cangallo, two blocks away from Corrientes.

others who had never seen him at all but had only heard him [on the radio], cried as well.¹⁰⁹

The funeral procession grew in size as it slowly made its way through the neighborhoods of Once and Villa Crespo, home to large populations of Eastern European Jews and the aforementioned theatres. It sped up after leaving these behind, and pedestrian followers either found a ride or returned home.

Since Jewish does not allow burials during the Sabbath, two days passed between Katz's death and funeral. This made the procession larger, because Sunday is the day off in Argentina, and also because mourners outside of Buenos Aires made use of the 48-hour waiting period to make their way to the capital from cities and towns of the Argentine interior and even neighboring Montevideo in Uruguay, across the River Plate. According to *Di Presse*, around twenty thousand people gathered around the building, although most of those on foot did not follow the motorized procession all the way to the Jewish cemetery in the suburb of Ciudadela (Liniers), ten miles away.

Many others skipped the procession and decided to travel directly to the cemetery and wait for the arrival of Jevl Katz's casket. *Di Presse* reported a telephone call from the cemetery staff at 8:00 AM warning that a crowd two thousand strong was already inside the premises. At 10:00 AM, the worried staff decided to close the gates to keep people from attempting to come in. When the procession arrived, it got stuck a few blocks away from the cemetery, its way barred by a flood of sad onlookers who insisted on witnessing the burial. The organizers had to call the police to make way for the hearse and a few vehicles. Most of the procession had to remain outside.

¹⁰⁹*Di Presse*, March 9, 1940, p. 1. My translation from the original Yiddish.

The cemetery organizers set up chains to provide some space for Katz's family and closest friends, the singers, orators, and undertakers. But the pressure of thousands of bodies shattered them as Katz's coffin was lowered into the ground, and once again, the police had to intercede to keep the funeral party from being overrun. Once calm had been restored, the cantor sang the *mole* and said the *kadish*, followed by Katz's brother Sholem. A series of speeches from friends and representatives of Jewish institutions, including the rival cultural critics of the country's two best-selling Jewish-Argentine newspapers – Samuel Rollansky and Jacobo Botoshansky – and the two broadcasters of Jewish-Argentine radio – Samuel Glasserman and Tobías Berelejis – concluded the ceremonies.

Jevl Katz's funerals, as well as his successful career in Argentina, provide a novel lens into the intersection of ethnic identity – and particularly a linguistically-defined ethnicity – with popular culture. For about a decade, Katz's songs were omnipresent in the lives of Yiddish speakers, played in most Jewish theatres and institutional events, repeated in every Jewish-Argentine radio show, and mangled in social gatherings by amateur enthusiasts who bought the booklets with his lyrics and guitar chords. At the same time, he was almost completely unknown by the inhabitants of Buenos Aires who spoke Spanish, Italian or Polish, and never rose to more than a footnote in the non-ethnic Argentine press.

However, Katz's *oeuvre* constantly fed off Argentina's popular culture, parodying the most famous radio and dancehall hits of the 1930s. He based his lyrics, written in Yiddish with generous additions of the local Spanish slang (which itself adopted many

terms from Italian), on the experiences, prejudices, desires and expectations of the country's immigrant population and its descendants; not only of Jewish descent, but of all ethnicities. The reaction of the Ashkenazi elite to his success, and the vigorous support he received from members of the Jewish intelligentsia, also speak of the immigrant communities' perception of respectability and decorum, as well as expectations of socio-cultural progress, in relation to popular entertainment.

The days-long coverage in the two most widely read Jewish-Argentine newspapers (*Di Presse* and *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung*), and the vivid, detailed descriptions of the event accompanied with photographs of overcrowded streets show that the death and funeral of Jevl Katz marked what should have been a moment of unprecedented public presence in the history of Jewish Argentina. It was a voluntary and public display of Jewish-Argentine presence and collective grief unmatched until the 1990s.

The public nature of the event, however, did not correlate with any public visibility in the non-ethnic Argentine media. Not one of the country's main newspapers – *La Prensa*, *La Razón*, *La Nación*, and *Crítica* – covered the procession, concerned instead with provincial elections and fraud accusations, federal interventions of provincial governments, and the growing momentum of war in Europe. The non-ethnic Argentine press simply failed to notice or care about Katz's funeral.¹¹⁰ This lack of coverage hints that, despite the enormous influence Argentine popular culture had on the culture and entertainment produced by and for the country's ethnic groups, linguistic particularity hindered most forms of cultural feedback from the linguistically ethnic to the broader Spanish-speaking world.

¹¹⁰ The exception is the March 9, 1940 edition of *Crítica*, which includes a tiny eulogy of Katz in its “*Teatro al día*” subsection, but the editions of the following week do not mention the funeral procession.

Over the decades, a myth arose of the non-ethnic Argentine media baptizing Katz as the “Jewish Gardel,” in reference to international Argentine tango idol, Carlos Gardel. According to one of the myth’s propagators, writer and intellectual Eliahu Toker, non-Jewish journalists were the first to compare Katz’s funerals to the burial of Gardel. The famous tango singer died in a plane crash in the middle of an international tour in Colombia in 1935. His remains arrived to Buenos Aires and a crowd of hundreds of thousands carried the casket to the Musician’s Pantheon in the Chacarita cemetery.¹¹¹

A methodical search of the archives, however, unmask this narrative as a post-hoc invention. As far as the record shows, the first time a journalist made this comparison, the day of Katz’s burial, was not on the pages of *La Prensa* or *La Nación*, but rather on those of Jewish-Argentine newspaper *Di Presse*. An unsigned article reads:

Now, after Jevl Katz’s untimely death, it can be seen that his popularity was phenomenal. Wherever one goes or stays, in the cafes, in fairs and in markets, in the meetings of any society, one hears of nothing but Jevl Katz. He was the only one who came up with the Jewish-Argentine song, who was accessible for anybody. One did not need to go to his shows to hear his songs[;] he brought them through the radio into everyone’s house. His songs were equally accessible for young and old and also for children. He made all his songs and couplets about domestic[heimish]-communitarian and contemporary themes. It brings to mind the name of Carlos Gardel and it can be said that Jevl Katz’s untimely death has created so much sadness for Jews, as Carlos Gardel’s untimely death did for Christians. But Gardel sang tangos about love which attracted only the youth, and Jevl Katz sang about contemporary and communitarian themes and sparked the interest of all.¹¹²

Leaving aside the chutzpah of claiming Jevl Katz had a broader audience than Carlos Gardel (or that only Christians were saddened by Gardel’s death), it is most telling that, in order to highlight the effect of Jevl Katz’s death, the journalist deployed Katz into an

¹¹¹ For Eliahu Toker’s essay on Katz, see http://www.eliahutoker.com.ar/escritos/gente_katz.html (accessed October, 2012).

¹¹² *Di Presse*, March 10, 1940. My translation from the original in Yiddish.

Argentine-centered network of reference. Katz's funeral was not contrasted with other massive burials of famous Jewish figures either in the United States (such as Sholem Aleychem's, in New York) or Europe (such as I.L. Peretz's, in Warsaw). The frame of reference was Argentina, and the comparison was with the country's most popular musician, branding Katz's death – and his life since immigration – as a Jewish-Argentine event.¹¹³

We do not know how the myth came to be, but the reasons are easy to deduct. The comparison with Gardel, and the construction of Jevl Katz as a Jewish-Argentine idol as important as the nation's most-beloved artist, became more powerful if it came not from the saddened fans of Katz, but from outside the rank of Jewish-Argentines. By positioning the mainstream media as the coiners of the phrase “the Jewish Gardel,” the inventors of the myth invested it with forged gravitas. The supposed judgment of the national media was seen as an objective description of the funerals, one which both gave pride to Katz and his followers and made up for the actual silence with which Argentine newspapers had treated the event.

Jevl Katz's career in Argentina was as successful as it was succinct. He taught himself to sing and play guitar and accordion from an early age, and had already debuted in the stages of Vilnius's Jewish theatres when he arrived in Buenos Aires in May 1930, at the age of 23. A printing house worker by trade, he immigrated – following in the footsteps of his older brother Eliahu – committed to earn a living as an artist. By 1939, he

¹¹³ This conceptualization of Jevl Katz as larger, even more important than the similar figure of Gardel is similar to the construction of myths to establish the “Braziliannes” of ethnic minorities in Brazil. See Jeffrey Lesser, “How the Jews Became Japanese and Other Stories of Nation and Ethnicity”, in Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein, eds, *Rethinking Jewish-Latin Americans* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008).

was such a hit that he drew the attention of Yiddish theater entrepreneurs from the United States; the opening salvos of World War II had created openings for new talent in the suddenly star-starved stages of New York's Jewish theatres, bereft of European entertainers. It was in preparation for his first tour in the United States that Katz went through a tonsillectomy at Buenos Aires's *Hospital Israelita* in 1940. His death after a quick, brutal postoperative infection left thousands of fans in shock.¹¹⁴

In the ten years from his arrival in Buenos Aires in May 1930 to his death in March 1940, Katz earned the love of thousands of Yiddish-speaking Jews who – like him – had chosen Argentina to build a new life. As an artist, he targeted this demographic exclusively, creating parody songs, couplets, and monologues that required both a fluent Yiddish and at least a rudimentary grasp of Spanish – especially the slang of Buenos Aires – as well as some experience living in the country. His audience repaid his exclusive dedication with an avid thirst for his songs and sketches: Katz performed at least weekly on one or both of the Yiddish-speaking national radio shows, and in many “musical evenings” and other fundraising events from Jewish clubs, libraries, resident societies, cultural centers, and charities. He was also a prominent feature in the variety shows at the four central Jewish theatres of the 1930s, where he also presented his one-man-cabaret performances.

The artist only left the stages of Buenos Aires to go on tour through the provinces, which he did regularly. His more traditional destinations were the Jewish Colonization Association's agricultural colonies in the provinces of Entre Rios, Buenos Aires, and

¹¹⁴ For additional tidbits of Katz's life in Lithuania see Jeremy Baker, “‘Gvald, Yidn, Buena Gente’: Jevl Katz, Yiddish bard of the Rio de la Plata,” in Berkowitz, Joel and Barbara Henry, eds., *Inventing the Modern Yiddish Stage. Essays in Drama, Performance, and Show Business* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012): 202-222.

Santa Fe, and nearby cities, but he also traveled farther away, to Tucumán in the north of the country and San Juan in the west, and even across the border to neighboring Uruguay, Chile, and Paraguay. His accolades outside Buenos Aires were dutifully covered by the Jewish-Argentine press, and even regional non-ethnic outlets such as *Los Andes* in Mendoza and *La Gaceta de Tucumán* reported on his tours when he rode into town.

The key to his artistic success was that his songs reflected, both in form and content, the fluid nature of the life experiences of the immigrant generation. Katz adapted popular songs and genres played in the theatres, ballrooms and radios in Argentina and gave them new lyrics in a mixture of Yiddish and Spanish. He turned the difficulties of adapting to a new country and a new language into laughter; sang the hardships of making a living but also the rewards of fitting in and moving up the social ladder. His lyrics boasted the comical wit and self-parodying nature of the Yiddish tradition, mocking Jewish institutions and leaders, old European traditions and new ones being created in Buenos Aires.

His language incorporated a plethora of terms from Spanish and *lunfardo* – the street-wise slang of Buenos Aires that mixed Spanish with Italian, French, and Portuguese words. The artist often “Yiddishized” Spanish terms, replacing the last vowel for an “-eh,” in the same manner his audience did. In this way, *paciencia* (patience) became *paciencieh*, and the tango “La Cumparsita” was renamed “Cumparsiteh.” His vocabulary also borrowed Hispanic-American verbs and gave them Yiddish conjugation: this gave way to linguistic gems like “*akrioshirn zikh*,” a reflexive verb based on the term “criollo” (meaning one born in the country), a rough equivalent to the Latin American neologism “acriollarse.” While this was literally impossible (an immigrant cannot

become a native-born), figuratively it meant adapting to the local customs, becoming Jewish-Argentine. Armed with this Buenos Aires Yiddish borrowed from Jewish-Argentines from Eastern Europe and their Argentine-born children, Katz let his songs and sketches not only reflect the adventures of immigrants on the streets of Buenos Aires and the interior, but also mimic the narrative style Yiddish speakers in Argentina used to narrate them.

What made Katz's act extraordinarily successful also imposed an acute limitation to his potential audience: it was not only targeted specifically to the experiences of Yiddish-speakers in Argentina, but also linguistically inaccessible to any other group. While other ethnic groups would most likely empathize with the experiences captured in Katz's songs and with his musical parody genre, the medium was linguistically exclusionary, hermetic both to others immigrant groups in Buenos Aires and to Yiddish-speakers outside Latin America.¹¹⁵ The artist thus defined himself and his audience by means of a hybrid linguistic code that was at the same time ethnic (Yiddish) and geographic (Hispanic America and Argentina).

The natural limits of Katz's clientele did not become a problem in the ten years he spent in Argentina. When he arrived in 1930, Argentina had a sizable Jewish population at least 200,000 strong, a majority of them born in Yiddish-speaking Eastern Europe. Entering the country became harder that very year, as a result of the global economic depression and a renewed influence of xenophobic nationalism in immigration policy, but

¹¹⁵ Jevl Katz had songs entirely in Yiddish with no references to life in Argentina. They dealt with life in Europe (mostly, idealized or satirized versions of life in the European *shtetl*) or, particularly by the late 1930s, with international politics and the plight of Jews. But they were extremely rare compared with his larger, more popular hybrid Yiddish-Spanish repertoire.

while the arrival of Eastern European Jews slowed down, it did not stop until the beginning of World War II in September, 1939.

As the numbers of recent immigrants – called *gringos* in Porteño and *grine* in Yiddish – decreased both in absolute and relative to the Jewish population, a Yiddish-and-Spanish Jewish-Argentine culture began to crystallize. In this context, Katz's *oeuvre* seemed to capture the experience of becoming Argentine, parodying the Yiddish-speaking immigrant's first encounters with Spanish as they sought how to get by in Buenos Aires. Most of his public could identify with the songs' characters, who struggled with debt and debtors and both scoffed at the failed promises of an America paved in gold and rejoiced at fitting in and smirking at the *gringos* they had ceased to be. In fact, understanding and enjoying Jevl Katz's humor was a mark of belonging, proof that one was no longer a recent arrival and could successfully navigate the challenges of being Jewish and Argentine.

This chapter examines Katz's professional career in Argentina as covered in the Jewish-Argentine media (newspapers and radio) as an example of adaptation and success that had many things in common with other Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, but also a unique aspect in the degree of popular appreciation he earned. I state that the affection for and identification with Katz, illustrated by his massive funeral procession and yearly tributes, holds clues to understand not only the artist's public persona but also the worldviews of his fans. A first subsection is dedicated to Katz's reception as mediated by the Jewish-Argentine press. The main sources are newspaper articles and radio columns, mined both for opinions as well as for factual data. The media silence about Jevl Katz (both the complete ignorance of the mainstream Argentine periodicals and the

unpublished voices of his opponents in some sections of the Jewish-Argentina elite) also informs our views about the encounter of ethnicity, language, and popular culture.

A following subsection analyzes Katz's lyrics as an expression of the hybrid Yiddish-Argentine culture developed by the immigrant generation in urban Buenos Aires. It starts with observations about the use of Spanish words in his songs, and moves on to a qualitative analysis of specific word-use and linguistic constructions. The topics of his most popular lyrics provide additional insight into Katz's relationship with his audience, and the role of humor in the quest for developing Jewish-Argentine-ness.¹¹⁶

"... One hears of nothing but Jevl Katz"¹¹⁷: Media coverage, career construction, and the negotiation of ethnic art and politics

Jevl Katz was media savvy. Aware of the power of the press to bestow him visibility among its readership, he tried to win over the Jewish-Argentine periodicals in Yiddish before even climbing on a stage. Hardly a week had passed since his arrival in May 1930 when Jevl Katz began touring the offices of the Yiddish newspapers and magazines. He played a repertoire of parody songs and monologues (completely in Yiddish) about Eastern European Jewish themes that he brought with him from Europe, and shared news of the latest artistic and literary developments in Vilnius, "the Jerusalem of Lithuania." He also handed clippings of positive reviews by two Lithuanian Yiddish periodicals, *Di Tzayt* (The Time) and Zalman Reisen's *Der Vilner Tog* (The Vilnius Day). Reisen himself, who traveled to Argentina to give a series of conferences in 1932,

¹¹⁶ This examination relies on the lyrics recorded in Katz's personal archive at the Instituto IWO, in downtown Buenos Aires.

¹¹⁷ *Di Presse*, March 10, 1940.

met Katz at a banquet where Katz provided the entertainment and wrote a new column singing the praises of his fellow Lithuanian as a Jewish bard of Buenos Aires.¹¹⁸

Katz's media strategy paid off. He received enthusiastic columns welcoming him to Buenos Aires in the two best-selling Jewish-Argentine dailies, *Di Presse* (The Press) and *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung* (The Jewish Newspaper¹¹⁹), and the cultural magazine *Der Shpigl* (The Mirror). A fragment of *Der Vilner Tog*'s article was quoted at length by *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung*'s piece:

[...] Jevl Katz is a son of the Vilnius people. Himself a printing press worker, he has had since childhood a knack for composing and playing songs about local Vilnius topics. The aforementioned songs have been so catchy and simple, containing such a novel popular humor, that he was always successful in the small circles where he used to sing. Five or six years ago, he had his first take at a broader public and quickly became very popular in Vilnius. He is a success with the public, not only with the self-made lyrics and music, but also with the execution. He is musically talented, plays several instruments and his couplets, which he accompanies in guitar, accordion, and other instruments, are new and original. [...]¹²⁰

All the reviews mentioned how Jevl Katz was the first Jewish *Kleinkunst* (cabaret) artist to arrive in Buenos Aires, a genre that spread widely in Europe and the United States in the 1920s and 1930s.¹²¹ *Di Presse*'s article went through a minute enumeration of the songs and monologues Katz performed at their offices, and concluded that he was a great addition to the "theatrical Buenos Aires." They warned, however, that the artist's collection of parodies would earn him only lukewarm enthusiasm, because the Jewish

¹¹⁸ Baker, "'Gvald, Yidn, Buena Gente'". *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung*, June 3, 1930. Zalman Reisen's column was partially reproduced in *Di Presse*, December 30, 1932.

¹¹⁹ In Yiddish, the term "Yiddish" can mean both the language "Yiddish" and the adjective "Jewish."

¹²⁰ *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung*, June 3, 1930. My translation from the original in Yiddish.

¹²¹ The term refers to variety performances by individuals or small groups of artists which include singing, dancing, and theatre, often with heavy doses of humor and parody. I translate "Kleinkunst" as "cabaret" understanding the latter in the technical sense, as a kind of stage act, without the moral underpinnings sometimes attached to it.

public of Buenos Aires did not know the original songs and were unfamiliar with the topics that caught the attention of the Eastern European audiences.¹²²

Katz was aware of this problem, and devoted his energies in his first years to create a local repertoire of parodies for his new audience. He used the songs played by the Argentine radio and bounced around dance halls, and also created his own tunes in the music genres popular in Buenos Aires in the 1930s, such as tango, ranchera, rumba, and foxtrot. For the lyrics, he turned his experiences as a recent arrival in Buenos Aires – and those of friends and neighbors – into humoristic lyrics, poking fun at himself and his fellow immigrants. The complexities of finding a room for rent in the overcrowded city, and living in small shared rooms with people from all over the world; the burdens of working as *kuentenike* (door-to-door salesmen offering all sorts of goods on installment plants to Jewish and non-Jewish clients; the most common occupation for recent immigrants lacking a trade or capital); the complicated juggling of a life in Buenos Aires and a wife and kids in Europe; and the struggle for learning the local language, all became fodder for parodies and couplets.

The artist never stopped composing new songs. Although the copies of his compiled lyrics are not dated, reviews of his shows and the topics of the songs provide valuable hints. We know that Katz first debuted a piece composed in Argentina in June 1930, less than two months after arriving. Lyrics condemning the state of world affairs in Europe, particularly a bitter parody song titled “Chamberlain,” hint of the artist producing new works at least into the opening salvos of World War II.

¹²² *Di Presse*, June 9, 1930.

While he worked on his new material, Katz played wherever possible. His debut was less than a month after his arrival, in an event of the “H. D. Nomberg” Writers Association honoring writer and journalist Mordechai Alperson. His second gig, at the end of June, was at the request of a Jewish sports club in neighboring city La Plata. Besides the parodies he brought with him from Europe, this show saw the debut of what seems to be his first Argentine song, called “*Italienish*” (Italian), in which he attempted to parody how Italians spoke. The song is mostly Yiddish with bits of supposedly Italianized Spanish, and evidences Katz’s then-shaky grasp of Spanish. According to the otherwise positive review, it “had as much relationship to Italian as to, to give an example, Turkish.”¹²³ A couple of years later, with more experience under his belt, the singer created new works mocking the Spanish of Yiddish-speakers, such as his famous “*Ranchera*” and a parody of Mexican classic song “*La Cucaracha*.”

The fact that Katz’s first local composition clumsily poked fun at another immigrant group’s struggles to speak Spanish illustrates not only the ubiquitous presence of foreign language speakers on the streets of Buenos Aires, but also how different immigrant groups interacted with each other and partook on similar experiences of linguistic and social integration within Argentine society. Recent arrivals learned Buenos Aires’s Spanish and became acquainted with local traditions through interactions with natives but also with other immigrants of diverse origins, each group intervening the others’ experiences.

¹²³ In the original, “... *Oykh hobn mir zikh bakant mit a nay lidl vos heist “Italienish” vos hot aza sheykhes tzu Italienish vi lemoshl tzu Terkish...*” M. Gorenberg, “Der oyftrit fun Jevl Katz in La Plata”, *Di Presse*, June 27, 1930. My translation from the original Yiddish.

In his first year in the country, Katz made a living as actor in the Yiddish theatre, both as part of the cast in plays and in variety shows with other performers. He also played in small acts and venues, such as weddings and balls and banquets of Jewish societies. Meanwhile, he worked on his growing Argentine repertoire, producing a plethora of parody songs about Jewish life in Eastern Europe and Argentina, like “The Unemployed Thief,” “A Ranchera” and “Argentine joys.”¹²⁴

The first is a tune sang by a thief, bitterly complaining that the good times of robbing are gone. The song erases the criminal’s marginal social position, making him just one more man unable to make ends meet. The thief retells his last hits: a bank hit, failed because the cashier had no money, and two hand robberies where the victims had nothing of value. “A Ranchera” and “Argentine joys” are parodies, with the narrator respectively boasting of and complaining about becoming Argentine. In the former, the singer brags of a way of life that his own telling betrays as miserable.

The latter is a missive to Jewish-Argentines (headed “Dear Jewish Argentines”) written by a recent immigrant. It begins with the complaint that, after staying in the country for a few days, he did not become immediately and automatically rich: “No gold coins fell onto my hand. Tell me, dear Jews of Argentina, why do you call your country, ‘the Golden Land’? Already three days since I arrived in the country. I flew in, but my eyes fail to see even a little piece of gold...”¹²⁵ As the song progresses, he stays longer: his family has adapted, and – although he fought it tooth and nail – so has he. “There can be no tea in my house. I must drink bitter *mate*, or make my daughter cry that her father

¹²⁴ Respectively in Yiddish, “*The arbeytslozer ganev*”, “*A Ranchera*” and “*Argentinier Glikn*.”

¹²⁵ FI/CJK, “Argentine Glikn”. My translation from the original Yiddish.

is a gringo. Now we cook Spanish food, and I have no strength left[.] We think of ourselves as locals...”¹²⁶

On Sunday, November 1st, 1931, Jevl Katz gave his first major concert since his arrival, in the concert hall of “*Societá Italia Unita*” building, owned by the mutual-aid society of the same name. Located in the *Once* neighborhood, near the corner of streets *Cangallo* and *Larrea*, it originally hosted visiting Italian Opera companies until most moved to the *Teatro Colón* Opera house in 1908. By the 1930s, it was one of the premiere *milongas*, where the most famous tango performers played, like Carlos Gardel, Alberto Castillo, and Juan D’Arienzo’s orchestra.

This was the first of his “yearly” concerts, which he always gave in the last months of the Argentine calendar year. The venue changed, but Katz upheld the tradition until his demise. It was during these shows that he debuted new song parodies and couplets, and the Jewish-Argentine press jockeyed for privileged access in order to beat the competition in reporting on the additions to the repertoire.

According to the reviews on the Yiddish press, Katz’s performance in 1931 was the main attraction of the night, after an introductory song set by amateur opera singer Dora Nisenson. The cultural critics at the Yiddish periodicals unanimously agreed that the night had been a defining moment in what would surely be a successful career in cabaret. For Samuel Rollansky, perhaps the most influential cultural critic in the Jewish press and the earliest and loudest of Jevl Katz’s cheerleaders, the show proved that the Yiddish-speaking public had come both to understand and appreciate the cabaret genre, and that “[cabaret] is an artistic branch that stands on its own merits and does not need to

¹²⁶ FI/CJK, “Argentine Glikn”. My translation from the original Yiddish.

be part of a theatre performance to reach a broader audience.”¹²⁷ Satiric magazine *Der Kundas* agreed that “the public, even though Katz and his type of act were unknown to them, had an extraordinarily good time. Only seldom is an actor rewarded with such fawning applause as Jevl Katz was in his show.”¹²⁸ *Di Presse*’s review highlighted the artist’s adoption of different characters to perform different songs, and announced that “[t]he public received Jevl Katz with long-lasting applause, like one has for his favorite.”¹²⁹

The show also marked the beginning of Jevl Katz’s first tour of the provinces. Just like he used his European reviews to kick-start his career in Buenos Aires, the artist let the laudatory reviews of his well-timed show generate expectations in the Argentine interior. *Di Presse* and *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung* mailed daily editions to thousands of subscribers all over the country, and both newspapers cooperated with the media strategy by not only writing fawning reviews of his November 1st show, but also by penning preview articles with positive profiles of Katz and columns about the importance of his tour.

Di Yiddishe Tsaytung penned a long column dated October 16th with his reflections on the impending trip across the country’s interior. The journalist called on weary audiences in the provinces – apparently tired of being shafted by substandard touring troupes – to give the artist a try, as “Jevl Katz deserves anyone’s complete trust”. He then launched into a comprehensive acclaim of the singer’s – to paraphrase – varied

¹²⁷ The first quote in the original Yiddish: “[...] *Dritens, az der kuplet un di parodies, oysgefirt vi s’gehert tzu zayn, mit talent, iz a kunstzveyg far zikh aleyun un darf nisht onkumen tzu a teater-forshetelung, kdey tzu veren forgetrogen far a breyter oydtorie.* [...]” In Sh. Rollansky, “Jevl Katz kontzert – An oydtizie fun an originele un talentirten kleynkunst-artist.” *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung*, November 6, 1931.

¹²⁸ Untitled, *Der Kundas* November 5, 1931.

¹²⁹ “In hign Yiddishn teater velt. The Jevl Katz Contsert”, *Di Presse*, November 6, 1931.

gifts as a musical wonder and sui generis, bighearted couplet artist.¹³⁰ *Di Presse* published its own pre-concert reflection, ostensibly dedicated to Katz's personal and artistic connection to the Vilnius cultural and intellectual environment. The columnist found the parodist to be an expression of the artistic and cultural exchanges found not on the city's stages, but rather in the public, yet more intimate, air of the famous restaurant "Velfke's," where writers and actors intermingled. Vilnius worked as a stand-in of all that was desirable and proper in a variety artist. By stressing Katz's "European" credentials, it sought to make him more attractive to a public that was hungering for international stars.¹³¹

On Tour with the Jewish Gauchos

Unsurprisingly, Katz devoted his first tour to the Jewish agricultural colonies in the Entre Rios and Santa Fe provinces. In so doing, he was feeding from and supporting the original myth legitimizing Jewish presence in Argentina and Brazil: the myth of the "Jewish gaucho." The largest colonies, Basavilbaso and Moisesville, were aware of their symbolic importance and expected the theatre stars to visit them as part of their tours. Katz followed in the footsteps of European and American legends like Joseph Buloff and Molly Picon, but with each passing tour took his commitment farther, making a point to visit even the most remote and tiniest settlements.

Argentina was the main location for the Jewish Colonization Association's efforts to evacuate Jews from the Russian empire and settle them as farmers outside Europe.

¹³⁰ Shmuel Rollansky, "Jevl Katz- tsu zayn aroysfor oyf a tur iber der provints", *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung*, October 16, 1931.

¹³¹ "Jevl Katz farmogt di rozhinke", *Di Presse*, October 30, 1931.

Founded in 1891 by philanthropist magnate Baron Maurice Hirsch, the JCA (IKA in Yiddish) bought land and established colonies in the Americas, Australia, and Palestine. Argentina became the foremost recipient of settlers, with dozens of colonies, most of them in the provinces of Santa Fe, Entre Rios, and Buenos Aires, but also in more secluded areas like the Chaco territory.

Despite the fortune and efforts invested by Baron Hirsch and his successors, the demographic impact of the colonies was negligible. Organizational chaos, immense logistical difficulties, national bureaucracies, and impossible qualification requirements that excluded those Russian Jews more desperate to migrate conspired to severely limit the amount of families that successfully left the Tsarist Empire to settle the Argentine Pampas. The original plan of relocating millions of Jews from the Pale of Settlement was dramatically downsized: at their apex in the mid-1920s, the combined amount of farmers from all Argentine colonies was about twenty thousand strong. The colonies also housed an additional thirteen thousand Jews (combining the numbers for all colonies in the country) who were not farmers and had not arrived through the JCA, but made a living providing goods and services to the farms and colony population, and about seven thousand non-Jews who worked as field-hands or in numerous trades.¹³²

The relative isolation of the colonies, the limited educational and career opportunities, and the constant conflicts between the JCA administrators and the colonists created incentives for the colonists to migrate to the Argentine cities, further eroding the colonies' demographics. After 1925, the number of Jewish farmers steadily decreased;

¹³² Haim Avni, "La agricultura judía en la Argentina. ¿Éxito o fracaso?" *Desarrollo Económico* 22.88 (1983): 535-548.

this fact, combined with an increasing transoceanic Jewish immigration to urban Argentina, meant the colonist population shrank both in absolute and relative terms.

However, the colonies compensated their small population with enormous symbolic importance. They became the location for the foundational myth of Jewish-Argentina. The mythological inhabitants of the colonies, the Jewish *gauchos*, neutralized the negative myths nativists deployed to argue Jewish incompatibility with nationalism and their general unassimilability. Instead of the cosmopolite, bookish, untrustworthy, parasitic moneylenders of hostile myth, Jewish *gauchos* were honest, simple, manual-laboring, hard-working, salt of the earth pioneers.¹³³ They drew from the original *gauchos* of the Argentine national myth, the valiant wandering laborers, rebels, bandits and poets who eschewed the comforts of civilized life to roam free in the frontier; savage mixed-blood *hidalgos* who lived on the saddle and died by the knife.¹³⁴

The first and foremost construction of the Jewish *gaucho* was published by Alberto Gerchunoff in 1910, coinciding with Argentina's centennial celebration. It was enthusiastically adopted by Jewish-Argentines (and by pro-immigration liberals in the Argentine elites) and became integral part of the group's collective memory. Jevl Katz's decision to devote his first tour to the colonies raised no eyebrows: even the international stars of Yiddish theatre – like Maurice Schwartz, Joseph Buloff and Molly Picon –

¹³³ Alberto Gerchunoff, *Los gauchos judíos* (La Plata: Talleres Gráficos Joaquín Sesé, 1910). For the book's role on the collective construction of Jewish-Argentine memory, see Leonardo Senkman, *La identidad judía en la literatura argentina* (Buenos Aires: Pardes, 1983). Leonardo Senkman, "Los gauchos judíos: una lectura desde Israel," *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe*, 10.1 (1998-9). <http://eial.tau.ac.il/index.php/eial/article/view/1045/1077> Accessed October 1, 2012.

¹³⁴ The most famous literary construction of the *gaucho* myth was José Hernández's 1972 epic poem "*El Gaucho Martín Fierro*." However, earlier constructions go back at least to 1845, when Domingo Faustino Sarmiento wrote his classic "*Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie*." Ariel De la Fuente, *Children of Facundo: Caudillo and Gaucho Insurgency During the Argentine State Formation Process (La Rioja, 1853-1870)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). John Charles Chasteen, *Heroes on Horseback: A Life and Times of the Last Gaucho Caudillos* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

visited the larger colonies as part of their Argentine tours. They relied on their fame to attract a large part of the local population – a not-insubstantial few thousand people – to their one-night-only performance before moving to the next colony and back to Buenos Aires.

Katz's tour to the colonies, however, was more than an attempt to sell a few thousand tickets. It was part of his exploration of Jewish Argentina as both audience and source material for new songs and parodies. Rather than sticking to the largest colonies to maximize his profits, he toured the interior as part of his Jewish-Argentine experience, validating himself and his repertoire by communing with his "roots" in the land. Katz did profit from the small but significant concentration of Jews in the main colonies (Moisesville, Basavilbaso, Colonia Clara), and aimed to turn them into fans for further tours and radio emissions. However, Katz sought above all to benefit from the symbolic value of the colonies. He saw it as his mission as a Jewish-Argentine artist, to the point where he visited far-away, isolated outposts with only a few Jews, even if he barely broke even:

In fact, his tours of the country's interior inspired Katz to write several songs which were immensely successful with audiences in the colonies and also in urban Argentina. Jews in Buenos Aires, Rosario and Córdoba (the three largest cities in the country) were heavily invested in the foundational myth of the Jewish *gauchos*, even – or especially – if they had never ridden a horse or planted seeds. Katz, who transformed into different characters to play his repertoire, even dressed up as a *gaucho* to interpret his rural-inspired hits like "A kolonist" (A Colonist) – based on Argentine folkloric song "Vidalita" –, "Moisesville," and "Basavilbaso."

The artist's interest in the symbolic importance of the interior and commitment to experience Jewish Argentina was evidenced by his later tours. Without abandoning the traditional "colony" circuit encompassed by northern Buenos Aires province, and South Entre Rios and Santa Fe, he visited more remote regions with smaller, less influential, and more recent Jewish communities. In September, 1932 he visited Tucumán, a city to the north of the country with a small community of recent immigrants, who founded their first institution in 1910 and bought land for a Jewish cemetery only in 1926. In November, 1934 he was in Mendoza and San Juan, two provinces on Argentina's western border with Chile, with minuscule Jewish populations. He visited the only Jewish school in San Juan (with no more than 50 students between its morning and afternoon classes) both on his first trip in 1934 and on his way to Chile in 1936. The provincial Argentine periodicals, unlike the larger newspapers based in Buenos Aires, covered Jevl Katz's arrival and previewed his shows. Tucumán's *La Gaceta* announced his debut in the province in 1932 in a small column. In Mendoza, he was featured both in the *Los Andes* newspaper and on the newspaper's own radio, where he played a few songs before his show.¹³⁵ Another regional newspaper announced Katz's arrival and described him as a "Jewish *payador*", after the mythological guitar-wielding bards of the rural *gaucho* tradition, who dueled each other in musical challenges called *payadas*.¹³⁶

Katz's tours took him beyond the borders of the country. His first international destination was Uruguayan capital Montevideo, in 1932. This became the first of many visits: the strong cultural connection between Montevideo and Buenos Aires, and the cities' similar immigrant composition, meant that the artist's repertoire was well-received

¹³⁵ *La Gaceta de Tucumán*, September 2, 1932. *Los Andes*, November 10, 1934.

¹³⁶ FI/CJW, undated untitled newspaper clipping.

by Uruguayan Jews and Jewish theatres on the eastern side of the Rio de la Plata were eager to have him perform. Steamboats connected the capitals every day, in only a few hours' time. When the first radio show in Yiddish appeared on Radio Artigas, Katz became a valued and familiar guest.

Just like with his Argentine tours, the parodist did not limit himself to the nearest destinations. He visited Santiago de Chile at least once in 1936, and Asunción de Paraguay in 1938. While the former city is puzzling, considering the length of the trip and the small size of Jewish population, Asunción makes more sense. Between 1930 and 1939, refugees from Central and Eastern Europe unable to migrate to the more popular Latin American countries due to quota systems or nativist legislation found a temporary safe haven in Paraguay. While a slow, continuous trickle entered Argentina and Brazil illegally, by 1938 there were still between ten and twenty thousand refugees in Asunción, most of them Yiddish speakers.¹³⁷

Why did Jevl Katz bother to visit these distant locations outside the region more traditionally coded as Jewish-Argentine? The rationale behind his travels cannot be explained through economic interest alone. Although he visited Tucumán and Mendoza after local Jewish institutions invited him and offered to cover his expenses, both cities were located well over a day's distance by train from Buenos Aires, and they barely had any Jewish population: less than 2,000 Jews in each province, while the capital housed over 200,000. The same can be said of Santiago de Chile.

¹³⁷ Paraguay, like Bolivia and the Dominican Republic, were only temporary safe havens for Jewish refugees from Europe. While the Jewish population from Europe increased in these countries during the 1930s, it quickly vanished after World War II as the refugees sought more permanent homes in the United States, Canada, Argentina, Brazil, and Israel. Allen Wells, *Tropical Zion: General Trujillo, FDR, and the Jews of Sosúa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009). Leo Spitzer, *Hotel Bolivia: The Culture of Memory in a Refuge from Nazism* (NYC: Hill & Wang, 1999).

The tours required planning, and meant that Katz was unavailable to play in the national Yiddish radio shows. Perhaps he aimed to be known in every part of the country, no matter how minuscule the Yiddish-speaking population. Perhaps he loved to travel to the point that he was willing to forsake alternative, better-paying opportunities near his home. Jevl Katz went out of his way to meet Jewish-Argentines even in remote areas of the country that, for a majority of Jews in the country, were coded as non-Jewish.

His piece “Mayn Tur in Provints,” written in 1932 after his first trip to the colonies, relays the contrast between rural and urban Jewish-Argentines as well as the improvised nature of his gigs in the middle of the grasslands:¹³⁸

| | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| For ikh mir arois oyf a tur in provints; | I travel on a tour to the |
| oys tsu prubirn mayn glik. | provinces; |
| Nem ikh mir mit mayn gantse klaper-getsayg; | going to try my luck. |
| un a ban-bilet hin un tsurik. | I bring all my tools with me |
| Vio Vio Khevele | and a two-way train ticket |
| Vio Vio Ketsele | Go, go Jevle! |
| Di <i>gastes</i> zaynen zeyer groys | Go, go Katzele! |
| zol dir guts bagegenen; | The <i>expenses</i> are very high |
| zol khotsh nit regen | may you do well; |
| truk zolstu khotsh aroys. | at least let it not rain |

Katz portrays himself as a tragicomic character, like the well-dressed buffoons of mute physical comedy films incarnated by the likes of Charles Chaplin and Buster Keaton. There he is, completely laden with instruments and a suitcase, doing his best to avoid the mud, betting all he has on a hopeful dream. Making a profit is desirable but ultimately secondary. He just wants to play without going bankrupt or getting wet.

¹³⁸ FI/CJK, “Mayn tur tin[sic] provints.” The italicized terms in both the Yiddish and English versions signals Spanish words originally in Yiddish letters.

This imaginary is only underlined by the precarious nature of his show:

| | |
|---|---|
| Gekumen in kolonye shpet in der nakht; | Arrived in the colony late at night; |
| in a <i>galpon</i> in a <i>camp</i> in a <i>vistn</i> . | to a <i>barn</i> in a <i>field</i> in the middle of nowhere |
| fun shtiblakh oyf <i>legüas</i> ; | the nearest shacks leagues away |
| ... | ... |
| Shteyt oysgeputst Jevl mitn gantsn knak; | Jevl stood made up full of knack; |
| oyf breter mit zeklakh a bine: | On a stage of boards and sacks: |
| hinter a <i>colche</i> a farhang shteyt er in frak | He stood in his frock behind a |
| | [<i>blanket-cum-curtain</i> |
| baloykhtn fun a lamp kerosine. | Lit by a kerosene lamp. |
| Vio vio yidalakh | Go go Jews! |
| Vio vio tayere | Go go [my] dears! |
| Kumt un fil ton dem <i>salon</i> ; | Come and fill the <i>hall</i> |
| Ikh kum tsu aykh tsu rayzn | I've traveled all the way here |
| Di kunst tsu bavaysn | To show you my art. |
| Vio | Go! |
| Vayzn vos ikh kon. | I'll show you what I can do. |

This song highlights the “culture shock” quality of Katz’s first tours to the interior, particularly to the smaller IKA colonies. It is designed for contrast: city man Jevl Katz, cleaned up after hours on the train, wearing his frock and dress shoes, is not in a theatre but in a barn, surrounded by nothing but grassland and a few lost shacks. He waits for the audience to pay the tickets behind an old blanket that stands in for a curtain, on a stage improvised out of old wooden boards and burlap sacks, with kerosene lamps instead of electrical spotlights. Many in the audience – the song informs us – cannot pay until harvest; others have no cash but brought hens or eggs. Katz tells the organizers: “Take whatever each one can pay. [Those] who cannot pay now will pay later, others will not

pay. [Those] who have chickens [will pay with] chickens, [those] who have eggs, with eggs. Come on! The concert is about to begin!”¹³⁹

| | |
|--|--|
| Un es hoybt zikh di <i>colche</i> ; | And the <i>blanket</i> is raised; |
| Es folt a aployz: | There is an applause, |
| geygt zikh Jevl Katz oyf der bine: | Jevl Katz goes on the stage: |
| tseveynt zikh a kind | A child cries out |
| az zi vil aroyz. | that she wants to leave. |
| A tsveyte shrayt “ <i>chocolatine[s]</i> ” | A second screams for <i>candy bars</i> |
| Vio lakh Jevele | Go, laugh Jevele! |
| Fraylakh makh Jevele | Make [them] happy, Jevele, |
| Di Yidn fun arbet un mi | the Jews of toil and effort[!] |
| a heym fun reyn zingen | Back home from singing, |
| nor derfolg vestu bringen | you will bring only success |
| Vio: | Go! |
| A Yiddisher kinstler bistu. | You are a Jewish artist. |

The inhabitants of the smaller colonies were, according to this song, unaccustomed to proper theater etiquette. It is a hard crowd, but Katz pushes himself to laugh and make them laugh, because they are “the Jews of toil and effort.” With this, he explains their importance: they may be only a handful of people, and he will probably end up with no earnings to bring back home (“only success”), but their existence forms the backbone of the legitimacy for Jewish immigration and integration in Argentina. They embody the myth of the Jewish gaucho, rural, hard-working, men and women of “of toil and effort,” and the task of the Jewish(-Argentine) artist is both to bring them his art from the cities, and bring back songs about them to the urban Jewish-Argentines. In this song, Katz puts

¹³⁹ In the original Yiddish: “Nem bay yedn vos men kon:/ ver gelt shpeter ver gelt shpeter ver frayer/ ver hiner ver ayer./ Vio[!] Der kontsert fang bald on.”

himself, as the “Jewish artist,” as a central piece maintaining a cultural connection between the “gauchos” in the Pampas and the urbanite Jews, thus guaranteeing that the former remain “Jewish” and the latter are made Argentines

Jevl Katz – man of the (Yiddish) Hour

The date of his debut is unclear, but by 1932 Jevl Katz had already become a regular in the first Argentine Yiddish radio show, *Di Yiddishe Shtime* (The Jewish/Yiddish Voice), later renamed *Di Yiddishe Sho* (The Jewish/Yiddish Hour), hosted by Tobías Berelejis. He was a habitual presence in this show – which, from 1933 onwards, had at least two daily airings – and the radio quickly became his most important channel to reach Yiddish-speaking Jews in Argentina and Uruguay.

By 1937, Katz had joined a second radio show, headed by theatre writer and entrepreneur Samuel Glasserman. This show also aired two – and, for some time, three – times a day, with segments both in Yiddish and Spanish. Glasserman and Katz’s relationship went beyond the radio: the artist also became a prominent feature at the Excelsior Theatre, where he gave his yearly concert for at least three years in a row (1937 through 1939). The radio show also hosted its own yearly “festival” in homage to Katz, starting in 1937, which included both radio features – such as short speeches by staff or guests praising the artist – and a theatre night with the honoree himself as the main attraction.

In the second half of the decade, a third Yiddish daily radio show debuted not in Buenos Aires, but in neighboring Montevideo, airing on Radio Artigas. Every time Katz visited the capital of Uruguay, he made an appearance on “*La hora cultural israelita*”

(The Jewish Cultural Hour). We do not know much about the host, Jewish-Uruguayan Pedro Sprinberg, but his show was transmitted across the Rio de la Plata and into Yiddish-speaking homes in Buenos Aires, just as Uruguayan radios picked up Berelejis's and Glasserman's shows.

Katz devoted a handful of songs to the topic of radio. Many of these were semi-improvised jokes sung on air that left only hints and traces in the archive, but he also composed whole pieces on the subject. One such song, "Tragedies of Radio," traces how the introduction of the radio changed the social dynamics of the home and neighborhood. The tune has a traditionalist narrator who bemoans how the machine brought chaos to his home. Every neighbor has one, and each plays a different station. Those without a radio go to the man's house uninvited, and stay until the wee hours, drinking his tea and eating his food. The man's children and wife are constantly changing the station, and even his mother-in-law requests that they put on the station with that Lithuanian Jevl Katz.¹⁴⁰ The tune "Radio" does a similar thing, but with a positive tweak. A love song to radio, it states how transistors were everywhere, "at home" and "on the street," and delighted in their providing news, music, theatre, advice, the time and weather, and even advertisement.¹⁴¹

Recorded and Published

In August 10th, 1934, *Di Presse* published the following article:

Jevl Katz became a bit of an institution in Buenos Aires, and a very popular institution at that. We hear and see him in a large number of communitarian and cultural initiatives. Early in the morning or in the

¹⁴⁰ FI/CJK: "Tsores fun der radio." My translation from the original Yiddish

¹⁴¹ FI/CJK: "Radio." My translation from the original Yiddish.

evening, we see his guitar everywhere and him alone even more. Even before he begins singing, the public gathers around him [...]

And in the radio in “Di Yiddishe Sho” the first segment is always – Jevl Katz. And also during the broadcasting [listeners] call in to tell “Ketsele” what he should sing. On the record-player we can now also hear Jevl Katz and in bookstores – again Jevl Katz. When a guest-star has been in Buenos Aires for ten weeks, he becomes tedious[.] Jevl Katz has been in Buenos Aires for give or take four years, and [people] do not yet tire of him; he attracts and pleases. [...]¹⁴²

Similar fragments were published several times, in slightly changed form, using different forms, in various Jewish-Argentine periodicals. They all made the same point: four years after his arrival to Argentina, Jevl Katz and his *oeuvre* seemed to be everywhere, and yet his Jewish-Argentine audience did not seem to tire of him.

Besides his constant personal appearances on institutional events, and his practically daily presence on the Yiddish radio shows, Jevl Katz first made it into the print world in 1933. In what was apparently a small print run, he published a short booklet with the lyrics of ten of his most popular songs, like “Ranchera” and “A picnic in Vicente López”. A year later, RCA Victor released the two records of Jevl Katz singles, his only surviving recordings. This allowed gramophone owners – which, admittedly, were not that many – to listen to the musician at any time, although in a sharply limited repertoire: he recorded only four songs.

In 1937, Katz started his own semi-regular column in *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung*, entitled “*Azoy zingt Jevl Katz*” (Thus Sings Jevl Katz). Each column consisted of the lyrics and guitar keys for one of his songs. This column continued even after the musician’s death. In fact, the newspaper editors published one the day of his burial, under

¹⁴² “Ver vet nit geyn tsu Ketshalen?,” *Di Presse*, August 10, 1934.

the slightly altered title “*Azoy hot gezungen Jevl Katz*” (Thus Sang Jevl Katz), which remained the new official title.¹⁴³

An artist you can take your wife and daughter to see

In their reviews of Katz’s shows, both *Di Presse*’s and *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung* coincided in praising Katz’s skills: as musical interpreter and composer; for the supposedly enormous range of his voice that, while thin, could imitate both an operatic tenor and an old woman; as a purportedly excellent writer of couplets and parodies. These newspaper’s early and continuous praise and support (joined by daily *Morgntsaytung* after its founding near the end of the 1930s) was echoed by many short-lived cultural and literary Yiddish magazines, like *Der Shpigl*.¹⁴⁴

Two main arguments stand out among these expressions of support for Katz. The first one is a vindication of the Argentine nature of his repertoire and his success; the second, a constant need to establish him as a decent, family-oriented artist offering “pure” and “clean” humoristic entertainment. Rollansky’s and Jacobo Botoshansky’s profiles of Katz usually made the case for both arguments. These two lines of defense also call into question whom they were aiming at, and whether their authors sought to rebut oppositional – if perhaps unwritten – claims.

Articles and columns highlighting the local nature of Katz’s *oeuvre* as the reason of his success started early in his Argentine career. As soon as 1931, less than two years

¹⁴³ “Azoy hot gezungen Jevl Katz,” *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung*, March 10, 1940. The song published was “Mayn rayze keyn Tucumán.”

¹⁴⁴ See “Der Libling fun Vilner oilom, H. Jevl Katz in B. Aires,” *Der Shpigl*, June 5, 1930.

after his arrival, the same *Di Presse* piece delving into his Lithuanian roots made one of the first iterations of this argument.

[...] Strange: Jevl Katz brought with him a repertoire from Vilnius, made of light parodies, ironic songs, a dash of sentimentalism, but no satirical songs. Only in Buenos Aires did he start writing satirical songs, because here he found ridiculousness, which he did not see in Vilnius. Here we made fun of the Spanish-Yiddish that Jews speak, in *feuilletons* and in theatrical scenes. Jevl Katz wrote a song about it, his “Ranchera”, which is sharp and playful. There Katz subtly introduced a satire not only linguistically, but also in his crude performance of a “*criollo*”. His “*compadre*” character is branded in my mind; just as his “Morde” was in Poland.¹⁴⁵

The fragment claims that there was something unique to the cultural-linguistic nature of being Jewish-Argentine (or, we could expand, to being any ethno-linguistic minority in Argentina) that allowed, or even required, a specific form of humor. Even though Katz’s “*compadre*” character was equivalent to his European “Morde,” there was something different in the former – namely, the recent character of Jewish (and more generally, minority) life in Argentina, with a still-ongoing stream of immigration and the corresponding cultural and linguistic shock, the ultimate comedy fodder. Where the “*compadre*” was satiric, Morde was not.

A year later, *Di Yiddish Tsaytung* added to this argument the specific requirements of cabaret as a theatrical genre:

Jevl Katz has blazed a trail in Argentina for Jewish Cabaret. He alone is the ideal cabaret artist for a cabaret stage. There were several attempts made before hi[s arrival]. Theatres, when business was going worse than it should, tried to organize cabaret evenings. I say “organize” and not create, with reason. Because even these attempts were plagued by the [star] import system. Foreign topics, here outdated, were obviously unable to arouse the longed interest [of audiences]. And for a cabaret repertoire that is most vital: actuality, lively, ebullience.

¹⁴⁵ “Jevl Katz farmogt di rozhinke,” *Di Presse*, October 30, 1931. My translation from the original Yiddish.

[...] Jevl Katz, a young artist, an amateur, because he loves [his work] and brings it forth in his expression, arrived with sentimental songs from [Alexander] Vertinsky's repertoire and also with his own parodies about the Jewish popular customs on the streets of Vilnius, with humorous character stories of Lithuanian religious Jews, but became aware of his weaknesses and created laughter on account of his mistakes.

But Katz [...] quickly and excellently naturalized in Argentina. He has already become intimate with popular Argentine songs (such as tangos, rancheras and dances) of every category[;] and they are of interest to him, as these songs became the daily background sounds of thousands of Jewish homes. And [also] because they figure prominently among the effects of an Argentine (Spanish) lifestyle and the changes that took place and are taking place among Jews; particularly among the Jewish youth, who became *criollos* in a strange way, becoming ostensibly intelligent.¹⁴⁶

Both by temporal accident and hard work, Jevl Katz had conquered the niche for a Jewish-Argentine cabaret artist. Any potential competitor from abroad had his work cut out for him: he had to undergo the task of familiarizing himself with Argentine custom, language, and taste in music. Perhaps unsurprisingly, *Di Yiddish Tsaytung's* article did not consider the possibility of competition from an Argentine-born artist, perhaps born in the colonies.

The second main argument of Katz's supporters in the Jewish-Argentine media was an insistence that his art was pure, free of vulgarity and bad taste. Cabaret had a dirty fame in Argentina, because newspaper chronicles had linked it to brothels and prostitution and white-slavery rings. Foreign-born pimps (Jewish, but also Italian, French, and others) had been among the first to patronize ethnic theatres in Buenos Aires, and cabaret, lacking the immunity of high-brow classic theatre and opera, was stained by the association.

¹⁴⁶ "Jevl Katz's krume shpigel fun yiddishen lebens-shteyger," *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung*, October 23, 1932. My translation from the original Yiddish.

The growing middle class and elites of Argentine immigrant groups were thus wary about popular theatre, because they feared any immorality by their lowly ethnic brethren would have a negative impact on their yearning to “pass” and be accepted into the Argentine upper echelons. Upper-class Jews were as sensitive to accusations of immorality as any other ethnic-Argentines, if not more so. While the community had led several campaigns against Jewish pimps, the government bust of the country’s largest ring of Ashkenazi pimps – operating in Europe, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil – had meant a lot of negative publicity, and plenty of ammunition for those of the Argentine elite willing to keep Jews at arms’ length.

That is why, at the beginning of Katz’s career, cultural critics like Rollansky and Botoshansky (who were influential felt compelled to defend him from accusations of immorality, pornography, or consorting with unethical types. They were trying to use their influence as cultural mediators to appease a thin-skinned elite that frowned upon any visible expression of popular entertainment. *Di Yiddish Tsaytung* expressed it thus:

Light theatre and light songs are sadly too common for us and also in ordinary theatres around the world. Ordinary theatre, ordinary songs, pornography or close enough to make no difference. Jevl Katz’s couplets are light, but not ordinary. Jevl Katz’s couplets are as good for the modern, outspoken radicals as for the dignified, orderly Jews. A man can take his wife and daughter to a Jevl Katz concert with no fear they might redder from embarrassment.

Jevl Katz is the singer of clean jokes, cleansed satires and even his caricatures are clean and pure. In fact, despite that cleanliness and purity he is generally not old-fashioned; he is a hundred percent actual and modern. He is a light artists in the sense that fathers and mothers can also enjoy [his work]. Jevl Katz and his light art have a somewhat unique power, in that everybody loves them[:] the utmost leftist and the utmost right-winger, Zionists see him as one of their own, and when he is around complete Leftist clichés, he is also seen as their own and befriended. Because his songs are cleansed not only of pornography, but also of politics.

The columnist committed himself to a difficult balancing act: reassuring the elite and middle classes that Jevl Katz's art would in no way damage their social standing, and at the same time make him seem interesting and modern. However, it is clear that this article's priority is to forcefully ascertain the manners and morality of Katz and his work. The author identified himself as one of those concerned with the "pornography" and lack of ethics of entertainment; from this position, he assured the Jewish-Argentine middle and upper classes that this artist was well above any moral reproach. In fact, the article claimed, Katz was so safe that he was not only "cleansed of pornography, but also of politics." This addition, at a time of authoritarian, filo-fascist rule in Argentina, must have been a welcomed sign for many readers, concerned that the community would be labeled as Communist.

This particular difficulty was unique to the ethnic artist, in that the supposed immorality of a *criollo* singer's work or way of life did not immediately reflect badly on the *criollo* elites. In fact, the purported criminality of tango, while condemned by politicians and institution of the elite, drew many young men of wealthy and traditional families looking for a thrill. This could bring shame to the individual family, but not to the entire elite.

One Does not Tire of Jevl Katz

Since the moment he landed in Buenos Aires until after his death ten years later, Jevl Katz had a constant presence in the Jewish-Argentine press and radio. Most journalists, and particularly the two most influential cultural critics in the Yiddish-written, Jewish-Argentine press – Samuel Rollansky and Jacabo Botoshansky, –

supported his career at every step and provided an important counterweight to the private criticism of sensitive middle- and upper-class Jews, fearful of the potential for immorality and embarrassment of a popular Jewish cabaret artist.

His constant exposure on the radio and institutional events provided Katz a means to reach his audience by himself. This near omnipresence, together with a growing and successful repertoire and enthusiastic fans, soon gave him enough momentum that the Jewish-Argentine press's cheerleading became just one factor among many for his popularity with Jewish-Argentines. By the late 1930s, Jevl Katz was so popular that the main communitarian institutions tried to get him to provide entertainment during elections days, to increase voter turnout.¹⁴⁷

However, the media also proved critical around Katz's demise, publishing news of his health, and writing about the public's reaction to his illness. With the artist's voice absent from the airwaves and communitarian events, it fell upon his friends and supporters in the radio and newspapers to mobilize his fan base and provide them information about the funerals and the money collection for the artist's widow and children. The media also played a vital role in defense of the Jewish Hospital (where the tonsillectomy took place, and where Katz expired); *Di Presse*, *Di Yiddishe Tsatung* and Samuel Glasserman's radio show stated over and over how the administration and medical staff did the impossible to save the parodist's life.

Glasserman's comments also show, once more, how language could become a chasm that kept those who did not speak Yiddish (or Italian, or Polish) ignorant of cultural developments such as Jevl Katz's career:

¹⁴⁷ "Tomer hobn mir ayn kupletist," *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung*, February 13, 1935. My translation from the original Yiddish.

Some friends of mine who are not Jewish [Hebreos, in the original Spanish] accompanied me to the location of the wake[. They] were astonished by the impressive demonstration of grief by the public. They told me: “Who was this being who can awaken such emotion with his death? He must have been a very important person.” “Yes,” I replied, “he was someone very important for his brethren. He was the man who, with his art, provided a humoristic and joyful balm that soothed our daily pains.” [...] ¹⁴⁸

While Glasserman was tempted to blame the outpouring of collective grief to Jewish particularism (he said that “it was also the fervor of Jewish piety; that traditional and ancestral piety of these people imbued in grief and anguish”), we need not take this route. One can easily envision similar funerals for other “Jevls Katz”, men who sang songs of immigrant life in Italian, Arabic, Russian, or German with a smattering of Spanish, beloved by their brethren, ignored by the rest of the country.

Lyrics analysis

Many songs sung by Jevl Katz, particularly those he improvised on the spot or scribbled in a piece of paper to sing on the radio, are now lost to us. Fortunately, the artist did write down the lyrics for a large part of his production. This collection, preserved at the Fundación IWO, informs my analysis of his literary production.

Sadly, we have no idea how most of these songs sounded, because Katz did not write down the music for them, and he only recorded a handful of them. This means that the performative dimension of his oeuvre is lost to us, which is a shame, because the reviewers of his shows stated that part of the meaning of his tunes – whether to take a phrase literally or ironically, for example – was expressed in how he sung. Nevertheless, the lyrics offer a window into the universe of meaning Jevl Katz created, and show us a

¹⁴⁸ FI/CSG, “Matinee Radial Israelita,” March 8, 1940. My translation from the original Spanish.

glimpse of the unique Jewish-Argentine geography of his Buenos Aires. This section reconstructs these meanings and geographies through an analysis of the main themes in Katz's songs.

The development of Argentine Yiddish

Jevl Katz's song lyrics provide us with a unique window into how immigrants adapted their Eastern European everyday language to the new geographical and social context of Argentina. This sort of Argentine Yiddish, mostly of oral use, lasted little more than a generation or two, and was eventually replaced by Spanish. Many Jewish-Argentines did not expect nor welcome such a replacement: Yiddish had subsisted in Eastern Europe despite centuries of Jewish life, because there were laws and practices designed to actively keep Polish or Lithuanian Jews from becoming fully Jewish-Poles and Jewish-Lithuanians.

This re-shaping of Yiddish took place apparently haphazardly, without central direction and as a combination of individual encounters both with native Spanish-speakers and other immigrants. Argentine-Yiddish proved to be extremely fluid, with the speaker easily borrowing words from Spanish when no Yiddish term was immediately apparent. Following Jevl Katz's writings, we can see that he sometimes preserved the loanwords intact, but more often than not they were "Yiddishized." For example, in the song 'Pitshuser Baile'¹⁴⁹ the author decided to use the Spanish term for "dance," "*baile*," rather than the Yiddish "*tants*." In the lyrics, however, he alternated between the Yiddish verb participle "*getants*" and the Yiddishized participle "*ge-baile-bet*," which

¹⁴⁹ FI/CJK: Jevl Katz, "Pitshuser Baile" lyrics.

incorporated the Spanish noun “dance” and conjugated it in Yiddish. The fact that Katz moved freely between both participles hints that for him, they were equal parts of the same (hybrid) language.

Besides providing such a linguistic record, the lyrics show how Katz and his fans perceived the Argentine culture they lived in, at a moment such culture was undergoing immense changes due to rapid immigration and urbanization. For example, ravioli and “milanesas” (fried breaded veal cutlets), two originally-foreign dishes introduced by Italian immigrants, appear in the lyrics as either “Spanish” or “Argentine” foods just like “asado,” the traditional Argentine style barbecue that Argentines consider the core of the national cookbook.¹⁵⁰

That re-conceptualization of Argentine cuisine to include immigrant dishes eventually came to be the country’s norm, but in the 1930s, it was a daring proposition, sure to anger the nativist Argentine Right. That is not to say that Katz’s position was purposefully daring; rather, it was the result of the Jewish-Argentine immigrant experience that started in the multi-national context of the *conventillo*, or tenement house.

Conventillos: The Immigrant Connection

Although Buenos Aires expanded rapidly in the first half of the twentieth century, the sheer number of immigrants outmatched the rate of geographical expansion. The city center was constantly teeming with new arrivals; most were unable to pay for the high rental prices. Hence, most recent “gringos,” unless they were wealthy or lucky enough to have relatives who could host them, ended up in tenement houses.

¹⁵⁰ FI/CJK: Jevl Katz, “A picnic in Vicente Lopez” lyrics. Katz, “Argentiner Glikn” lyrics.

Conventillos were colonial-style buildings of no more than three floors with several rooms, often around a central patio and a common bathroom and kitchen. Single men often shared rooms; families lived together in a single room (although those too starved for cash shared too), and expanded to two if things went well. One person or family usually rented the whole house and sub-let each room for a profit.

Life in tenement houses colored the first encounters with Buenos Aires in multi-ethnic hues. While Buenos Aires had a few exclusively Jewish *conventillos*, particularly in the neighborhood of Once, these buildings usually hosted tenants from various countries, religions, and trades. They were spaces of inter-ethnic sociability, where immigrants of different origins intervened in each other's processes of becoming Argentines.

It is not surprising, then, that five Jevl Katz songs make fun of life in the *conventillo*. All songs have in common a sensation of noise and constant upheaval, and neighbors of diverse origins. In "Tipi Tipi Ton," the din is played in an ironically positive light: the tenants turn on their radios every morning and each one sings tunes from their homelands. Katz mentions an Italian, who sings "canzonettas" from "Rigoletto"; a man from Tirol, who comes from the "Swiss *queso*" and yodels; a Russian peasant, whose voice makes the walls tremble; and a Pole from Cracow. Amongst the ruckus, an artist – presumably Katz – softly sings a lullaby to his crying newborn.¹⁵¹

The song "In a *conventillo*" makes similar arguments:

¹⁵¹ FI/CJK, Jevl Katz, "Tipi Tipi Ton" lyrics.

| | |
|---|--|
| Voint dort mentshn fun ale natsionen, fun ale fir ekn der velt. | There live people of all nations, from all four corners of the world. |
| Shpanier, un Terk, un Italiener, Araber in zelber hoyz. | Spaniards, Turks, and Italians, and Arabs all in the same house. |
| Idn poylishe, litvakes un galitsianer oikh feln kholile nit oys. | Jews from Poland, Lithuania and Galicia They are of course there as well. |

This multi-ethnic space is not without conflict: its denizens switch from their native language to Spanish to have discussions and fights. However, there is a positive dimension even of the fights:

| | |
|--|---|
| S'iz a fargenign, ven men hoybt zikh [on krign, | It is a pleasure, when they start [to fight. |
| Nishto dan kayn orem kayn raykh. | There are then no rich, no poor. |
| Nishto dort kayn tayne, fun groyse [un klayne, | There are no complaints, from [big or small, |
| Kabtsonim zaynen ale glaykh. | They are all equally paupers. |

There is a class component to this piece, where common poverty and living conditions equalize all the tenants and turn them into brothers. The song continually returns to a

narrative of brotherhood. They eat together, with the Italian providing “something Italian”; the Turk, sweet beans; a Jew, latke soup; and they then watch their children dance and play together in the mud. The narrator watches from outside with his wife, and decides he wants to be part of the *conventillo* community.¹⁵²

The tune “I seek a room [to rent]” mocks the difficulties of finding housing in overcrowded Buenos Aires. It stars an immigrant, who states he is charmed by Argentina. “I ony have one problem, one must be constantly looking for a room.”¹⁵³ He searches for guarantors and recommendations, all his things packed in a moving truck. The song then becomes a list of every negative thing a house can have: one has an evil manager, another too many radios, yet another does not accept children, and a forth has a moist ceiling, and so on. At last he tells the audience that he has an excellent room, but that he has to move, because he has no money to pay the rent.

Every Jevl Katz song about *conventillos* described the tenement houses as spaces of multi-ethnic socialization. The narrator changed (he is either a tenant, the manager, or a prospective neighbor), and so did the jokes, but the plural nature of the place was always the same. At the same time, the ethnic or national variation was balanced by similar economic circumstances, which made their mutual experience of Argentina a shared one.

Being a Gringo and Becoming Criollo

The theme of being a “gringo” and becoming “criollo” circles over most of Katz’s oeuvre, with the exception of the few plays that deal exclusively with European topics. A

¹⁵² FI/CJK, Jevl Katz, “In a conventille.” My translation from the original Yiddish.

¹⁵³ FI/CJK, Jevl Katz, “Ikh zukh a tsimer.” My translation from the original Yiddish.

number of songs tackle the process of becoming Jewish-Argentine directly, sometimes jokingly looking back on the narrator-s plight when he was a “gringo,” while others mock how swiftly immigrants forget their previous customs and embrace those of their new homes.

Katz’s “A Ranchera” is one of his earliest hits; the piece strings together several of the author’s main themes. The narrator, an immigrant who claims to be already a “criollo,” takes listener in a walk-through of a day in his Jewish-Argentine life. The song is packed with Spanish and *lunfardo* terms. “I have no *paciencia* (patience) for Yiddish,” warns the singer (in Argentine Yiddish), “I always get ‘*La Prensa*’” (a newspaper in Spanish). “And when I hold it in front of my *ojos* (eyes), I do not understand a thing,” he finishes.¹⁵⁴

Like most of Katz’s characters, the man is a struggling *cuentenik*, a house-to-house peddler who sold goods of all sorts on credit, and quite unsuccessful. His *conventillo* room has a few empty barrels and a faucet passing for furniture, and he does not make enough to buy breakfast (he goes to the creamery, but orders a glass of water). Poverty or at least the difficulties of “making America” is a recurring theme for Katz’s songs taking place both in Europe and – to a lesser degree – in Argentina.

Two more themes appear in this piece. The first is that Argentine food does not sit well in Jewish digestive system. The singer takes a “*purgante*” (purgative) when he goes to a restaurant, and so do most of his characters who eat non-Jewish food. It might be only a recurring humoristic gag, but it could also be a physical metaphor of transitory incompatibility: perhaps, according to Katz, it takes a while for the immigrant to get used

¹⁵⁴ FI/CJK, Jevl Katz, “A Ranchera.” My translation from the original Yiddish.

to – or, let us say, digest – the particularities of Argentine culture and traditions without a little unease.

The second recurring theme has to do with non-reproductive romance. In “Ranchera,” the protagonist meets a forty-year old “babe (*nena*),” a stall-holder in the city’s main marketplace, in the border of the Once neighborhood. He takes her to the cinema and, after the date, steals a kiss. For his temerity, he ends up in a cell at the police station.

Almost every time forbidden romance and the menace of sex appear in Jevl Katz’s lyrics, it ends badly for the male protagonist. It could be only that Katz’s brand of humor relies on characters being losers: poor, intestinally-troubled, sexually frustrated men. However, it could also be that the author conceived of sex outside the bounds of marriage (even worse, with non-Jewish women) as dangerous, leading to moral decay and, even worse, to assimilation and the end of Jewishness.

Another classic, “Mucho ojo,” tells a successful story of passing from “gringo” to “criollo.” It starts with an anecdote from Europe, when the narrator’s teacher (or master, it is unclear) warned him to have “a good eye” out in his travels to far-away Argentina. Armed with such advice, he could not be “*macaneado*,” an Argentine term for tricked or conned. He knows to avoid offers of a too-hot mate, so as not to scald his mouth, and to drink a “*purgante*” when he goes to a banquet. In fact, he knows that, walking a girl back home from the movies, he should walk behind her and next to the wall, in order to dodge out of her father’s way if he is waiting up for her. One might think that this is an exception from the previous theme of dangerous sex, but note that he was not taking her

to a dark place to have intercourse, or stealing a kiss: the narrator has “*mucho ojo*” and knows not to try any such thing.

“El gringo” is Jevl Katz’s only song written completely in (slightly broken) Spanish. He wrote:¹⁵⁵

| | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Nacido yo soy lituano | I am a Lithuanian by birth. |
| hace año y mes, | For a year and a month |
| que estoy in país | I have been in the country, |
| y ya sé hablar castellano. | and I can already speak Spanish |
| Castellano aprendí muy ligero | Spanish I learned really quickly |
| porque yo sabía, | because I knew, |
| tres veces por día | three times a day, |
| hay que comer buen puchero | one has to eat a good stew. |

“Comer buen puchero” means, figuratively, to get a good meal. The song then turns into the story of a failed romance. The singer goes to “Palermo,” where he finds a girl, “a potato” (figuratively, a “hottie”). Following the rules of Katz’s moral world, the thing turns sour: the woman is married, the husband shows up, the narrator begs for his life.

| | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Y él me muy mal decidió [sic] | And he cursed at me |
| y me mandó allá | and sent me |
| que no se puede decir, | to a place I cannot name, |

¹⁵⁵ FI/CJK, Jevl Katz, “El Gringo” lyrics. My translation from the original Spanish.

| | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| y yo no fui, no quería. | but I did not go, I did not want to. |
| Por fin terminó el marido... | Finally, the husband finished... |
| él con la señora | he, along with his woman |
| se fueron los dos, | both of them left, |
| y yo con un ojo torcido. | and I was left with a swollen |
| eye. ¹⁵⁶ | |

This song, and Katz's other pieces about forbidden romance, show striking differences with Argentine tango. The first difference is in the protagonist's behavior; where a tango's main terms of the symbolic geography of Palermo, the largest neighborhood of Buenos Aires: for tango composers, "Palermo" meant the racetrack, where men gambled (and lost) their livelihoods and later melodramatically sang about the betrayal of horses (and often women too).

For Katz, "Palermo" meant the neighborhood's woods, where families and young people spent sunny summer days. For the artist, the woods at night turned into "lover's lane," where people drove or walked to have forbidden, out-of-wedlock sex. Just like in horror movies, the teenagers in lover's lane were the first victims, in the artist's songs Jews going to Palermo always end up badly: if the woman's husband does not show up, the police does. While tango's "Palermo" is a place of perdition through gambling (the tango anti-hero is a sinner at heart), for Katz the term is coded as a negative space for immoral acts; not just unmarried sex, but unmarried inter-ethnic sex.

¹⁵⁶ FI/CJK, Jevl Katz, "El Gringo" lyrics. My translation from the original Spanish.

The condemnation of forbidden sex fits *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung*'s description of Katz's art: moral, bereft of pornography and even politics, a show you can take your wife and daughters to see. It also shows that ethnic artists like looking for acceptance within their community had to play it safe with regards to collective morals. Katz could flirt with the idea of out-of-wedlock sex and inter-ethnic relations as long as his songs made it clear that the end result was tragic.

Conclusion

The death of Buenos Aires's "merriest Jew", as the Yiddish press called Jevl Katz, was a hard blow to the Yiddish-speaking community. Undoubtedly, Katz had made himself an integral part of Jewish-Argentine life. Whether on the radio or the gramophone, in his shows or played by amateurs and fans, his songs both played in the background in Jewish homes and provided a sense of belonging as listeners "got" their meaning or lived similar experiences. The impossible task of finding a room in the overcrowded Argentine capital became less horrific if it made one a "criollo," a part of the Jewish-Argentine experience, and gave permission to poke fun at the less experienced "gringos".

Through his oeuvre, Katz reflected the fluid nature of Jewish-Argentine identities. His characters, often poor peddlers looking to catch a break through hard work, both suffered and enjoyed the process of becoming Argentines. The songs, however, also worked as cautionary tales against gambling, dishonesty, and unbridled sexuality, trying to preserve the integrity of the collective as well as to promote a bourgeois morality that inoculated Jewish-Argentine elites against accusations of communist sympathies or

harboring pimps. However, the artist did not hesitate to castigate Jewish institutions and their leaders for caring more about ballots than the welfare of their constituents.

Katz's travels and songs brought together the world of rural and urban Jewish-Argentines, reinforcing the mutually beneficial ties that provided cultural connections for the former and a legitimizing narrative for the latter. In fact, Katz himself saw this as part of his mission as an ethnic artist: to keep together a socially mismatched community through a combination of both idealization and self-deprecating humor.

There is a second reason for the massive scale of Katz's funerals. In the midst of World War II, Jewish-Argentines, ignorant of the fate of family and friends in Europe, saw this (comparatively) minor tragedy as an opportunity to channel their deeper anxieties. They could not openly mourn for their loved ones (and they would not want to assume them dead), so Jevl Katz stood in for them. Perhaps appropriately, the demise of the "Yiddish bard of the Río de la Plata" became a synecdoche for the death of most of the world's Yiddish speaking population.

CHAPTER 2

We Want the Airwaves: Radio as a Forge of Jewish-Argentine Representations and

Samuel Glasserman's Identitary Balancing Act (1937-1942)

An uncommon event took place on June 17, 1937 at the Jewish-Argentine Excelsior Theater. An international star of the Yiddish stage, a hermetic genre usually enjoyed almost exclusively by Jews of Eastern European descent, shared the stage with a world-renowned representative of the Spanish-speaking Argentine dramaturgy. The meeting was not mere coincidence: the foreign artist, Jewish-American actress Jennie Goldstein, was giving a special performance of “Madam Pagliacci,” her box office success for the season. The honoree, Camila Quiroga, one of the most famous thespians of the Argentine stage, had just returned from a tour of Europe with her drama company. Mere hours before the event, Samuel Glasserman, co-owner of the Excelsior Theater, exulted over the microphone of *Matinee Radial Hebrea*:

Tonight, the bonds of fraternity between Jewish artists and their Argentine colleagues will once again tighten. *Matinée Radial Hebrea*, as in previous cases, has wished for the members of both show businesses to be reunited. And it has achieved it.¹⁵⁷

The sense of accomplishment noticeable in the words of the radio show host was well-deserved. It had taken some effort to convince Jennie Goldstein to pay homage to a local star. She had little interest in the Spanish-speaking theater world and likely considered Argentina as little more than a source of additional income during New York's low theater season. It had been worth it. The following day, the host reported how “a large audience filled up the hall early on, anxious to witness this rapprochement between artists

¹⁵⁷ FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Spanish, June 17, 1937.

of different languages.”¹⁵⁸ The play generated thunderous applause, as did the speeches by Glasserman, Goldstein, and Héctor Quiroga, Camila’s husband and representative.

The event was a success in several ways. The first and obvious way was material, seeing how the show sold out. From Glasserman’s perspective, however, the most important accomplishment was the creation of symbolic bonds between Jewish and Argentine artists, the audience at the theater, and those listening to his radio report in their homes across Argentina. The event, entirely orchestrated by the cultural entrepreneur and radio host, was part of his careful agenda to construct robust yet fluid representations of Jewish-Argentine identity.

Radio broadcasting, a growing industry that expanded all across the Argentine territory during the 1930s and early 1940s, had become by 1937, when Glasserman’s radio show debuted, an important tool for instigating cultural as well material consumption. The historiography argues that radio was instrumental in cementing the idea of the nation beyond the limits of what institutions like public education and mandatory military service could achieve. Matthew Karush expands on this analysis, arguing that radio was a cultural force and that, through its use of specific narrative styles and tropes, became critical in the development of not only national but also class and, eventually, political identities.¹⁵⁹

I contend that, in the context of a Buenos Aires with a high immigrant population, a similar case can be made regarding ethnic identities. Leveraging the reach of a rapidly spreading new technology, *Matinee Radial Hebrea* – one of two Yiddish-and-Spanish

¹⁵⁸ FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Spanish, June 18, 1937.

¹⁵⁹ Matthew B. Karush, *Culture of Class: Radio and Cinema in the Making of a Divided Argentina, 1920-1946* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

Jewish-Argentine live radio shows airing on a nationwide network – sought to deploy the medium of radio for the following reasons: to soothe the identitary anxiety of recent immigrants and their descendants, to combat their feelings of inadequacy by crafting narratives legitimizing Jewish belonging in the Argentine nation, and to provide local-born Jewish-Argentines with a sense of ethnic belonging to combat the forces of assimilation. Additionally, the show host and producer sought to promote his theater and make a profit. By assimilation, this chapter refers to the process through which young Jewish-Argentines shed their ethnic character and abandoned their hyphenated identities to become simply Argentines. The show's definitions of Jewish-Argentineness varied depending on the national and international context, reflecting strategic deployments of identity representations as well as ethnic anxieties about the future of Jews in what Glasserman and his audience perceived as an increasingly hostile world.

By analyzing *Matinee Radial Hebrea*, this chapter studies the use of mass media to construct or reinforce representations of cultural, ethnic, and national identities. Specifically, Glasserman's radio show focused on a multidimensional and – even if he did not know it – transitional vision of Jewish-Argentineness that changed and evolved as the show matured. The radio show sought to carve spaces of identity that bridged a perceived distance between being Argentine and having an Eastern European Jewish ethno-cultural background. It did so through the content it aired and the combination of local Yiddish and Spanish it used to connect with its audience. The show aimed to soothe ethnic anxieties and provide its audience – particularly the younger, local-born generations – with a legitimizing narrative for Jewish presence and belonging within the

Argentine national borders.

Creating and reinforcing Jewish-Argentine identity required a claim of simultaneous belonging and specificity of being Argentines without renouncing the specific Eastern European “Jewishness.” The show identified the “Jewishness” as having a cultural as well as a social component. Culturally, it manifested through the Yiddish language as well as a large literary, theatrical, and musical production, mostly in this language. Socially, “Jewishness” was maintained by constantly advertising ethnic spaces of socialization and ceaselessly campaigning against intermarriage. At the same time, this construction had to be – often, precariously – balanced with a robust defense against the perceived and real accusations of Jewish incompatibility with Argentineness and illegitimacy of hyphenated identities at the heart of xenophobic attacks on immigration in general and the willingness and ability of Jews to assimilate in particular.¹⁶⁰

In many of his prepared commentaries, the radio show host insisted that there was no incompatibility or contradiction in Jewish-Argentine identities. In fact, Glasserman stated that Jews of Eastern European descent had a unique insight into and connection with the core of the national spirit. Although he often changed his definitions of “Jewish” and “Argentine,” he remained an unwavering proponent of the reality of this hyphenated identity. Jewish-Argentines – in Glasserman’s construction – were nationally and nationalistically Argentine, ethnically Jewish, and culturally fluid. They were able to move from Old World cantor music in Yiddish to tango in Spanish through a whole spectrum of hybrid cultural expression and homegrown Argentine Jewish cultural production.

¹⁶⁰ Sandra McGee-Deutsch, *Las Derechas: The Extreme Right in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, 1890-1939* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

The show's full-throated embrace of Argentine nationalism, the country's values (or, better said, its interpretation of these values), and national cultural expressions can be read as both a genuine expression of allegiance and integrationist impetus as well as a defense against local and international environments perceived as increasingly hostile to Jews in the 1930s. It is likely that both readings influenced each other, and the hostility of a small yet loud fraction of the local elite provided additional incentives to demonstrate earnest yet hyperbolic affection and loyalty to the new *patria*.

Glasserman's conception of a culturally integrationist Jewish-Argentineness was devised as a strategy to broaden – or perhaps soften – the borders of the group's identity to try and keep the younger, local-born generations within the fold. The surviving prepared commentaries in the archive of *Matinee Radial Hebrea* show that the radio show host's interest in defining and reinforcing a version of Jewish-Argentine identity able to bring succor to his listeners and legitimize the presence of Eastern European Jews and their descendants in Argentina was not a side project, but rather the main goal of his show.

Matinee Radial Hebrea was a project of cultural hybridity and sociocultural integration that fell short of total assimilation. For Glasserman's goal, the specificity of Jewish-Argentines had to be safeguarded, and the ethnic socio-biological realm (i.e., marriage and reproduction) was the dimension where this was attainable while arguing for the successful "Argentinization" of Jews. The perennial fear that accompanied the threat of cultural integration, that of mixed marriages and the physical and cultural disappearance of the ethnically Jewish family and home, became the boundary to be policed. A segment of the show devoted to relationship and marital advice – *Di*

Sentimentale Post (The Sentimental Mail) – directed by a Jewish-Argentine matchmaker, became the enforcement mechanism – to the degree that a radio show is able to enforce sociocultural practices – designed to reign in one of the perceived perils of cultural openness.

Glasserman advocated for Jewish-Argentineness through his prepared commentaries as well as through the show’s content: with the selective use of Yiddish and Spanish, with the careful curation of cultural content provided to his audience, and with the emphasis on the support to Jewish-Argentine institutions (particularly youth groups). A key vehicle for reinforcing the space of Jewish-Argentineness was the radio show host’s attempts to generate moments of cultural exchange between Jewish stars and non-Jewish Argentine artists and intellectuals. On-stage encounters like that of Jennie Goldstein and Camila Quiroga symbolically connected Eastern European tradition and Argentine culture, and the local renown of the latter legitimized the former.

Matinee Radial Hebrea gave particular emphasis to the success of immigrant or local-born Jewish-Argentines in Argentine cultural fields. This mattered so much to Glasserman’s construction of hyphenated identities that he sometimes referred to the most famous examples (such as writers César Tiempo and Alberto Gerchunoff, actor and director Elías Alippi, and actress and reciter Berta Singerman) as simply “Argentine” artists, thus marking their success in the national scene and making the act of omitting their Jewishness a matter of ethnic pride.

By the 1930s, radio in Argentina was no longer the exclusive domain of technologically-savvy hobbyists. The new medium was taking the first steps to become

an actual commercial enterprise. Amateurish attempts gave way to a burgeoning industry, and radio stations acquired specialized professionals to develop content production and programming, provide maintenance of the existing equipment and install new machinery, and expand the new field of radio (or aural) advertisement. The number of applications for a radio frequency license ballooned as radio receivers became more common.¹⁶¹

The introduction of radio – both as a technology and as a cultural manifestation – into the lives of Argentines had lasting effects in terms of material and cultural consumption. Aural advertisement meant the creation of new stimuli to induce the listener into buying products and services. The radio receiver itself changed the material organization of the house: as technology improved, the radio apparatus changed from a mysterious technological gizmo that required at least one knowledgeable family member to handle to the dominant piece of furniture that adorned the living room in middle- and upper-class homes. Receivers also became increasingly accessible: according to Andrea Matallana, an official U.S. report estimated the number of these devices in Argentina to be around 525,000 in 1929, higher than most European nations. A 1934 report raised this figure to 600,000 units, which meant that Argentines owned approximately two thirds of the receivers available in the whole of South America. By 1947, the country had a receiver for every nine inhabitants; one in every five in the case of Buenos Aires.¹⁶²

With the proliferation of radio, Argentines were no longer mere citizens, but also listeners, a new social, cultural, and consuming category, targeted by new audio advertisements to buy new products and services. Listeners had to develop a taste in radio

¹⁶¹ Andrea Matallana, *Locos por la radio: una historia social de la radiofonía en la Argentina, 1923-1947* (Buenos Aires, Prometeo, 2006).

¹⁶² Matallana, *Locos por la radio*, 35-37.

shows and content for this new kind of cultural consumption. A number of specialized magazines, spearheaded by *Radiolandia*, came out during the 1930s to try and educate the audience and cultivate its taste. These periodicals published gossip about famous radio singers and the stars of radio-theater, articles about technological novelties, radio show reviews, opinion columns about the future of radio, and interviews with radio station owners and show hosts. Perhaps more important, *Radiolandia* and its competition published programming grids to help listeners navigate the increasingly larger number of radio stations and shows available, and form their own listening schedule.¹⁶³

Most specialized magazines and cultural critics agreed that the main goal of radio should be the education of audiences through a carefully curated programming that sought to elevate the cultural level of the population. This belief often clashed with the reality of radio as a commercial enterprise, more willing to follow the tastes and preferences of its listeners than to challenge them and risk losing audience to competitors with less “elevated” principles and more business acumen. However, the idea turned out to be such an article of faith that it became impervious to evidence. Since it was at least partially shared by most radio station owners and a minor but steady percentage of listeners, there was never a dearth of shows devoted to “high cultural” themes such as world literature, intellectual conferences, opera, or classical music. The consumers of these shows were not necessarily highly educated or of a high social status; many of them were working- or middle-class listeners with expectations of social progress through the acquisition of “high culture.”¹⁶⁴ Glasserman shared the ideal of instilling his audience

¹⁶³ Matallana, *Locos por la radio*. Karush, *Culture of Class*.

¹⁶⁴ Luis Alberto Romero and Leandro Gutierrez, *Sectores populares, cultura y politica: Buenos Aires en la entreguerra* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1995).

with “high culture,” if not for the sake of social advancement, at least led by the belief that local elites were more likely to accept “educated” immigrants. Clearly, at least part of his audience looked at culture as one potential avenue for social improvement. Oftentimes, immigrants and their descendants – Jewish and otherwise – who quickly climbed the economic ladder felt the need to ease their social anxieties and justify their new status through the acquisition of elite culture and manners.¹⁶⁵

Given that in the early 1930s approximately half of the population of Buenos Aires had been born abroad, savvy radio station owners either created ethnic shows or sold air-time to ethnic producers. In December, 1936, ten out of the eighteen radio stations in Buenos Aires hosted shows devoted to ethnic, national, or regional minorities. There were at least nineteen of these shows on-air during the week: four of them on LS2 “Radio Prieto;” three on LS3 “Ultra,” LR10 “Radio Cultura,” and LR8 “Paris;” two on LS10 “Callao” and LR2 “Argentina;” and only one show each for LS4 “Porteña,” LS1 “Municipal,” LS8 “Stentor,” and LS6 “Del Pueblo.” Ten of these shows were one-hour Sunday shows, a day chosen because workers were more likely to be in their homes. Seven others had daily editions or broadcasts six days a week.¹⁶⁶ Almost every show, regardless of frequency, lasted an hour. The specialized magazines provide little information about the content of these ethnic shows, particularly about those with a content in languages other than Spanish.

The most numerous immigrant groups, Spaniards and Italians, had – perhaps

¹⁶⁵ Jeffrey Shandler, “*Di Toyre fun shkoyre*, or, I Shop, Therefore I Am: The Consumer Cultures of American Jews,” in Gideon Reuveni and Nils H. Roemer, eds., *Longing, Belonging, and the Making of Jewish Consumer Culture* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010):183-200. Andrew R. Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance: Jewish Immigrants, Mass Consumption, and the Search for American Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990). John Tofik Karam, *Another Arabesque: Syrian-Lebanese Ethnicity in Neoliberal Brazil* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007).

¹⁶⁶ *Radiolandia*, December, 1936.

unsurprisingly – more shows in total: four and three respectively, without including regionalist weekly shows like “The Calabrese Hour,” “The Catalan Hour,” and “The Asturian Hour.” There were also at least three German shows, a fact at first sight at odds with the diminutive number of German immigrants and their local-born children in Argentina. However, the muscular cultural dimension of the Third Reich’s foreign policy towards ethnic Germans abroad easily explains the reasons behind this exceptional case.¹⁶⁷

The historiography on radio in Argentina agrees that radio played an important role as a culturally integrationist device. Juan Carlos Torre and Elisa Pastoriza claim that it was radio’s “ability to generate a feeling of community across distances and instantaneously amidst millions of people” that turned the new medium into a means of reinforcing the cultural homogenizing process promoted by public education and military service.¹⁶⁸ Matallana differs on this argument, contending that radio allowed listeners to come into contact with Argentines with experiences different than their own, even if it still created a sense of unity in that these different lives were seen as cohesive and Argentine.¹⁶⁹ Matthew Karush added class to the analysis, arguing that, through its use of specific narrative styles and tropes, radio became critical in the development of not only national but also class and, eventually, political identities.¹⁷⁰

Creating a Radio Show, Creating Jewish-Argentines: Analyzing *Matinee Radial Hebrea*

¹⁶⁷ Ronald C. Newton, “The United States, the German-Argentines, and the Myth of the Fourth Reich, 1943-1947,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 64.1 (1984): 81-103.

¹⁶⁸ Juan Carlos Torre and Elisa Pastoriza, “La democratización del bienestar,” in *Nueva Historia Argentina. Tomo VIII: Los años peronistas (1943-1955)*, ed. Juan Carlos Torre (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2002), 257-313.

¹⁶⁹ Matallana, *Locos por la radio*, 75-76.

¹⁷⁰ Karush, *Culture of Class*.

Samuel Glasserman, producer and on-air host, launched *Matinee Radial Hebrea* on LR2 “Radio Argentina” in March 14, 1937. His creation was one of two bilingual Jewish-Argentine shows on commercial radio in the 1930s. The other show, *La Hora Hebrea/ Di Yiddishe Sho – The Jewish Hour –*, broadcasted through LS6 “Radio Del Pueblo”¹⁷¹ and left no archive behind. *Matinee Radial Hebrea* aired Monday to Friday from 5:00 to 6:00 in the afternoon, with special guests joining the show for Saturday editions aired live at 10:15 at night. *Matinee Radial Hebrea* had a short-lived Sunday midday edition that was brought back in May 1939, when Glasserman found a sponsor (Jewish-owned furniture factory “Latino-Americana”) willing to cover the production costs. Beginning in January 1940, the show moved to LS9 “La Voz del Aire” and started airing twice a day, abandoning its afternoon timeslot to broadcast a midday and a nightly edition. The host justified the logic behind the schedule change thus:

[...] We logically thought that for our show to really accomplish its goal, it had to broadcast when it could be heard by the whole family. And when does that usually happen? Either at noon or at night. We had already [planned] a nightly edition from 22 to 23 hours, but what about our second edition? It had to be at noon, at the exact hour that the whole family gathers for lunch [...]¹⁷²

Matinee Radial Hebrea did its best to provide content for Jewish-Argentines of every generation and diverse degrees of familiarity with Argentine cultural norms and the Spanish language. Its main focus, however, was on the younger, local-born generations, which the show saw as in peril of assimilation. It sought to provide them with a Jewish-

¹⁷¹ The radio-focused magazine *Radiolandia* misnamed this show as “Hora Hebrea.” According to that periodical, the show was part of the LS6 station’s grid in 1936. However, other sources place it on LS10 “Radio América/ Radio Callao” for the “decade of 1930.” This is not necessarily contradictory, as shows often changed from one station to another. See *Radiolandia*, December, 1936. Matallana, *Locos por la radio*, 76.

¹⁷² FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Spanish, January 1, 1940. FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Spanish, December 20, 1939. My translations from the original Spanish.

Argentine identity that embraced most aspects of Argentineness while aiming to maintain at least a measure of ethnic particularity, if not culturally, at least socially and biologically.

Glasserman embraced a broad conceptualization of Jewishness that included both religious and secular tradition and culture. The show itself, however, seemed to err on the side of secularism. The remaining archive shows that *Matinee Radial Hebrea* commemorated Passover only once, in 1939, and even then the host's comments made no mention of the religious meaning of the festivity. Glasserman did not reference Moses's miraculous feats or the Abrahamic deity. In fact, the radio jockey took it as an opportunity to symbolically reinforce the hyphen connecting "Jewish" and "Argentine:" the prophet Moses was described as the "caudillo" of the Jewish people, an analogy devised to Argentinize the biblical character and, through him, create a similarity between the roaming Israelites (and, by analogy, the modern Jews) and the gaucho militias of Argentine folklore. This adaptation of Jewish religious myth to the terminology and aesthetics of the foundational Argentine mythology hints that Glasserman did not see the biblical canon as a holy and untouchable "truth," but rather as a narrative that was not unlike other parts of the Jewish – or any other – tradition, equally adaptable as a tool for identity-building purposes. In fact, in his prepared commentary Glasserman equated "Pesach" to "Easter" ("Pesach, that is to say, Easter..."), linking the Jewish holiday with the Catholic one celebrated all over Argentina for both Jewish and non-Jewish members of his audience. The prepared commentary takes the celebration as a metaphor of hope and a symbol of Jewish resilience through adversity, apparently to

provide comfort to his audience during the dark moment Europe was undergoing.¹⁷³

Matinee Radial Hebrea, then, did not dismiss religious Judaism, but rather saw it as one – positive – part of a bigger reservoir of Jewish tradition and culture, without granting it exceptional status. In fact, the radio show itself showed a certain laxity with regards to religious observance, at least in comparison with Orthodox practice. This can be grasped from the fact that Glasserman and his team saw no problem with broadcasting a live edition on Friday evening, in clear violation of the biblical mandate to keep the Sabbath.

Most of the surviving archive of *Matinee Radial Hebrea* consists of the prepared commentaries that Glasserman or his staff members wrote and then read on-air. When compared to the length of the radio show, however, it is clear that they only comprised a fraction of the air-time. A careful reading of the surviving prepared commentaries provides insights regarding the nature of the show's content that left no other traces in the archive. Much of the air-time of the *Matinee Radial Hebrea* was devoted to live segments such as radio-theatre, live and recorded music, special sections, and interviews.

An edition of *Matinee Radial Hebrea* – both at noon and at night – lasted, including commercial breaks, about an hour. The show started with either a standard greeting or a theme song, neither of which left a trace in the archive. The opening was followed by one of Glasserman's prepared statements, almost always devoted to community news or commentary, or to announce a special guest. From time to time, the host's commentary would include news from "correspondents" in the country's interior,

¹⁷³ FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Spanish, April 4, 1939. My translation from the original Spanish.

particularly from the various Jewish agrarian settlements. Most of these informants seemed to have been listeners of the show who decided to write in to share local news, hoping they would be broadcasted. Glasserman often obliged, because this allowed him to connect his audience in different parts of Argentina, helping create the image of a nation-wide Jewish-Argentine community.

For important dates, such as Argentine national holidays or Jewish or international celebrations (such as Passover or May Day), the radio host would deliver an enthusiastic speech highlighting the relevance of the day, which sought to tie the event to his efforts of identity construction. In his commentaries in Spanish, Glasserman always painted the country in the most positive of lights, as well as Jews in general and Jewish-Argentines in particular.

Each show, the host read prepared comments in at least three occasions. Most of them were in Spanish, while the minority was in Yiddish. The length of these readings varied from less than a minute to several minutes (It is difficult to calculate without knowing Glasserman's reading speed, but the surviving commentaries vary from merely half a page to a little over four pages – most are typed, even those in Yiddish).

Unless there was a guest to interview, the rest of the airtime was filled with entertainment, whether in the form of music, theater, or recitations – either recorded or played live, more often in Yiddish than Spanish. When the guest was an artist, she or he was also expected to perform. Several times a week, part of the hour was devoted to one of the segments where specialists answered questions mailed in by listeners about financial, legal, romantic, or marital matters.

Bringing the Stage to the Radio Studios

The radio-theater included live in-studio acting by the show's artistic cast, called "Lightning Theater;" live or recorded special performances by guest actors, actresses, and reciters, emitted from the studio or Glasserman's *Excelsior* theater; and recorded fragments by famous European or American Jewish actors. "Lightning theater" (the radio show used the Spanish term "teatro relámpago" even though the segment was in Yiddish) referred exclusively to live representations by the cast of actors of the *Matinee Radial Hebrea* with the occasional guest appearance of a local or international star. Although the segment's title seems to imply improvisation, it actually aims to connote brevity: the troupe often played famous Yiddish short plays or stories adapted to the radio format, as well as brief radio pieces penned by Glasserman himself. The former were exclusively in Eastern European Yiddish, while the latter, written in the new Yiddish of Buenos Aires, often incorporated yiddishized Spanish terms and expressions. Starting in May, 1939, *Matinee Radial Hebrea* broadcasted its "Lightning Theater" segment once a day, except during the weekends.¹⁷⁴

From time to time, the show transmitted special performances by famous stage artists. During the high season of the Yiddish theater scene in Buenos Aires (May to July), Glasserman paraded the main American "stars" headlining his own theater, the *Excelsior*. Artists from Jewish New York, like Lillian Lux, Jenny Goldstein, Julius Natanson, and Pesach Burstein made on-air appearances, either from the theater or from *Matinee Radial Hebrea*'s studios. Besides acting out scenes of the season's play or other classics from Yiddish theater, they made themselves available for interviews with the

¹⁷⁴ FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Yiddish, May 14, 1939.

radio show host. Glasserman went to great lengths to organize homages to the foreign stars before they returned to their countries, where Jewish-Argentine artists performed in the stars' honor. The honoree would often play or sing part of his or her most popular material for the show's audience.

Fiddler on the Airwaves

The musical repertoire that staff members of the *Matinee Radial Hebrea* played on air (live or recorded) can be divided into two broad categories: classical music, and Jewish music. A niche product serving an ethnic community, the show did not try to compete with the main musical offerings of Argentine radio, offering basically no tango, jazz, or argentine folklore, with Jevl Katz's parodies of these genres as the main exception.

Classical music, however, was another matter altogether. Although several mainstream radio shows offered it, *Matinee Radial Argentina* also partook in this musical genre. By "classical music" the show's production referred to pieces composed by the great European masters (Jewish and non-Jewish) that are still grouped today under that rubric. Often played by the show's piano player and occasionally accompanied by fiddlers or opera singers, it was part of what Glasserman called "our effort to introduce a program of high culture in the Jewish home, executed by the most select artists and singers of the Jewish street."¹⁷⁵ This attempt to familiarize his audience with "high culture" was a goal the radio host believed most Jewish-Argentines would share. In this, he was channeling a collective urge of urban Argentines, both immigrants and natives, to

¹⁷⁵ FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Yiddish, May 14, 1939. My translation from the original Yiddish.

gain social standing and middle-class status through the adoption of a bourgeois, socially desirable cultural taste or “refinement.”¹⁷⁶

The second genre, “Jewish music,” was the most widely performed and played on-air at *Matinée Radial Hebrea*. It included pieces that the producers, staff, and their audience – at least those born in Eastern Europe – would immediately codify as ethnically Ashkenazi. For purposes of linguistic analysis, I divide this genre in three subcategories: liturgical music, sung mostly in Hebrew; folkloric songs from Jewish Eastern Europe, exclusively in Yiddish; and humoristic and satirical pieces, in Yiddish if they came from the Old World and hybridized with Spanish if they were penned in Argentina (in what we will call “Argentine Yiddish”).

The show’s producers did not seem to divide Jewish music into different subgenres. Rather, they saw music as a heterogeneous whole. According to a partial list of the songs and recitations played on the evening edition of July 14, 1939, the show included at least eleven Jewish pieces: five folkloric songs in Yiddish, three instrumental pieces by Klezmer ensembles, a dramatic recitation in Yiddish by famous actor Maurice Schwartz, and two liturgical songs by famous world-renowned cantors, Mordechai Herschman and Pierre Pinchik. The performances were not separated in this way, but actually interspersed, implying both a planned variation and a lack of clear subgenre definitions.

The recorded production of cantors Herschman and Pinchik also put sacred and folkloric music on the same footing, combining liturgical songs in Hebrew with folk-music in Yiddish in the same album. The blurring of lines between “holy” and “folk”

¹⁷⁶ Romero and Gutierrez, *Sectores populares, cultura y politica*.

music, then, went beyond the scope of *Matinee Radial Hebrea*; it was a character of Eastern European Jewish culture. By choosing religious pieces in Hebrew by the two cantors but interspersing those with the broader range of recordings in Yiddish, the producers replicated this conceptualization of Jewish music as a broad and non-hierarchical category that included both folk and liturgical songs (and Hebrew and Yiddish music).

The show would regularly play recorded classics, following both the decisions of its producers as well as requests from the audience. However, *Matinee Radial Hebrea* had its own cast of singers and musicians, as well as guest performers. During the interwar period, renowned artists and cantors from Europe and the United States would tour Buenos Aires and the regions of the interior with large Jewish populations. Glasserman would often arrange for most of these artists – unless they were under contract with a rival from another theater – to drop by *Matinee Radial Hebrea*'s studios, chat with the host, and perform either a few songs, a recitation, a famous soliloquy from a classical scene of Yiddish theater, or a scene from their latest play. If the artists were regularly performing at the Excelsior, the theater Glasserman co-owned along with other cultural entrepreneurs, a performance live from the stage was also likely. In all of these cases, the interviews and the performances were completely in Eastern European Yiddish (with the occasional New York Yiddish term added in the case of artists who had been living in the United States for decades), with the exception of liturgical music, which was always sung in Hebrew.

Finally, the last genre is musical parodies and comedy sketches. This is an umbrella term that includes comic sketches and jokes, humorous recitations – most often

couplets –, and parody songs. The surviving archival material provides no clues regarding the kind of comical recordings *Matinee Radial Hebrea* played for its audience. The selection might have including Sholem Aleichem’s readings of his own stories, and perhaps sketches by the most famous Yiddish comedy duo, “(Szymon) Dzigal and (Yisroel) Shumacher,” active in Yiddish theater and film before the beginning of the Second World War. Live performance, however, quickly became the show’s forte in the realm of comedy, thanks to a repertoire that included comic actors playing humorous scenes and sketches from classic theater or Glasserman’s own pen, “respectful” joke tellers (the host made a point about avoiding lewd and sexual humor), and, last but not least, the increasingly popular singer-parodist Jevl Katz, who was constantly in demand and performed at least several times a week, if not every day.

In fact, Jevl Katz became such an important part of the show (and, additionally, a close personal friend of Glasserman), that starting in 1940 (the year of Katz’s death) *Matinee Radial Hebrea* stopped celebrating its anniversary in March, to keep it from coinciding with the more lugubrious commemoration. Glasserman argued on air that the pain of the parodist’s demise was so deep for him, the staff, and the audience that the show could not celebrate a merry occasion like its birthday during the same month as Katz’s death. Therefore, each year the show rescheduled the celebration of its anniversary either for February or April.

A Matchmaker, a Lawyer, and an Accountant Walk into a Jewish Radio Show

Matinee Radial Hebrea offered two live sections where specialists received letters from the audience and gave practical advice on various topics. One of these segments,

called “Estudio contable y jurídico gratuito” (free accounting and legal office), provided economic, accounting, legal and juridical advice. At least by 1940, the founder and possibly only member of the Goffan law firm and public accountant Abraham Steinvorcel were in charge of this part of the programing.¹⁷⁷ As far as the archive shows, this advice segment was broadcasted exclusively in Spanish. Every Wednesday and Friday in the evening edition (beginning at 10:15pm), the professionals responded on-air to questions that listeners mailed in. In exchange for their time and experience with the Argentine tax, banking, and legal systems, they gained visibility within the community and, at least potentially, new customers. Both Goffan and Steinvorcel made sure to read the addresses of their professional offices on-air as often as possible.

The second specialized segment was devoted to romantic and marital advice. “Sentimentale Post” – in Yiddish – or “Correo Sentimental” – in Spanish – (Sentimental Mail, in English) answered the audience’s questions with the authority provided by its hostess, Jewish matchmaker Madame Rive Roje. The column was often divided in three parts broadcasted during the same show, and always followed the same pattern: a secretary, never identified by name, offered some introductory comments and then, in a deferential tone, asked “the director” if she was ready to answer the next question. The secretary then proceeded to read the carefully chosen letter, and Madame Roche followed that by offering her romantic or relationship advice, depending on what the situation required. Although we only get a glimpse of the letter writers filtered through the show’s selection of which missives to read on air, we know that both married and single Jewish men and women, young and old, wrote to “Sentimentale Post,” in Yiddish and also in

¹⁷⁷ FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Spanish, January 31, 1941. See also FI/CSG, “Sentimentale Post,” transcript in Yiddish, August 22, 1940.

Spanish. Sometimes the matchmaker and her secretary performed the segment in Spanish; other editions had the duo read questions and answers in Yiddish. Whether the choice of language followed the choice of the letter writers or depended on the perceived sensitivity of the topic under discussion is open to speculation. Like the lawyer and accountant duo, Madame Roje made sure to recommend most of the letter writers that, if they needed further advice, or her services as a matchmaker, they should “come to our offices in Viamonte 2258.”¹⁷⁸

Aware that *Matinee Radial Hebrea* did not have much to offer to Jewish-Argentine children except for a few of Jevl Katz’s songs, Glasserman conceived of and starred in the third special segment of the show, “El Tío Samuel y Sus Sobrinitos” (Uncle Samuel and His Nephews and Nieces). For this section, the host drew on his experience writing children’s plays and editing a short-lived magazine for children in Yiddish – which incidentally, he advertised in his radio show before its launch –, “In Kinderland” (the journal’s name had no apparent connection with the left-leaning Jewish summer and holiday camps present both in Argentina and the United States). Twice a week, “Uncle Samuel,” as Glasserman referred to his character for this section, engaged with his “nephews and nieces” in the audience like a family member. The few mentions of the segment in the surviving archive hint that it took part mostly if not entirely in Spanish, and most of its airtime was devoted to the host or a guest reading children stories, and perhaps occasional letters written by or on behalf of young listeners of the show. The early induction of children into the world of radio generally, and the world of ethnic Jewish-Argentine radio specifically, was a matter of extreme importance to Glasserman,

¹⁷⁸ FI/CSG, “Sentimentale Post,” transcript in Yiddish, August 8, 1940.

who conceived of his show as, besides a provider of culture and entertainment, a vital tool in the struggle to maintain the ethno-cultural specificity of Jews in Argentina. The introduction of children to Jewish culture in the form of folk stories, regardless of the language, was vital to instill from early on the identity that the show so tirelessly peddled. The fact that the section was the only one with a commercial sponsor – a business called “Groisman Hermanos” – indicated that the show host was not alone in assigning importance to “Uncle Samuel”’s message to his Jewish-Argentine “nephews” and “nieces.”

A Star-Studded Program: Guest Appearances and Interviews

Through the friendships and connections he had made as a playwright, writer, and cultural entrepreneur, as well as his position in the world of radio, Glasserman gained access to a broad range of public figures, particularly but not only artists. These men and women, well-known to most Jewish-Argentines, and in some cases also to the general Argentine public, formed a pool of interviewees that the radio show host regularly invited to his show. Besides increasing the ratings of the show, their presence helped the radio show host to promote his construction of Jewish-Argentine identity.

Whether local or foreign, these guests regularly visited the studios of *Matinee Radial Hebrea*. A connoisseur of the inner workings of radio and the behavior of audiences, Glasserman announced these visits in advance to guarantee as many listeners as possible. Jewish stars from abroad, non-Jewish Argentine artists, and famous Jewish-Argentines welcomed into the mainstream cultural milieu of the country all played a role in the radio show’s goal to construct a robust, fluid, and resilient representation of

Jewish-Argentineness for its audience.

The international Jewish artists, usually actors and musicians, mentioned in the previous subsections were among the most common special guests of *Matinee Radial Hebrea*. This category also includes the few Jewish intellectuals and Yiddish literature luminaries who visited from Europe or the United States and agreed to drop by the show's studios. Although numerically dwarfed in comparison with foreign stage artists, the host highlighted the visits of writers and intellectuals, in part because of their rarity, but also to lay claim to an educational role for his show that went beyond culture as entertainment.

Before singing a piece of traditional folk music or reciting a classic short story from venerated author Sholem Aleichem, the foreign star would chat on air with Glasserman. Sadly, neither recordings nor transcripts survive of such interviews. However, taking into account the extremely respectful and superficial style of entertainment reporting in fashion during the 1930s and 1940s, as well as the fact that most of the guests were either personal acquaintances of Glasserman or performing for the theater he co-owned, it is safe to assume that, along with a steady stream of compliments, the host asked generic softball questions meant to parade the guest before the microphone. The interviews took place in Yiddish – although Glasserman boasted of his English skills – as the *lingua franca* shared by artists, host, and at least part of the audience. Even so, the host most often wrote his prepared commentaries introducing the stars in Spanish.

Matinee Radial Hebrea benefitted in multiple ways from their international guests. To a certain extent, so did the artists: exposure to a large number of Yiddish-

speaking listeners meant free advertisement and potentially larger audiences during their touring season in Buenos Aires and Argentina. Glasserman, of course, also welcomed this result, as most of the foreign stars visiting the radio show worked in the theater he co-owned, the Excelsior. Most importantly to *Matinee Radial Hebrea*'s identity goals, the interviews and performances of international Jewish stars served to preserve and foment the cultural links between Jewish-Argentines and the two largest areas of the Jewish Diaspora, the newer nucleus centered around New York City and the traditional, more populous yet increasingly endangered area spread across Eastern Europe. The presence of these guest stars, their performances, Glasserman's narrative of their enormous success in Argentina, and the news they brought from either New York or the "Old Home" (a direct translation of *alter heim*, a Yiddish term emigrated Jews used to signify Europe) reinforced the imagined ties of transoceanic community and the idea of a common core of "universal" (that is, Eastern European) Jewishness. The presence of international stars on the radio strengthened the "Jewish" side of the Jewish-Argentine hyphenated identity.

The appearances of famous and prestigious non-Jewish Argentines on the show were as important as the international guests. Samuel Glasserman interviewed a broad range of local artists, writers, and intellectuals for *Matinee Radial Hebrea*. These include award-winning writers like liberal Arturo Capdevila (who was one of the renowned non-Jewish member of the "ProPalestina" Zionist committee of the 1920s);¹⁷⁹ first-billed actress Camila Quiroga, who toured Spain with her theater company; Armando Discépolo, successful playwright and brother of tango legend Enrique Santos Discépolo;

¹⁷⁹ Ricardo Feierstein, *Historia de los judios argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 2006).

and theater, radio, and film actors like Uruguayan-born Domingo Sapelli, celebrated in the 1930s for his many roles in *criollista* Argentine films. *Criollismo* was a literary, theatrical, musical, and film genre that focused on rural folkloric narratives where the semi-mythological “gauchos” acted as main characters and heroes. From the turn of the century onwards, this genre and the figure of the gaucho became part of the Argentine founding mythology and folklore, a central narrative style and archetype for the construction of the Argentine national identity.¹⁸⁰

The voices of these men and women transmitted on-air through *Matinee Radial Hebrea* and their flattering words towards the show’s audience were a vital part of Glasserman’s construction of Jewish-Argentineness. As the host expressed during the celebrations of their first anniversary:

We have done all we could to successfully build a bridge of confraternity, which was needed to tighten our environment with that of Argentina. We brought great figures of the country’s theater and literature to our studios...¹⁸¹

According to Glasserman, an integral part of becoming (Jewish-)Argentine relied on the acquisition of fluency in Argentine culture, including the most popular arts such as theater, film, and folklore, as well as poetry and literature. The appearance of Argentine artists and intellectuals on *Matinee Radial Hebrea* served a dual purpose: a programmatic “Argentinization” attempt, it aimed to educate the audience, both to reinforce the “Argentine” side of the Jewish-Argentine equation (that is to say, as an integrationist tool) and to follow radio’s theoretical call to cultivate its listeners and provide the cultural

¹⁸⁰ Leopoldo Lugones was the Argentine intellectual who canonized *gauchesca* style poetry and *criollismo* as symbols of Argentine identity in a series of conferences in 1913. See Ana María Dupey, “Recentrando textos de la narrativa nacional referida al gaucho en sus contextos comunicativos,” *Revista de investigaciones folclóricas*, 1996.11: 29-32.

¹⁸¹ FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Spanish, March 14, 1938. My translation from the original Spanish.

means to attain a higher social status. As an integrationist tool, it helped listeners, particularly recent immigrants, adopt some of the cultural trappings of educated *porteños* and broaden their horizons for cultural consumption. An additional benefit of this relentless education campaign was its use as a potential shield: the more integrated into Argentine culture, the better defended Jewish-Argentines would feel vis-à-vis xenophobic accusations of Jewish non-belonging or incompatibility with Argentineness.

In case the carrot failed, Glasserman did not hesitate to deploy a concealed stick.

This is how he introduced Camila Quiroga:

Introducing Quiroga, whether as a performer or as a woman, ´should be a completely unnecessary task. Anyone who is even slightly knowledgeable about Argentina’s stage life knows, without a doubt, who Camila Quiroga is.

She is the actress who paraded Argentina’s glorious name around the globe, conquering the unanimous applause of thousands of spectators[.] It was also she who brought us the theatrical tradition of our motherland, Spain.¹⁸²

In the first half of the introduction, the host subtly shames those in his audience who do not know Quiroga under the guise of extolling her legendary status in Argentina. “If you do not know her,” the paragraph implies, “you are ignorant about Argentine theater, and you are not fulfilling your cultural duties as a Jewish-Argentine.” Not knowing Quiroga threatened the listener’s status as an Argentine and as an educated, cultured person with expectations of social progress.

The second paragraph provides a summary of the actress’s background for the listeners who did not know her, including the reasons of her importance from a patriotic perspective: bringing cultural renown to the nation and re-establishing cultural bridges with Argentina’s motherland, Spain. By referring to Spain as “our” motherland,

¹⁸² FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Spanish, June 17, 1937. My translation from the original Spanish.

Glasserman defined himself – and, through him, Jewish-Argentines in general – as Argentine after the fashion of *Hispanismo*. This literary as well as cultural-political movement was a transatlantic effort between Spanish and Latin American creole elites to recast national identities as derived from the idea of the “Hispanic race.” This conception of race was not biological, however, but rather ethnic: it highlighted the Spanish “character,” based on idealized personal emotional, spiritual, and artistic traits contrasted to Anglo-Saxon utilitarian materialism. *Hispanismo* sought to rebuild an ethno-cultural bridge between Spain and its former Latin American colonies, based on a common language and literature, as well as a shared history and cultural practices. In Argentina, proponents of this ideology sought to re-instate a privileged relationship with Spain, strengthen the social boundaries and markers of prestige that separated the creole elite from the new wealth produced by mass European immigration, and establish a counterweight to the commercial, political, and cultural influence of the United Kingdom and, to a lesser but increasing degree, of the United States.¹⁸³

From a cultural perspective, at least, *Hispanismo* was a successful strategy. Members of the Iberian intelligentsia, like José Ortega y Gasset and Gregorio Marañón, regularly visited Argentina, where local intellectuals received them with full honors. Victoria Ocampo welcomed Ortega y Gasset in 1939 by saying: “[he] is not a visitor amidst strangers. He is in his house, among friends.”¹⁸⁴ Glasserman’s apparent support for *Hispanismo*, despite the ideology’s usual inhospitable attitude towards non-Catholic,

¹⁸³ Fernando Esquivel-Suárez, “‘Españoles trasplantados’: raza hispana y migración en las misiones culturales españolas enviadas al centenario de la independencia argentina (1898-1910)” (PhD diss., Emory University, 2014).

¹⁸⁴ Victoria Ocampo, “Ortega y Gasset,” *Sur* 60, September 1939: 73, quoted in Tzvi Medin, “Ortega y Gasset en la Argentina: la tercera es la vencida,” *EIAL* 2, no. 2 (1990-1991). My translation from the original Spanish.

non-Spanish speaking immigrants, speaks of his attempt to publicly embrace conceptions of Argentineness endorsed by the national elite. In so doing, he sought to soften the edges of *Hispanismo*, interpreting it as available for those who, although not born within its cultural-linguistic framework, sought to adopt it as their own.

What are the implications of Glasserman's assertion about Spain as "motherland," beyond his identification as Argentine? There are different possible interpretations: either Glasserman considered Jewish-Argentine identity as one which could either host several motherlands (Eastern Europe and Spain as the more immediate, but Palestine as well, as the ancestral homeland of Jews); or he privileged Argentina as the new and only *patria* for Jewish-Argentines, relegating the Jewish dimension of the hyphenated identity to an ethnicity rather than a nationality; or he understood identity (and especially narrative representations of identity) as fluid, in a constant state of re-construction, where the motherland shifted as the subject moved discursively and linguistically from one side of the hyphen to the other.¹⁸⁵

Glasserman signaled his support for the second and third implications with increasing emphasis as the years went by and the local as well as the international environments seemed to grow more nationalistic and less tolerant of immigration and multiculturalism. However, he constantly tried to leave some symbolic space that allowed him to support certain expressions of Jewishness-as-nation. Take, for example, his advertisement of events by global Zionist institutions like the *Kerem Kayemet Leisrael* (KKL, Jewish National Fund), which had as its main goal the purchase of land to create a Jewish state in Palestine. In 1941, the Argentine branch of the KKL decided to celebrate

¹⁸⁵ For more on this conceptualizations, and Glasserman's shifts between them, see the subsection about patriotic dates below.

the Jewish holiday of Purim with a big fundraising event that included a ball with a live orchestra and a beauty pageant where 150 young ladies would compete for the title of “Queen Esther.” Glasserman advertised the celebration at least in three different days during the two weeks preceding it, including a whole edition “in honor of the Kerem Kayemet Leisrael,” in which he interviewed the president of the Ladies Commission, who assured the audience that the jurors electing “Queen Esther” would take as the deciding factors “good taste, grace, and [all that is] chic.”¹⁸⁶ Although in this instance he carefully avoided a direct endorsement of Jewish nationhood, his support for an organization that had as its main goal the creation of a Jewish national state in Palestine was a coded way of advocating for such a conception.

Many of the local stars, like the Italian-descendants Sapelli and Discépolo, were also children of transoceanic immigrants, and perhaps even saw themselves as hyphenated-Argentines. However, their standing in the “mainstream” cultural field had led most of the country’s public – the majority of which also carried recent immigrant ancestry of varied origins – to consider them un-hyphenated Argentine artists, part of the nation’s cultural capital. In fact, Sapelli’s success had led to his not only losing the hyphen, but also being adopted as Argentine despite his Uruguayan birth and citizenship. Proof of his perceived Argentineness was that he was trusted by producers, the director, and the majority of the Argentine public to bring to life before the silver screen the persona of none other than *Juán Moreira*, the famous gaucho whose legendary life was fictionalized in the 1936 film adaptation of the canonical novel.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Spanish, June 21, 1937. Prepared commentary in Spanish, June 21, 1937. Prepared commentary in Spanish, June 8, 1941. Prepared commentary in Spanish, June 15, 1941.

¹⁸⁷ *Juan Moreira*. Directed by Nelo Cosimi (1936; Buenos Aires: Art Film, Vaccari Alonso Film). For the original book: Eduardo Gutiérrez, *Juan Moreira* (Buenos Aires: Ateneo, 1946).

It was precisely this public omission of the hyphen that made famous Jewish-Argentines another valuable category of guests for *Matinee Radial Hebrea* and its identity mission. Glasserman celebrated his guests' admittance into the Argentine artistic elite and their success with the mainstream national public, offering them to his audience as proof of the acceptance of Jewish immigrants and their descendants as full-fledged members of the Argentine nation. According to his narrative, these men and women acted as cultural ambassadors of Jewish-Argentineness among non-Jews, and the fact of their recognition as simple Argentines was a badge of pride and a reassurance against what many Jewish-Argentines increasingly perceived as a hostile local and international environment. The show host prided himself in having interviewed famous Jewish-Argentines, such as poet, novelist, playwright, and journalist César Tiempo (*nom de plume* of Israel Zeitlin) and poet Carlos Grünberg; and stage artists like actor-director Elías Alippi and actress and reciter Berta Singerman.

For the anniversary editions of *Matinee Radial Hebrea*, Glasserman went through a list of the show's most distinguished guests as proof of the show's accomplishments in providing the audience with entertainment, culture, and renewed ties both with both the Diaspora Jewry and the new Argentine environment. Not by accident, the host listed together all famous Argentine guests, whether hyphenated or un-hyphenated. This was not exclusively Glasserman's behavior: at least certain mainstream Spanish-language newspapers, such as best-selling daily *Crítica*, referred to Berta Singerman as an Argentine actress in their theater section, making no mention of her Jewish origins.¹⁸⁸ The fact that both Singerman and Tiempo were actual immigrants who arrived to Buenos

¹⁸⁸ *Crítica*, January 3, 1932.

Aires at very young ages further drove home the point that Argentineness – recognized as such by the national elites and mass media – was attainable and within the grasp of Jewish-Argentines, regardless of their country of birth.

Similarly, Carlos Grünberg and César Tiempo became members of the two rival and most influential literary groups of the 1920s and 1930s, “Florida” and “Boedo.” Grünberg was a regular contributor to *Martín Fierro*, the flagship journal of the more elitist and vanguard-focused “Florida” group, while Tiempo published in the more socially-engaged and socialist-aligned periodicals and books of “Claridad,” the printing house around which the “Boedo” group formed. Both also published articles and columns in national newspapers and magazines, like *Crítica*, *La Nación*, and *Caras y Caretas*. Their acceptance within the Argentine mainstream does not mean, however, that these writers avoided the hyphenated character of their identities: in 1940 Grünberg published *Mester de judería* (“The Craft of the Jewish Ghetto,” roughly translated), a compilation of poems; Tiempo published his own book with a title that referenced Jewish religion, *Libro para la pausa del sábado* (Book for the Week’s Holy Break), in 1930. Even these works, however, targeted the general national public and not just Jewish-Argentine readers.

Actor and theater (and later, film) director, Elías Alippi ran one of the most prestigious theater companies of Argentina of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Co-founder (in 1916) and co-director of the Muiño-Alippi Company, which he shared with Spanish-born actor Enrique Muiño, Alippi was a local born Jewish-Argentine of Sephardic origins. His parents had arrived to the country from the region of the Ottoman Empire that later became modern-day Syria. Throughout their career, this artistic duo debuted

dozens of plays by the most famous Argentine playwrights, from (Jewish-)Argentine Samuel Eichelbaum to (Italian-)Argentines Alberto Vacarezza and Arnaldo Mario Germán Malfatti. Alippi and Muiño's inter-ethnic collaboration in the Argentine mainstream, as well as the recognition they received as triumphant non-hyphenated Argentine artists, became yet another integrationist success story that Glasserman could brandish before his audience.

Despite the losing of their hyphenated nature, in the announcement of imminent interviews Glasserman often mentioned the Jewish-Argentine character of the famous artists and intellectuals who visited the show. At times, these guests lent their prestige in order to contribute to the host's struggle to reinforce viable representations of Jewish-Argentine identity, particularly after moments of xenophobic activity or anti-Semitic violence by groups and militias of the Argentine Right.¹⁸⁹ In one of his first visits around Easter, 1937, César Tiempo gave an on-air speech seeking to defend Jewish immigrants and their descendants as legitimate members of the Argentine nation.

The writer's on-air speech was a response to a public campaign of anti-Semitic posters carried out by nationalistic Catholic groups in March, 1937. Said posters accused Jewish-Argentines of being an alien, foreign presence on the national soil, a group antithetical to Argentina's culture, tradition, and Catholic foundations:

[...] In these days in which most of our population commemorates the Passion of Christ, the walls of Buenos Aires have been stained with abject posters heaping scorn on Christ's mother's people. They attack the Jews, forgetting that the essential formulations of Christian doctrine can be found in the Pentateuch. "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." That is Deuteronomy 5, chapter VI. "Love your neighbor as yourself," is Leviticus 18, Chapter 19. The initial phrase of the Sermon on the Mount is a literal quote of Isaiah.

¹⁸⁹ McGee-Deutsch, *Las Derechas*.

[... T]his group [...] has committed a virtual act of sedition, punished by law, because “no Argentine or group of Argentines can assume the representation of the whole community and exclude other Argentines from the enjoyment of their Argentineness.” The [legal principle of] *jus soli* makes the Jew of Argentina into a Jewish Argentine, and those who deny the *jus soli* threaten the Republic’s institutions and the very stability of the State. Because, if being born in the country was not enough to be an Argentine, and the child of a foreigner was a foreigner, our nation would immediately become a European [colony], since most of its inhabitants would be European rather than Argentines.

Additionally, Jews have lived in America – and [this statement is supported by] the knowledgeable testimony of Montesinos – since before colonization [...]. This historian’s revelation, respected by prestigious ethnographers, speaks of a Jewish presence in America that predates, or at least coincides, with the pre-historical peoples, whose increasingly surprising remains can be found in our very Argentina. What for can these newcomers of the worst sort, then, criticize us? [...] ¹⁹⁰

The writer’s prepared commentary used different arguments to defend against traditional religious attacks against Jews, reinstated Jewish-Argentines as rightful and righteous citizens of the nation and even sought to turn the tables on the accusers. Since it is unlikely that Tiempo or Glasserman expected the authors of the posters to tune into the show, the speech was most likely aimed at both reassuring the Jewish-Argentine population and arming it with powerful rhetorical defense mechanisms in the eventuality of potential verbal altercations.

The religious argument was nothing new: Tiempo simply showed how the teachings of Christ were based on the Jewish Torah, thus tending bridges of continuity between Judaism and Christianity, neutralizing claims of Jewish religious otherness or incompatibility. The lack of a rebuttal to the old accusation of deicide could simply reflect that the posters in question did not appeal to that argument.

Tiempo also deployed a civic argument. His attack was two-pronged: on the one

¹⁹⁰ FI/CSG, César Tiempo’s prepared column in Spanish, March, 1937. My translation from the original Spanish.

hand, he relied on Argentina's Constitution and legislation to accuse the nationalist groups of claiming to represent the totality of the nation to exclude a minority, a crime which he labeled as "sedition." As we shall see, Glasserman himself would later adopt and slightly modify this argument. Additionally, the writer argued for the absurdity of the nationalists' claims by conflating their refusal to recognize people of Jewish descent because of their supposed "nature," with a rejection on their part of the juridical principle of *jus soli* (of nationality granted by place of birth), without which no child of immigrants could be considered an Argentine.

Finally, Tiempo's last argument relied on the work of a supposedly "reputable" authority, 16th century friar Antonio de Montesinos, to claim that Jews – at least one of the ten "lost tribes" of Israel, according to this narrative – actually lived in America, including the territory of modern Argentina, since pre-Columbian times. Hence, even the Yiddish-speaking recent arrivals could claim an Argentine ancestry that went farther back than that of *criollos* of the purest lineage. In this, the writer was breaking no new ground: it was a common thing for immigrant communities to create narratives that legitimized their presence in their new host nation, often by crafting mythological links to the indigenous populations. In fact, this strategy was also displayed by Latin American nations and national elites in attempts to legitimize their existence and position. Jacques Lafaye has shown how the leaders and intellectuals of the Mexican state sought to link Aztec beliefs and prophecies with the particular character of Mexican Catholicism, in order to rebuff claims of American inferiority.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Jacques Lafaye, *Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, 1531-1813* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). For examples of legitimizing ethnic myths in Brazil, see Jeffrey Lesser, "How the Jews Became Japanese and Other Stories of Nation and Ethnicity," in

The Organized Community in Need of Air (Time): Jewish-Argentine Institutions and *Matinee Radial Hebrea*

Touring stars of the Yiddish theater were not the only ones interested in the visibility that *Matinee Radial Hebrea* could provide among its audience of Yiddish-speaking immigrants and their descendants through its nation-wide broadcasting. The heterogeneous sea of institutions that formed the organized Eastern European Jewish-Argentine community saw in the new medium of (ethnic) radio a new way to attract unaffiliated Jews and guide strayed sheep back into the fold. These organizations already resorted to Yiddish newspapers to advertise their events and fundraisers, and conceived of the radio as a new and better tool to reach those Jewish-Argentines with little or no institutional affiliations, particularly local-born children and grandchildren of immigrants who were more comfortable with Spanish than with Yiddish. *Matinee Radial Hebrea* had a broader appeal than the Yiddish newspapers, and required less commitment: it was free to tune in, requiring no subscription, and its entertainment value meant it could attract Jewish-Argentines who did not feel compelled to go out of their way to perform Jewishness.

In Glasserman's view, the goals of the organized community dovetailed with his effort of constructing Jewish-Argentineness. Of course, not every Jewish organization had identical aims, and only some of their work was compatible with the goals of *Matinee Radial Hebrea* and its representation of Jewish-Argentineness. These discrepancies, however became an opportunity. Glasserman's position as the host and

Rethinking Jewish-Latin Americans, eds. Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein, 41-54 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008).

producer of one of only two Jewish radio shows in Argentina gave him the power to choose which institutions received air-time and visibility (and how much), and which ones had to make do without the powerful assistance of favorable radio coverage. The technological power of the radio, with its ability – whether perceived or real – to reach practically every Jewish-Argentine home in the nation at the same time allowed Glasserman to assist the institutions with a cultural and identitary approach similar to his own, effectively turning him into a cultural and institutional power-broker within the organized Jewish-Argentine community.

The radio show host proved to be extremely generous with the air time he supplied to Jewish-Argentine institutions. Glasserman was not particularly picky, and seemed to have a very positive outlook on Jewish-Argentine organizations in general: the majority of the surviving prepared commentaries in the archives correspond to Glasserman's publicizing the events of a broad range of them. He boasted of his openness during an edition in March, 1941

The dedication we have always shown to all the Jewish institutions in the Republic is a fact that our audience knows well [...] These institutions, even those in the country's interior, have always found in our microphones an open and impartial platform.

It has always been and continues to be our greatest concern to be aware of the activities of [Jewish] organizations all across the Republic. Among those of the interior, we favor La Plata and Berisso for reasons of geographical proximity.¹⁹²

Glasserman's criterion to choose his favorites do not seem to be partisan: even on issues in which the organized community and its activists were bitterly divided, he seemed to take no sides. Communist- and Zionist-affiliated cultural organizations (bitter rivals for control of the main institutions by the late 1930s and early 1940s, and antagonistic about

¹⁹² FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Spanish, March 19, 1941. My translation from the original Spanish.

the place of Palestine and the role of Hebrew for the future of Jews world-wide) advertised their cultural events and celebrations through the radio show. In the same month, the host announced that the “Zionist Athenaeum ‘Kadima’” would host a dancing soiree with no admittance fee, and also celebrated the creation of the “Folks Theater,” or IFT, a Yiddish theater troupe affiliated with IKUF, the cultural arm of the Communist Party within the Jewish community.¹⁹³

A similar situation arose during the elections for the executive committee of the “Chevra Kadisha,” the Jewish burial society. This was the only Jewish-Argentine institution without funding problems, because being a dues-paying member was necessary to receive burial at the Jewish cemeteries. By the 1930s, this financial advantage had turned the “Chevra Kadisha” into the richest community institution. Once it started using this economic power to subsidize other organizations – particularly schools and homes for orphans and the elderly –, it also became the most influential. Although the burial society only adopted the official mantle of central pillar of Ashkenazi institutional life when it became AMIA in the 1940s, its vital role and robust treasury were already a reality in the previous decade. For the elections of the board members of the “Chevra Kadisha” in 1941, *Matinee Radial Hebrea* ceded its microphone to representatives of both opposing factions and allowed them to introduce themselves to the audience, explain their program and even bash their rivals.¹⁹⁴

Although *Matinee Radial Hebrea* advertised the events of most institutions, the show provided considerably more air-time for social welfare institutions, particularly

¹⁹³ FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Spanish, May 6, 1937. FI/CSM, prepared commentary in Spanish, May 14, 1937.

¹⁹⁴ FI/CSG, two prepared commentaries in Spanish, December 13, 1941.

those active beyond the boundaries of the Jewish-Argentine community. A prime example is the *Liga Argentina Contra la Tuberculosis* (Argentine League against Tuberculosis), which aided both Jewish and non-Jewish sufferers of the disease.

Glasserman saw their public health work as extremely beneficial for the image of Jewish-Argentines and their institutions. Its first appearance on the show, in 1937, included a telephone interview with the League's president, who told the story of the institution since its foundation, the number of members in Buenos Aires and the rest of country (5,000 in each area), and their medical and social methodology for providing assistance. The interviewee made a point to note that his organization was able to feed the poorest of its patients thanks to "the generous subsidy granted by the Nation, of a sum of 15,000 pesos; and another by the municipal government of 3,000 pesos, which clearly shows the support that our work deserves."¹⁹⁵

Glasserman's description highlighted how both the national government and the municipality of the country's largest and richest city considered the work of a Jewish institution (although it omitted its Jewish character from its name) to be not only beneficial to public health, but also worthy of open public support and funding. Governmental backing to a Jewish-Argentine institution aided the show's construction of identity: this support entailed an official recognition of how Jewish collective action had positive effects for Argentine society. By association, this acceptance of the League acted as a welcome for Jewish-Argentines within the confines of the nation.

Additionally, the radio show host and the League's president seemed to agree that these facts should be known by *Matinee Radial Hebrea's* audience because they

¹⁹⁵ FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Spanish, June 20, 1937. My translation from the original Spanish.

constituted a narrative defense against claims that Jewish immigration had a negative impact. After all, here was the Argentine government showing support for Jewish-Argentine settlement in the country. This endorsement was particularly meaningful in a context of increasing hostility to international immigration in Argentina and most of the Americas – that began in earnest with the Depression of the 1930s –, as well as the appearance of xenophobic groups and militias in Buenos Aires.¹⁹⁶

Matinee Radial Hebrea's provision of airtime and visibility for the League was a frequent occurrence. The show provided several days of coverage for the ribbon-cutting ceremony of a new pavilion of the institution's sanatorium in a suburb of the city of Córdoba. Glasserman even left the show in charge of the co-director and traveled 450 miles for the inauguration. He hailed the occasion as one for which

the Jewish community of Argentina can congratulate itself, as this building is the result of its collective labor[. It is] a badge of honor [ejecutoria de honor] for Jews in Argentina. [This] was confirmed by the presence of national and provincial authorities during the ceremony, presided by His Excellency, the Governor of the Province of Córdoba and the direct representative of the nation's Executive Branch [...] No decent Jew of the Argentine Republic can remain indifferent to the labor of the League, and each one, according to his means – from the modest monthly membership fee to the larger sponsorship contributions – must contribute to sustain this earthly Eden provided by the League...¹⁹⁷

The League's prestige and social status resulting from the recognition of the local governor and the direct representatives of the national government not only reflected positively on Jewish-Argentines, but were in fact the community's prestige. Glasserman argued that it was the duty of Jewish-Argentines to fund the League, not only for the institution's goals in terms of public health, but also –

¹⁹⁶ Haim Avni, *Argentina & the Jews: A History of Jewish Immigration* (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1991), 128-174.

¹⁹⁷ FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Spanish, January 28, 1941. My translation from the original Spanish.

and especially – because by doing so, they were supporting their own standing among the Argentine population and government.

The men and women in charge of other Jewish-Argentine philanthropic societies were also welcomed with assiduity at the studios of *Matinee Radial Hebrea*, particularly if their social assistance went beyond the boundaries of the community. Hence, the “Comedores Populares Israelitas” (Jewish Soup Kitchens), which provided hundreds of hearty meals three times a day to those who could not afford them – regardless of ethnicity or religion – were also favorably covered. Even those institutions devoted to a branch of activism that mostly assisted Jews, such as the “Hogar Infantil Israelita” (Jewish Orphanage), counted themselves as other beneficiaries of the radio show’s attention.¹⁹⁸

For the large majority of Jewish-Argentine organizations, Glasserman only mentioned them as part of an agenda of events, where he publicized their activities, particularly when these were of a cultural nature or specifically aimed at the Jewish-Argentine youth. This included fundraising events, as long as the dances, picnics, or dinners seemed able or, better yet, designed to attract the Jewish-Argentine youth. The host dedicated much of his air-time to provide exposure to the events and activities of a multitude of institutions, ranging from the Argentine branch of large international organizations like the *Kerem Kayemet Leisrael* to small neighborhood cultural organizations, like the Communist-controlled “Mendele” Cultural Center in the neighborhood of Villa Crespo. Glasserman did this in part because he supported the fact

¹⁹⁸ For the “Comedores Populares Israelitas,” see FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Spanish, June 22, 1937. For the “Hogar Infantil Israelita,” see FI/CSG prepared commentary in Spanish, June 15, 1937 for a history of the institution; see FI/CSG “El Tio Samuel y sus Sobrinitos,” commentary in Spanish, July 1, 1937.

of a strong organized community, but he advertised these events in particular because they reinforced institutional communitarian ties, and created spaces for exclusive ethnic social interaction among Jewish-Argentines, thus limiting the potential risks of assimilation in the construction of an integrationist Jewish-Argentineness.

Besides welfare or public aid organizations, cultural and youth institutions were among those most favored by the radio host. The surviving archive shows that several youth clubs, popular libraries, and other social and cultural entities received broader coverage, including interviews with directors and board members over the phone or in the show's studios. As previously stated, this was followed the host's concern about assimilation in a social context where young Jewish-Argentines had to go through assimilationist state institutions such as the public school and mandatory military service, and where everyday cultural experience allowed young men and women to – should they so desire – abandon their Jewishness and embrace an unhyphenated Argentineness. Promoting the work of these institutions was vital for Glasserman's attempts to prevent assimilation: these organizations represented efforts to foment interest in different aspect of Jewish culture, including music, literature, and for some of these events, even the Yiddish language – although they also incorporated dimensions of Argentine culture. Of equal importance, even if through dances where tango and other non-Jewish rhythms ruled supreme, these events created spaces of exclusive intra-ethnic sociability for young Jewish-Argentine men and women to mingle, reinforcing social ties and ethnic boundaries.

In an environment unlike that of Eastern Europe – where integration and assimilation were unlikely due mostly to externally-imposed limitations – these

institutions generated positive incentives for local born children of immigrants to actively embrace Jewish-Argentine identities in a social context where – in Glasserman’s view – local-born generations were at risk (or had the opportunity) of abandoning their ethnic heritage and becoming simply Argentines. Interviewed on *Matinee Radial Hebrea*, Mr. Sarubinsky, director of the “Peña Israelita” (Jewish *Peña*: an Argentine term for a rural-style gathering where folklore music is played) agreed with the radio show host as he expressed the objectives of his organization:

Our goal is [fomenting] culture, under any form it might take, and especially Jewish culture, because we find it to be [an aspect] often ignored by our youth [...] The work of our association, a year after its creation, has been vast... the cultural program we developed [includes] conferences, shows, art expositions, day trips [...]. We have organized two paintings expositions by young artists of our [Jewish] community [...]¹⁹⁹

As the radio show matured, the host’s emphasis on the local-born generations became central to his message and his goal of identity construction and reinforcement. For the celebration of *Matinee Radial Hebrea*’s fourth anniversary and the second jubilee of its nightly edition, Glasserman decided to organize a festival “in honor of the Jewish-Argentine youth.” In his first announcements of the upcoming event, the host announced the event would gather “the most famous and optimal orchestras of our city,” and the attractions “would be of such class that they will constitute the zenith of good taste and sociability.”²⁰⁰ Such a tribute was long overdue, argued the host:

[Y]outh organizations, by their very nature, form the vanguard of our cultural and social movements. They awake healthy inquisitiveness in our youth and form the character of the men of the future [...]. [They] educate our future generations in a noble social climate; promote culture, raising the intellectual level of our youth; and stimulate collective life [forming] a tight and solid bond among our diverse elements.

¹⁹⁹ FI/CSG, Interview in Spanish, March 1937. My translation from the original Spanish.

²⁰⁰ FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Spanish, January 1, 1941. My translation from the original Spanish.

Matinee Radial Hebrea understood this and from its first moment opened its doors and heart to them, offered them its energies and support. And the youth organizations also understood our feelings, and so it was that this show, we might say, became the show of the Jewish-Argentine youth.²⁰¹

Such a full-throated embrace of youth to the exclusion of every other age group clashed with Glasserman's own words from a year before, when he declared on-air:

[O]ur show has a strictly family-oriented character, in the broadest sense of the word. It was created for the Jewish family of Argentina, and we have always made sure that the topics, themes, and pieces were of the liking of every family member. [...] We have added all sorts of topics and artistic expressions[:] old songs that rejoice our elders; modern songs adapted to the sensitivities of young people; liturgical songs for the pious; merry songs, liked by those with a light spirit; a variety of talks that appealed to all ages and temperaments; to summarize, a true mosaic that – while trying to remain high-cultural – could simultaneously be attractive for everyone.²⁰²

Rather than a contradiction, this is the result of the host's increasing concern about the threat of trans-generational assimilation (as well as his tendency towards literary hyperbole). Most foreign-born Jewish-Argentines did not go through the national institutions in charge of forging Argentines, such as the public education system or mandatory military service. Additionally, they would always be ethnically marked by their Yiddish accent. Their children, however, who had spent their youth and teenage years in these government institutions and the local sociolinguistic environment, saw Spanish as their mother tongue. "Passing," and abandoning the hyphenated nature of their identity, was for them as simple as cutting off ties with their parents' traditions and spaces of socialization, and perhaps adopting a non-Jewish name. Although the perception of a hostile xenophobic, nativist environment both locally and abroad could tighten ethnic community ties, this situation also created incentives for "passing" and

²⁰¹ FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Spanish, January 1, 1941. My translation from the original Spanish.

²⁰² FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Spanish, March 14, 1940. My translation from the original Spanish.

leaving behind the perceived risks associated with a hyphenated identity.

In this context, Glasserman's extravagant youth festival and his reinvigorated efforts to provide positive incentives for Jewish-Argentine youths to retain their identities through the ceaseless promotion of spaces for intra-ethnic cultural and social interaction make perfect sense. In the month leading up to the festival, he devoted several prepared commentaries every week to introduce the many participating youth organizations from Buenos Aires and surrounding suburbs. The host read a short summary of the institution's history, the list of its board members, the character of their cultural or social work, and lauded their efforts in his habitual flamboyant rhetoric. Each youth institution would also provide competitors from among its members for the festival's beauty pageant. The winner would earn the title of "Miss Deborah," because the celebration coincided with the Jewish holiday of *Shabbat Shira*, when the Biblical story of Deborah, a female judge of the Israelites, is traditionally read in the synagogue.

Celebrating Patriotic Dates: Defining and Re-defining Jewish, Argentine, and Jewish-Argentine

In the early 20th century, Argentina celebrated several yearly national holidays. These occasions included religious dates, like Christmas or Easter; international events, like May Day (established as an official holiday in 1930); and patriotic celebrations of momentous national developments. Then (as now), Argentina commemorated independence through two distinct holidays. May 25 celebrated the events of 1810, when the revolutionary movement began; July 9 commemorated the year 1816, when the former colony formally declared its independence from the Spanish empire.

Matinee Radial Hebrea, like most radio shows – both ethnic and non-ethnic –, enthusiastically celebrated Argentine independence, and devoted entire shows to praise the nation, deploying its wide range of musicians, singers, actors, and parodists to honor the occasion. In his prepared commentaries, Glasserman embraced these opportunities to define “authentic” Argentine national identity as open, liberal, and welcoming. His insistence in reaffirming this representation seems to acknowledge how the meaning of Argentineness was ferociously disputed between different groups, particularly – but not only – liberals and right-wing nationalists.

The radio host went out of his way to signal how at home Jewish-Argentines, both immigrants and their children, felt in their new *Patria*. But his construction of Jewish-Argentineness (and of Argentineness itself) shifted as the show matured and the country and the world – as Glasserman and his audience conceived them – became increasingly hostile to Jews. This fluidity responded to strategic deployments of identity as well as minority anxieties about their safety in Argentina.

In the first independence celebration since the radio show’s debut, on May 25, 1937, the radio host read the following message:

Today, *Matinee Radial Hebrea* dresses up in black tie and, through the friendly, nice wavelength of LR2 Radio Argentina, transmits an extraordinary edition commemorating the splendid patriotic day of May 25th[.] Through it, we pay homage to the generous and magnanimous country that offers generous hospitality to its children, [and to] all the foreign residents that find here a home for themselves, their children, and their descendants.

We associate ourselves with [other] warm voices radiating from all radio signals and we prove how we, the Jews, recognize the high sentiment of freedom that rules in this country, particularly us, who have our own date to commemorate freedom[. A]nd although the celebration of Jewish freedom has become a painful irony in these times, we celebrate it regardless because our hopes of having a free *Patria* like the Argentine

nation [does] are not dead.²⁰³

In his introductory words, Glasserman defines two different – yet friendly – nations, each with its own independence date: the Argentine and the Jewish. The former, generous and living in a country of its own, welcomes in its territory the members of the latter, who nonetheless retain both their separate national character and the hopes of one day having their own *patria*. This was a daring proposition to make in Spanish, on air in a popular radio station: the invocation of Jewish nationhood opened the community up for attacks of “double loyalty²⁰⁴” from those opposing Jewish immigration. Glasserman risked providing fodder to those arguing that Jews were a “foreign body” incompatible with Argentineness, and thus impossible to assimilate. That line of attack was espoused by factions opposed to Jewish immigration (and often, immigration in general) who were most likely unaware of Glasserman’s words, but his on-air prepared speech risked creating alarm within the Jewish community.

It is unclear whether this explicit statement of Jewishness as a national identity equal to Argentineness was the result of Glasserman’s confidence in the place of Jewish immigrants within Argentine society or to a certain political naiveté on his part regarding the potential reception of his words. Whichever it was, either the circumstances had changed two years later, or Glasserman had gained awareness of the political risk of openly defending Jewish nationality in Spanish while on-air in an Argentine public radio station.

In later years, during the editions celebrating Argentine holidays, the host

²⁰³ FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Spanish, May 25, 1939. My translation from the original Spanish.

²⁰⁴ Ilan Zvi Baron, “The Problem of Double Loyalty,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 4 (2009): 1025-1044.

changed the way he referenced Jewishness vis-à-vis Argentineness. He stopped addressing them as two equal, comparable nations. Perhaps he reacted to criticism by Jewish-Argentines, or became worried by his perception of an increasingly hostile social environment. There is no clear evidence pointing to any unique factor. When he publicized a festival co-organized by the radio show to celebrate May 25 in 1939, Glasserman said the following:

[...] We feel the impulse to celebrate this patriotic moment, a symbol of the triumphant liberty that reigns in this land where our brothers have found such hospitable welcome, and which is also the *patria* of many Jews born in this country, so favorable towards work, progress and human dignity. How not to take part of this celebration?
 [...] [We aim to] celebrate the patriotic festival with justice and emotion, because *Matinee Radial Hebrea*, while being eminently Jewish, is simultaneously authentically Argentine. [The celebration] is the best link joining us, the children of the People of Israel, to this generous land. It makes us feel proud to be Jewish and Argentine at the same time. That is why we offer this edition of our radio show as a homage to the festivity of May 25th.²⁰⁵

Whether a result of the growing tensions in Argentine society, or the worsening news about Europe during 1939, the radio host had changed his tune. Argentina was now not only the land that had welcomed many Jews, but also the *patria* of at least the generations born in the new host country. Local-born Jews had a *patria*, a nation, and that was Argentina, not their Jewishness. This edition of the show stated that Jews were a “people,” no longer an equal “nation” with its own independence celebration.

Furthermore, Glasserman stated that even foreign-born Jews, like a part of his audience, had a right to feel simultaneously Jewish and Argentine. They were no longer “foreign residents” who found a home in the country, but actual Jewish-Argentines. The radio host defined Jewishness as an equally important half of a hyphenated identity that,

²⁰⁵ FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Spanish, May 9, 1939. My translation from the original Spanish.

however, circumscribed “nationhood” to Argentina.

Nine days later, in another preview of the festival of May 25th, Glasserman became bolder in his commitment to both Argentineness and Jewishness:

The Jewish-Argentine youth of Avellaneda [the co-organizers of the event] wanted to bear testament of their gratitude to these hospitable lands, their *patria* and the adoptive *patria* of their parents, and to celebrate this great day of national independence is organizing this festival [...] that will have huge Argentine motifs and artistically it will try to go beyond all expectations [...] [After] the Argentine and Hebrew [Hebreo] anthems, [the festival] will vibrate with the beautiful Jewish song, and the heart of those in attendance will flutter with recitations about the patriotic date.”

This statement seeks to reinforce the performance of Jewish-Argentineness without surrendering the claim to Jewish nationalism. The first half of the paragraph broadens the reach of Argentina as a Jewish *patria*: it was no longer only the *patria* of the native-born generations, but also the adopted *patria* of their immigrant parents. The second half of the statement seeks to carve room for Jewish-Argentines to maintain legitimate allegiance to Jewish nationalism, Zionism: the Argentine and Hebrew national anthems shared a space of honor.

Glasserman’s public construction of Jewish-Argentine identity was in flux in one single paragraph. The radio host shifted from a conception of Jewish-Argentines as having one *patria*, Argentina, to the implied allegiance, through the anthem *Hatikvah*, to a future Jewish nation in Palestine. It is apparent that, for the narrator, there was no contradiction between the two: being both Jewish and Argentine meant an adherence to the Argentine nation that left room for an expansive Jewish identity that included Zionist political affiliations.

The content of the festival, however, seemed to express a cultural dimension of Jewish-Argentineness. The event, after the anthems, would have both Jewish music in

Yiddish (performed by the staff of the *Matinee Radial Hebrea*, including Jevl Katz) and recitations of patriotic motifs in Spanish. Language then, even in the context of the festival, served as a barrier between both sides of the identitary hyphen. It would seem the explicit intent was not so much to celebrate Argentina's patriotic date, but to celebrate it as Jewish-Argentines, for Jewish-Argentines.

The hypothetical listeners who followed only the Yiddish segments of the *Matinee Radial Hebrea* had no hint that an Argentine patriotic date was approaching, or that the radio show was co-organizing a festival to celebrate it. The only surviving Yiddish transcript for May 25, 1939, foregoes any mentions of *patria* or nation. Instead, Glasserman used his prepared remarks to heap praise on the upcoming show of European cantor Y. Shtimerman which – no coincidence – was to take place in Glasserman's own theater, the Excelsior. This hints not only that the content, and thus the identity representations, were linguistically specific, but also that the apparent disconnect between the Spanish and Yiddish content corresponded *de facto* to distinct chronological subjectivities. National patriotic dates, a high point in Glasserman's on-air Spanish performance of Jewish-Argentineness, were absent from the Yiddish radio calendar. For the radio host's Yiddish-speaking persona and the very small older fragment of his audience that listened only to his prepared commentaries in Yiddish, the yearly calendar was non-hyphenated Jewish.

For July 9, 1939, the radio host devoted his airtime at the *Matinee Radial Hebrea* to another intense Spanish-language evocation of the patriotic date and its relation to the radio show.

Matinee Radial Hebrea, following its purpose of enacting Argentineness in this generous land, before the Jewish community living in this country

as a human example of laboriousness and harmony, devotes this audition to commemorate the date that the *Patria* celebrates so joyfully. [Ours is a community] that feels kindred to the Argentine spirit, due to the liberality of its laws, and the breadth of its principles.

In revering the patriotic quest, we rekindle in our hearts the holy fire of our love to this land, blessed by its virtues, and we reaffirm *the principles that must live in the souls of all of its children*, and those are to enlarge, magnify, and elevate it in the universal concert of nations.²⁰⁶

This opening commentary portrays Jewish-Argentines as an ethnic minority but also Argentine nationals, enamored with it and committed to the nation to the point where the radio show states as its purpose “to enact Argentineness.” Glasserman, however, went even farther in his representation: beyond love of country, Jewish-Argentines were uniquely tied to the nation’s spirit through a kinship of values, and acted as an example of laboriousness and harmony to unnamed others. Against the common nativist trope that condemned Jews as incompatible with the nation (because of “irreconcilable” religious, spiritual, or racial differences), Glasserman asserted a unique affinity between Jews and Argentina. In fact, the radio host saw his own show as having a patriotic duty.

As the edition progressed, Glasserman delved into the meaning of the holiday during the rising fears of war in Europe and the growth of anti-democratic forces in Argentina in 1939:

The date of July 9 [...] has a very special and joyful meaning for the authentically Argentine hearts, which by their nature love liberty and independence [...]

This gesture [of independence] – more than a gesture, a transcendental epic in the history of our country – gains particular importance in these moments of painful universal crisis in which so many tendencies fight, both for and against freedom.

It is very easy to find which vision and conceptions are true. It was not for nothing that the Tucuman congressmen reaffirmed on July 9, 1816 that the *patria* was free and independent, for them, their children, and all those men of good will who want to inhabit it. And this is the most precious legacy that Argentines could have. A legacy that must be proclaimed loud

²⁰⁶ FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Spanish, July 9, 1939. My translation from the original Spanish.

and clear, [and must be] defended, enlarged, reinforced, sustained, and generously broadened time and time again. We are a free people, an independent people, and [our legacy must become] a deep conscience rooted at the center of our collective soul. By contemplating the supreme effort of the Tucuman congressmen, we can value the sacrifice and nobility that drove these great men in July epic. [I]t is our duty as legitimate Argentines, genuine in soul and tradition, to defend this legacy of freedom and independence.²⁰⁷

In this prepared commentary, Glasserman performed a particularly daring operation. Having previously established that Jewish-Argentines were uniquely Argentines, he went on to redefine Argentineness itself in order to push anti-immigrant nativists outside of the boundaries of nationhood. To do this, he collapsed two events into one: the declaration of independence of 1816, and the declaration of principles in the Preamble of the Argentine Constitution, from 1853. It is the latter, and not the document that the Tucuman congressmen crafted, that states the need to protect freedom and independence “for ourselves, our posterity, and any man in the world who wants to inhabit the Argentine soil.” This conflation of the two documents (and events) allowed the radio host to tie the idea of Argentina as an open country that welcomes those willing to live in it (an idea linked to the temporary hegemony of the liberal elites and the establishment of a constitutional republic) with the older, uncontested, mythological origin story of the nation’s birth.

Glasserman established in his speech that only those willing to defend this legacy – and he clarified that the legacy was inextricably linked to the principle of open immigration – were “legitimate, genuine [...] Argentines.” With this, he discursively turned the tables on the nativists who argued against Jewish immigration. In his argument, it was Jewish-Argentines who were the authentic patriots, and those who

²⁰⁷ FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Spanish, July 9, 1939. My translation from the original Spanish.

dismissed their Argentineness, by that very act of denial, put themselves outside the boundaries of the nation. This argument resembles that of César Tiempo's speech against the authors of anti-Semitic posters, analyzed earlier in this chapter. Glasserman surreptitiously identified the nativist Argentine Right with at least some of the tendencies who fight "against freedom" in "this moment of universal crisis." The enemies of liberty in Argentina and abroad were also discursively collapsed into one common foe.

How Argentine can Jewish-Argentines be? Gender, the Intermarriage Taboo and the Resetting of Ethnic Boundaries

Glasserman's airtime largesse towards youth organizations and their social and cultural activities, aimed at fostering spaces of intra-ethnic social interaction, tried to incentivize Jewish-Argentine youths into remaining within the ethnic boundaries marked by the organized community. This focus on the local-born youth reflected an anxiety that the host shared with community leaders and members of the immigrant generations: how to combat assimilation?

Given the host's enthusiastic on-air embrace of Argentine culture and nationhood, there were clear limits to how Glasserman could police the ethnic boundaries that maintained Jewish-Argentine specificity. The cultural integration involved in *Matinee Radial Hebrea's* identity construction process meant that any re-creation or reinforcement of community boundaries had to take place in another dimension. The responsibility for this task fell on the shoulders of Madame Rive Roje, Jewish-Argentine matchmaker extraordinaire.

Roje, who ran her own matchmaking business in the neighborhood of Once, in

Buenos Aires, became the Director – in caps in every prepared script – of “Sentimentale Post/Correo Sentimental” (Sentimental Mail), a segment of *Matinee Radial Hebrea* that debuted in late 1938. The matchmaker offered relationship, romantic, and marital advice to the audience, who submitted their questions and problems through the mail. The usual structure of the segment – often divided in three parts similar throughout the hour-long show – consisted of an introduction by Roje’s secretary, who then read a letter, followed by the matchmaker providing her response and advice.

On occasions, however, the Director deviated from the question-and-answer design in order to buttress Glasserman’s – and, more generally, radio’s – goal of elevating the audience. Unlike the show host, she attempted this not through art but via direct education. Roje provided her listeners with advice on social norms, beauty tips, fashion, and etiquette that she read on-air from popular manuals and encyclopedias on proper social behavior for the emerging Argentine middle classes. For example, during the December 3, 1940 edition, the matchmaker devoted two out of three segments to share selected pages from *Enciclopedia del Hogar* (Encyclopedia of the Home) and *Nuevas Normas Sociales* (New Social Norms), the former to instruct listeners on “massages and rubbings” and the latter as part of her ongoing “general advice” on “sophisticated” social behavior.²⁰⁸

The large majority of “Sentimentale Post” segments stuck to the fixed structure of the secretary reading a letter with a question and the Director offering advice. As a source about *Matinee Radial Hebrea*’s audience, these letters have to be treated with caution. Before being read on-air, Roje selected the missives; editorial preference and screening

²⁰⁸ FI/CSG, prepared dialogue in Spanish for “Sentimentale Post”, second and third parts, December 3, 1940.

process acted as filters that precluded direct access to the questions and anxieties of the show's listeners. We do not even know the volume of letters "Sentimentale Post" received, as the original unfiltered mail did not survive in the archive. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the chosen questions are more representative than others that the producers left out. Rive Roje and her secretary insisted that certain topics incited a special excitement in the audience that manifested in an unusual amount of correspondence, and often used their audience's interest as a reason to linger for several editions on a specific issue. As researchers, however, we lack any hard evidence to substantiate these claims, and are left only with their verisimilitude.

If analyzed with the abovementioned limits in mind, however, the segment and the letters it uses do provide useful data, in part about the audience but also about the show's producers. About the former, this edited data provides some minimum demographic information. We know that those who wrote to "Sentimentale Post" were in an age range going *at least* from their 20s to their 40s, because Roje replied to young men and women looking for spouses as well as married couples with children facing different sorts of problems, and even the rare widow looking to remarry. We also know that the letter writers were both men and women, Spanish and Yiddish writers, immigrants and Argentine-born Jewish-Argentines. Roje hid the identity of the correspondents, but as a general rule did not allow anonymous or pseudonymous missives into her segment. All the letters read on-air were written by Jewish-Argentines, and this particular segment seemed – even more than the rest of the *Matinee Radial Hebrea* – unambiguously directed exclusively to a Jewish-Argentine audience.

The mail also provides a glimpse into the show's understanding of its audience

and what its producers thought was important or interesting to the listeners. The missives read on-air – along with Roje’s reply – had for the production team either an entertainment or educational value, or a role as convenient vehicles for the reinforcement of ethnic boundaries through the segment’s relentless campaigning against intermarriage. Additionally, the edited mail informs us of which topics dealing with relationships and sexuality were, for Glasserman and Roje, safe or proper – that is, unlikely to give the show or Jewish-Argentines in general bad publicity with government officials or the middle classes – to discuss on-air. Within this group, producers deemed certain topics as “safe” enough or interesting to a broad enough public to be read and commented in Spanish, while they restricted others to (most) Jewish-Argentines by limiting their discussion to Yiddish. Their editorial decisions do not imply that the topics that were not covered were necessarily unsafe, nor are the letters read and commented in Yiddish systematically “riskier” than those aired in Spanish. These choices, however, give us a picture, although limited, of which themes a self-described ethnic family-oriented show considered appropriate or necessary to discuss with its audience.

One of the recurring themes in the letters to the “Sentimentale Post” was the young (and sometimes, not young at all) person, usually female, who for some reason was single and looking to get married. These letter-writers included stereotypical cases, such as the young girl in her late teens or early twenties whose parents wanted to see her married;²⁰⁹ but also the rarer young woman who had had a fiancée but certain unmentioned circumstances forced her to break the engagement, leading her deep into depression.²¹⁰ One young maiden, whose parents had already hired a match-making firm,

²⁰⁹ FI/CSG: prepared dialogue in Yiddish for “Sentimentale Post: Second Part,” October 8, 1940

²¹⁰ FI/CSG: prepared dialogue in Yiddish for “Sentimentale Post: First Part,” August 8, 1940.

complained that the potential candidates had seemed more interested in her dowry than in her.²¹¹

Rive Roje's cure-all solution for all these women's issues was to offer them appropriate marriage matches through her own agency. Depression could be overcome – following her recipe – by the simple process of meeting new available young men. Superficial men interested in dowries were just a result of using the wrong matchmaking agency: the bachelors in her register had better qualities, and were also looking for their “happiness.” She recommended most of those who wrote in to “come to our offices, on Viamonte 2258,” for a more in-depth answer or to hire her professional services.

Other listeners wrote to “Sentimentale Post” with more dire problems than dating conflict or unfulfilled engagements. A man's wife had been committed in a psychiatric hospital shortly after giving birth, leaving him with no choice than to leave his six-year old and newborn daughters under the care of two different Jewish-Argentine philanthropic institutions. Eighteen months had passed, the psychiatrists offered him no hope of a quick recovery, and the organizations could no longer take care of his children. Since he worked full time and had no relatives in the country, he did not know how to take care of his daughters on his own. He “would like to obtain a *get* (Jewish religious divorce), and hence being free, [...] able to find a new match and rebuild my home...”²¹² The listener asked no questions; only for Roje's opinion, tacitly granting her the moral authority to validate or condemn his preference, dictating whether he was right or wrong.

From the way many listeners worded their letters, it appears that, two years into her segment, Rive Roje had amassed significant symbolic capital with a large part of her

²¹¹ FI/CSG, prepared dialogue in Yiddish for “Sentimentale Post: Third Part,” September 22, 1940.

²¹² FI/CSG: prepared dialogue in Spanish for “Sentimentale Post,” first part, October 27, 1940.

audience, both male and female, which translated into a virtual position as a kind of secular, unofficial authority in social and emotional matters, including proper ethical behavior regarding familial roles and obligations. A female listener asked Roje to weigh in on an issue she disagreed about with her husband: the writer's mother, who had stolen her daughter's previous fiancée and abandoned her to live with that man, had been dumped in turn, fallen on hard times, and now was asking her daughter to let her into the home she had made with her new husband. The listener was willing to forgive and welcome her progenitor, but her spouse did not want his estranged mother-in-law under his roof or near his children. It was up to Roje's expert judgment to settle the issue.²¹³

How did Roje amass such respect from at least part of her listeners without actual institutional power or enforcement mechanisms of any sort? There are several reasons. First, her status as a professional matchmaker signaled an expertise on issues of love and relationships. What set her apart from others sharing her career choice was the power of the radio: the very fact of having a spot in a radio show for a segment on marriage and emotional conflict granted her an air of authority that derived from the star power of the medium itself and its new social role within the household and communities, as well as its status as a new technology. Additionally, the anonymity provided to the letter writers, characteristic of the relationship advice genre (in both the radio and printed media), might have helped show listeners to find the courage to write in with their doubts and problems. Finally, Roje herself proved the wisdom of her judgments – at least to part of her regular audience – in the years her segment was on-air, hence reinforcing this authority.

In these and many other cases, the Director of “Sentimentale Post” provided her

²¹³ FI/CSG: prepared dialogue in Yiddish for “Sentimentale Post,” second part, September 22, 1940.

opinion based on what appears to be one of her main guiding principles: the preservation of the Jewish-Argentine family unit, particularly in those cases where the family had small children. Roje seemed to have no particular gender bias except the paternalism intrinsic to the structure of a traditional nuclear family, willing to go against the wishes and preferences of the letter writers and even reprimand them when she felt it necessary.

The man asking for a religious divorce received the following scolding:

Do not be selfish, thinking only about your life. How can you think of abandoning your sick wife, making such a definite cut? [...] To act in the way you plan requires some insensitiveness. Have you not considered even for a moment what might happen to her if she recovers – and I hope she does recover? Where will she go? Who will help her? She will have no one and will be weak after her stay in the hospital.²¹⁴

The woman willing to forgive her mother received a much milder rebuke, but the

Director still sided with her husband:

[A] mother who does such a disgraceful thing [...] is] cursed [and] deserve[s] no mercy, it cannot be given to women like this. [...] Do not interpret this as us being too harsh on your mother, who you were prepared to forgive for the sins committed[. Rather,] grasp the mood of your husband, [consider] the environment in which your happy children live, and refrain from complicating your new peaceful life. Your mother will have to be thankful for your generous disposition and your willingness to help her financially if at all. Maybe years from now, when she has truly aged, you can have the conversation about bringing her into your house. That is the advice we feel your case needs [...]²¹⁵

Even where Roje herself agreed that a spouse had been legitimately wronged, she still recommended to preserve the family unit when children were involved. A listener wrote in to ask how to cancel his marriage papers, because his wife had not only lied about her age, but also hid from him a previous marriage to another man in Poland, with whom she

²¹⁴ FI/CSG: prepared dialogue in Spanish for “Sentimentale Post,” first part, October 27, 1940. My translation from the original Spanish.

²¹⁵ FI/CSG: prepared dialogue in Yiddish for “Sentimentale Post,” second part, September 22, 1940. My translation from the original Yiddish.

had a child. The matchmaker referred the main question to the show's segment dealing with legal issues, and focused on "the emotional dimension," as she put it. She advised the listener to try and keep his family together, even though she acknowledged he had been wronged:

First, your facts seem a bit unclear. [...] you do not share with us whether you separated from your wife as soon as you became aware that she had been married to another man, and you do not say whether your marriage with her produced a child. We will then limit ourselves to the last point, and assume that indeed a child was born. We can advise that you should consider your next step well, [and think about] what you must do, because we cannot allow children to experience the loss of a torn home, when they [done no wrong] whatsoever...²¹⁶

From time to time, "Sentimentale Post" discussed a letter that asked Roje to provide her opinion not on one case, but rather on a broad, "hot" issue. In other cases, she just steered a missive about a specific person or circumstance into a larger debate. In these situations, the Director asked her listeners to weigh in and share their opinions on the matter. Only after reading on-air a variety of – carefully curated – thoughts did she deliver her definitive verdict.

In December, 1940, the segment's secretary read aloud the letter of a newlywed man who identified himself as a "[liberal] professional [...] from a well-known family in the [Jewish-Argentine] community."²¹⁷ His wife refused to quit her job after their marriage, and argued she wanted to keep working to help him, who was just starting his career and making a modest income.

[I] am categorically opposed to my wife's desire to continue working [...]. This cannot be, because our home is neglected (which is logical, because she cannot take care of both things at the same time). We have had serious discussions that have threatened the tranquility of our home. I have several

²¹⁶ FI/CSG: prepared dialogue in Yiddish for "Sentimentale Post," second part, August 22, 1940. My translation from the original Yiddish.

²¹⁷ FI/CSG: prepared dialogue in Spanish for "Sentimentale Post," first part, December 3, 1940.

friends in the same circumstances. [...] Taking advantage of the fact that our wives have developed a vivid interest in your very interesting segment, paying you their full attention, I beg you to tackle this question: Should a married woman continue working on her job? I have complete certainty that you will do this perfectly, because your expressions and your way of answering other questions prove that you are a very superior woman.²¹⁸

The listener started the letter by asserting his social status: he came from a family of good standing within the organized community and was university educated, which in the context of the 1930s and 1940s most likely meant either accounting, medicine, law, or engineering. His letter, although anecdotal in nature, hints at a growing number of young, possibly local-born, married Jewish-Argentine women who fought, or at least negotiated with their husbands for the right to maintain their jobs and thus their own personal income and space of socialization, against patriarchal expectations. The missive also explains that these same young women were regular listeners of the “Sentimentale Post,” implying they would likely accept Rive Roje’s judgment on the matter even if it went against their wishes. Finally, the letter-writer lets the Director know that he assumes she will agree with him and his friends based on her previous opinions, which makes her ideal to put down their unruly wives and teach them proper behavior.

Unfortunately, the debate started by this letter could not be found in the archives. We know only that Rive Roje invited her audience to write in with their opinions on the matter, informing that she would only provide her own after she and her secretary had shared a selection of letters with the listeners. However, she did mention that “on a first look it must be agreed that reason seems to be on the side of the husband, who does not want to see his wife working outside of the home for considering that she has enough

²¹⁸ FI/CSG: prepared dialogue in Spanish for “Sentimentale Post,” first part, December 3, 1940. My translation from the original Spanish.

work inside of it already.”²¹⁹ The assumption of the “professional from a well-known family” seems to have had solid ground to stand on: Rive Roje’s consistent defense of a traditional understanding of the nuclear family. This paints the Director as a supporter of patriarchal social hierarchies, with clear notions about the role of women – particularly married women – within the bourgeois family unit.

The archive registers two other large debates during this period. The first one, which took place from the last days of August to September 10, 1940, raised the issue of whether “free love” was preferable over traditional marriage through “civil court and *jupe*” (“jupe,” a Yiddishized version of the Hebrew word “chuppah,” refers to the Jewish religious marriage ceremony).²²⁰ The supporters of the former, described as a pure love between a man and a woman unencumbered by any institutional or traditional ties, were for the most part young local-born Jewish-Argentines. They relied for support on socially progressive theater dramas penned by respected intellectuals and community figures, such as the director of the Jewish Hospital, Dr. Nicolas Rapoport, and *Matinee Radial Hebrea*’s own Samuel Glasserman (his short play in defense of “free love” was in fact aired in the “Lightning Theater” segment of the show).

The Director cunningly made her case for civil court and religious marriage through the curation of the letters that were read on-air. Some of these were indeed the opinion of listeners who wrote in to support the traditional stance, while others had no idea they were contributing to an ongoing debate. A missive told the story of a woman who, back in Europe, worked in psychology and pedagogy. She had fallen in love with a

²¹⁹ FI/CSG: prepared dialogue in Spanish for “Sentimentale Post,” first part, December 3, 1940. My translation from the original Spanish.

²²⁰ FI/CSG: prepared dialogue in Yiddish for “Sentimentale Post,” second part, September 5, 1940.

poor patient who lacked the will to live. He had moved in with her, and she had nursed him back to mental health. They were happy, until he received news that a rich relative had passed away in Argentina and he was the only living heir. Unlike most transatlantic immigrants, the couple had crossed the ocean in a first class cabin. Once in Buenos Aires, after receiving the inheritance, they had led a life of luxury. The man, however, had suddenly fallen in love with another woman, and abandoned the letter-writer without warning. The recent arrival was left penniless in a foreign country, with barely any knowledge of Spanish, and neither family nor friends. Even though it hurt her pride as a mental health professional to do so, she begged Rive Roje for advice, because she could only contemplate suicide.

Only part of the Director's reply tackled the issue of how to help this woman. The first half of the response used this listener's story as a rhetorical cudgel against the arguments in favor of "free love:"

From your letter we understand that you did not get married, but lived a free love. And that is perhaps the defect of the free [love:] that it is not recognized by law. Because otherwise you would be able to legally demand a pension or [some other form of financial] compensation.

Rive Roje then recommended a match through her agency and a legal and religious wedding as the remedy for the listener's material and mental despair.

This argument – that is, the lack of legal protection for women and children if a "free love" couple separated – became the backbone of Roje's argument for the "civil court and *jupe*" position. It was further reinforced by a letter from Jewish-Argentine leftist social activist Jayke Naparstek, who called on women in "free love" partnerships who had children to go through legal marriage to access the protections bestowed by the State in case their men left the family and abandoned their obligations.

The Director's final opinion, unsurprisingly, condemned "free love" and supported "civil court and *jupe*" marriages. Her main argument against the former and in favor of the latter was based on the protections that a State-endorsed legal marriage provided women and children. However, she did not use this argument to side with only "civil court"-based secular marriage. Since Roje never presented the scenario of a legal wedding without a religious ceremony as an existing alternative, instead focusing on the "free love" versus "civil court and *jupe*" dichotomy, the evidence favoring "civil court" automatically supported "*jupe*" as well. Hence, her rational argument about providing basic legal safeguards to women and children became the bridge that justified tradition and the preservation of ethnic particularity through Jewish religious marriage.

The most important debate topic, the issue of mixed marriages, dwarfed these other questions in terms of both the airtime "Sentimentale Post" lavished on it and the supposed interest of the audience. Marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew had been taboo for Jews since biblical times (although there are several high profile exceptions, such as Moses and Abraham) and it remained an absolute religious prohibition at least until the 1844 Rabbinical Conference of Brunswick. For Conservative, Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox Jews, as well as for the State of Israel, the ban on interfaith marriage remains in place to this day. Even in the case of Reconstructionist and Reform Judaism, the lifting of prohibition did not mean an end to social condemnation nor to uneasiness about the Jewish status of interfaith couples' offspring. That said, marriage between Jews and non-Jews, although rare, happened with some regularity throughout Jewish history despite the threat of ostracism, kin rejection, and even execution faced by both spouses.

The development of secular liberal ideologies, societies, and regimes, as well as

the metaphorical tearing down of the walls of the medieval European ghettos – a process that began in the eighteenth century in Central and Western Europe but was only slowly taking place in Eastern Europe by the early 1900s – severely compromised the enforcement powers of traditional ethnic-religious authorities such as rabbis.²²¹ While Argentina was officially a Catholic nation, its Constitution enshrined liberal principles such as civil equality before the law regardless of ethnicity or religion. Since 1888, the only legally valid marriages from the perspective of the Argentine State are those officiated through a civil court (*registro civil*), although spouses are free to additionally undergo a religious ceremony, if they so choose.

Matinee Radial Hebrea, in its effort to maintain group cohesion and reinforce the ethnic boundaries of Jewish-Argentineness, identified intermarriage as a particularly dangerous threat. The show sought to stem the perceived imminent tide of local-born Jewish-Argentines at risk of falling in love and marrying their non-Jewish peers, as well as reinforce the traditional imperatives for endogamy. For this reason, intermarriage became one of the most important topics for Rive Roje's segment.

Although "Sentimentale Post" apparently covered the question of intermarriage with regularity, the only recorded instance of a long debate on the subject took place in the months of August and September of 1940. The edition of the segment that launched the topic, along with the listener's letter that the Director chose to open the discussion, did not survive into the archives. Both, however, were referenced in the following show. Roje informed her audience that, as a result of the interest the "intermarriage question"

²²¹ Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto. The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770-1870* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973). Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2002).

generated and the “countless listeners” who were sharing their “diverse opinions” through the mail, her team would “take time to collect and read them thoroughly, and bring the most interesting of them to our microphones in our nightly editions.”²²²

Apparently, by the time this debate took place either the Director had already expressed her opposition to mixed marriage in general, or she considered the consensus on the matter to be so overwhelming that she deemed it unnecessary to justify her disapproval. The duo in charge of “Sentimentale Post” treated the idea of a Jewish-Argentine forming a family with a non-Jew to be self-evidently wrong and reprehensible, a fact which did not keep them from expressing their rejection and mentioning the agreement between the matchmaker and most of her audience on this particular topic. Roje did, however, give her opinion on a specific case: that of a Jewish-Argentine man marrying a non-Jewish Argentine woman.

At first sight, one might think that this occurrence would be preferable than a marriage between a Jewish girl and a non-Jewish man. Traditionally, the man is the one who establishes the tone in the household, and if the man is a Jew, so must his wife be, even when she is a practicing non-Jew[. Th]en the Jewish man’s family life can develop normally, just as in the case a married Jewish couple.²²³

That first impression, however, was erroneous. The Director explained to her audience that, in sharp contrast to what could be seen “in the Jewish youth, and especially [...] in Jewish girls in their attitude towards the Jewish synagogue,” non-Jewish young women in Argentina were quite devoted to the Catholic Church. Their deeply ingrained religious feelings

may possibly remain dormant for a time when she mates with a Jewish man, but sooner or later, the memories of big Catholic celebrations will

²²² FI/CSG: prepared dialogue in Yiddish for “Sentimentale Post,” first part, August 21, 1940.

²²³ FI/CSG: prepared dialogue in Yiddish for “Sentimentale Post,” first part, August 21, 1940. My translation from the original Yiddish.

return, and the non-Jewish lady will begin to yearn for them. She will consider the Jewish man as [the] one who stole something away from her soul, from her being.²²⁴

Would a Jewish-Argentine husband – asked Roje to her audience – especially a non-religious man, ban his wife from returning to the Catholic ceremonies she missed? What would happen when she went back to mass and heard the “poisonous sermons against Jews from those evil men who speak for God [...]”? That situation would, she argued, create quarrels that would destroy the peace, and thereby she advised “Jewish youngsters not to marry non-Jewish girls.”²²⁵

“Sentimentale Post” drew a line in the sand on the issue of intermarriage. The Director and her secretary made their position clear. Still, from time to time Roje would return to the topic to express her condemnation of even the most exceptional cases, brought by listeners who wrote in – fruitlessly, as it turned out – to ask for her blessing.

In one of these instances, the secretary read on-air the letter of a 19 year old Jewish-Argentine. The listener started her missive by asserting her Jewishness: she wrote in Yiddish that she was “local born, but from a home with a strong Yiddish tradition. Therefore I can speak both Yiddish and Hebrew well, and I have a good general Jewish culture...”²²⁶ She claimed that, after meeting several bachelors through a matchmaking service, she had been disappointed, thinking that they were only interested in her dowry. Simultaneously, she had met a non-Jewish man, who she described as “a fanatical

²²⁴ FI/CSG: prepared dialogue in Yiddish for “Sentimentale Post,” first part, August 21, 1940. My translation from the original Yiddish.

²²⁵ FI/CSG: prepared dialogue in Yiddish for “Sentimentale Post,” first part, August 21, 1940. My translation from the original Yiddish.

²²⁶ FI/CSG: prepared dialogue in Yiddish for “Sentimentale Post,” third part, September 22, 1940. My translation from the original Yiddish.

democrat, a liberal person,” and someone who “defends the Jews at all times.”²²⁷ Their mutual love, she claimed, was so strong that he was willing to undergo conversion in order to marry her, but her parents wanted her to break the relationship and find herself a Jewish fiancée. She had considered running away, but wanted Madame Roje’s advice before doing anything.²²⁸

The Director gladly revisited the topic. She explained that the majority of her listeners, just like Roje herself, were of the opinion that “we must restrain ourselves from mixed marriages, even in the best of cases, such as yours, when the non-Jew is willing to become a Jew.” The letter-writer, said Roje, had created “a tragedy” for her parents, “who won’t even be able to harbor the thought that their daughter married a non-Jew, and they will not be able to connect with him, due to language and custom differences.”²²⁹ Even worse, she had embarrassed them in front of family and strangers alike.

Regarding the young lady’s claim that the potential Jewish matches she had met seemed only interested in her dowry, the matchmaker asserted that it was simply the result of employing the wrong match-making agency. To make everything better, the listener should try Roje’s own services, because her registry was full of candidates who “truly search for the kind of beautiful family that yours exemplifies.” If the young woman visited her offices, the Director would soon have her “speak differently, and also think differently.”²³⁰

Roje’s strenuous fight against the dangers of intermarriage and her tireless

²²⁷ FI/CSG: prepared dialogue in Yiddish for “Sentimentale Post,” third part, September 22, 1940. My translation from the original Yiddish.

²²⁸ FI/CSG: prepared dialogue in Yiddish for “Sentimentale Post,” third part, September 22, 1940.

²²⁹ FI/CSG: prepared dialogue in Yiddish for “Sentimentale Post,” third part, September 22, 1940. My translation from the original Yiddish.

²³⁰ FI/CSG: prepared dialogue in Yiddish for “Sentimentale Post,” third part, September 22, 1940. My translation from the original Yiddish.

defense of traditional conceptions of the nuclear family seemed designed to complement Glasserman's project to create strong representations of Jewish-Argentine collective identity. Due to the radio show host's eager embrace of Argentine nationalism and culture, the task of reinforcing ethnic boundaries fell on Rive Roje, and became the central *raison d'être* for "Sentimentale Post." Although intermarriage was more an imaginary fear than a real existential threat to the continued existence of Jewish-Argentineness, its status as a menace for much of the organized community's leadership explains the importance of this segment to *Matinee Radial Hebrea*.

The symbolic authority as arbiter of family and relationship issues with which the segment's listeners bestowed Rive Roje provides additional clues to understand the role of radio and the service that the segment provided for Jewish-Argentines. Radio's ability to enter the privacy of the home and, through the self-assumed role of educating its listeners, become an unembodied voice of expertise gave the Director not only a platform and an audience, but also an imbued prestige. Collective anxieties about ethnic and national identity as well as ambitions of class and social progress created the need of new, modernized authority figures that could provide guidance and offer at least the illusion of order in the quick, ever-changing pace of modernizing and expanding Buenos Aires. Through her role as a radio figure and her insistence on established conceptions of family and ethnic boundaries, Roje could breach the gap between the modern and the traditional.

The Many Roles of Yiddish and Spanish: Language Politics in the Airwaves

The hyphenated ethnic character that *Matinee Radial Hebrea* shared with other

shows catering to communities of overseas immigrants and their descendants (with the obvious exception of those targeting Spaniards) included a linguistic component that defined these broadcasting experiences. Unlike any other programs, these niche shows had audiences that were largely – although often not entirely – bilingual, and often reflected this fact in their own on-air language use. Although even partially eschewing Spanish had the downside of limiting the pool of listeners (likely decreasing the potential advertisement revenue), it also allowed for the strategic deployment of language as well as hybridized terms and expressions in different contexts, and for different goals.

Matinee Radial Hebrea provides a lens into this specific expression of language politics. Spanish and Yiddish were chosen to connect with different audiences (although their use overlapped on certain dimensions) or to communicate different ideas, which charged each language with a particular function. Yiddish, which had been the street language and main means of communication in Europe, became mostly a signifier of Jewishness: the language in which the richness of Eastern European Jewish culture was preserved and transmitted. Particularly after the beginning of World War II, this new role turned the Yiddish of Eastern Europe rigid, in sharp contrast with its origins as a fluid oral medium. This transformation, however, was by no means total: it still operated as the lingua franca of Ashkenazi Jews living in different parts of the world, and Glasserman relied on this “classical” Yiddish in his interviews with visiting intellectuals and artists from the United States or Europe.

Furthermore, the radio show hosted another kind of Yiddish, an Argentine one developed by immigrants as they lived, worked, and formed families and social ties in the new country. This variation retained the language’s main character as a medium for intra-

ethnic oral and written communication. Argentine Yiddish also became a vehicle for the artistic expression of immigrant experiences and the encounter of Eastern European Jews with a new culture and society which was also undergoing intense transformation.²³¹

Among the Jewish-Argentine performers, Jevl Katz became a particularly brilliant star in the constellation of contributors to *Matinee Radial Hebrea*. His presence on the show increased from weekly to almost daily appearances, giving him extensive recognition in advance of his tours of the Argentine interior.

Glasserman deployed this Argentine Yiddish in his communication with the show's audience to serve particular goals. His surviving commentaries show that, in many instances – or, better said, for many subjects – Yiddish and Spanish were used almost interchangeably. Despite this large overlap, however, the host and his team relied exclusively on one language over the other for strategic reasons, in order to broach certain topics.

For *Matinee Radial Hebrea*, Yiddish became a hermetic channel which guaranteed, through linguistic encryption, a semi-private communication with most, if not all, Jewish-Argentines. As such, it was reserved for those statements or positions which, in the estimation of Glasserman and his team, could harm the show's construction of Jewish-Argentineness or the image of Jewish-Argentines in the eyes of non-Jews. Commentary or opinion that seemed to defy the show's constant celebration of cultural, social, political, and economic integration, or that expressed doubts about how safe and welcome Jewish-Argentines felt in the country (particularly during the Second World War) were therefore limited to a Yiddish-speaking audience.

²³¹ See Chapter 1.

Madame Rive Roje, in fact, only expressed her uncompromising opposition to mixed marriages in Yiddish, despite surviving scripts of “Sentimentale Post” segments in the archive showing that, for other topics, the matchmaker also relied on Spanish. The linguistic restriction of such an insistent support for ethnic endogamy signals that Glasserman’s team was aware that their position, were they to broadcast it in Spanish, could provide fodder for the nativist right’s accusations of Jewish incompatibility with Argentineness and unwillingness to integrate. In fact, this determination to combat intermarriage could potentially alienate even their non-Jewish liberal allies, whose narrative about Argentine nationhood often relied on the commitment of ethnic and national minorities – Jews included – to eventual assimilation.²³²

Yiddish also became the only means through which the usually upbeat Glasserman expressed doubts or fears about the future of Jewish life in Argentina. While his usual mentions of the country – particularly his prepared speeches commemorating May 25 or July 9 – constantly lauded Argentina as a virtuous, liberal, democratic haven, a new *patria* with which Jews shared a unique connection, in rare occasions the host shared with his audience a darker image. Most likely due to fear of negative consequences to the show itself (there were government censors regulating radio content, who were almost certainly monolingual) or to Jewish-Argentines in general, *Matinee Radial Hebrea* always broadcasted these instances in Yiddish.

In July 31, 1940, Glasserman chose Yiddish as the vehicle to inform his listeners about a theater production. At first glance, this choice seems odd, particularly considering that the play was written and performed in Spanish at a mainstream (non-ethnic)

²³² See Chapter 4.

Argentine theater, *Liceo*. The language of the prepared radio commentary cannot be explained by the host's attempt to rally his audience to go see the play, even if one takes into account its title, *La Gaucha Rebeca*, and its nature as a positive portrayal of Jewish-Argentines based on "Jewish gaucho" characters.

Glasserman's reasons can be found in his explanation as to why Argentine-Jews must show their support to the actors and theater, "who are giving preference to a play with an extremely Jewish content when they are surely not lacking other [potential] pieces without Jewish content [that could surely be hits:]"²³³

La Gaucha Rebeca, by German Siklis [is] a piece with a Jewish theme that truly elevates the Jewish spirit in the eyes of the non-Jewish world. In today's dark times, when poisonous tongues that speak evilly about Jews lurk in all directions, [...] it is very important that a Spanish theater will show a play that represent Jews in a luminous gleam, and in a way that is sure to annoy our obstinate enemies.

The piece will depict a moment when the government needs the use of a piece of land for a road, and while the great land-owner, a Christian, [...] refuses to surrender the required area, there comes the Jew Rebeca[.She] surrenders the last bit of land that she possesses. Generally the piece is full of praise for Jews, and not just regular praise, which can be subtle, but rather a praise that moves one to action.²³⁴

The host's reasoning betrayed a sense of urgency and anxiety that were absent in most of his Spanish allocutions. Inside the hermetic semi-public space that Yiddish created, Glasserman could take a break from his constant exaltation of an idealized nation and address his concerns about the nativist "obstinate enemies" of Eastern European Jewish immigrants and their descendants. The alleged importance of the play is only intelligible through an understanding of the situation of Jews in Argentina as precarious and aware of the contested meaning of Jewish-Argentineness: in this context, *La Gaucha Rebeca*

²³³ FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Yiddish, July 31, 1940. My translation from the original Yiddish.

²³⁴ FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Yiddish, July 31, 1940. My translation from the original Yiddish.

became a powerful argument for a positive, “luminous” portrayal of Jewish-Argentines based on the “Jewish gaucho,” the preferred myth of the intellectuals and leaders of the organized community. Yiddish offered the radio show host a vehicle to communicate to fellow members of his ethnic group why supporting the piece was important while minimizing the risk of alerting their “enemies” or alienating their non-Jewish allies.

In similar fashion, the radio host restricted arguments based on “the hard times the Jewry²³⁵ [is] going through” to commentaries in Yiddish. These included a call to support the union of Jewish teachers in a campaign for donations to guarantee pensions for its members, reminding his audience of the vital role the ethnic teachers played as “educators of the young Jewish generations in Argentina...,” that is to say, as a countervailing influence to the assimilating force of the national public school system.²³⁶ Here, then, his reliance on the ethnic character of Yiddish allowed Glasserman to not only agree with the perception of danger and hostility that many Jewish-Argentines felt both globally and locally, but also to qualify and revisit his previously total embrace of cultural integration to subtly signal support for ethnic resistance to the assimilationist aims of State institutions.

The only instance of an acknowledgment in Spanish of (symbolic) attacks against the Jewish population took place in March 26, 1937, during the first weeks of existence of *Matinee Radial Hebrea*. Even then, the author of such statements – already analyzed in the present chapter – was not Glasserman, but Jewish-Argentine award-winning writer César Tiempo. As a renowned intellectual figure of the Argentine world of letters,

²³⁵ The Yiddish term used is “Yidntum,” FI/CSG, prepared commentaries in Yiddish, May 9, 1939; May 24, 1939.

²³⁶ FI/CSG, prepared commentary in Yiddish, May 24, 1939. My translation from the original Yiddish.

Tiempo had enough symbolic capital to condemn anti-Semitic attacks without fear of his position reflecting negatively on the standing of Jewish-Argentines.²³⁷

In fact, this radio allocution was not Tiempo's first public offensive against anti-Semitism in the *porteño* public sphere, nor his most daring. Two years earlier, in 1935, he had published a pamphlet denouncing Hugo Wast (*nom de plume* of Gustavo Martínez Zuviría), the best-selling author of the anti-Semitic novel *Oro* (Gold) and influential director of the Argentine National Library.²³⁸ This critique, published by a Jewish press, was all the more daring considering that it was, at least in part, a response to the sentencing of Communist Argentine poet Raúl González Tuñón for instigating rebellion with his piece "Las brigadas de choque" (The Shock Brigades).²³⁹

With the unique exception of Tiempo's one-time intervention, *Matinee Radial Hebrea* did not consider Spanish as the language in which to express doubts about the status of Jewish-Argentines in their new South American home, or even as the means through which to acknowledge the existence of anti-Jewish sentiment in certain parts of the population and the ruling elites. Was this caution excessive? The extent to which censors listened to every radio broadcast is unknown to us. However, Glasserman bragged on-air about receiving congratulatory letters from – presumably liberal – non-Jewish listeners, who wrote in to say that they enjoyed the show although, clearly, they could only understand the parts in Spanish.²⁴⁰

The local language was also a tool for crafting and disseminating representations

²³⁷ FI/CSG, prepared column in Spanish, March, 1937.

²³⁸ César Tiempo, *La campaña antisemita y el Director de la Biblioteca Nacional* (Buenos Aires: Mundo Israelita, 1935).

²³⁹ César Tiempo, *La campaña antisemita*. Raúl González Tuñón, "Las brigadas de choque," in *Contra* 4 (August, 1933), reproduced in Sylvia Saítta, *Contra: La revista de los franco-tiradores* (Quilmes: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes Editorial, 2005): 366-375.

²⁴⁰ FI/CSG, prepared column in Spanish, May 5, 1939.

of Jewish-Argentine identity. As previously shown, Spanish was the chosen vehicle for the ritual enunciation of love and faithfulness to the new *patria*, particularly – but not only – during Argentine national holidays. Glasserman constantly mentioned the close relationship between the nation and its Jewish citizens in every possible topic: for the celebration of Christmas or the coming of a new year, on the occasion of Jewish-American artists sharing the stage with non-Jewish Argentine stars (occasions, unsurprisingly, arranged by the radio show host and theater entrepreneur himself), and shoehorned in prepared comments about the feats of a Jewish-Argentine pilot. *Matinee Radial Hebrea* also preferred the local language for commentaries lauding the many facets of Argentine culture that Jewish-Argentines – according to Glasserman’s project – should embrace.

Spanish was, additionally, *Matinee Radial Hebrea*’s favored language to attract the Jewish-Argentine youth and connect them with intra-ethnic spaces of socialization. To this end, the radio show announced and endorsed every dance, concert, and fundraising event either aimed at the younger generations or organized by youth organizations. Glasserman’s concern about the potential assimilation of the local-born generations meant that the need to establish these spaces became vital to the process of identity formation, as part of an attempt to reestablish ethnic boundaries. The radio show host chose Spanish because many local-born Jewish-Argentines were more familiar and comfortable with the local language than with their parents’. The other dimension of this attempt to set ethnic boundaries was left to Rive Roje’s column, “Sentimentale Post.” However, the show seemed to have decided that, given the potentially risky nature of the matchmaker’s campaign against intermarriage, it would be more cautious to broadcast it

in Yiddish, even if meant losing young listeners.

This distance (and overlaps) between what was broadcasted in Spanish and Yiddish shows that the linguistic barrier allowed for parallel, complementary, but not always connected representations of identity. Exclusive listeners of the Spanish prepared commentaries received a distinct cultural and discursive content, particularly because anxieties about the status of Jewish-Argentines in a country perceived as increasingly hostile were only expressed in Yiddish. In fact, Yiddish operated as a linguistic insulator of cultural meaning, opening up a space for the expression not only of ethnic anxiety and doubts about the future of Jews in Argentina and the world, but also of what at first look seems to be an unapologetic non-hyphenated representation of Jewish identity. However, even this ethno-linguistic construction was unavoidably Jewish-Argentine, for several reasons. First, because even events that aimed for an unequivocal Jewishness, such as the Eastern European cantor's performance during the national holiday of May 25, took place in the cultural geography of multilingual, multiethnic Buenos Aires. Second, because Glasserman's Yiddish was an Argentine Yiddish, packed with Spanish loanwords and *porteño* expressions. Finally, because this Argentine Yiddish space was where – subverting the traditional status of Eastern European Jewish music and Argentine music alike – artists like Jevl Katz deployed cultural hybridity through song and where the cast of *Matinee Radial Hebrea*'s actors performed radio-theater plays about life in Argentina.

Conclusion

From its debut in March, 1937, to its disappearance during World War II, *Matinee Radial Hebrea* provided its audience with ethnic entertainment, cultural programming,

institutional news, and educational content. The show's columns provided financial, legal, romantic, and marital advice to both recent arrivals and well-established Jewish-Argentines. With the passing years, Samuel Glasserman's project incorporated extra daily editions, Sunday specials, and live events for its listeners to join in anniversary celebrations or homages to visiting stars and local artists.

The on-air content and live events were part of *Matinee Radial Hebrea*'s project of constructing and disseminating representations of Jewish-Argentine identity for immigrants from Eastern Europe and their local-born descendants. This experience relied on a fluid understanding of identity, where being Jewish and being Argentine could be embraced simultaneously without contradiction. At the same time, the project was supported by the strategic deployment of Yiddish and Spanish to emphasize different messages and creating safe spaces for expressing specific ideas and concerns.

Glasserman's identitary representation was an integrationist strategy, where Jewish-Argentines embraced Argentina as their *patria*, and adopted the national culture and values as their own. Simultaneously, the project required a concerted effort to preserve the cultural tradition associated with the Yiddish language, as well as the language itself. The show host periodically provided his audience with reassurances about the future of Jews in the country, and armed them with arguments to defend themselves and collective legitimacy of Jewish-Argentineness against verbal and symbolic attacks.

The main problem Glasserman and – supposedly – many among his listeners found with this construction of Jewish-Argentine identity was that its integrationist dimension brought with it the risk of losing the local-born generations to assimilation.

Already exposed to state-based assimilationist institutions like mandatory public schooling and military service, the children and grandchildren of immigrants were more comfortable with the Spanish language and local culture they dealt with on a daily basis than with Yiddish, even when it was their parents' main means of communication. In order to guard against this perceived threat, Glasserman's project sought to buttress the boundaries of Jewish-Argentineness by both constantly promoting events and spaces of intra-ethnic social interaction, and – through the column of matchmaker Rive Roje – relentlessly campaigning against the dangers of intermarriage.

Eventually, the specific representation of Jewish-Argentine identity championed by *Matinee Radial Hebrea* disintegrated. The power of cultural and linguistic integration and the lack of resources the organized community devoted to preserve the Yiddish language and culture, along with a shift of priorities towards Hebrew and the Middle East following the end of World War II and the creation of the State of Israel, sealed the fate of this iteration of Jewish-Argentineness as a transitional identitary representation. In this, the experience of (Eastern European) Jewish-Argentines did not differ much from that of other immigrant ethnicities, such as the Italians, Arabs, or Armenians, who also underwent transformative processes of trans-generational integration, with corresponding changes in their ethnic, hyphenated identities.

CHAPTER 3

Found in Translation: The Power of the Written Word, Translation as Identitary

Strategy, and the Emergence of Cultural Jewish-Argentineness, 1933-1946

The previous chapter considered how cultural and social actors worked to maintain Jewishness and Argentineness simultaneously. This chapter explores how intellectuals promoted translated culture – specifically translation into Spanish in print media – as an essential process of establishing a Jewish-Argentine identity in literary works and publications. Translation functioned as a central cultural strategy of activists and intellectuals to address questions of cultural integration and difference among Jewish immigrants in Argentina in the 1930s and 40s. These cultural actors understood the symbolic power of the written word as profoundly transformative; they deployed it as a device to shape ideas and attitudes towards Jewish-Argentines, as well as to offer new identitary constructions to the local-born children of immigrants.

As activists, artists, intellectuals and other cultural agents worked to establish the symbolic space for Jewish-Argentine identities, they struggled with two primary challenges. The first challenge was gaining the support and acceptance of the Buenos Aires elite, influential intellectuals and policy-makers invested in the legal and symbolic definition of Argentine identity and national character. The second concern of Jewish-Argentine activists and intellectuals resulted from ethnic perceptions of complete assimilation as an existential threat: their strategy centered on reinforcing ethnic boundaries to keep the younger, local-born generations within the ethnic community. Like other immigrant groups, Jewish-Argentines tried to strike a balance between

integration and assimilation. Through this dual approach, cultural agents attempted to establish a sense of ethnic cohesion while showing their commitment to their new *patria* or homeland. This two-pronged approach reflected the major difficulties – as ethnic elites and intellectuals perceived them – of sustaining “the hyphen;” externally, minorities needed the support of national deciders and opinion-makers, and internally, they developed strategies to preserve their identity for future generations.

Although different actors and organizations engaged in works of translation, there was one central figure that conceived of translation as both a vital tool and guiding ideology for the successful enactment of Jewish-Argentineness. Salomón Resnick, writer, editor, publisher and, above all, translator of Yiddish was responsible for this focus. *JUDAICA* (1933-1946), the name of both his journal and publishing house, became his vehicle to further this understanding of identity. Both the periodical and its founder make up the case analyzed in this chapter.

In the understanding of cultural agents such as Resnick, literary translation served as the bridge which made millennia of multilingual Jewish cultural development intelligible to a Spanish-speaking population. Jewish activists and intellectuals in Argentina were motivated to translate and disseminate Yiddish works to produce a constellation of signifiers to influence local understanding of Jewish traditions and people. This impulse grew out of the idea that ignorance of the accumulated Jewish literature and cultural contributions could stunt the development of Jewish-Argentine identity. The increased availability of essays on Jewish tradition as well as fiction in Spanish filled the informational void of Argentine elites and local-born Jewish-Argentines alike, showing how Jews in Argentina negotiated nationality and cultural

heritage through the process of literary translation as cultural translation.

Through careful curation, Jewish-Argentine cultural agents portrayed Jews in a positive light. They selected literary works and essays that conformed to their ideal representation of the Jewish-Argentine. In this, their understanding of the expectations of national elites influenced their choices. These cultural activists and intellectuals considered the task of curated translation and dissemination as not only vital, but also urgent: a lack of commitment to reproduce content in Spanish risked leaving the field to anti-Semite publicists, who already provided negative myths about the ill social effects of Jewish immigration, and noxious propaganda about unassimilable nature of “the Jew.” Negligent or incompetent curation risked translating literature that could backfire, engendering or reinforcing negative stereotypes. Proponents of curated translation argued that the production of Spanish versions of Jewish tradition and literature could produce the “right” kind of knowledge about Jews to both legitimize Jewish-Argentines in the eyes of the national elites as well as foster hyphenated identities in the local-born generations.

Actors like Resnick saw increased access to Jewish history and tradition through translation and publication as a tool to establish the roots of a Jewish identity adapted to the specific cultural geography of Spanish-speaking Latin America. This conceptualization required an understanding of identity as linked to cultural production (and consumption), and of culture as a collective, dynamic construction in constant change and development. For the proponents of this strategy of curation, translation, and dissemination, the accumulated collection of Jewish culture and history was a vital component of an embryonic Jewish-Argentineness. Without access to this inherited

tradition, the preservation of Jewishness as an ethnicity became imperiled, and Jewish culture risked fossilization. With newfound access to Jewish tradition, the local-born generations – these cultural agents argued – would draw on the “golden chain” (a Jewish metaphor for the endurance of tradition and culture throughout many generations) as inspiration and guidance, part of a sum of influences – along with the Argentine cultural context – out of which they would develop Jewish-Argentineness.

The ultimate goal of this cultural strategy of translation was ambitious: not merely to Argentinize Yiddish tradition, but also to Yiddishize Argentine culture. Cities with a stronger Jewish presence, such as New York City, already experienced this mutual influence.²⁴¹ In Buenos Aires, other immigrant groups with a stronger demographic presence, such as Italians, impacted the everyday life of every *porteño*, from cuisine to edgy slang terminology, called *lunfardo*.²⁴²

Resnick’s particular understanding of culture, in part a result of his craft as translator, his relationship with Yiddish, and his fascination with the study of languages, separated him from his allies and friends in the *Sociedad Hebraica Argentina* (SHA). The latter institution also published Yiddish books in Spanish, as did Jewish-Argentine editor Manuel Gleizer; Resnick often worked as translator and editor for these publishing houses.²⁴³ What set the founder of *JUDAICA* apart was his belief in the centrality of

²⁴¹ See, for example: Hasia Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

²⁴² Samuel L. Baily, *Immigrants in the Land of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City, 1870-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004). For Italian influence in tango, see: Ricardo A. Ostuni, *Tango, voz cortada de organito: la inmigración italiana y su influencia* (Buenos Aires: Lumière, 2005). For the linguistic influence of Italian, see: Ángela Di Tullio, *Políticas lingüísticas e inmigración: el caso argentino* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 2003).

²⁴³ Alejandro Dujovne, *Una historia del libro judío. La cultura judía argentina a través de sus editores, librerías, traductores, imprentas y bibliotecas* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2014), 140-141.

universal Jewish culture, and the role of Yiddish literature in particular, to the goal of establishing a stable, long-lasting Jewish-Argentineness. Translation acted as the catalyst that allowed this process of cultural transplantation to take place.

Through an examination of Resnick's ideas about the use of translation and the production of *JUDAICA*, this chapter examines the role of translation, culture, and tradition in Buenos Aires from 1933 to 1946. This expression of Jewish-Argentine identity differs from the one analyzed in the previous chapter. While *Matinee Radial Hebrea* developed a strategy based on a sociobiological conceptualization of ethnic boundaries and a bilingual mechanism to engage its audience, *JUDAICA* relied on curated translation and dissemination and focused exclusively on Spanish as the vehicle for culture and literature. The contrast between these two approaches reflects divergent understandings of identity, as well as the contrast between a mass media like radio and a periodical aimed at a select readership. Both the radio show and the journal and publishing house existed simultaneously, which raises questions about whether their audiences overlapped, and about the interaction of their strategies. However, we lack the sources for this complex comparative analysis of reception.

Salomón Resnick and *JUDAICA*

Salomón Resnick was born in Russia in 1894 and moved with his family to the agricultural colonies in Argentina when he was eight years old. There, this son of a rabbi, whose mother tongue was Yiddish, became a Spanish teacher. By 1914, he had left the

rural life for the lights of Buenos Aires, where he joined a group of young writers and intellectuals who launched the Spanish-language journal *Juventud* (Youth).

After a rift between the members of that magazine's staff, Resnick joined the faction that favored Jewish integration in Argentine society over total assimilation in the new periodical, *Vida Nuestra*, established in 1917. It was within that cosmopolitan, elite, avant-garde literary environment that he published his first writings. While working at that journal, Resnick began to position himself within the Argentine as well as Jewish-Argentine intellectual fields.

Resnick's experience in *Vida Nueva* proved formative in several ways. First, the environment of the magazine gave him the opportunity to meet and establish relationships with renowned local and international writers. For example, he became friends with Chilean poet and diplomat Gabriela Mistral, who later, in 1945, became the first Latin American winner of the Literature Nobel Prize. Second, the Jewish-Argentine translator familiarized himself with the inner workings of the literary circles, and the composition, character, and interests of the circles' aesthetic and ideological factions. Third, his participation in the magazine provided a first opportunity to publish Resnick's translations of Yiddish literature into Spanish.

Starting in 1917, Resnick's versions of a handful of I.L. Peretz's stories appeared in *Vida Nuestra*. Two years later, these works became part of the first Spanish-language anthology of stories by I.L. Peretz, entitled *Los cabalistas* (The Kabbalists). This book was the first Spanish-language anthology of short stories translated from Yiddish in Argentina, and likely the first such publication in the world. Resnick's translation included a prologue and a lengthy preliminary study that introduced Spanish-readers to

both Peretz's work and modern Yiddish literature in general. A second volume of Peretz's stories translated by Resnick, entitled *Adan y Eva* (Adam and Eve), came out in 1922. *Adan y Eva* was published by *Vida Nuestra*, while *Los cabalistas* was self-published under the *ad hoc* publishing house *La Cultural Israelita*.²⁴⁴

After his first stints in the worlds of periodicals and publishing, Resnick became founding co-editor and staff writer of *Mundo Israelita*. The leaders of the SHA were behind the production, financing, editing, and writing of this Jewish weekly in Spanish, launched in 1923. During this period in his career, Resnick gained valuable experience not merely as a writer and editor, but also as publisher, and he added international (mostly, but not only) Jewish links to the network of intellectual contacts.

An essay in *Mundo Israelita* from 1924, unsigned yet most likely penned by Resnick, provides an early indication of his intellectual concerns:

The ignorance of the historical role played by the people of Israel in the development of mankind; the lack of knowledge of the social moral value bequeathed by the Hebrews, which is the axis on which the world turns in the path towards perfection, [are] the main cause[s] of the malaise, struggles, and misfortunes that have hit the Jews. And if the ignorance of strangers is fatal because it causes setbacks in this march toward[s] a better humanity, ignorance of Jewish ideals is even worse when those who suffer it are the Israelites themselves, especially the youth.²⁴⁵

This article was the first public expression of Resnick's diagnosis of the underlying causes behind what many within the Jewish-Argentine intelligentsia saw as the ethnic group's most pressing problems. Societies and individuals – reasoned the intellectual –

²⁴⁴ Dujovne, *Una historia del libro judío*, 133. I. L. Peretz, *Los cabalistas*, trans. Salomón Resnick (Buenos Aires: La Cultura Israelita, 1919). I. L. Peretz, *Adan y Eva*, trans. Salomón Resnick (Buenos Aires: Vida Nuestra, 1922).

²⁴⁵ "La orientación de la actividad cultural," *Mundo Israelita*, March 1, 1924. Quoted in Alejandro Dujovne, "'The Books that Should not be Missing from any Jewish Home': Translation as a Cultural Policy in Argentina, 1919-1938," in *Returning to Babel: Jewish Latin American Experiences, Representations, and Identity*, ed. Amalia Ran and Jean Axelrad Cahan (Leiden and London: Brill, 2012), 161.

were hostile towards Jews because of ignorance: they were unaware of the many positive contributions of Jews to the world in general, and Western civilization in particular. This ignorance opened the way for noxious, negative visions of Jewish history and the role of Jews that could be traced back at least a millennia, to the construction of Jews as antithetical “others” in the Catholic belief system.²⁴⁶ Anti-Jewish feelings, however, had more modern and nefarious incarnations, like (pseudo)scientific racism and eugenics had made abundantly clear. For Resnick, a treatment followed his prognosis: the lack of accurate and positive information about historical Jewish contributions to world culture, art, science, and civilization in general (contributions that, for Resnick and his staff and guest writers, were an objective historical reality) could be fixed through cultural dissemination among both Jews and non-Jews alike. With the latter, such propagation of knowledge would foster acceptance and legitimize Jewish-Argentines as a productive part of society. Educating the former in Jewish tradition was necessary to guarantee the survival of Judaism as a cultural identity, and to lay the ground for the coming generations to use this tradition to produce the Jewish (-Argentine) culture of tomorrow.

Resnick’s search for an educational tool to counteract ignorance as well as malicious propaganda inspired him to establish *JUDAICA*. He founded the journal in 1933, at a historical moment when anti-Jewish hostility – particularly in Europe – had grown into powerful political expressions. The rise of Nazism in Europe and the ways in which this development echoed in Argentina provide an essential context to understand

²⁴⁶ See: David Nirenberg, “Race and the Middle Ages: The Case of Spain and Its Jews,” in *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires*, ed. Margaret Greer, Walter Mignolo, and Maureen Quilligan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). David Nirenberg, “Enmity and Assimilation: Jews, Christians, and Converts in Medieval Spain,” *Common Knowledge* 9, no. 1 (2003): 137-55. David Nirenberg, “Conversion, Sex, and Segregation: Jews and Christians in Medieval Spain,” *American Historical Review* 107, no. 4 (2002): 1065-93.

JUDAICA.

For his project, Resnick needed to combine the different skillsets he had developed in the previous decades: his skills as translator, his judgment as an editor, his abilities as an essayist, and his experience and know-how as publisher. Even more importantly, his then well-developed network of intellectual contacts, both Jewish and non-Jewish, local and international, became a vital asset to attract contributors, reviewers, and translators from Argentina, Latin America, the United States, and Europe.

Translation, Curation, and Language: a Recipe for Cultural Identity Representations

The case study of *JUDAICA* illustrates the particular role of translation in this cultural project of Jewish-Argentine representation, and how it transcended a mere dissemination instrument, becoming a fundamental principle. Translation was the central strategy that allowed for the safeguarding of ethnic particularity and the influencing of local elites. This understanding was linked to the conceptualization of identity as a cultural phenomenon, with cultural preservation and development as central factors guaranteeing the perpetuation of minority or ethnic identities.

The vital character of translation relied on the certainty of the power of culture in general, and literature in particular, to shape opinion. Once they became accessible to Spanish speakers, the logic went, the works of Jewish authors could shape the readers' understanding of the nature of "the Jew." For this reason, the enterprise of literary translation should not be carelessly undertaken. Although Resnick and his contributors saw their project as a pioneering example, and often expressed the need for similar efforts, they also zealously policed other translations, convinced that the wrong curatorial

decisions could harm the standing of Jewish-Argentines with Argentine elites.

In the second half of 1933, a recently-formed Jewish-Argentine publishing house released its first book. Known as Sem, the editorial translated and published the novella *Romance of a Horse Thief*, the first Spanish version of Joseph Opatoschu's piece. As they moved from the Yiddish title, *A roman fun a ferd ganef*, to the Spanish *El romance de un ladrón de caballos*, the editors of the series echoed JUDAICA's quest to make Jewish culture accessible for a broad Argentine readership.

Sem defined its work as an attempt to preserve and disseminate Yiddish cultural production in Argentina, publishing the novel as the opening volume of the collection called "compendium of Jewish treasures" (*cuadernos de valores judíos*). JUDAICA, launched earlier in the same year, devoted several pages to review this novel. The journal's resident literary critic, Antonio Portnoy, disapproved of the work of translator Juan Goldstraj. The reviewer disparaged Goldstraj's dominion of Spanish: his version had "forced and violent expressions, which conspire against the canon and spirit of the Spanish language."²⁴⁷ Even worse, the translator had replaced Opatoschu's use of Yiddish vulgarities with expressions borrowed from *lunfardo*, the specific slang of Buenos Aires. As a consequence, the potential readership was limited to the capital city and its immediate surroundings, where such jargon was intelligible.

The worst offense of all, however, could not be faulted on the translator. Portnoy objected strenuously to the publisher's selection of *Romance of a Horse Thief* as its debut into the Spanish language publishing world. He considered that this story – written when its author was 24 years old – was far from the best or most representative of Opatoschu's

²⁴⁷ Antonio Portnoy, "El romance de un ladrón de caballos by José Opatoschu" in "Bibliografía," JUDAICA, 5 (November 1933):224-226, 225.

works. The author had at least two widely acclaimed novels – in Yiddish – that had sold out several editions in the United States and Europe. Additionally, considering the wealth of great fiction in Yiddish, it was a poor choice for Sem’s first translation, and as the opening book for a collection seeking to represent Yiddish literature.

Lastly, and – in Portnoy’s view – most importantly, *Romance of a Horse Thief*, given the character of its protagonist and its reliance on vulgarity, was a terrible ambassador of Jewish-Argentines:

... Schloime [sic], a professional thief, criminal, and fanatic brutalized by alcoholism, is not a worthy hero to launch a selection of Jewish [literary] works[. Even] more importantly, [this character] cannot elevate, but rather will demean the concept of the Jewish people in the eyes of the Christians that Sem publishing house is doubtlessly interested in reaching.²⁴⁸

The reviewer, who shared Resnick’s belief in the power of the written word to shape the worldview of readers, expressed his concern that Sem’s curatorial malpractice could have detrimental results. For the men and women of *JUDAICA*, the translation of literature was not an end in itself, but rather a central instrument in a broader cultural project with collective sociopolitical consequences. Publishers unaware of these implications were blindly swinging a double-edged sword, and could jeopardize the status of Jewish-Argentines with the country’s “Christians” by portraying the former as anything other than grateful adoptive children and productive members of the new *patria*. The journal’s staff inhabited the contradiction of seeing their periodical as a cultural vanguard, an example for others to follow, while harboring mistrust about new agents challenging their monopoly on curatorial discretion.

The intellectuals behind the journal’s approach to translation, as opposed to others

²⁴⁸ Portnoy, “El romance...,” 225. My translation from the original Spanish.

like *Matinee Radial Hebrea*'s Samuel Glasserman, forsook the use of Yiddish to fully embrace Spanish. As a result, *JUDAICA* opted out of the radio show's reliance on Yiddish as a mode of linguistic encryption, a tactic to minimize fallout and limit its audience for specific topics. The choice for translation and Spanish, thus, led to a self-censorship – or, at the very least, an intra-ethnic censorship – that limited what could be published, translated, and written.

The Uses of Translation and the Uses of Language

For the *JUDAICA* project, translation became more than a tool for the dissemination of Jewish literature and culture into Spanish. The editors did not relegate the act of translation to the background, but actually highlighted it in the printed page, as information they deemed relevant for the reader. This involved stating the name of the translator for each article, story, and poem, as well as the original language of the piece – usually Yiddish, but also Hebrew, English, German, Russian, and French. The journal also turned translation and language into topics of inquiry in its essays, and an important portion of its book reviews.

The proportion of pieces translated from Yiddish – particularly works of fiction – increased with the passing years in relation to other languages. By late 1933, the end of the journal's first semester, the mother tongue of Eastern European Jews had established its supremacy over Hebrew in terms of space and attention. Pieces translated from other languages appeared more rarely.

The periodical's founder translated and printed stories by Mendele Mocher Sforim (the lifelong pen name of Sholem Yankev Abramovich), Sholem Aleichem, I. L.

Peretz, Joseph Opatoschu, and David Bergelson.²⁴⁹ *JUDAICA* also published other essays by Yiddishist historian Shimon Dubnow – not all of them translated by Resnick.²⁵⁰ As the journal came of age, Yiddish became the hegemonic language of origin for translated pieces, particularly from fiction, with Hebrew in a secondary role.

The most traditionally cultured languages of Europe played a unique part in *JUDAICA*. The popular tongue of the Jewish masses in Eastern Europe never appeared in its original form and with its traditional alphabet on the journal's pages. However, Resnick's contributors freely employed French, English, and even Italian phrases in the original languages without offering any translation. In a review of the Spanish translation of Lucien Wolf's *The Jewish Ghost and the Fake Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, reviewer Portnoy even made a play on words in French, writing that the motto "*cherchez la femme*" should be changed for "*cherchez le Juif*."²⁵¹

The different approaches towards Western European and Jewish languages sheds light on the understanding of how the men and women behind *JUDAICA* understood translation and language vis-à-vis their mission of cultural dissemination. First, the use of untranslated French and English phrases shows that Resnick and his staff conceived of "Spanish" as a broad linguistic hybrid, a cosmopolitan pastiche that allowed for borrowed terms from languages that Western-educated elites traditionally coded as cultural and

²⁴⁹ See for example: Sholem Aleijem, "Guetzal," *JUDAICA* 77 (November, 1939); Sholem Aleijem, "El maestro Boaz," *JUDAICA* 79 (January 1940); Méndele Mojer Sforim, "Aventuras prodigiosas en el río Piatignilevke," *JUDAICA* 71 (May, 1939): 219-224; Isaac León Peretz, "Prodigios en el mar," *JUDAICA* 14 (August, 1934): 61-66; José Opatoschu, "La máquina," *JUDAICA* 73-75 (July-September, 1939): 47-49; Opatoschu, "La señora Marchese," *JUDAICA* 78 (December, 1939): 216-219; David Bergelson, "Decadencia," *JUDAICA* 85 (November, 1940): 20-27.

²⁵⁰ The article printed in November, 1939, was translated by "S. Benmoisés." See: Simón Dubnow, "Maimónides en la historia judía," *JUDAICA* 77 (November, 1939): 147-153.

²⁵¹ Antonio Portnoy, "El fantasma judío y los falsos protocolos de los sabios de Sión by Lucien Wolf" in "Bibliografía," *JUDAICA* 4 (October, 1933): 176-178, 176.

literary. Second, their assumption that *JUDAICA*'s readers could understand the use of these phrases – but no words or terms in Hebrew or Yiddish – points to how the contributors conceptualized their desired readership: well-read, cultured, educated Argentines.

Resnick's decision to include essays about language and translation illustrates how the topic became a fundamental principle for the *JUDAICA* project. The publisher based his choice in several factors. First, Resnick's own professional trajectory, his awareness of the second-rate status of translators in the world of letters, and his conviction of the importance of the "scientific" study of philology and linguistics – in the Positivist vein that gave everything "scientific" a higher value. Second, in a magazine devoted to cultural dissemination, with the objective of making the polyglot cultural production of Jews accessible for a more or less monolingual, Spanish-speaking readership, translation had a much more sizable role than in other periodicals. This position as a structural part of *JUDAICA*'s project not only meant that translation was more visible, but also morphed it from a vehicle to give accessibility to non-Spanish content into actually becoming content itself, a topic worthy of public discussion. Third, as previously shown, Yiddish literature enjoyed a favored status within this project: the magazine granted these works the largest amount of space and coverage. Yiddish had only become a vehicle for high literature in the previous 50 years, and this had coincided with the rise of its "scientific" study. For this reason, Resnick and his staff favored disseminating articles about translation as well as biographical sketches of the pioneers of Yiddish linguistics.

Translation and the Uses of Literature

Most of the translated fiction published in *JUDAICA* came from Yiddish originals; translations of both modern and medieval Hebrew texts were in a distant second place. The traditional Hebrew sources were exclusively Sephardic poetry, mostly works by Ibn Gabirol, but also sages like Rashi (Rabi Shlomo Yitzchaki) and Nahmanides (Rabbi Moses ben Nahman Girondi). This homage to Iberian Jewish sages linked Jewishness with Spanish tradition in an attempt to re-articulate the claims of the *Hispanismo* – an ideology that highlighted the cultural, linguistic, and identity connections between Spain and its former colonies, popular with the Argentine intellectual elites – into a legitimation of Jewish belonging within the Argentine nation based on a shared cultural and geographical idealized past.²⁵²

The principal Modern Hebrew author published in Spanish by *JUDAICA* was Haim Nahman Bialik. Issue 13, printed in July, 1934, was an homage to the recently deceased writer, “the most representative Hebrew poet of our times.”²⁵³ The Bialik issue included five pages of his poetry, and two of his reflections – in prose – about literature: one on Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, and the other on the *Mishnah*, the oldest codification of Judaic oral law. The choice of the essay on *Don Quixote* linked the poet to a literary tradition familiar to Spanish readers, and in particular to the most famous writer of the Spanish Golden Age. Both essays were originally published as prefaces of Hebrew versions of these books, which Bialik edited and commented. Author Carlos M. Grünberg and writer and journalist Rebeca Mactas Alperson translated the

²⁵² Fernando Esquivel-Suárez, “‘Españoles trasplantados’: raza hispana y migración en las misiones culturales españolas enviadas al centenario de la independencia argentina (1898-1910)” (PhD diss., Emory University, 2014).

²⁵³ Unsigned editorial, “Jaime Najman Bialik. 1873-1934,” *JUDAICA* 13 (July, 1934): 1-4, 1.

poems for *JUDAICA*.²⁵⁴

Resnick himself was responsible for the bulk of the translations of Yiddish literature. Initially, he focused more on stories from authors whom Yiddish literary scholars called the “first generation” of modern writers: Sholem Aleichem, I. L. Peretz, and Mendele Mocher Sforim.²⁵⁵ Resnick slowly incorporated fictional works by younger literary figures, most of them still alive at the time, such as David Bergelson and Joseph Opatoshu.

Resnick only translated works from a narrow group of younger Yiddish writers. Different decisions explain the logic behind his curatorial choices. First, the editor did not translate poetry, most likely for the increased challenge of transmitting not only meaning but also meter and flow into Spanish. This excluded a large part of the modern Yiddish literary corpus, as many new authors were primarily or exclusively poets (such as Yankev Glatshteyn, H. Leivick, or Dovid Eynhorn). Second, Resnick left out the works of certain renowned fiction writers such as Israel Joshua Singer and Isaac Bashevis Singer. The writings of the Singer brothers shared views that were sharply critical of socially progressive movements as well as traditional Hasidic Judaism. More importantly, they painted the consequences of Jewish cultural integration in a negative light (for Jews). Although the stories of Peretz, Sholem Aleichem, and Opatoshu are also ripe with social critique – from progressive perspectives in their case, – they are of a more ambiguous character; according to Resnick, Peretz condemned the backward social system that

²⁵⁴ J. N. Bialik, “Poemas,” *JUDAICA* 13 (July, 1934): 5-9. J. N. Bialik, “Don Quijote,” *JUDAICA* 13 (July, 1934): 10-14. J. N. Bialik, “La Mischna,” *JUDAICA* 13 (July, 1934): 14-15.

²⁵⁵ See: Mikhail Krutikov, *Yiddish Fiction and the Crisis of Modernity, 1905-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). Ken Frieden, *Classic Yiddish Fiction: Abramovitsh, Sholem Aleichem, & Peretz* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

subjugated Jewish religious women and the Jewish poor, but at the same time lovingly recreated Hasidic legends, valuing them as portraits of the Jewish spirit.²⁵⁶

Resnick had a soft spot for center-left and even leftist authors: he even translated stories by communist true believer David Bergelson, who immigrated to the USSR in the interwar years. The editor's short introductory essay to the author defended the literary quality – although not the proselytizing character – of a propaganda novel that Bergelson wrote about the Jewish colonization of the Jewish Autonomous Region of Birobidzhan, in a remote area of Russian Siberia.²⁵⁷ An ideological preference, however, cannot explain the absence of the Singer brothers from *JUDAICA*: despite his sympathies for Labour Zionism and Socialist-Zionism, Resnick printed the contributions of Aaron Spivak – a firebrand member of Revisionist Zionism, the extreme right wing of the movement – about news and political analysis from Palestine.²⁵⁸ The editor himself translated two essays by Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the founder of Revisionism, for issue 84, an edition unofficially devoted to the Zionist leader.²⁵⁹

Taking into account Resnick's ideological pluralism (at least when it came to his curatorial decision-making), the strongest argument for why he excluded certain world-renowned authors lies in the types of Jewish characters that populated their works. Israel Joshua Singer's stories and novels were famous for their consistently negative portrayals of Eastern European Jewish types (whether Hasidic, Zionists, Bundists, Yiddish secularists, or Socialists; rich, middle-class, or poor) and a pessimistic critique of what he

²⁵⁶ Salomón Resnick, "Presentación de I. L. Péretz," *JUDAICA* 80-81: 50-67.

²⁵⁷ Salomón Resnick, "David Bergelson," *JUDAICA* 85 (July, 1940): 15-19.

²⁵⁸ Aaron Spivak, "El porvenir de la fe," *JUDAICA* 1 (July, 1933): 4-11; *JUDAICA* 2 (August, 1933): 60-69. Aaron Spivak, "La realidad sionista," *JUDAICA* 6 (December, 1933): 256-265.

²⁵⁹ W. Jabotinsky, "Cuando el mundo era joven," *JUDAICA* 84 (June, 1940): 259-264. W. Jabotinsky, "Sus hijos y los nuestros (a propósito del suicidio del hijo y la hija de Herzl)," *JUDAICA* 84 (June, 1940): 264-268.

saw as the Jewish search for a solution – whether religious, social, political, or historical – to their wanderings and suffering.²⁶⁰ His brother, award-winning writer Isaac Bashevis Singer, condemned the entire project of the Jewish Enlightenment and Jewish integration into their host societies as ethical corruption: accordingly, his characters are morally weak, sinners and criminals constantly surrendering to lust and temptation.²⁶¹

As shown earlier, the central criticism that *JUDAICA*'s reviewer Portnoy leveled against a Spanish translation of Joseph Opatoshu's *The Horse Thief* was that the book's main character "cannot elevate, but rather will demean the concept of the Jewish people in the eyes of the Christians..."²⁶² Resnick, who shared the curatorial standards of his literary critic, applied it to select which works by which authors to translate into Spanish. Although success and renown, as well as writing skill and "translatability," certainly took part in his criterion, the perceived effect of a piece on "the concept of the Jewish people in the eyes of the [non-Jewish Argentine elites]" became the most important consideration.

Simply because the *JUDAICA*'s critic deemed one story or novel unsuitable for translation and publication did not mean that the rest of an author's corpus was immediately disqualified. Despite the journal's negative review of Sem's book, Resnick favored the writing style, themes (old life in Europe and Jewish integration in American society), and sensibility of an author like Opatoshu. He took it upon himself to re-introduce the work of this Jewish-American author on the pages of his journal.

²⁶⁰ www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Singer_Israel_Joshua (accessed June 22, 2015), based on Zaynvl Diamant, "Zinger, Yisroel-Yeshue," in *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literature*, vol 3, ed. Samuel Niger et al (New York: YIVO, 1960), 640-646.

²⁶¹ Haike Beruriah Wiegand, "Recent Critical Approaches to the Work of Isaac Bashevis Singer: A Review Article," *The Modern Language Review* 103, no. 3 (2008): 800-806.

²⁶² Portnoy, "El ladrón de caballos..." 225. My translation from the original Spanish.

JUDAICA's founder applied his curatorial experience to select the stories better suited for his (both Jewish and non-Jewish) Argentine target readership. Resnick personally translated and published two of Opatoshu's stories in 1939 ("La máquina" and "La señora Marchese"), and another two the following year ("En el destierro" and "Posteridad").²⁶³

The case of Sholem Asch in translation is particularly illuminating in that it highlights the role of the local Argentine context in the journal's curatorial choices. This author combined political conservatism, in the form of a rejection of Socialism and the Russian Revolution, with a vivid portrayal of the tribulations of immigrant Jews trying to adapt to the American reality. An *avant-garde* Yiddish author, Asch's thematic range extended from idealistic depictions of pious Hasidic Judaism to vivid scenes of "sexual depravity" that took place in brothels.

Asch's work led to moral condemnations and even public scandal in at least two occasions. His 1916 novel, *Motke the Thief*, had enraged his most moralistic critics because the main character and his lover – both Jewish – became, respectively, a pimp and a madam. Years later, the Broadway debut of his play *God of Vengeance* in 1927 – set in a brothel, and openly featuring a lesbian relationship – ended up with the whole cast arrested and prosecuted on obscenity charges. Neither development dissuaded Resnick from carefully curating and translating into Spanish a volume of Asch's short stories in 1928. However – and despite an anthology of already translated stories to borrow from –, the editor did not include Asch's pieces in *JUDAICA* for years.

²⁶³ Opatoshu, José, "La máquina," *JUDAICA* 73-75 (July-September, 1939): 47-49; Opatoshu, "La señora Marchese," *JUDAICA* 78 (December, 1939): 216-219; Opatoshu, "En el destierro," *JUDAICA* 82 (April, 1940): 162-164; Opatoshu, "Posteridad," *JUDAICA* 89 (November, 1940): 197-200.

The explanation for Resnick's change of heart about Asch's stories can be found in the Argentine newspapers of 1930. That September, at the end of a year-long investigation, the federal judiciary dismantled a transnational network of Jewish sex-traffickers that brought Jewish women from Eastern Europe – mostly Poland – and forced them into prostitution in Argentina (as well as Uruguay and Brazil). Although the members of this organization, called “Zwi Migdal” in its last iteration, had long been shunned and excluded from Jewish-Argentine community life (to the point where, banned from the Ashkenazi cemeteries, the pimps had established their own burial association), the crackdown and months-long investigation fed the scandal-hungry front pages of Spanish-language newspapers with issue after issue of dramatic headlines, photographs, and testimony.²⁶⁴

Jewish-Argentines were far from the only minority to count pimps among their numbers. However, no criminal organization from any other ethnic group drew as much publicity in the country's press as “Zwi Migdal.” Argentine nativists, anti-immigration activists, and anti-Semites exploited the visibility of the case to argue for the intrinsic moral degeneracy of all Jews, their negative influence on the national spirit, and the general undesirability of the “race.”²⁶⁵

This charged local context, particularly sensitive to any real or fictional links between Jews and prostitution, explains why Resnick adjusted his curatorial criterion vis-à-vis the works of Sholem Asch. Before 1930, the author's penchant for developing his

²⁶⁴ Donna Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1991). Sandra McGee-Deutsch, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation. A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880-1955* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010),

²⁶⁵ Leonardo Senknam and Saúl Sosnowski, *Fascismo y nazismo en las letras argentinas* (Buenos Aires: Lumière, 2009).

plays and novels in risqué settings like brothels signaled his status as an *avant-garde* figure. However, highlighting his work after the “Zwi Migdal” scandal could have provided rhetorical munition for those arguing that all Jewish-Argentines (in fact, all Jews) shared a racial collective propensity towards sexual and financial immorality. Resnick saw Asch’s fame itself as a risk: he even avoided republishing those stories he had curated and translated in 1928.

This cautious attitude towards Asch changed in 1940, although the role of defender of the author in the pages of *JUDAICA* did not fall on Resnick, but on Samuel Glusberg. Even then, Glusberg – a Spanish-language author and devoted editor then residing in Chile – signed with his nom-de-plum, “Enrique Espinoza.” His essay defended *The Nazarene*, the latest historical novel of the Yiddish author exiled in New York, after that city’s Socialist-leaning Jewish daily *Forverts* refused to publish it. The rejection by the then most widely read Yiddish periodical in the United States, where Asch had been a contributor for three decades, quickly escalated into a large campaign of denunciation by Jewish-American media and institutions. The novel was rejected by Yiddish presses along the western hemisphere, although its English version gained wide acclaim with the American public and critics.

Glusberg accused the Jewish campaigners against Asch of religious orthodoxy and zealotry, and compared their treatment of the author to the shunning, or excommunication, of philosopher Baruch Spinoza (whose last name Glusberg borrowed for his pseudonym) by the Sephardic community of Amsterdam in the XVII century.²⁶⁶ *The Nazarene* explores the life of rabbi Yeshua ben Joseph (better known as Jesus Christ)

²⁶⁶ Enrique Espinoza, “‘El Nazareno’ de Scholem Asch,” *JUDAICA* 82 (April, 1940): 149-151, 150.

as a Jewish religious leader defying the religious powers of his time. Academics have interpreted Asch's work as an attempt to reclaim Jesus's origins and relationship with Jewish belief and practice, a way to bridge the gap between Christianity and Judaism. His opponents within the Jewish-American intelligentsia accused him of converting to Christianity and luring Jewish children to follow in his footsteps.²⁶⁷ *JUDAICA* accompanied Glusberg's defense with the first chapter of the novel, which Glusberg and his wife translated into Spanish from the English version.²⁶⁸

What led Resnick to print a defense of Asch and a fragment of *The Nazarene*, reversing his previous rationale of cautious silence? First, ten years separated the "Zwi Migdal" scandal to the author's latest novel, which led to the perception of decreased risk. Second, the uproar about Asch's latest book lacked any sexual character, and was entirely intra-ethnic: (non-Jewish) American readers had supported the author overwhelmingly, the critical reviews in major American periodicals had lauded the exercise of historical fiction, and the English version of *The Nazarene* quickly became Asch's best-selling work. This meant that the odds of a Spanish version of the novel becoming fodder for anti-Semitic propaganda were remote. Resnick deemed intra-communitarian condemnation and outrage to be a manageable problem compared with a broader scandal that could jeopardize his project.

Despite this calculation, Resnick still felt it necessary to distance his periodical from Glusberg's defense of Asch. The editor had worked for transnational Jewish organizations based in the United States, such as the American Joint Distribution

²⁶⁷ Herman Lieberman, *The Christianity of Sholem Asch* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953). Quoted in Ellen Umansky, "Asch's Passion," *Tablet Magazine*, April 24, 2007, <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/books/801/aschs-passion> (accessed October 9, 2015).

²⁶⁸ Scholem Asch, "El Nazareno," *JUDAICA* 82 (April, 1940): 152-161.

Committee. His relationship with Jewish-American institutions explains why Resnick went out of his way to signal that publishing Glusberg's essay did not mean an endorsement of its contents. The work's only footnote, signed by "*JUDAICA*'s staff," stated the journal's disagreement with Glusberg and stated that Asch's Jewish critics were not following the directions of any "church" – literal or metaphorical, – but that they had their own reasons ("reasons that have no place in this article") to repudiate his work.²⁶⁹ The reasons alluded in the cryptic footnote were likely the particular timing of the novel's publication, 1939, at the onset of the Second World War. Jewish-American organizations and periodicals were focused on closing ranks and establishing a uniform voice to assist the Jews of Europe and influence American public opinion against the Nazi government and for intervention, and, in this context, they deemed Asch's work to be divisive.²⁷⁰

Non-Fiction: Borrowing Authority, Establishing Contributions

JUDAICA published both exclusive as well as translated and reprinted essays. The staff drew from published pieces in Yiddish, Hebrew, English, Russian, German, and French. Their choice was only limited by two factors: first, the availability of the desired kind of article in a given language – that is, a function of the size of the Jewish press in said language, and the visibility of writers sympathetic to Jews and/or opposed to anti-Semitism within that language's periodicals and printing houses. Second, the accessibility of those articles for *JUDAICA* – mostly a factor of the availability of foreign language

²⁶⁹ Enrique Espinoza, "El Nazareno..." 150, note 1.

²⁷⁰ Ellen Umansky, "Asch's Passion," *Tablet Magazine*, April 24, 2007, <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/books/801/aschs-passion> (accessed October 9, 2015).

periodicals in Buenos Aires and of translators of that language. Resnick's participation in transnational intellectual networks facilitated access: the editor regularly corresponded with contributors, editors, and readers of periodicals in different countries and languages, and his journal's office regularly received international books and magazines.

For languages other than Yiddish, Resnick delegated the translation to his contributors. Here he was constrained by his ability to find women and men with the right linguistic skills; this resulted in uneven quality of translations. For example, the editor ceded the editorial space of *JUDAICA* 8, printed in February, 1934, to an article by Jewish-German journalist and writer, Joseph Roth. Written from his Parisian exile, "The Auto-da-fé of the Mind" was a *cri de coeur* denouncing National-Socialism's hostility to the European spirit. The author predicted that the public book burnings and persecution of Jewish and liberal intellectuals were only the first battle of the mechanized barbarians against Europe. Although Roth typically wrote in German, he published this essay in French in 1933; Resnick resorted to Raquel Schuster de Levit, an unknown and apparently amateur translator. Her work on Roth's piece was far from perfect, beginning with a mistranslation of the title itself, which was published as "El auto de Fe del Espíritu" (The Auto-da-fé of the Spirit). Although "*l'esprit*" could be translated as either "spirit" or "mind," the context makes it clear that the author aimed at the latter meaning.²⁷¹

Nobel Laureates, Ancient Hebrews, and Jewish Gauchos: or Why You Should Stop Worrying and Love the Jews

²⁷¹ Joseph Roth, "El Auto da Fe del Espíritu," *JUDAICA* 8 (February, 1934): 49-57.

Most articles in *JUDAICA* – whether original content or translated reprints – sought to promote one aspect or another of Jewish history, recent as well as ancient. Usual topics included histories of Jewish communities in the Americas and the world; Jewish contributions to an academic, cultural, or scientific field (from biblical times to the modern era); and biographical essays of relatively famous, little-known, and outright obscure Jews. Although, taken separately, these essays were unlikely to sway a reader’s mind, they had an aggregate effect, and formed a relentless influx of positive examples, images, and stereotypes.

The essays on Jewish contributions to different scholarly, artistic, and scientific fields constructed a counter-narrative to anti-Semitic claims of the negative impact of Jewish immigration and the group’s alien, harmful character. *JUDAICA* printed three articles on the role of Jews in German health sciences, two on Jewish contributions to European music, and at least one on Jewish philosophers.²⁷² For example, Melekh Khmelnitzky’s essay was a long, detailed listing of the discoveries and contributions of Jewish-German doctors. The piece included a mention of the Jewish doctors persecuted, fired, and expelled from Germany, along with their scientific discoveries. The author also devoted a special paragraph to the Jewish laureates of the Nobel Prize. The essay finished with a comparison, noting that five out of nine German Nobel Prizes in Medicine belonged to Jews. The translator added a note to reinforce this comparison by

²⁷² For medicine, see: Ernesto Fraenkel, “Los judíos en la medicina alemana,” *JUDAICA* 5 (November, 1933): 198-204; J. B. Eiger, “Historia de los médicos judíos,” part I, *JUDAICA* 15 (September, 1934): 130-136. J. B. Eiger, “Historia de los médicos judíos,” part II, *JUDAICA* 16 (October, 1934): 177-185. J. B. Eiger, “Historia de los médicos judíos,” part III, *JUDAICA* 17 (November, 1934): 227-232; Melej Jmelnitzky, “Papel de los judíos alemanes en la medicina moderna,” *JUDAICA* 76 (October, 1939): 111-122. For the music articles, see: León Algazi, “Los judíos en la música francesa,” *JUDAICA* 8 (February, 1934): 62-71; David Ewen, “Nuevos compositores judíos,” *JUDAICA* 17 (November, 1934): 212-217. For philosophy, see: Abraham Aaron Roback, “Los judíos en la filosofía moderna,” *JUDAICA* 15 (October 1934): 97-110.

highlighting the overrepresentation of Jewish laureates compared to the tiny demographic presence of Jews in the German population.²⁷³

A similar kind of piece focused on a single Jewish academic, author, or sage. This biographical sketches, instead of painting a broad picture of the many Jews present in one field of knowledge, celebrated the qualities, genius, and contributions of a specific figure. The person described was often a historical character or a recently deceased contemporary. Slowly, essay by essay, *JUDAICA* built a constellation of Jewish artistic and intellectual might, chronologically diverse but centered mostly around Europe.

The renown of the men thus honored varied greatly, from obscure characters known only by those familiar with the world of Jewish periodicals to world-famous writers. *JUDAICA*, for example, published articles analyzing the writings and ideology of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, founder of right-wing Revisionist Zionism;²⁷⁴ lauding the literary genius of Haim Nahman Bialik, the most famous modern Hebrew poet;²⁷⁵ and welcoming the Spanish translation of *Main Currents in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, the magnum opus of Georg Brandes, the Jewish-Danish literary critic and scholar who founded the “Modern Breakthrough” movement in Scandinavian literature.²⁷⁶

Additionally, Resnick wrote and commissioned biographical pieces as obituaries to relatively unknown activists and scholars of Jewish culture. Although these articles

²⁷³ Jmelnitzky, “Papel de los judíos alemanes en la medicina moderna...”

²⁷⁴ Sanson Lissin, “La sinceridad de Jabotinsky,” *JUDAICA* 84 (June, 1940): 252-253. A. Milleritzky, “Rabi Zeev Jabotinsky,” *JUDAICA* 84 (June, 1940): 254-258.

²⁷⁵ José Mendelson, “Bialik, poeta y prosista,” *JUDAICA* 13 (July, 1934): 16-19. Saúl Chernijovsky, “Bialik: el artifice de la forma,” *JUDAICA* 13 (July, 1934): 20-22. Jacobo Botoschansky, “Algunos recuerdos sobre J. N. Bialik” *JUDAICA* 13 (July, 1934): 23-28. Isaac Isaacson, “Significación de Bialik,” *JUDAICA* 13 (July, 1934): 29-32. Alberto Hazán, “Bialik, poeta nacional,” *JUDAICA* 13 (July, 1934): 33-40. Máximo Yagupsky, “Bialik, el maestro,” *JUDAICA* 13 (July, 1934): 41-44. R. Rilov, “Jaim Najman Bialik,” *JUDAICA* 13 (July, 1934): 45-48.

²⁷⁶ Antonio Portnoy, “Jorge Brandes (a propósito de la primera versión castellana de su obra maestra),” *JUDAICA* 3 (September, 1933): 106-114.

added to the volume of disseminated knowledge about Jewish intellectuals and their work, they must also be read as an outcrop of the editor's effort to vindicate the cultural labor that took place "backstage." Like Resnick's insistence on adding the name of the translators to the pieces they rendered into Spanish, these essays provided public recognition to activists and intellectuals who devoted their lives to the heavy lifting of Jewish cultural production from positions of limited visibility, such as translators, editors, publishers, and activists. For example, issue 87-88 included an article, penned by Resnick, to signal the passing of Saul Ginsburg, a journalist and historian. The honoree, a disciple of renowned historian Simon Dubnow, had been a publisher of Russian, Yiddish, and Hebrew.²⁷⁷

We are Here, We are Jewish-Latin Americans, Get Used to it

A specific subset of *JUDAICA*'s articles tackled the relationship of Jews and Jewish culture with Latin American and Hispanic (as well as indigenous) culture, in the present day as well as in colonial and mythologized pre-Columbian times. These non-fiction essays and fictional stories, besides adding to the conglomerate of material that constituted the journal's attempt at creating a positive image of Jews for its readers, sought to establish the legitimacy of Jewish presence in the Americas. Different pieces articulated diverse arguments and justifications with the same goal.

These essays traced cultural connections and exchanges between Sephardic (or *converso*) and Iberian, *criollo*, or indigenous traditions, establishing genealogies that tied Jews to Latin America and its native and peninsular roots. The emphasis on common

²⁷⁷ Salomón Resnick, "Saúl Guinzburg," *JUDAICA* 87-88 (September-October, 1940): 150-153. See also: Unsigned, "I. A. Merison. Su fallecimiento," *JUDAICA* 89 (November, 1940): 201-202.

ground and mutual interactions symbolically nullified the articulation of *criollo*, Catholic, and Iberian tradition into attacks on the Jews' "foreign" and "alien" character, and on their incompatibility with Argentine identity. Such a symbolic operation required a collapse of intra-Jewish difference, subsuming "Sephardic" and "Ashkenazi" categories into a broader homogenous Jewishness. However, *JUDAICA*'s inclusive understanding of Jewish tradition and the lack of differentiation in anti-Semitic constructions of the "Jew" made this strategy easier.

A subtype of this theme included essays that established a – real or imagined – Jewish presence in the Americas in colonial times, and on occasions even before the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors. This kind of argument sought to establish an origin myth that counteracted the accusation of Jews as recent-arrivals with no right to citizenship in the Latin American nations. Chapter 2 discussed similar appeals to mythological community origins in the radio show *Matinee Radial Hebrea*, as well as how this creation of origin myths in the Americas was a common pattern for minorities with a recent history of immigration (such as the Japanese, Koreans, and Armenian, for example), and common to immigrant communities in different countries in the region.²⁷⁸

JUDAICA published articles that advanced the myth of a Jewish presence in the viceroyalties of Peru and Mexico, in colonial Latin America. For example, an article about the modern Jewish community in Mexico included an introduction on colonial history. In his piece, Eduardo Weinfeld traced Jewish presence in Mexico back to the days of conquistadors, particularly to *adelantado* (a noble title that the Crown gave to those funding, organizing, and leading exploratory, military, and colonizing expeditions)

²⁷⁸ See Chapter 2. See also: Lesser, "How the Jews Became Japanese." Lafaye, *Quetzacoatl and Guadalupe*.

Luis de Carvajal and his descendants. The essay stated that the convert Carvajal family brought other New Christian families – all of whom, Weinfeld assumed, had to be crypto-Jews, since the conquistador and his nephew were tried by the Inquisition. The author then asserted – without offering evidence – that many descendants of colonial crypto-Jews remained in XX century Mexico, particularly among the elites. He thus created a genealogy that tied XIX and XX century Sephardic and Ashkenazi immigrants to the Spaniards who had first established a European presence in the Americas.²⁷⁹

Weinfeld's piece also provided information about the status of the modern Jewish community of Mexico, most of which had arrived only decades ago. He described the migratory process, the economic progress of Jewish-Mexicans, and the existence of anti-Semitism in the country since the Revolution.²⁸⁰ His essay broadened the geographical perspective on Jewish-Latin Americans beyond Argentina.²⁸¹

Not every piece providing a positive spin on Jewish presence in the Americas was journalistic or academic: a segment of *JUDAICA*'s fiction was also aimed at legitimizing Jewish-Latin Americans. Bolivian writer Porfirio Díaz Machicao sent Resnick a story, "El reino de la tierra" ("Kingdom of Earth"), the tale of a fictional Jewish refugee family. Young Esther and her father Rabin wandered from country to country, their entrance barred in every port. The author's fractured narrative works as a device to transmit rootlessness. They finally arrived in Bolivia, one of the few countries still open to

²⁷⁹ Eduardo Weinfeld, "Los judíos en México," *JUDAICA* 85 (July, 1940): 3-14. For the case of Peru, see: C. García Rosell, "Montesinos y sus memorias historiales," *JUDAICA* 87-88 (September-October, 1940): 161-162; César Rosell, "Los judíos en el antiguo Perú," *JUDAICA* 85 (July, 1940): 42-43.

²⁸⁰ Weinfeld, "Los judíos en México."

²⁸¹ For an essay of the Jewish refugee colony in the Dominican Republic, see: Ernst Schwartz, "La colonia de refugiados en Sosua, República Dominicana," *JUDAICA* 89 (November, 1940), 194-196.

immigration in the 1930s and 1940s, which received a small stream of Jewish refugees.²⁸²

Esther met and fell in love with “el indio Gutiérrez,” a Bolivian of indigenous ancestry, and soon became one with her new Bolivian homeland: Jewish Esther “already smells like *achiras*,²⁸³ tastes of tangerines, and has the rhythm of *yaravi* or *kaluyo*²⁸⁴ ...”²⁸⁵

Although most of Bolivia’s Jewish population left the country after the war, Díaz Machicao’s story crafted a narrative of successful integration, where Esther became fully Bolivian while remaining Jewish. Her coupling with “el indio Gutiérrez” symbolized the development of Jewish-Bolivianness. Esther was still worried that “there are still those among you who do not want us,” but Gutiérrez told her not to worry, and to “love [him] as the best Bolivian,” for he was a new man.²⁸⁶

Finally, *JUDAICA* published essays that established points of contact and hybridity between Jewish and Iberian culture and tradition. Most of these pieces focused on Spain in the early and late Middle Ages – before the expulsion of Jews and Muslims of 1492, – a period of symbolic importance to the cultural and identitary construction of *Hispanismo*, an ideology embraced by many within the Argentine elite. Both nativist and liberal writers based their understanding of Argentine identity on the colonial heritage, linked to Iberian cultural and religious production in the Middle Ages and the “*Siglo de Oro*” of the XVI and XVII centuries.²⁸⁷

A typical example of this essay is Alberto Gerchunoff’s “The Jewish Spirit in

²⁸² Leo Spitzer, *Hotel Bolivia: The Culture of Memory in a Refuge from Nazism* (New York: Hill and Want, 1999).

²⁸³ “Achira” is a leafy, fragrant plant with red or yellow flowers, used ornamentally and as a folk remedy.

²⁸⁴ “Yaravi” is a hybrid Incan-Spanish type of song, and “kaluyo” is an Andean musical genre.

²⁸⁵285 Porfirio Díaz Machicao, “El reino de la tierra,” *JUDAICA* 87-88 (September-October, 1940): 154-160, 159.

²⁸⁶ Díaz Machicao, “El reino de la tierra,” 155.

²⁸⁷ See: Esquivel-Suárez, “Españoles trasplantados.”

Spanish Culture,” published in the pages of *JUDAICA* in October, 1940. The author of *Los gauchos judíos* traced Jewish presence in Spain to antiquity, and constructed a mythical idyllic cohabitation between Jews and Christian, with both groups living in harmonious coexistence. The writer admitted that medieval Spanish law included several examples of anti-Jewish legislation, but argued that these measures had been codified to satisfy the uneasiness of Catholic clergy, afraid that collegial proximity would lead Christians to convert to Judaism. The author insisted these laws were rarely enforced. Fiery, passionate impulses towards generosity and hospitality were, he added, part of the Iberian Christian nature. Thus, he established friendly coexistence and tolerance as essential characteristics of a mythic, foundational Hispanic identity, implicitly labeling the chauvinism and nativist zeal of XX century anti-Jewish activists as un-Hispanic.²⁸⁸

Gerchunoff argued that medieval Jews had ample participation in the spiritual and intellectual developments of the Spanish kingdoms, such as Castile and Cataluña. Jewish philosophers and writers, he added, had been essential in the development of “Hispanic culture and the Castilian language”²⁸⁹ in fields as varied as philosophy, poetry, religion, and even agriculture. The author described this peaceful and productive coexistence as a natural evolution, and had required the artificial intervention of the state to be broken.

The essayist finished with a broader argument that linked his piece directly to the Argentine context: such a coexistence was not unique to Spain, but “natural” in the interactions between Jewish and Christian people. “The Jews had a home in Spain and gifted it with the best that they have, like they have always done with the lands that

²⁸⁸ Alberto Gerchunoff, “El espíritu judío en la cultura española,” *JUDAICA* 87-88 (September-October, 1940): 142-149.

²⁸⁹ Gerchunoff, “El espíritu judío en la cultura española,” 146.

offered them hospitality [...]”²⁹⁰ Unsaid, but hardly unclear, was the promise of all that the Jews could do for Argentina, if only they were allowed to integrate.

A recurring theme in *JUDAICA*’s legitimizing arguments of Jewish presence and of the validity of hyphenated identities owed much to Gernchunoff’s work as a novelist. The writer had been the central promoter of the myth of the “Jewish gauchos” with his homonymous novel published in 1910, on the centennial of Argentine independence.²⁹¹ The introduction as well as Chapters 1 and 2 of this dissertation discuss how the symbolic “Jewish gaucho” attached itself to the also mythical roaming frontiersmen of the Pampas, perhaps the most influential icons of Argentineness.²⁹² At the center of this construction laid the Jewish agricultural colonies of the interior, established in Argentina in the late XIX century through the work of magnate Baron Maurice de Hirsch. The settlers arrived from the Russian empire via his Jewish Colonization Association (JCA). Although numerically trivial relative to the Jewish population of Argentina’s urban centers, the colonists had an immense symbolic significance: their presence not only tied Jewish-Argentines to agriculture, the base of the national economy and romanticized identity, but also protected them from the accusation of being classless speculators and exploiters of the work of others.²⁹³

The journal devoted the entirety of issue 18, from December, 1934, to “the Jewish colonization in Argentina.”²⁹⁴ Former administrators of the JCA as well as activists and intellectuals wrote about different aspects of the enterprise, including historical

²⁹⁰ Gerchunoff, “El espíritu judío en la cultura española,” 149.

²⁹¹ Leonardo Senknam, *La identidad judía en la literatura argentina* (Buenos Aires: Pardés SRL, 1983).

²⁹² Introduction, Chapter 1, Chapter 2.

²⁹³ Judith Noemí Freidenberg, *The Invention of the Jewish Gaucho: Villa Clara and the Construction of Argentine Identity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).

²⁹⁴ Cover, *JUDAICA* 18 (December, 1934).

summaries, a biography of Baron Hirsch, and essays on agricultural cooperatives, the establishment of Jewish rural schools, and the least-known and smallest colony in the remote area of the Argentine Chaco.²⁹⁵ The issue also contained primary sources from the JCA project, including untranslated letters in Yiddish in French (as well as others in Spanish), the only instance of documents printed entirely in another language in the journal.

JUDAICA also dedicated a sizable part of the last two issues of 1940 to summarize, review, and publicize the bilingual volume *Cincuenta años de vida judía en Argentina: Homenaje a "El Diario Israelita" en su vigésimo aniversario*, a massive book that gathered essays about different aspects of Jewish-Argentine life. In *JUDAICA*'s summaries, even more than in the actual book, the numbers of essays and pages devoted to the agricultural colonies greatly surpassed those assigned to city-dwellers, even though the latter group made up most of the Jewish-Argentine population. When it came to reproducing and reinforcing the legitimizing myth of the "Jewish gaucho," as well as overstating the numerical, economic, and technical impact of the agrarian Jew, the journal did not stray from the central community institutions or, for that matter, popular radio shows like *Matinee Radial Hebrea*. The only clear difference was the heavy intellectual slant of *JUDAICA*'s dissemination efforts, as evinced by the inclusion of primary documents and letters in three different languages.

²⁹⁵ Narcisse Leven, "Orígenes de la colonización judía en la Argentina," *JUDAICA* 18 (December, 1934): 243-253. Naúm Kreichmar, "La evolución de las colonias," *JUDAICA* 18 (December, 1934): 261-271. Salomón Resnick, "Ubicación del Barón Hirsch," *JUDAICA* 18 (December, 1934): 256-260. Isaac Kaplan, "La cooperación agrícola en las colonias judías," *JUDAICA* 18 (December, 1934): 272-279. Jedidia Efrón, "La obra educacional de la J. C. A.," *JUDAICA* 18 (December, 1934): 289-297. Meier Bursuck, "Los colonos judíos del Chaco," *JUDAICA* 18 (December, 1934): 281-286.

Life on the Hyphen: Bridging the Gap between Yiddishists and Integrationists

Resnick's particular understanding of the relationship between language, culture, and identity led him to a new ideological synthesis. *JUDAICA*'s double focus on Jewish cultural and literary tradition as well as on the Spanish language and the Argentine context brought together two previously antagonistic conceptions of Jewish and Argentine identity. Curated translation, the central piece of the journal's project, bridged the apparent chasm between the language-centric Yiddishists and the integrationist faction, focused on adapting to the Argentine context.

The second issue of *JUDAICA* opened with the first part (of three) of a long historical essay by Resnick devoted to the linguistic evolution of the Jewish people. The journal's editor stated the main idea of his study in the first paragraphs:²⁹⁶

[...] Although, during their long wandering of the Earth, Jews demonstrated a heroic resistance to being absorbed by other peoples, they have however shown a remarkable tendency towards linguistic assimilation. What they were unwilling to allow in the racial dimension, they accepted in the linguistic one. There is probably no other nation that changed its language more often and with more ease. [...] More than the outside trappings, fundamental to other nations, Israel was interested in preserving the Jewish spirit, incarnated, until this century, in religion. The [issue of] national language, thus, never had for [Jews] the transcendental importance it had for other nations. This explains why what we can properly call Jewish literature is expressed in several languages, both ancient and new, and not only in Hebrew. [...] Until its actual resurrection in Palestine, Hebrew had been reduced to a holy tongue, [used in the] synagogue [...] In some cases, the language Jews adopted did not suffer any fundamental alterations in its structure, such as the cases of Greek and Arabic; other times, it was slightly modified, mostly by the incorporation of the Hebrew alphabet and terminology, as it happened with Aramaic, Persian, Judeo-Spanish, and – perhaps most noticeably – with Yiddish. All of these languages have left lasting marks in Jewish literature, which is essentially polyglot. [...] Geographic dispersion engendered linguistic diversity, which became from then on a salient characteristic of

²⁹⁶ Salomón Resnick, “La evolución idiomática de los judíos,” part 1, *JUDAICA* 2 (August, 1933): 49-57; Resnick, “La evolución idiomática de los judíos,” part 2, *JUDAICA* 3 (September, 1933): 118-126; Resnick, “La evolución idiomática de los judíos,” part 3, *JUDAICA* 4 (October, 1933): 155-159.

Jewishness.²⁹⁷

In the above fragment, Resnick established a clear separation between Jewish identity and Jewish languages: the latter, he claimed, were nothing but “outside trappings” lacking “transcendental importance” compared to the “Jewish spirit,” which once was exclusively religious but now had exceeded those limitations. The article even stated not only how language was expendable and unrelated to the core of Jewishness, but also how linguistic plasticity – the ability to adapt to new languages and even abandon old ones – had become an eminently Jewish characteristic, the trait that had made possible the survival of Jewish particularity throughout millennia of stateless wandering and foreign domination. Implicit in this argument (and made explicit later in the text) was the coda that translation had been – and remained – an essential component of Jewish linguistic plasticity.

Although in the second and third parts Resnick granted the apparently exceptional status of Yiddish and, to a lesser and decreasing degree, Ladino, as languages that had taken root deeply with Jews in specific geographic-cultural regions, the translator argued that maintaining this exceptionality required the continued development of a literature. Otherwise, the educated circles as well as the new generations gravitated towards other languages with more to offer than nostalgia.²⁹⁸ Ultimately, the survival of a linguistic tradition depended on the will of the masses and a favorable sociocultural context:

[...] You cannot extirpate a language or impose another by academic decision. Human groups create their dialects, form their languages, and cultivate them lovingly despite all their defects, *while historical circumstance allows*, paying no mind to the elevated disquisitions of

²⁹⁷ Resnick, “La evolución idiomática de los judíos,” part 1, 49-50. My translation from Spanish.

²⁹⁸ Resnick, “La evolución idiomática del pueblo judío,” part 3, 156.

philologists.²⁹⁹

Here, the author's argument carried an unstated implication: the desires of a fraction of linguistic activists, no matter how devoted, could only succeed with massive popular support and a favorable historical framework. A blind and rigid adherence to the "outside trappings" of a language, no matter how Jewish its enthusiasts deemed it to be, risked endangering the survival of its contents, the cultural core of Jewishness.

With this conceptualization, Resnick established a synthesis that reimagined the meaning of Jewish culture and identity. In this essay, the founder of *JUDAICA* justified his position as intellectual, translator, and activist by establishing a genealogy that tied his understanding of Jewish identity to the origin of Jews as an exiled people. This construction tied the survival of Jews as a stateless, wandering group, which Resnick tied to the Biblical days of the Babylonian exile, to their polyglot character, re-interpreting linguistic plasticity as a "Jewish" trait. This mythology could resonate culturally and historically with readers with immigrant backgrounds.

The author's conceptualization of language and its relation to culture and ethnic belonging, with translation as its core strategy as well as ideological driving force, permeate the essay despite the author's façade of objective, academic erudition. Although Resnick did not state his views on the issue of language in Argentina – he merely mentions the country as one of many with an active Yiddish press,³⁰⁰ – the article provides the structure for the author's historical analysis and his proposed strategy for establishing Jewish-Argentineness. The construction of linguistic plasticity as a Jewish

²⁹⁹ Resnick, "La evolución idiomática del pueblo judío," part 3, 159. My translation from Spanish (my Italics).

³⁰⁰ Resnick, "La evolución idiomática del pueblo judío," part 2, 126.

trait that enabled the preservation and development of Jewish culture since biblical times became an argument from tradition that bolstered the translation-based approach of *JUDAICA*.

The historical-linguistic essay articulated the understanding of culture and identity behind Resnick's project. The magazine's two linked goals, as well as each goal's target audience as identified by Resnick – that is, local-born Jewish-Argentine youth and the Argentine intellectual elite – tackled two of the central questions that different ideological factions within the Jewish-Argentine community – Yiddishists and integrationists – sought to address. The first of these was the fear of assimilation, an anxiety born from the disappearance of external legal barriers keeping Jews segregated from non-Jewish society. With these restrictions lifted, it was up to the Jews themselves to maintain ethnic cohesiveness and cultural continuity in the face of centripetal social forces and the agenda of government institutions. The second issue, legitimizing Jewish presence in the country, entailed convincing the nation's decision-makers and cultural agents that it was positive and desirable not only to have Jews as citizens, but also to allow them to retain their "Jewish" character, becoming hyphenated Argentines.

The transplantation and dissemination of Eastern European Yiddish literature and culture, the journal's proposed solution, was in many ways a synthesis of the apparently antithetical positions of Yiddishists and integrationists. Translation became Resnick's key element to bridge the distance between them. While these groups shared the anxieties about the future of Jewish life in Argentina as well as the character of such life, each faction had its own institutions, interlocutors, and even public languages. A further difference between Yiddishists and integrationists was that, while the former group was

particularly focused on the perceived threat of assimilation, the latter's main worry was the successful incorporation of Jews into the many facets of Argentine society.

Yiddishists, more influential with immigrants from Eastern Europe than with local-born Jewish-Argentines, saw language as the central load-bearing column in a cohesive cultural structure at the heart of (Eastern European) Jewishness. This understanding was intimately linked to the Yiddish language itself, where the term "Yiddish" means both the adjective "Jewish" and the language "Yiddish." All across Eastern Europe – where emancipation and civil equality were either unfulfilled promises or works in progress, – Jews learned the official national language, yet retained Yiddish as their own tongue, the dialect of the home, the street, and the shop.

Like other immigrant groups, Eastern European Jewish immigrants in Buenos Aires had built cultural organizations, libraries, educational establishment, publishing houses, and periodicals that relied on their mother tongue. For many factions all across the political and ideological spectrum (Hasidim and Orthodox Jews, Communists, Bundists, and even certain Socialist-Zionist parties), Yiddish was more than a means of communication: it was inseparable from Jewish identity itself. As such, loss of the language was equated with dreaded assimilation. For them, there was no *Yiddishkayt* (the Yiddish term for Jewishness) without Yiddish.

This is not to say that the steadfast supporters of Yiddish were unconcerned with potential hostility and rejection from non-Jews. For starters, they did not object to Spanish; nor could they, considering they lived, worked, and shopped in a Spanish-speaking environment, and their children attended mandatory Argentine public education. In practice, this meant that committed Yiddish-speakers operated bilingually, with

Yiddish – a new Argentine Yiddish that incorporated Spanish loanwords and local slang – as the private ethnic language and Spanish as the means of communication with non-Jews. The linguistic deployment of the *Matinee Radial Hebrea* radio show, discussed in Chapter 2, is an example of such bilingualism.³⁰¹

Yiddishist activism focused on teaching Yiddish language and culture to the local-born generations. Yiddish language dailies, like *Di Presse* and *Di Yiddishe Tzaytung*, as well as journals like *Der Spiegel*, abound with editorials that alternate between exaltations of the cultural work of new organizations with denunciations of insufficient activism and community collaboration. Periodical *cris du coeur* called for renewed efforts to stem the perceived tide of trans-generational assimilation.

The steadfast, rigid defense and support for Yiddish was both a strength and a weakness of Yiddishism. The faction's reaction to local-born generations of Jewish-Argentines being more familiar with Spanish was to redouble their educational and cultural efforts without switching strategies. Their conceptualization of Yiddish as a vital, core component of Jewish identity made them unable to adapt to the trans-generational loss of the language or to see this change as anything other than a total erasure of Jewish identity. Chapter 2 analyzed how Samuel Glasserman's *Matinee Radial Hebrea* sought to solve this challenge with a different strategy: faced with the eventual disappearance of Yiddish as the language of Jewish-Argentine youth, the radio show shifted focus from the cultural-linguistic to the sociobiological realm, fostering an understanding of Jewishness based on ethnic sociability and reproduction, and opposition to intermarriage.³⁰²

A non-negotiable position on language also limited the possibilities and range of

³⁰¹ See Chapter 2.

³⁰² See chapter 2.

the activists' outreach towards non-Jews. The inaccessibility of Yiddish for those not of Eastern European descent created a semi-private ethnic sphere that allowed Jewish-Argentines to communicate without fear of outside judgment. However, this linguistic isolation also meant that any claims about the quality of their ethnic literary and cultural tradition had to be taken on faith by local elites. The hermetic quality of the Yiddish printed word also allowed anti-Jewish conspiratorial propaganda to make claims about Jewish secrecy, untrustworthiness, and unassimilability.

Matinee Radial Hebraea, the case study in Chapter 2, compensated for the limitations of Yiddish as a means for dissemination with a bilingual production. This allowed their host and artists to craft content targeting specific audiences through language selection. However, the show did not engage in anything like *JUDAICA*'s translation strategy; this resulted in parallel radio products offered in Yiddish and Spanish, with an emphasis on Spanish in an attempt to retain the attention and foster the hyphenated identities of local-born generations. Glasserman did not share Resnick's understanding of Jewish cultural and literal production as an outreach tool to influence the Jewish-Argentine youth and the local elites, so their strategies for establishing and reinforcing Jewish-Argentineness, as well as the character of these representations, differed for these activists and their media.³⁰³

Adherents to the integrationist field, many of whom congregated around the *Sociedad Hebraica Argentina* (SHA), operated at ease in the Spanish-speaking circles of Buenos Aires. Although they were for the most part educated and fluent in Yiddish, members of this group – whether local-born or immigrants – developed their professional

³⁰³ See chapter 2.

work and community activism in the host country's language. Scholars, artists, writers, and members of the liberal professions (graduated from Argentine universities), they were often involved in the Argentine cultural, literary, and political circles. A few writers, like Alberto Gerchunoff, César Tiempo, or Carlos Grünberg, effectively became renowned members of the unhyphenated Argentine intellectual elite. These men and women did not take part in the debates about the future of Jews in Argentina held in the Yiddish press. Instead, they had their own journals in Spanish, and the most famous members also wrote for the main national periodicals. Their language and their insider status with the liberal wing of the Argentine elite gave the integrationists a clear advantage in outreach and legitimization. In fact, non-Jewish scholars and authors regularly contributed to their periodicals and participated in their conference cycles.

Despite the outreach advantages of the integrationist faction, their approach to Jewish-Argentine identities did not account for strategies to curb assimilation. Although they could argue convincingly for the positive contributions of Jewish-Argentines, they did not offer many reasons why Jewish-Argentines should maintain their hyphenated identity. They did share, however, the concern about assimilation of Yiddishists. Most integrationists had received an education – religious in some cases, secular in others – that included Yiddish. Their position, however, for the most part assumed the survival of Jewish-Argentineness in younger generations and lacked a clear strategy against the perceived threat.

Salomon Resnick was in the unique situation of being close to both Yiddishist and integrationist positions, and aware of the perceived weaknesses with each group's understanding of Jewish-Argentine identity. *JUDAICA*, his publishing project, combined

what he saw as the strengths of both tendencies. Translation became Resnick's strategy to synthesize their approaches.

His association with the SHA taught Resnick the importance of Spanish as a vehicle to reach local-born generations of Jewish-Argentines and the national elites. His familiarity with Yiddish literary production convinced him of its value to win over the aforementioned groups. The *JUDAICA* project is therefore an ideal case study to analyze this synthesis as well as this particular articulation of culture, language, and identity.

Translation allowed Resnick to decouple Yiddish culture and literature from the Yiddish language, to conceive of a Yiddish-less *Yiddishkayt*. This operation, inconceivable to Yiddishist ideology, became the backbone of the *JUDAICA* gambit. Through careful selection of which works of Jewish literature to translate, and which parts of Jewish history and tradition to disseminate for its readership – including works in philosophy, religion, psychology, politics, and science, among other topics –, the monthly magazine projected a carefully supervised representation of Jewish culture. This curated Spanish-language Jewishness was meant to legitimize the Jewish presence in Argentina and simultaneously provide the core for the development of a Spanish-based Jewish-Argentine identity with roots that stretched across the Atlantic Ocean and through time.

The Ticking Clock: The Rise of Nazism and *JUDAICA*'s Sense of Urgency

The first issue of *JUDAICA* saw the light of day in July, 1933, less than half a year after German president Paul von Hindenburg named Adolf Hitler as his country's new chancellor. The following months saw the realization of fears of state-based persecution against Jews in Central Europe. A growing concern that Nazi ideology could

spread over Europe and even across the Atlantic Ocean gave a new sense of urgency to Resnick's project. It had suddenly become imperative to provide young Jewish-Argentines with a strong identity and sense of community and selves, and even more vital to win over the local elites to legitimize Jews as part of Argentine society and body politic.

The rise of Nazism first and the beginning of the Second World War six years later had a significant impact on the project of translation and production of Jewish-Argentine identity representations. The violent anti-Jewish discourse and actions of Hitler's Germany turned a rather abstract concern into a fight for survival. More importantly, it provided a tangible and visible antagonist, one that – as *JUDAICA* would argue – threatened not only Jews in Europe and the Americas, but “Western” society as an heir of the Enlightenment ideals. By the time Resnick's journal debuted in 1933, its mission, besides the positive goal of (re)producing Jewish culture in Spanish, became a fight against a declared enemy of Jews and anything coded as “Jewish.”

The irruption of National-Socialism as a global power and an expansive, militarist ideology with admirers and imitators in Argentina allowed *JUDAICA* to adopt a narrative that collapsed the defense of Jewish-Argentine identities with a broader struggle for “civilization” against “barbarism,” a language that resonated with founding discourses of Argentina.³⁰⁴ The new geopolitical context also led Resnick and his contributors to a strategy of painting local nationalists and anti-Semites as foreign infiltrators, agents of a European power with goals that were incompatible with the national interest. Hitler's political ascension facilitated the adoption of symbolic operations that sought to redefine

³⁰⁴ Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo, o civilización y barbarie* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 2011).

the meaning of Argentine identity to include ethnic minorities and exclude their foes.

This strategy was not exclusive to *JUDAICA*: Chapter 2 analyzed how the host of

Matinee Radial Hebrea deployed similar arguments on-air.

In his opening editorial, Resnick explained the urgency behind his project, and how the threat behind this urgency opened up opportunities:

The fateful events in Germany and the spread of xenophobia everywhere – even [to] an environment that, like the Argentine one, should be totally foreign to this hatred – logically provoke in Israelite³⁰⁵ youth a desire to reassert their historical feelings by reasserting racial consciousness... The Spanish-speaking Jewish youth longs more than ever to enter the cultural maze of [its] people, to connect [with its] fundamental problems, to be impregnated with Jewish knowledge; this is ultimately our only and most effective weapon in the fight against adversity.³⁰⁶

Increased persecution against Jews in Europe and a louder and more visible hostility in Argentina (or at least the perception of increased hostility) changed the situation that Resnick's original theorization sought to address. Structural factors that created long-term problems in a generation or two now posed an immediate, human-based threat. Rather than abstract, emotionless social forces like assimilation (forces, however, empowered by the state and its institutions and agents), European Jews and Jewish-Argentines could now put faces and names to their adversaries and their hatred.

The editorial identified a silver lining in the election of Hitler as German chancellor. While the rise of Nazism and its impact in the Americas made the situation dire for Jewish-Argentines (as well as Jews elsewhere), it also created the impulse to combat both hatred of Jews and the perceived threat of assimilation. Topics that were

³⁰⁵ *JUDAICA* and its contemporary Jewish periodicals and institutions often employed the term "israelita" (here translated as "Israelite" by Dujovne) as a common synonym for "Jewish" (my preferred translation).

³⁰⁶ Unsigned, "Presentación," *JUDAICA* 1 (1933), quoted in Dujovne, "The Books that Should Not be Missing." Translation by Alejandro Dujovne.

previously academic, the object of intellectual debate, became visible and concrete emergencies. According to *JUDAICA*'s editorial, the Jewish-Argentine youth, once unmoved by the warnings of parents and activists about assimilation and the loss of their ethnic identity, felt drawn to stress their Jewishness and learn their history and cultural tradition. The community's intellectuals, scholars, and activists would be remiss to ignore what was simultaneously an opportunity and a threat. Resnick saw it as his duty to push the various actors into action – particularly the slow and noncommittal local institutions.

The staff of *JUDAICA* conceived of the journal as a model for addressing these challenges. Its monthly articles, stories, poetry, and book reviews became vehicles for establishing the valuable Jewish contributions to philosophical, cultural, literary, and scientific progress throughout history, as well as to signal the growing role of Jewish-Argentines in advancing their nation's cultural and material interests. The journal turned its editorial pages into a favored space to defend Jewish character in general and Jewish-Argentine patriotism in particular, and into the launch site of rhetorical attacks against Nazi Germany and those perceived – and branded – as Hitler's local allies.

The editorial of *JUDAICA*'s fifth issue is an example of how the periodical reacted to the rise of Nazism. In order to strengthen the call for a commercial boycott against Hitler's Germany, Resnick reprinted an article by famous Jewish Russian historian Simon Dubnow, who fled Berlin to escape the Nazi government. The journal's director relied on the academic's fame that he had helped cultivate among Spanish-speaking readers – along with León Dujovne, he translated his two-volume work, which the SHA published in 1925 and 1928.³⁰⁷ The essay, a firsthand account of persecution

³⁰⁷ Alejandro Dujovne, *Una historia del libro judío*.

and violence against Jews in Berlin that explained the harmful effect of anti-Jewish Nazi laws, combined intellectual prestige with an emotional appeal to convince Jewish-Argentine merchants and industrialists to act against personal interest and boycott German products.³⁰⁸

The following month, in an editorial condemning an article in the Argentine press that justified anti-Jewish sentiment in Germany, Resnick translated the – apparently, still unpublished – Yiddish manuscript of A. L. Schusheim, a Jewish-Argentine journalist who worked for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTS). The offending piece had been published in Catholic magazine *Criterion* by its director, influential nationalist and Catholic priest, Monsignor Gustavo J. Franceschi.³⁰⁹ Schusheim had written his retort out of a feeling of outrage and betrayal: a few months earlier, Franceschi had penned a harsh critique of the Nazi regime and its attacks on minorities after returning from a visit to Germany, which Schusheim had translated to Yiddish and, through the JTS – an international news agency – reprinted in different Jewish magazines in the United States and Europe.³¹⁰

Franceschi's article troubled the journalist because, through the example of Germany, it hinted at the menace of a global Jewish economic imperialism that threatened not only Europe, but also Argentina. That Schusheim had a reply ready soon after *Criterion* came out, and that he had previously held Franceschi in high esteem, influenced Resnick's decision to publish his essay as *JUDAICA*'s editorial. The decision

³⁰⁸ Simon Dubnow, "El boycott a Alemania" *JUDAICA* 5 (November 1933): 193-197.

³⁰⁹ Sandra McGee-Deutsch, *Las Derechas: The Extreme Right in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, 1890-1939* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

³¹⁰ A. L. Schusheim, "¿Hace falta un problema judío en Argentina? (A propósito de un artículo de Monseñor G. J. Franceschi)," *JUDAICA* 6 (December, 1933): 241-255.

to grant the piece the editorial pages rather than publish it with the regular content speaks of how the editor and his staff saw Franceschi's article as an important threat.

Schusheim accused Franceschi of importing the German concept of a "Jewish problem." The reporter added that, although the cleric did not believe in religious anti-Semitism or in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, he seemed convinced of the existence of a Jewish "economic imperialism" based on ethnic solidarity and a total disregard for the welfare of other human groups. For Schusheim, the priest's argument betrayed a double-standard, where the child of an Italian immigrant became an Argentine but the son of a Jewish immigrant remained a Jew. The local-born children of Jewish immigrants, countered Schusheim, were no less Argentine, because they learned Spanish and patriotism in the state school. Why would Franceschi single out the Jews, when all minority groups taught their children about their ethnic traditions and built schools and other institutions to preserve them? The reporter concluded that the priest must fear the exaggerated threat of communist Jews, and counseled his adversary to simply wait:

Be patient and you shall see: you will have in Argentina (like in England) conservative Jews, as long as conservative circles abandon anti-Semitism[;] and even fascist Jews, and Jewish adherents of bourgeois radicalism, but also Jewish communists. For you do not fight Communism with anti-Semitism. You fight it more successfully by improving the life conditions of the working classes.³¹¹

The last two sentences seemed especially crafted as a barbed attack against Franceschi, one of the founders of the Catholic labor movement in Argentina, conceived as a tool to steer workers away from Socialism, and Communism.

The editorial for February 1934 had a broader goal than rebutting a local anti-

³¹¹ Schusheim, "¿Hace falta un problema judío en Argentina?," 254. My translation from the original Spanish.

Semitic article or convincing Jewish-Argentines to join the boycott against German products. This translated and reprinted piece by famous German Jewish journalist Joseph Roth denounced Nazism as an enemy not only of Jews, but of the “European spirit.”³¹² The author predicted that the rise of Hitler embodied a continental threat: the ideology of National Socialism represented a barbaric attack against the ideals, culture, and intellect of Europe. Through this editorial, a passionate and heartfelt response to the massive book-burning and persecution of artists and intellectuals in Germany, Resnick appealed to the Europhile educated classes. He aimed to convince those undecided, and perhaps even turn those attracted to the Nazi imagery of strength and appeal to symbolism and mythology, that Hitler and his local sympathizers were their enemies as well. Roth’s inclusion of a list of German writers and intellectuals (“Jewish,” “half-Jewish,” “quarter-Jewish,” as well as non-Jewish liberals) persecuted or exiled, their works banned, black-listed, or burned by Nazi “hordes,” facilitated Resnick’s goal of mobilizing the local elite’s admiration of European culture and literature to win their support.³¹³

The sense of urgency that accompanied *JUDAICA* since its debut – created by Hitler’s ascent to the chancellorship – grew frantic with each new piece of anti-Jewish legal restrictions and state-supported act of violence and persecution in Germany, and reached its peak with the onset of World War II. The journal’s editorials initially joined the community-wide calls for financial assistance to aid the Jews of Europe survive and, when possible, escape the war. Soon, however, Resnick was expressing disappointment at the fracture of the local United Campaign, which followed the pre-existing political divisions between Communists and Zionists. The November, 1939 issue opened with an

³¹² Joseph Roth, “El Auto de Fe del Espíritu,” *JUDAICA* 8 (February, 1934): 49-57.

³¹³ Roth, “El Auto de Fe del Espíritu.”

analysis of the failed conference meant to establish the unified fundraiser. The editorial castigated the Zionist groups for abusing their majority to impose their preference – half of the funds to aid European Jews, half to aid in “the reconstruction of Palestine” – in the least diplomatic way possible, causing a split when “a unity of action was necessary” both for internal reasons as well as to show a common front in public.³¹⁴

Starting in 1940, *JUDAICA*'s editorials turned into calls to action for the Jewish-Argentine community – and particularly its institutions and activists – to apply its resources to save Jewish European culture from oblivion. The January issue opened with a warning for the fundraising campaigns to include the cultural dimension:

Assistance for Jewish cultural undertakings are now more urgent than ever before, precisely for the catastrophic state in which they now find themselves. Before [the war], the main centers of Jewish culture were based in Russia and Poland. For the time being, however, these countries can no longer contribute to Jewish culture. [...] What little activity still remains takes places in Lithuania, where Jewish cultural activity tries to survive. That is why any possible assistance for the unyielding champions of this culture can help save our most valuable treasure from extinction.³¹⁵

By this time, Resnick still hoped that the military advance of the Reich had stagnated, and that European Jews and their cultural organizations needed only temporary assistance until the situation improved. Even in the dire situation that European Jews faced, he still thought that the future Jewish culture lay on the eastern coast of the Atlantic Ocean:

Today, there is no alternative cultural nucleus, outside of [Lithuania]'s reduced core, capable of shining a path for other Jewish centers abroad. Palestine is a center for culture in the Hebrew language, with little impact beyond its borders; The United States does, indeed, possess an important core of writers and intellectuals, now further strengthened by immigration, but it lacks the proper environment to produce great works of Jewish

³¹⁴ Unsigned editorial, “Unidad de acción,” *JUDAICA* 77 (November, 1939): 145-146. My translation from the original Spanish.

³¹⁵ Unsigned editorial, “La ayuda a las obras de cultura judío,” *JUDAICA* 79 (January, 1940): 1-2, 2. My translation from the original Spanish.

culture. For now, then, the Old World continues to be, despite its wounds, the remaining hope for this culture.³¹⁶

The editor's optimism proved to be short lived. In April, Resnick published a new editorial highlighting the duties that now befell the Jews of the Americas:

[...] although we must continue to provide material and moral aid with a generous hand to our unfortunate brethren in the Old World, the time has come for us to become seriously concerned about our own situation in the Americas. Even here things are not working as they should. The Nazi poison has infiltrated deep, and threatens all the American people. [...] along with the tasks common to all in the Americas, the Jewish nuclei face an additional duty. Besides their civic duties, they must also concern themselves with the conservation or development of Jewish cultural values, which have disappeared from the European stage under the brutal attacks [...] While that flowering center [of Jewish culture] remains succumbed, the holy duty of continuing that century-long work falls upon the Jews of the Americas. It is true that, so far, we cannot measure up to what was done until recently in Europe [...] However, even if we are not prepared to carry on developing [Jewish culture], let us at least devote to preserve its traces and maintain its radiance in these somber days. Let us get used to the idea that the Jews of the Americas are called upon to assume the stewardship of a grand spiritual heritage, if only to physically protect it from extinction.³¹⁷

The concern about Nazi infiltration in South America was a reaction to the uncovering of underground cells of German spies in Uruguay and Brazil. Although there were groups linked to the German embassies, their numbers were not nearly enough to organize coups or seriously jeopardize the American republics. However, ethnic cultural agents shared the fear of most Jewish-Argentines, partly a reaction to the news that trickled from war-torn Europe. At the same time, they were aware of the power of tangible, concrete threats such as war and Nazism to reinforce ethnic cohesion and solidarity.

The editorial was more concerned with the new duty facing the continent's Jews:

³¹⁶ "La ayuda a las obras de cultura judío," 2. My translation from the original Spanish.

³¹⁷ Unsigned editorial, "El deber del momento," *JUDAICA* 82 (April, 1940): 129-130. My translation from the original Spanish.

the preservation and development of Jewish culture. Resnick acknowledged that the communities in most American nations – with the exception of the United States – lacked the resources for this task, but concluded that they were still the best hope. By April, *JUDAICA*'s founder no longer thought that the situation would improve for European Jewry. The new cultural mission, for Resnick, was a top priority:

Such a duty is, at this time, a sacred duty. It must take the place of other less fundamental activities that require much of our collective energies. It is not enough to help the Jews of Europe with bread crumbs. We must also safeguard the spiritual values that they have produced; it is vital to keep that spirit alive, for it is the essential force that has animated our people through our painful history.³¹⁸

This essay echoed the argument first published in January, 1940, of how cultural work was not a luxury that could be ignored in times of crisis. *JUDAICA*'s staff considered culture as key to the survival of ethnic identity, particularly in such a catastrophic context where Europe could no longer produce or preserve it.

Resnick continued to push his position. Three months later, in July, he provided detail on the necessary cultural work and explained the specific role of Jewish-Argentines and the effect of their actions in the regional context. He criticized the amateur character of Jewish-Argentine cultural institutions and the wanting state of their activity. The new essay distinguished between the United States and the rest of the continent:

The way things stand now, the heaviest responsibility of preserving Judaism falls on the Jewish communities spread across the American nations. [...] The task falls primary on the United States, and secondarily on South America. Clearly, the United States is much more qualified than the South American republics to carry out this work[,] not only for its large Jewish population and vast economic means, but also because the brightest lights of our intellectual life have found their way there. The Jewish nuclei in South American countries, more recent and with fewer

³¹⁸ “El deber del momento,” 130. My translation from the original Spanish.

resources, occupy a secondary role in the cultural dimension. But this is no reason to remain on the sidelines.³¹⁹

Within the “secondary” role of South American Jews, Jewish-Argentines had to lead the way in terms of a renewed, strengthened cultural activism, providing an example for others to follow:

We must also bear in mind that, in the context of the Americas – and with the exception of the United States, – Argentina is the vanguard. If we devote ourselves to this work, our coreligionists from the rest of the region will feel compelled to follow us; if we neglect our duties, they too will falter. That is why Argentine Jews must play a preponderant role, perhaps one that is beyond our current forces, but an honorable, inalienable role nonetheless. History has laid this duty of intensifying our cultural production on our shoulders, and we must fulfil it for our sake and that of our brethren in the Americas.³²⁰

The argument played on the ego of Jewish-Argentines, highlighting their regional importance as the largest Jewish collective in Latin America, and the one with the most periodicals and institutions. This, however, also meant that Jewish-Argentines carried with them the responsibility of meeting this challenge and inspiring Jews in neighboring nations to follow suit. Much had to be improved in order for Argentina to fulfill its duty; Resnick’s analysis of the state of Jewish cultural activism in the country showed his disappointment and frustration:

[...] The Jewish colony [of Argentina] has existed for half a century. Having taken root, it must begin to bear fruit. The many different types of social work we have are not enough; along with it, we must secure Jewish culture, for without it all our institutions are worthless. [...] It is true that we already have many institutions of this kind, but most if not all of them lead languid existences and have no impact. The cultural entities of the city of Buenos Aires, for example, the most active of the lot, limit themselves to organizing isolated events, readings or talks accompanied with a cup of tea [...] They engage in entertainment. To make things worse, they squabble among themselves. We are lacking a prolific,

³¹⁹ Unsigned editorial, “El deber de los judíos argentinos,” *JUDAICA* 85 (July, 1940): 1-2. My translation from the original Spanish.

³²⁰ “El deber de los judíos argentinos,” 2. My translation from the original Spanish.

stimulating labor, [able to] provide incentives to lead the talents we have and stimulate the rise of new ones. [...]³²¹

The disillusionment of *JUDAICA*'s founder emanated from an apparent disconnect between his analysis and that of other activists and those in charge of most Jewish institutions. Despite the routine declarations on the importance of culture that community leaders offered in public speeches and articles, a majority of them – according to Resnick – disagreed with his conviction that the cultural dimension was intimately tied to the survival of ethnic specificity and the reproduction of collective identity.

Resnick returned to the topic in the September-October issue, trying to convince the Jewish-Argentine community, and particularly its intellectuals and administrators, of the central role of cultural preservation and development. His new editorial, “Transplant of Culture” gave a more positive spin on the progress in what he saw as the vital duty of Jewish communities in the Americas, and of Jewish-Argentines in particular:

[...] It will take years of persistent labor for something like [the atmosphere in which European institutions and intellectuals operated] to emerge in the American milieu. But it matters not that this process takes years: it is essential that it happens and that it takes root. [...] For this, it is indispensable that the largest Jewish nuclei become aware of their duty. [...] Truth be told, awareness of this burden seems to be growing for Jews of the Americas. [...] Instinctively, they are starting to realize that the destruction of the old center in Europe has charged them with the duty of carrying on the work that began millennia ago, of continuing to weave the golden thread that is their legacy. Several recent developments in the spiritual and social dimensions show this to be the case [...]³²²

Despite the more upbeat tone, Resnick cautioned that the recent developments – a work of “suburban colonization” and the drive to build a central Jewish library – were only the first steps in the right direction. In this editorial, the director showed that he did not think

³²¹ “El deber de los judíos argentinos,” 2. My translation from the original Spanish.

³²² Unsigned editorial, “Transplante de cultura,” *JUDAICA* 87-88 (September-October, 1940): 97-98. My translation from the original Spanish.

that isolated cultural undertakings – such as *JUDAICA* – could achieve their goals on their own. To prepare the Argentine “soil” for Jewish culture to “take root” and, in time “bear fruit” in the form of a new Jewish-Argentine culture that retained its ties to its millenarian cultural legacy, a community-wide effort was necessary. *JUDAICA*, to continue Resnick’s metaphor of cultural transplantation, worked as a pioneering greenhouse: it developed the techniques and skills, and watched over the first sprouts of a new Jewish-Argentine hybrid, a vital mission for such a vast (agri)cultural task.

Fighting Fire with Fire: Expelling Anti-Semites from the Argentine Body Politic

JUDAICA assumed a hands-on approach towards xenophobic and anti-Jewish propaganda from its 1933 debut. Resnick printed exclusive essays as well as translated works attacking anti-Semites and establishing counter-narratives to their discourse. Although the journal devoted much of its space to combat National Socialism and the persecution of German Jews, it did not overlook the activities of local nativists and the Argentine Right. Less common at first, articles combating local anti-Semitism were also more targeted. As the 1930s progressed, and especially with the onset of the Second World War, the perceived threat of local sympathizers – or even agents – of Nazi Germany increased along with the concern for the fate of European Jews.

Essays lamenting or attacking Nazi ideology and policies were a regular feature of *JUDAICA*. The developments in Europe permeated the tone and content of the journal and found their way into diverse and, at a first read, unrelated themes. Articles praising Jewish contributions to a field of knowledge, such as a 1933 piece on the roles of Jews in German medicine, invariably mentioned how the rise of Hitler had severed the fruitful

link between Jews and the German people.³²³ A similar essay in 1939 included a list of the medical doctors and researchers – with special mention of the Nobel laureates – persecuted and exiled.³²⁴ Roback’s introduction in his 1934 editorial on Jewish contributions to philosophy explained how the cruelty evidenced by Germany retroactively made intelligible the previously unfathomable history of the Inquisition.³²⁵

JUDAICA published its first article devoted exclusively to European anti-Semitism in two parts, in issues three and four. Authored by Spanish intellectual – and Jewish convert – Rafael Cansinos-Asséns, the piece claimed to be a psychoanalytic study, a typology that classified and defined types of anti-Semitism. The writer defined an irrational religious hatred of Jews, rooted in the Gospels but finally established in the Middle Ages; a more recent, secular anti-Christian version, which blamed the Jew for the existence and hegemony of Christianity; the fiery anti-Semitism of the convert, who hated Jews because they reminded him of his betrayal and challenged the authenticity of his new faith; and finally, political anti-Semitism, a conscious, cynical manipulation of the unconscious hatred and prejudices of the masses. Hitler, for Cansinos-Asséns, was the perfect incarnation of this last type, a megalomaniac and criminal manipulator.³²⁶

The author appealed to the “scientific” language of psychoanalysis to reinforce the authority of his narrative. He was not alone: another piece, entitled “Anti-Semitism, Social Disease (Clinical Scheme),” described the phenomenon as a medical condition. Through the use of technical terminology and subtitles like “Etiology and Pathology,”

³²³ Fraenkel, “Los judíos en la medicina alemana,” 204.

³²⁴ Jmelnitzky, “Papel de los judíos alemanes en la medicina moderna,” 121-122.

³²⁵ Roback, “Los judíos en la filosofía moderna,” 97.

³²⁶ Rafael Cansinos-Asséns, “El complejo antisemita. Ensayo psicoanalítico,” part I, *JUDAICA* 3 (September, 1933), 97-103. Rafael Cansinos-Asséns, “El complejo antisemita. Ensayo psicoanalítico,” part II, *JUDAICA* 4 (October, 1933), 147-152.

“Symptomatology,” and “Prognosis,” the writer – herself a doctor – appropriated the prestige of medicine.³²⁷ In an intellectual context shaped by Positivism, scientific language was tied to objectivity, knowledge and authority. Both writers appropriated biopower, in that their claims of medical and psychoanalytical diagnoses established a hierarchy with them as the doctors, imbued with knowledge and State-endorsed authority, and anti-Semites as diseased or insane patients.³²⁸

For Resnick and his contributors, Nazism in Europe and local anti-Semitic nativism were related. *JUDAICA*'s narrative, beginning with its first editorial, constructed Argentine anti-Semitism as unnatural, a development that “should be totally foreign”³²⁹ to the local environment. The discourse of racial and religious hatred as alien to true Argentineness led to the argument that intolerance against Jews and others were the result of foreign infiltration, the work of agents that could not be truly Argentine. This logic tied their local opponents to Nazi Germany, and had two clear consequences: first, it collapsed the local and European antagonists of Jews into one transnational anti-Semitic and anti-liberal force; second, it turned the tables on the nativist claim of Jewish incompatibility with Argentina and placed them outside the boundaries of Argentineness.

This latter consequence worked through two interrelated parts. The conflation of Nazis and the Argentine Right as well as the “othering” of racial intolerance defined local anti-Semites as agents of an external power. That is, the narrative established them as serving foreign rather than national interests. Additionally, this redefined the boundaries of Argentineness so that those expressing intolerance and hatred of minorities were

³²⁷ Dra. Clara S. de Filer, “El antisemitismo, enfermedad social (esquema clínico),” *JUDAICA* 3 (Septamber, 1933), 127-128.

³²⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: The Will to Power* (London: Penguin, 1998).

³²⁹ Unsigned, “Presentación.”

axiomatically outsiders (because such expressions were anti-Argentine by definition).

The strategy of redefining the Argentine national self to exclude anti-Semites, and the subsequent denunciation of anti-Jewish and anti-immigrant activism as anti-Argentine and foreign was not unique to *JUDAICA*. The radio show *Matinee Radial Hebrea*, analyzed in Chapter 2, resorted to similar symbolic operations against local xenophobic groups and engaged in analogous attacks against foes of immigration in general and anti-Semitic organizations in particular. Samuel Glasserman, the show's director, deployed this argumentation in his comments commemorating Argentine independence days.³³⁰

The accusation of foreignness of anti-Semitism and of incompatibility with Argentine culture and identity became a recurrent trope in *JUDAICA*. Resnick and his contributors often reiterated this argument, which they saw as powerful or reassuring. Schusheim's editorial – analyzed previously – attacking *Claridad's* director referenced this narrative in its very title: “Do We Need a Jewish Problem in Argentina? (Regarding an Article by Monsignor G. J. Franceschi)”³³¹ A 1939 four-part article broadened this trope by extending the incompatibility and foreign character of anti-Semitism beyond Argentine boundaries and to the entirety of the Americas.³³²

Reception, Exoticization, Appropriation

In historical analyses of cultural production, studying the purpose and methods of producers is often simpler than measuring reception. Unless the phenomenon being

³³⁰ Chapter 2.

³³¹ Schusheim, “¿Hace falta un problema judío en Argentina?”

³³² Eduardo Weinfeld, “El antisemitismo en la América Latina,” part I, *JUDAICA* 78 (December, 1939), 220-228. Eduardo Weinfeld, “El antisemitismo en la América Latina,” part II, *JUDAICA* 79 (January, 1940), 29-36. Eduardo Weinfeld, “El antisemitismo en la América Latina,” part III, *JUDAICA* 82 (April, 1940), 163-172. Eduardo Weinfeld, “El antisemitismo en la América Latina,” part IV, *JUDAICA* 83 (May, 1940), 201-208.

researched proved to be truly transformative – if not revolutionary, – the effects of cultural objects, trends, or authors on consumers rarely find their way into the archive.

The results aimed for by cultural agents seldom define how critics and audiences react to these contributions, even when the products actually reach the intended targets.

The difficulty in studying reception varies according to the context and circumstances of cultural production and consumption. How did Argentine literary elites react to the project of systematic and strategic translation and dissemination of Jewish cultural tradition, and Yiddish literature in particular? As shown by Portnoy’s scathing review of *The Horse Thief*’s Spanish version, the staff of *JUDAICA* cared deeply about reception, and went out of their way to both take every precaution to generate their desired results and learn about the elite’s reaction to their cultural labor.

In 1940, Resnick dedicated a double issue of the journal to celebrate the perceived impact of his first works of literary translation. Although the reviews and written testimonies were most likely filtered to present a positive reception, a careful analysis of the issue’s accompanying essays and literary critiques sheds light on several aspects of the project. First, the image of Jews and Jewish-Argentines produced by both *JUDAICA* and the Argentine literary elite. Second, the particular way in which local elites “othered” the symbolic “Jew” and saw their own cultural values and ideological positions reflected in this appropriated signifier.³³³ Finally, how this appropriation allowed antagonistic factions within the elite to “weaponize” the “Jew” character in order to attack each other’s positions. That is, how Jews became players in the struggle to set the course of Argentine literature.

³³³ Erin Graff Zivin, *The Wandering Signifier: Rhetoric of Jewishness in the Latin American Imaginary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

Issue 80-81 of *JUDAICA* was devoted to the theme of literary translation from Yiddish into Spanish. Although the cover of the journal defined its contents as a tribute to Yiddishist writer Isaac Leib Peretz on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death, the editorial clarified that it also commemorated twenty years since Resnick had first published *Los Cabalistas* in Buenos Aires, his first anthology of Peretz's stories in Spanish. The editor of *JUDAICA* and his seminal work as a translator and disseminator became the theme of a whole issue of his own magazine. The issue included three articles – one republished from 1931 – about Peretz's Spanish editions, a selection of nine glowing reviews of Resnick's translations of the author in Argentine newspapers, and a reprint of five of the translated stories.

The re-printing of newspaper and magazine reviews of Resnick's two tomes allows for a careful glimpse at elite reception. Although the journal's editors likely filtered the existing reviews to provide the most positive impression possible, their selection is still significant to analyze reception among literary critics. The compiled reviews include pieces published in one of the country's main national newspapers, patrician *La Nación*; a popular general interest magazine, *Revista Atlántida* (printing over 56,000 weekly issues by the time Resnick's first book came out);³³⁴ the organ of the Argentine Socialist Party, *La Vanguardia*; and two literary magazines, *Hebe* and *Vida Nuestra*, of limited but influential circulation – particularly among Argentine intellectuals. *JUDAICA* could have omitted reviews by nativist periodicals hostile to immigrants in general and Jews in particular, but it is also possible that these magazines

³³⁴ "Atlántida," *Lea Revistas*, <http://www.learevistas.com/notaHistoria.php?nota=7> (accessed July 15, 2015).

never bothered to review Resnick's work.³³⁵

An analysis of the collected reviews illustrates two different but interrelated phenomena. First, Resnick's curation of Peretz's *oeuvre* allowed the anthology of stories in Spanish to win over Argentine intellectuals from different ideological circles and with different –even antagonistic– stylistic, thematic, and aesthetic preferences. In an accompanying essay published in the same issue, *JUDAICA* contributor José Mendelson praised the translator for trying to maximize thematic breadth as the guiding principle behind the curatorial process: for him, “[Resnick] disseminated in each volume [of the anthology] the diverse and multifaceted character of Peretz's production.”³³⁶ Arturo Lagorio, reviewer for *Hebe*, congratulated the translator for having “the undeniable finesse to select, among the enormous production of the great author, the part most accessible to us and to everyone, the most universal. He chose the stories...”³³⁷

Even considering their filtered character, the reviews republished in *JUDAICA* reflect different sectors of the Argentine intellectual elite. All these critics welcomed the access that Resnick's anthologies granted to a previously unavailable literature, and highlighted the “exotic” character of the world that Peretz's works unveiled. They differed, however, in which stories or themes piqued their interest. The literary critic of *La Nación*, a traditionalist yet liberal –in the XIX century sense– newspaper, in his appraisal of “Los cabalistas,” focused on the retelling of folkloric Jewish legends and

³³⁵ Juan Torrendel, “Peretz, modelo para los escritores argentinos,” *JUDAICA* 80-81 (February-March, 1940): 78-80. Various authors, “Algunas opiniones sobre I. L. Peretz,” *JUDAICA* 80-81 (February-March, 1940): 85-95.

³³⁶ José Mendelson, “I. L. Peretz en castellano,” *JUDAICA* 80-81 (February-March, 1940): 68-70, 70. My translation from Spanish.

³³⁷ Arturo Lagorio, “Los Cabalistas (cuentos). Isaac León Peretz. Traducción del idish y estudio preliminar de Salomón Resnick. Con un prólogo de Alberto Gerchunoff. Editorial “La Cultura Israelita”, Buenos Aires, 1919,” *Hebe* (1919), reproduced in Various authors, “Algunas opiniones argentinas sobre I. L. Peretz,” *JUDAICA* 80-81 (February-March, 1940), 90-91, 90. My translation from Spanish.

religious stories, particularly about the Hassidic revival of the XVIII century. For his colleague at the socialist *La Vanguardia*, meanwhile,

the common theme in all of [the stories] is the miserable, persecuted Jewry, hated by everyone, isolated in the ghettos. And in all of his stories the understanding of the centuries-long pain of his race is so clear that it is effortlessly communicated to the reader; and above all, what a sympathy for the poor, the humble ones, such that the little traces of irony present in the pages cannot begin to hide!³³⁸

This anonymous critic also felt the need to mention Peretz's position in the debate between Yiddish and Hebrew literature, which he clearly learned about through Resnick's preliminary study. His version, however, differed from the translator's academic tone and neutral approach:

[...] The writers of his race despised the popular language and wrote in Hebrew, [a language] unknown by most [Jews]. Peretz reacted against that intellectual aristocracy and soon his works found their way into every home, and a throng of young writers who did not dare to take the first step followed his lead.³³⁹

The critic for the socialist daily saw in the historical rise of modern Yiddish literature a popular revolt led by a committed author against the "intellectual aristocracy," with the aim of bringing culture to the masses. In his review, the writer for the traditional newspaper *La Nación* merely mentioned that Yiddish, while a rich language developed by an old civilization, had "only recently acquired clear artistic forms."³⁴⁰

The literary sections of periodicals from across the ideological spectrum highlighted the themes and topics from Resnick's curation of Peretz that suited their and

³³⁸ Unknown author, "Los Cabalistas, Isaac León Peretz," *La Vanguardia*, June 22, 1919, reproduced in Various authors, "Algunas opiniones argentinas sobre I. L. Peretz," *JUDAICA* 80-81 (February-March, 1940), 89-90, 89. My translation from Spanish.

³³⁹ Ibid, 89. My translation from Spanish.

³⁴⁰ Arturo Cancela, "'Los Cabalistas', por Isaac León Peretz (traducción de S. Resnick)," *La Nación*, June 27, 1919, reproduced on Various authors, "Algunas opiniones argentinas sobre I. L. Peretz," *JUDAICA* 80-81 (February-March, 1940), 86. My translation from the original Spanish.

their readers' inclinations, and saw these preferences and positions reflected in the author's stories. The high accolades that the Spanish anthologies received from such diverse sources confirms the success in the translator's strategy to win over the broadest segment of the Argentine intellectual class. These reviews showed Resnick and his contributors that literary dissemination could have an impact, which made the case for 'further cultural work of this sort. From this perspective, *JUDAICA*'s harsh critique of Editorial Sem's translation of Joseph Opatoschu's *The Horse Thief*, covered previously in this chapter, gains new meaning: reckless translation and dissemination were not only a waste of limited resources (not simply money and skill, but also the amount of attention local intellectuals would pay to translations from Yiddish), but could work against the goal of winning support for Jewish culture and literature and, through it, for Jewish-Argentines as legitimate members of the nation.

The reprinted reviews also allow for the analysis of a second phenomenon. Not only did the literary critics of the Argentine periodicals selectively identify with the parts of Peretz's translated *oeuvre* that best suited their literary or even political ideology, but the reviewers also used the works of the Yiddish author to validate these positions and even deploy the writer's stories as symbolic weapons against their intellectual adversaries. For example, renowned Spanish author and literary critic Juan Torrendel, the reviewer of *Revista Atlántida*, saw *Los Cabalistas* as a lesson for Argentine writers to correct the stylistic and thematic vices he identified in their writing. In fact, Torrendel titled his commentary on Resnick's translation – and the only one *JUDAICA* separated from the other reviews and published as a separate essay – “Peretz, a Model for Argentine Writers,” and devoted almost half of his review to directly address the young

cadres of would-be literati.³⁴¹ He praised his “clean, simple, and flexible prose, strong like Toledo steel” and immediately highlighted what Peretz did not do, strongly implying the flaws he found in the new cohorts of local authors:³⁴²

No lexical complications; no syntactic delirium[. A]nd his austerity in no way means disdain for novelty or elegance. Of course, absolute contempt for platitudes and especially for clichés...³⁴³

The thematic principles that Torrendel identified behind Peretz’s literature were also channeled as a lesson that highlighted the author’s choices and chastised young Argentine writers. The critic praised how the Yiddish author’s themes “are all taken from the life of his people [and] his local environment, no matter how transcendent the underlying thought.” In his review, the Spaniard added that even when the intention behind Peretz’s stories “rose to the highest of critiques, touching on issues of universal philosophy and aesthetics,” the author reached those high spaces after “starting out from the known, the real, by diving deep into the particular soul until he arrived to the common human resemblance.”³⁴⁴

Peretz’s was “a nationalist literature,” in that he “does not dream with works of fantastical lyricism, neither in his language nor in his representations. He never abandons his Yiddish or his land.”³⁴⁵ Torrendel mobilized his praise of the Yiddish author into a criticism of Argentine *avant-garde* literature focused on linguistic, genre, and thematic

³⁴¹ Juan Torrendel, “Peretz, modelo para los escritores argentinos,” My translation from the original Spanish.

³⁴² Juan Torrendel, “Peretz, modelo para los escritores argentinos,” 80. My translation from the original Spanish.

³⁴³ Juan Torrendel, “Peretz, modelo para los escritores argentinos,” 80. My translation from the original Spanish.

³⁴⁴ Juan Torrendel, “Peretz, modelo para los escritores argentinos,” 80. My translation from the original Spanish.

³⁴⁵ Juan Torrendel, “Peretz, modelo para los escritores argentinos,” 80. My translation from the original Spanish.

experimentation. The review became an exhortation to follow Peretz's example to craft an Argentine nationalist literature that focused on the local environment and language (as opposed to experimentation and a gaze that faced Europe). In his review for *Revista Atlántida*, the Spanish critic and author drafted the Yiddish writer as a weapon to argue his position against elitist, experimental literature (famously incarnated in Buenos Aires in the Grupo Florida) and for a less pretentious fiction that connected with the population. Torrendel founded the Tor publishing house in 1916, which in its two decades of life helped to popularize the work – both of fiction and non-fiction – of many still unknown local authors.³⁴⁶

Pablo Rojas Paz, the (non-Jewish) critic for literary magazine *Vida Nuestra* – where Resnick was a contributor –, carried out a symbolic operation similar to Torrendel's in his review of *Adán y Eva*, the second volume of Peretz's stories published in Buenos Aires in 1922. However, Rojas Paz found in the work of the Yiddish writer validation for an aesthetic and formal literary ideology that stood in sharp contrast to the one championed by the journalist of *Revista Atlántida*. Rojas Paz described Peretz's writing as analogous to impressionist music:

Peretz is not a narrator in the anecdotal or historicist meaning of the word; Peretz is an expresser of states of being, of inner struggles. His stories do not conform to the exhausted [narrative] matrix of setup, confrontation, and resolution. Hence why his language is essentially emotional, his words are not the expression of feelings but actual part of those feelings; [in his work,] words are not vessels carrying meaning but meaning themselves...³⁴⁷

³⁴⁶ In the second stage of Tor's existence, starting in the 1940s, the publishing house veered into a different policy of printing cheap, low-quality editions of literary classics (including genre fiction).

³⁴⁷ This segment is actually a reference to Edmund Husserl's phenomenology: "[...]; son ellas, la palabra, índice de existencia y no vasos contenientes. [...]" Pablo Rojas Paz, "Adán y Eva," *Vida Nuestra*, 1922, review republished in Various Authors, *Algunas opiniones argentinas sobre I. L. Peretz*, *JUDAICA* 80-81 (February-March, 1940): 92-94, 93. My translation from the original Spanish.

This reviewer extracted from Peretz's work a different lesson than Torrendel did. Where the latter saw in the Yiddish author's clear and simple style and thematic "nationalism" a validation of his criticism of Argentine *avant-garde* writers, Rojas Paz, an enthusiastic defender of literary experimentation, identified Peretz as a righteous example of the kind of intellectual search Torrendel condemned. For the *Vida Nuestra* critic, the Yiddishist transcended traditional writing genres, and transformed his language from a vehicle to transmit meaning into actual emotion. That is, Rojas Paz's review articulated Peretz's stories as legitimizing the practices of avant-garde literary circles, by portraying him as a courageous expresser of emotion who pushed the boundaries of writing.

How could critics with such disparate – when not oppositional – ideological, aesthetic, and literary preferences not only coincide in their appreciation of the translation of I. L. Peretz's oeuvre, but also find in it legitimation for their dissimilar views? The success of Resnick's curatorial strategy is partly responsible: his selection of the broadest possible sample of Peretz's stories offered something to intellectuals from different ideological factions (except anti-Semites). However, the author's range does not explain the reception his work received from different – and rival – circles.

Each critic saw the ideological struggles and positions of his faction (mostly literary, but also cultural and political) reflected in Peretz's literature. The reviewer for socialist *La Vanguardia* read the author's embrace of Yiddish over Hebrew as a parallel with his party's self-image as champions of popular culture over that produced by disconnected elites. His colleague for conservative *La Nación* barely mentioned language, and focused instead on Peretz's stories with mythological and religious themes as confirmation of the importance of tradition even in "alien" cultures. Meanwhile,

Torrendel and Rojas Paz, more engaged with the quarrel around avant-garde literary groups, saw in the work of the Yiddish author vindication for their positions for and against experimental writing. Torrendel even sought to deploy Peretz's writing as a symbolic tool to attack his foes and, using the Jewish writer as an example, "educate" the new generation of Argentine intellectuals – and reduce them to the status of immature students.

These multiple and even antagonistic appropriations signal how the works of Peretz, from the perspective of the Argentine critics, lacked an intrinsic meaning, and that meaning was "in the eye of the beholder." The periodicals' reviewers and the members of the local literary elites conceived of his fiction – and, through his fiction, Jewish culture and the symbolic Jew – as a source where disparate readers found validation for their own positions as well as symbolic munition for their intellectual disputes. In a similar manner to the fantastic mirrors of legend that showed their owners what they wished to see, the Yiddish author's literature worked as a legitimizing reflection, or showed itself as a symbolic weapon.

This "weaponization" of constructions of "the Jew" by non-Jews and its subsequent deployment in the public sphere in symbolic struggles was not exclusive to literary critics and the issue of *avant-garde* experimentation: a similar phenomenon also took place in other sections of the newspapers and even in different media, such as the theater stage. Chapter 4 analyzes the role of comedic Jewish characters crafted by the staff of liberal newspapers and successful playwrights to bolster broader arguments about the nature and boundaries of Argentineness.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁸ See chapter 4.

Such a plasticity of meaning was not an original component of the work of Peretz: it was a result of the author's "foreign" and "exotic" status in the context of Argentina in the first half of the XX century. Most reviewers mention the exotic character of the social environment, situations, and religion of the stories: Cancela, writing for *La Nación*, praised how relatable he found the characters, despite how "only a few readers will find the ideas, feelings, and things described by the Jewish author of *Los Cabalistas* anything other than singularly exotic."³⁴⁹ The critic for *El Diario* praised Resnick for making available to the Argentine readers the work of an author of such an "exotic tongue,"³⁵⁰ while the opening sentence of the review on *La Capital* announced the appearance of a book that "adds to our environment a note of oriental exoticism."³⁵¹

Peretz and his work were not unique recipients of this exoticizing, but rather an expression of a broader phenomenon. Jewish literature in general or, even more broadly, the meaning of "Jewishness" in Latin America, also received similar treatment.³⁵² These "othering" and exoticizing were not exclusively reserved for Jews: they were a fixture of positionality and power relations between ruling elites and ethnic (or religious, gender, generational, class, or sexual) minorities. Oftentimes, the branding of a group as "other" was used to build group identity and cohesion oppositionally.³⁵³

The distance established in the exoticizing of Peretz's *oeuvre* allowed critics to realign his literature, from work with its own inherent meaning into a vehicle for

³⁴⁹ Cancela, "Los Cabalistas," 86. My translation from the original Spanish.

³⁵⁰ Unknown author, "Los Cabalistas," *El Diario*, July 5, 1919, reproduced on Various authors, "Algunas opiniones argentinas sobre I. L. Peret," *JUDAICA* 80-81 (February-March, 1940), 86-86, 87.

³⁵¹ Unknown author, "Los Cabalistas, de Isaac León Peretz," *La Capital*, June 20, 1919, reproduced on Various authors, "Algunas opiniones argentinas sobre I. L. Peret," *JUDAICA* 80-81 (February-March, 1940), 87-88, 87. My translation from the original Spanish.

³⁵² Graff Zivin, *The Wandering Signifier*.

³⁵³ Nirenberg, "Enmity and Assimilation." Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient (25th Anniversary Edition)* (New York: Vintage Books-Random House, 2014).

reinforcing local beliefs and positions and fighting out local ideological fights. The “exotic” otherness of Jews did not hinder, but actually helped in the cooptation of Jewish narratives and experiences to serve new local purposes. Such a pattern took place in the Argentine press beyond the literature pages, and is further analyzed in Chapter 4.³⁵⁴

The critical reception of Peretz’s work, however, shows characteristics that differ from how majorities and elites typically construct “the Other.” Rather than constructing a definition of Argentine literature or nationhood based on the contrast with Resnick’s translations, the critics overwhelmingly highlighted the dimensions of the Yiddish author’s work that – for them – reflected their preferred values and ideologies. Despite their diversity, they related to Peretz’s themes and style, and found legitimation in seeing their preferences mirrored in his stories. Even though the perceived exotic character of his work proved useful to the Argentine literary circles, the critics simultaneously established this symbolic distance while also bridging it by highlighting their stylistic and thematic agreement with the Yiddish author.

Conclusion

The case study of *JUDAICA* and its embrace of translation allows us to analyze the adoption of a monolingual Spanish-based conception of Jewish-Argentine identity. For the ethnic cultural agents behind this journal, literature and tradition proved indispensable for the construction of a viable image of hyphenated identity. They were convinced that the different expressions of Jewish and Yiddish culture could only find fertile ground in Argentina by shedding their original language and adopting the local

³⁵⁴ Chapter 4.

one.

The intellectuals behind this project conceived of translated culture and literature as a strategy to address two challenges: legitimization of Jewish presence in the country and transgenerational reproduction of hyphenated identity. The strategy of translation also sought to engage two specific demographics: Argentine elites and the local-born Jewish-Argentine youth. Additionally, this approach was built on a cultural understanding of ethnicity, and relied on the belief of the power of the written word to win over hearts and minds.

JUDAICA was a publishing project created with the explicit goal of pursuing the strategy of translation. Its founders considered the task of disseminating Jewish literature and tradition one of the utmost important for the future of Jewish life in Argentina. The rise of Nazism, which coincided with the magazine's debut, provided a new sense of urgency to the project as well as a more concrete threat than lack of legitimation and assimilation.

The Jewish-Argentines and their non-Jewish allies involved in the curation, translation, and dissemination project produced favorable representations of historical Jews as well as Jewish-Argentines, and diverse legitimizing narratives. Through these representations, they sought to establish the positive influence of Jewish-Argentines to their new *patria*, and discredit the depictions of Jews and immigrants as nefarious, untrustworthy, and incompatible with Argentina. After the Second World War, and the progressive disappearance of Yiddish as an ethnic language both in Argentina and the world, other projects followed *JUDAICA*'s pioneering efforts to translate and disseminate Jewish literature and culture to Spanish-speakers.

CHAPTER 4

People of (Jewish-Argentine) Character: Representation, Linguistic Markers of Ethnicity, and Jews as a Liberal Discourse in the Fight for Argentineness

The last section of the previous chapter studied the local reception of the translation-based strategy to produce positive representations of Jewish-Argentineness. Based on the reviews of Resnick's anthologies of Peretz's stories, that section analyzed how Argentine critics and members of the literary elite appropriated the Yiddish author's aesthetic and thematic interests to validate their own artistic preferences and attack their opponents'. Despite – or because of – the supposed foreignness and exoticism of Peretz's literature, the warring factions within the Argentine literary elite found in his work authority and validation, and projected onto it new local meanings.³⁵⁵

Such an occurrence was not uncommon. Mainstream cultural agents and opinion-makers engaged in similar instances of appropriation of minority culture, tradition, and even identities in different genres and media. These appropriations, and in particular the use of stereotypes of ethnic and religious immigrants and their descendants (but also of gender, sexual, regional, and class identities), became common tropes in Argentine culture and entertainment.

This chapter analyzes how and why liberal factions within the Argentine elite deployed images of “the Jew” and the “Jewish immigrant” to influence the public debate on the meaning of Argentineness and as part of their struggle against their nativist opponents. Even when producers of cultural goods deployed representations of Jewish-

³⁵⁵ Chapter 3.

Argentines without a specific agenda, the mere aggregation of Jewish characters in public fora normalized their presence as legitimate members of a growing, heterodox Argentine society.

Although stereotypes of all kinds of ethnic, minority, and immigrant characters abounded in Argentine stages, periodicals, and radio airwaves, “the Jew” as a symbol became particularly relevant – as well as contested – in the interwar period. At a moment of economic disjunction, refugee crisis, and growing nativism, the “foreignness” of Jews and the debate about their compatibility with Argentineness played a pivotal role in the struggle to define national identity and the role of immigrants in Argentine society. Both xenophobic nativists in the Argentine Right and pro-immigration liberals manipulated the public representations of this group for antagonistic ends.

Like the “Italian” a generation before, the “Jew” had become the preferred symbol and argument of nativist intellectuals and propagandists who opposed immigration and favored a restrictive understanding of Argentineness. According to their narrative, Jews incarnated a radical exoticism, an irreducible otherness based on a global intra-ethnic loyalty. This ethnic group, argued the Argentine Right, sported their own private religion, language – with its own cryptic alphabet, to boot, – and values, which marked Jews as enigmatic, untrustworthy and disloyal, generally unassimilable, politically disruptive, and above all, undesirable.³⁵⁶

Rather than abandoning the “Jew” as an exception to the rule and basing their defense of immigration on other “less alien” minorities, cultural agents of the liberal faction chose to aggressively contest the meaning of Jewishness in the public sphere. If

³⁵⁶ Sandra McGee-Deutsch, *Las Derechas: The Extreme Right in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, 1890-1939* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

the most exotic and alien human group could successfully integrate into Argentine society and contribute to the nation's development – their counterargument went, – then the nineteenth century liberal ideal of unrestricted immigration (although revised from its original formulation) had been correct, and was now validated.³⁵⁷ Pro-immigration elites subverted the nativist narrative of Jews, transforming their supposed otherness into evidence of the power of the Argentine “melting pot.”

The liberal elite's appropriation of the image of “the Jew” and its deployment as counter-narratives of successful immigrant integration was a multimedia effort. Fictional Jewish-Argentines in different media – newspaper comic-strip protagonists and invented sports columnists, as well as theater characters – provide the case studies informing the analysis. Although nativist representations of Jews serve as contrast, they are not studied here: there already exists a buoyant historiography of anti-Semitic representations in Argentine letters and culture, a summary of which can be found in the dissertation's introduction.³⁵⁸

A key operation of Argentine liberal writers, journalists, and playwrights was to shift the understanding of Jewish identity from the sociobiological to the linguistic and cultural. They deployed linguistic markers of ethnic identity: that is, they codified “Jewish” ethnicity – specifically in Eastern European Jewish immigrant characters – not through stereotypical physical traits, but through an exaggerated Yiddish accent. These devices stressed malleability and underlined the impact of the sociocultural context in the making of fully integrated Jewish-Argentines. Liberal narratives emphasized the trans-

³⁵⁷ Carl Solberg, *Immigration and Nationalism: Argentina and Chile, 1890-1914* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1970).

³⁵⁸ See Introduction.

generational effect of structural assimilatory forces, portraying the strong Yiddish accent of immigrants and the smooth “unaccented” *porteño* Spanish of their descendants.

These liberal representations of Jewish-Argentines in the public sphere shared a gendered characterization of the phenomenon of assimilation. Portrayals in different media and by different authors depicted Jewish-Argentine women (particularly local-born) as more susceptible – or inclined – towards assimilation, both linguistic and romantic. The *porteñas* daughters of Jewish immigrants spoke unaccented Spanish and sought non-hyphenated *criollos* as mates and husbands.

Don Jacobo and Patoff Battle the *Nacionalistas*: *Crítica*, Mass-Media, and Liberal Populism

One of the most influential and relentless promoters of liberal images of Jewish-Argentines was *Crítica*, the best-selling Argentine newspaper from the late 1920s until well into the 1930s. This periodical, which at its height sold over half a million daily copies, resorted to different representations of immigrant Jews and their Argentine-born descendants to argue for the positive impact of immigration and a broad, inclusive national identity. This intervention in the public sphere went beyond journalistic articles about Jews, and included the creation of humorous Jewish characters as both comic-strip protagonists and fictional sports columnists.

The Jewish figures that showed up most often in *Crítica*'s pages were Don Jacobo, a cartoon character and Eastern European immigrant, and Moisés Patoff, an invented racetrack expert. Although both immigrants were fictional, Patoff's position as a columnist in the “Sports” section made him a less-obvious creation than Don Jacobo, a

daily feature of the funny pages. *Crítica* portrayed both figures as successful yet quirky stories of integration into Buenos Aires life and culture. Patoff provided readers with insider knowledge and “*fijas*” (sure bets) in a Spanish overloaded with *lunfardo* oral expressions and written to reflect a Yiddish accent, while Jacobo – who “spoke” with a similar accent – adapted to Argentine holidays and dealt with his daughter’s preference for non-Jewish men.

From the late 1920s until the late 1930s, *Crítica*, the newspaper founded by Uruguayan journalist Natalio Botana, became the unchallenged best-selling Argentine daily. After his founder’s failed attempt of establishing a popular conservative medium in the 1910s, *Crítica* underwent a metamorphosis into a pioneering, modernizing, liberal periodical modeled after the American media empires of William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer. Botana’s product, the first to adopt the tabloid format in Argentina, relied on big, eye-catching titles, large photographs, and cartoon drawings; offered sections targeting different demographics, including women, children, workers, and intellectuals; published articles about technology, social conflict, human drama, gossip, and crime; and created a relationship with its readership, enticing them to send in scoops and leading them in protests or political campaigns.³⁵⁹

The periodical showed a commitment to engage with as well as define the interests of its readers. *Crítica*’s editorial line embraced a discourse that celebrated modernity through its coverage of modernist literature, motor vehicles, women issues, international sports – such as boxing, car and horse racing, soccer, and even baseball; – new architectural trends; and artistic vanguards. As part of this strategy, the newspaper

³⁵⁹ Silvia Saitta, *Regueros de tinta: el diario Crítica en la década de 1920* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1998), 38.

adopted the by-line “The People’s Voice.”³⁶⁰

Botana bragged that, through its connection with the readers, his periodical influenced the results of national elections by endorsing one party or candidate. This claim was further reinforced by socialist Nicolás Repetto, who complained that *Crítica*’s lack of support had cost his party several thousand votes, and by arch-conservative Leopoldo Lugones Jr.’s accusation that the newspaper defined the 1928 presidential election in Hipólito Yrigoyen’s favor.³⁶¹

Crítica became a champion of liberal populism. One of the positions shaping their ideological worldview was an insistent embrace of an inclusive nationalism that defended and promoted – mostly European – immigration. This put Botana’s daily at odds with nativist groups and intellectuals, and the periodical often became entangled in public disputes with various Argentine “Legions:” authoritarian, xenophobic, and anti-liberal militias that flourished in the 1920s and 1930s.³⁶² *Crítica*’s editorial line projected confident optimism regarding the integration and contribution of immigrants of different ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds.

Crítica often resorted to the Jewish-Argentine experience to argue for the benefits of immigration and the importance of a liberal conception of nationhood. These interventions contested the negative representations of Jewishness pushed by the newspaper’s antagonists in the Argentine Right. By subverting the nativist tropes and shifting the locus of ethnicity from biological to linguistic markers, the liberal daily transformed public representations of Jews from supposedly incompatible aliens with

³⁶⁰ Saitta, *Regueros de tinta*, 55-64, 125-152.

³⁶¹ Saitta, *Regueros de tinta*, 16-17, 229.

³⁶² Sandra McGee-Deutsch and Ronald H. Dolkart, eds., *The Argentine Right: Its History and Intellectual Origins, 1910 to the Present* (Wilmington: SR Books, 1993).

nefarious secret agendas to examples of successful assimilation and Argentinization.

Botana's daily argued for the assimilability of Jewish-Argentines by deploying linguistic markers of ethnic identity. Unlike the periodicals and intellectuals of the Argentine Right, which represented Eastern European Jews not only through behavioral stereotypes, but also through physical markers like hooked noses, long black beards, and the traditional garments of the Orthodox practitioners of Judaism, *Crítica* relied on accents and speech patterns to denote the traces of Jewishness in those it deemed new (Jewish) Argentines.³⁶³ Even immigrants were pictured as physically unremarkable citizens until they spoke, betraying their origin with their hybrid Yiddish-Spanish patois. The newspaper's narrative emphasized the success of trans-generational assimilation by arguing that children of immigrants, after growing up in the local environment and undergoing mandatory public education, embraced Argentine Spanish as their mother tongue and retained only a remnant of their Jewish "otherness" in their last names.

The written representation of Yiddish accents followed the principles established for previous immigrant characters, such as Italians. "Cocoliche," a creation of the popular theater (*circo criollo*) of the Podestá brothers (Pepe, Antonio, Gerónimo, and Pablo), became a stock character in popular representations of Italian-Argentines in different genres. "Cocoliche" also became the term for the exaggerated speech pattern typical of immigrant Italian characters.³⁶⁴ The popular representation of the Yiddish accent similarly included vowel alterations ("pir quí" instead of "por qué") and the addition or subtraction

³⁶³ See Sandra McGee-Deutsch, *Counterrevolution in Argentina, 1900-1932: The Argentine Patriotic League* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986). McGee-Deutsch and Dolkart, *The Argentine Right*. Leonardo Senkman, ed., *El antisemitismo en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1989).

³⁶⁴ Ana Cara-Walker, "Cocoliche: The Art of Assimilation and Dissimulation among Italians and Argentines," *Latin American Research Review*, 22 (1987): 37-67. Ángela Di Tullio, *Políticas lingüísticas e inmigración: el caso argentino* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 2003).

of consonants (typically the “s” at the end of a word). The most characteristically Jewish (or Yiddish) feature was the replacement of the “eu” and “ue” phonemes for “oy” (“cointas” instead of “cuentas,” “joigo” instead of “juego”).³⁶⁵

That the best-selling periodical of the late 1920s and 1930s could repeatedly signal “Jewishness” through linguistic rather than physical characteristics suggests that, at least for many *porteños* (the main readers of *Crítica*), such markers were sufficient identification. While this does not necessarily show that Jews were only recognizable as such through their use of Yiddish and its effect on their speech in Spanish, it does hint that the popular image of “the Jew” was far from that of a conspicuous, alien “other.” Additionally, that most *Crítica* readers could identify linguistic representations of Jewishness implies that Eastern European Jews had considerable social visibility in Buenos Aires by the end of the 1920s and beginnings of the 1930s.

On November 2, 1929, the newspaper devoted a page to an article about the integration of Jewish immigrants in Buenos Aires.³⁶⁶ Despite a title that referenced an anti-Jewish massacre in Eastern Europe, the piece was a light, general interest inquiry about Eastern European Jewish immigrants living in Argentina’s capital city. The referenced “popular *porteño* neighborhood” was the central district of Once, imagined by both Argentine Jews and non-Jews as a “Jewish” living and commercial space.³⁶⁷

The narrative of the article followed the integration of Jews, from complete

³⁶⁵ For a philological analysis of the characteristics of “cocoliche,” see: Oscar Conde, *Lunfardo: Un estudio sobre el habla popular de los argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Taurus, 2011).

³⁶⁶ Anonymous, “Las matanzas de judíos mantienen en vilo a un popular barrio porteño”, *Crítica*, September 2, 1929. My translation from the original Spanish.

³⁶⁷ There is an ongoing historiographical discussion regarding Once’s character as a Jewish neighborhood. Eugene Sofer described it as a ghetto, an image that misrepresents the broad presence of Jews around Buenos Aires. See: Eugene Sofer, *From Pale to Pampa: A Social History of the Jews of Buenos Aires* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1982).

“ethnic” strangers to Argentines. It started describing

comb-resistant beards; boys with yellow fuzz on their cheeks; women holding their dresses with their bony shoulders; the dreadful dance of misery and unleavened bread that swirls in the poor Jewish homes... and in the poor Hebrew girl who goes out to work every morning with her lips painted red, as if her mouth was the heart of Israel.³⁶⁸

After this exoticizing image, the narrator described the early integrated Jews as those who adopted the habits of the host society in public yet kept on practicing “Talmudic Judaism” in the privacy of their homes. The following subtitle, “Jewish-Argentines,” noted the arrival of Jews in Argentina looking for hope, giving birth

every day to an Argentine that, following the intervention of the mohel³⁶⁹, becomes Jewish... and when the boy grows and makes friends, adapting to the environment, his steps, unlike the heavy, painful steps of his ancestors, become agile as they follow the melodious rhythm of a quick tango. His forehead, however, carries forever the atavistic sadness of his persecuted race.³⁷⁰

The article argued for a progressive, incremental assimilation, with each generation becoming more and more Argentine. It also stated confidence in the principle of *ius solis*: merely by being born in the country, the children were Argentines, and only became Jews through the ritual of circumcision. The text did refer to Jews as a race, but in the 1920s and 1930s, the concept of “race” was an amorphous category: even eugenicists were divided about its meaning and the degree to which miscegenation could “better” a race.³⁷¹

These young native-born Jewish-Argentines, “quieter than others, but more studious,” gave back to the country “to which they owe a sacred debt.” The article explained how, through effort in a land of equal opportunity, the liberal professions and

³⁶⁸ “Las matanzas de judíos.” My translation from the original Spanish.

³⁶⁹ Mohel is the Hebrew term for the professional in charge of circumcision.

³⁷⁰ “Las matanzas de judíos.” My translation from the original Spanish.

³⁷¹ Nancy Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

the arts filled up with new names ending “in intricate pronunciations.”

What have these men done? They have erased the imaginary stain, the stigma that other peoples’ egotism had branded on their foreheads. They have given their country of birth, the country which granted their parents the bread that fed them, the best of their enlightened brains and labor, and children of their own who, maybe, the mohel will not touch a few days after they are born.³⁷²

The author thus predicted that, in a matter of two generations, the grandchildren of Jewish immigrants could become un-hyphenated Argentines, losing even the religious ritual of circumcision which, as he had previously stated, turned newborn Argentine children into Jewish-Argentines. In this article, such total assimilation – save for any vestigial last names of “intricately pronounced” endings – was portrayed as an incontrovertibly positive development.

The editors further reinforced the message of Jewish adaptation to Argentine social and cultural norms through the accompanying pictures. Two photographs at the edges of the page sported older men with sidelocks, derby hats, bushy beards, and long black overcoats, physical stereotypes of Eastern European religious Jews. They contrasted sharply with the larger picture at the center of the page, which showed a group of young men, modernly dressed in two- and three-piece suits and ties. They were all clean-shaven except for one sporting a thin, fashion-conscious mustache. Gathered around a table in a cafe, they chatted and read newspapers. The only Jewish markers were the Yiddish characters in one of the periodicals, the left-leaning daily *Di Presse*. The captions below the pictures of elderly, Orthodox-looking Jews contained “quotes” in broken Spanish with Yiddish-heavy accents, supposedly representing their comments to

³⁷² “Las matanzas de judíos.” My translation from the original Spanish.

the reporter.³⁷³ In contrast, the one below the modernly dressed men in the central picture simply noted that, in the social gathering at the café, “everybody reads”.³⁷⁴

Crítica's article supported a clear narrative of progressive, incremental assimilation, showing that Jews had already become productive members of society while retaining some ethnic markers, such as private Jewish ritual, unusual last names, and their own language and the accent derived from it. The author expressed confidence that they would go on to blend completely with the broader population within only a few generations. The article argued that the ultimate – and desirable – stage of the integration experience was assimilation: the disappearance of ethnic particularisms, in this case of the practice of Jewish religion (symbolized through the act of ritual circumcision).³⁷⁵

The above-mentioned piece is an explicit endorsement of Jewish integration into Argentina, but by no means the only one. The Arts section of *Crítica* celebrated Jewish-Argentine actors such as Berta and Paulina Singerman. Alberto Gerchunoff and César Tiempo, award-winning Jewish-Argentine writers, worked as columnists in the newspaper's literary supplement. However, the Jewish figures that showed up most often in *Crítica*'s pages, surpassing even the Jewish-Argentine authors who wrote for the periodical, were fictional persons created by the newspaper: Don Jacobo and Moisés Patoff.

The newspaper strategically deployed Jewish-Argentines to argue for the success of assimilation and the positive impact of immigration on the country's economic,

³⁷³ “¿Pir qui mi sacás fotografías?” “¿Dicís qui saldré en la CRÍTICAS? Boino”. In “Las matanzas de judíos.”

³⁷⁴ “Las matanzas de judíos.” My translation from the original Spanish.

³⁷⁵ See: Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England, 1714-1830: Tradition and Change in a Liberal Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

cultural, and intellectual progress. By emphasizing positive images about Jews (their supposed intelligence and commercial ingenuity, for example) and subverting the negative stereotypes (the claims of irreducible foreignness, cowardice, and avarice), *Crítica* purposefully worked to influence the public debate – and, in particular, the new group of readers with no previous contact with mass media – through portrayals of existing and fictional Jewish-Argentines. At the same time, *Crítica* manipulated the image of Jewish-Argentines as represented in characters such as “Don Jacobo” and “Patoff” to challenge the Argentine Right’s deployment of negative stereotypes of Jews.

An Immigrant Family Man: Don Jacobo, Jewish-Argentines, and the Success of Trans-Generation Assimilation

On September 2, 1929, a mustached, bald, stocky old man debuted on the last page of *Crítica*. This was not his first brush with the public eye; since 1912 and under another name, he had appeared regularly in the comic-strips of the *New York Journal*, a periodical in William Randolph Hearst’s media empire. In the United States, where syndication put him in several newspapers every day, this all-American character went under the common name of Sam Perkins, although his family and friends called him “Paw.” He arrived in Buenos Aires under a new identity: he had become Don Jacobo, a Jewish immigrant from somewhere in Eastern Europe.

“Don Jacobo en la Argentina” was what the anonymous translator(s) of *Crítica* re-titled Cliff Sterrett’s classic “flapper” comic “Polly and her Pals,” one of several strips that Natalio Botana bought from Hearst media’s syndication business. It was the only imported strip that, instead of being merely translated into Spanish (which often implied a

slight adaptation of the strip for the Argentine public), was instead completely transformed, its characters and narrative altered by a new textual framework. Botana and his staff decided to turn the American comic-strip from a tale of tradition and modernity based on the conflict between “Paw” and his flapper girl daughter “Polly” into the humorous story of a Jewish immigrant in Argentina, and a tale of social and cultural integration. “Paw” received not only a new name, but also a heavy “Yiddish” accent. His daughter “Polly” remained a modern “flapper” girl, with short skirts, a sharp fashion sense, and a penchant for regularly changing boyfriends. Her name, however, was changed to “Rebeca,” the Argentine-born daughter of “Jacobo.” Unlike her father, Rebeca spoke fluent *porteño* Spanish, which hints at *Crítica*’s narrative of transgenerational assimilation.

Rebeca’s link with modernity and easygoing Argentineness prompts questions on the gendered nature of assimilation in the newspaper’s narrative. Gender was an important factor in *Crítica*’s portrayal of assimilation. It is true that the graphic dimension of the strip determined that Jacobo’s child was female. However, it was the choice of the newspaper editors to portray his wife’s speech as unaccented Spanish. The strip never clarified whether Jacobo’s spouse was an immigrant herself or a local-born descendant of immigrants; there is no clear sign that she was even Jewish (if she was not, then she and the titular character were a mixed marriage). That both women in the family spoke *porteño* Spanish and lacked any markers of ethnicity whatsoever points to a gender-specific representation of assimilation. Although the comic fails to provide certain information, the disparity in markers of ethnic identity shows that *Crítica* coded the loss

of ethnicity as feminine, as a form of cultural submission.³⁷⁶

Why did *Crítica* transform “Polly and her Pals” into a strip about immigrants? Why turn American Sam Perkins into a Jewish-Argentine, instead of a “regular” unhyphenated citizen? If the newspaper wanted an immigrant protagonist, why make him or her Jewish, when Argentina had more men and women born in Italy or Spain than in Eastern Europe?

The newspaper editors decided to turn “Polly and her Pals” into an immigrant narrative as part of a discursive strategy to push back against nativist conceptions of nationhood and to further *Crítica*’s vision of a liberal, expansive Argentineness. They chose to transform “Paw” into “Jacobo,” rather than “Fernando” or “Vittorio,” because their opponents in the Argentine Right had chosen Jewish-Argentines from Eastern European descent as the battleground on which to dispute the issues of immigration and Argentine identity.

Anti-immigrant activists had set their sights on Jews because they were a more recent wave of transatlantic expatriates than Southern Europeans and, although numerically smaller, they still garnered remarkable public visibility. As opposed to Italians and Spaniards, Eastern European Jews spoke – and published in – a non-Latin language, and were not Catholic – not even Christians, – which facilitated portraying them as foreign and alien. The Right could also draw on a different argument from the millennia-old tradition of anti-Semitism, as well as resort to newer forms of nationalist,

³⁷⁶ There is only one exception to Jacobo’s wife speech: her only accented term is her husband’s name, which she pronounces *Jacoibos* in several strips. For gendered constructions of (national) identity, see: Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). See also: Erin Graff Zivin, *The Wandering Signifier: Rhetoric of Jewishness in the Latin American Imaginary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

ideological, and racial prejudice to bolster their claims. Liberal opinion-makers, such as *Crítica*, chose to contest and subvert nativist representations of Jews. By appropriating “the Jew” as a symbol, *Crítica* aimed to destabilize its discursive power as a rhetorical tool of the Argentine Right, and redeploy it to argue for an inclusive nationalism. The ubiquity of both negative and positive stereotypes about Jews (such as stinginess, cowardice, untrustworthiness, and an above-average intelligence) also allowed the translators of the strip to address and subvert them to serve their needs. If even these “most alien” of immigrants integrated into Argentine society and adopted Argentine mores and values, the newspaper’s counter-narrative followed, then the liberal conception of an expansive and inclusive national identity was correct.³⁷⁷

Why, then, did *Crítica*’s editors chose to transform “Polly and her Pals” into a story of Jewish-Argentines, instead of the other comic-strips bought from American media? All these imported strips required translation, understood here as a broader process that entailed more than simply rewriting the speech-balloons in Spanish.³⁷⁸ The translators often had to adapt the set-ups, punch lines and jokes to make them intelligible to a new audience and a different sense of humor. This meant altering not just the speech balloons, but also other “grammatical devices” such as the strip’s title, character names, onomatopoeic words (always used outside speech balloons), and even writings that were effectively part of the graphic dimension (such as a jar labeled “tea” or a shop sign that read “Saloon”). All these devices had to be regularly modified to fit the cultural

³⁷⁷ For discussions on the relationship between “Nacionalismo” and anti-Semitism, see McGee-Deutsch and Dolkart, *The Argentine Right*; Senkman, *El antisemitismo en Argentina*.

³⁷⁸ Nadine Celotti, “The Translator of Comics as a Semiotic Investigator,” in *Comics in Translation*, ed. Federico Zanettin (Manchester and New York: St. Jerome Publishing, 2008).

environment of Spanish-speaking Buenos Aires.³⁷⁹

The majority of *Crítica*'s comic-strips underwent minor changes. The most notable transformations took place in the strip's titles and the names of the characters. "Tilly the Toiler" became "*Pepita la Dactilógrafa*," with the added subtitle "*Todo lo que ocurre en una oficina*" (everything that happens in an office). "Gus and Gussie," by Jack Lait and Paul Fung, became "*Escalope y Severina*," subtitled "*Los humildes servidores de un gran hotel*" (the humble staff of a great hotel). These two cases exemplify attempts to keep the translation as close to the original as possible.

Other comics suffered more intensive intervention, like "The Katzenjammer Kids," which became "*Los Sobrinos del Capitán*" (the captain's nephews). The local version changed the captain from foster-father into uncle. A further transformation erased the original German accents of the main characters; in *Crítica*, the nephews as well as the captain spoke unaccented Spanish. It is significant that the newspaper's editors and translators chose to remove the accent – thus eliminating the immigrant nature of the characters – rather than replacing the German linguistic markers with an accent more common to Argentine readers.³⁸⁰

A comparison with "The Katzenjammer Kids"/"Los Sobrinos del Capitán" makes the transformation of "Polly and her Pals" into "Don Jacobo en la Argentina" more intriguing. The original narrative of "Polly and her Pals" would have been intelligible to *Crítica*'s readers without modifications. In fact, the humorous story of an emancipated "flapper" girl whose flirting with men drove her old-fashioned father crazy would have

³⁷⁹ Federico Zanettin, "Comics in Translation: An Overview," in *Comics in Translation*, ed. Federico Zanettin (Manchester and New York: St. Jerome Publishing, 2008).

³⁸⁰ The strip was also titled "The Captain and the Kids" due to the fact that, after a protracted legal battle, both the Hearst corporation and Joseph Pulitzer's newspapers retained the rights to use the characters.

dovetailed with the newspaper's attention to women's issues and its commitment to modernization. Paw's transformation to Don Jacobo, then, was not a question of the original comic-strip being deemed unadaptable to Argentine humor, but rather the result of the editors finding in the strip's graphic dimension the potential to sustain the kind of immigration and integration narrative they sought to tell. Whereas "Tilly the Toiler" took place inside an office, and "The Katzenjammer Kids" aboard a ship traveling through the African wilderness, most "Polly and her Pals" stories ensued either inside a house or shop, or within the confines of a city (that could easily be Buenos Aires). Its main characters formed a modern nuclear family of the kind that was common in U.S. metropolises and was crystalizing in urban Argentina; in this case, elderly parents and a young-adult daughter. *Crítica's* editors, then, chose the graphics of "Polly and her Pals" in order to craft a strip about an immigrant and his family. Polly – now Rebeca – remained a flapper, but the focus of the strip shifted to her father. Through this comic, the newspaper sought to familiarize readers with both recognizably "ethnic" and relatable characters in a way that implicitly underscored their acquired Argentineness.³⁸¹

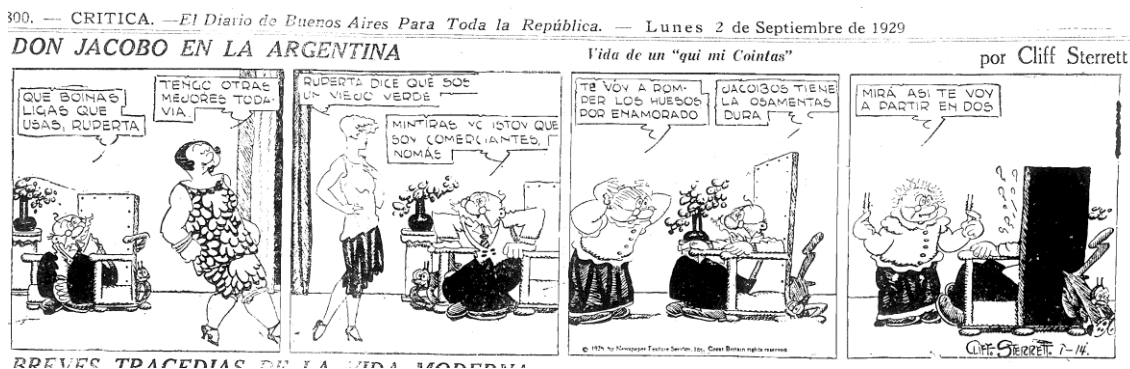
The nature of the comic-strip medium determines the dual aspect of its narrative, combining the visual (the drawings) with the verbal (the speech and thought bubbles and narrator boxes). For most translations in this genre, the graphics do not operate as a corset, but rather as a tool necessary "to grasp the totality of the meaning," which is local rather than universal.³⁸² For the specific case of "Don Jacobo en la Argentina," however, the fixed visual dimension became both an enabler of narrative opportunity and a

³⁸¹ Eduardo Míguez, "Familias de clase media: la formación de un modelo," in *Historia de la vida privada en Argentina. La Argentina plural (1870-1930), Tomo 2*, ed. Fernando Devoto and Marta Madero, 21-45 (Buenos Aires: Taurus, 1999).

³⁸² Nadine Celotti, "The Translator of Comics as a Semiotic Investigator."

structural limitation thereof. *Crítica*'s goal was not to translate "Polly and her Pals," but to craft a completely different story by transforming the textual dimension while retaining the graphic aspect intact. Hence, the pre-existing images placed limits on how the altered text could convey new meaning and still retain narrative coherence and intelligibility.

For some "Don Jacobo en la Argentina" strips, attempts to alter the story resulted in a collapse of narrative coherence. Take the following example:³⁸³



In the new version, Jacobo's wife threatened him with bodily harm after he commented on Ruperta's stockings. In the final panel, the new punch-line had Jacobo's wife tell him "this is how I will split you in half."³⁸⁴ Following the text, the reader was expected to assume that her hands were holding a broken twig or stick. The drawing, however, shows that she is not holding a broken item, but a pair of bobby pins. The visual aspect of the narrative as it progresses between the third and last panel shows that, from the way her hairdo changes, she has simply removed the pins from her hair. This example illustrates the limits a pre-existing graphic dimension posed to the transformation of one cartoon into another through textual modification alone.

³⁸³ "Don Jacobo en la Argentina", *Crítica*, September 2, 1929.

³⁸⁴ "Don Jacobo en la Argentina", *Crítica*, September 2, 1929. My translation from the original Spanish.

The Conversion of Paw and his Newfound Jewish-Argentineness

“Don Jacobo en la Argentina” replaced the strip’s titular character Polly with her father. *Crítica* rechristened him – pun not intended – Jacobo, a common Jewish name, and changed Polly’s name to the equally Jewish Rebeca. The new title established the strip as a narrative of immigration from the perspective of the immigrant generation. No other strip in the newspaper mentioned a geographical location; the addition of “en la Argentina” to the title underscored the foreign status of Don Jacobo, as it implied that his presence in the country was somehow notable, and that he had not always been “in Argentina.” The subtitle,³⁸⁵ “Vida de un *qui mi cointas*,” reinforced the protagonist’s ethno-linguistic origins: “*qui mi cointas*” reflected how native Yiddish-speakers supposedly pronounced “¿qué me cuentas?,” a Spanish phrase that can be translated as “what’s new?”

The pre-existence of the graphic dimension made it impossible for the translators to incorporate physical markers of Jewishness, which dovetailed with *Crítica*’s goal of relying on linguistic markers of ethnic identity. Paw/Jacobo did not look “Jewish” in the way of traditional anti-Semitic caricatures: his clothes were not the typical garments of Orthodox Jews, he wore neither a yarmulke nor a derby hat, and never covered his head inside his house. He donned a bowler hat in a few strips, but that was in line with men’s fashion in the early twentieth century. While Jacobo did sport a bushy mustache, he lacked even a hint of a beard, let alone sidelocks. The character’s face did not match what anti-Semites and eugenics specialists described as traditional Jewish features: he had a round nose instead of the typical hooked beak, and regularly sized ears. He was short and

³⁸⁵ The subtitle is not present in every strip of “Don Jacobo en la Argentina.” There seems to be no clear explanation for this inconsistency.

bespectacled, features which could be coded as Jewish but were hardly unique to Jews.

Graphically speaking, Paw/Jacobo was a neutral figure. The strip's graphics did not codify him as Jewish, and they also did not preclude the possibility of the character being Jewish. His body was neither tall nor muscular, nor was he dark-skinned, physical characteristics that would have hindered attempts to "Judaize" him. It was Jacobo's speech, a crude imitation of how native Yiddish-speakers spoke Spanish, that defined him in ethnic terms. The character's speech matched *Crítica*'s portrayal of the Yiddish accent of immigrant Jewish-Argentines. The photo captions that accompanied the article about Jews in *Once* – previously analyzed in this chapter – read "¿Dicís qui saldré la CRÍTICAS? Boinos." "¿Pir qui mi sacás fotografías?"³⁸⁶ The translators gave Don Jacobo the same pronunciation (such as the replacement of most vowels with "i," and the wrong additions of "s" at the end of words), alongside the particularly *porteño* use of "vos" instead of "tú": "Istá qui ahí lo tenés, quiridos. ¡Ti ha hecho un desafíos in forma!"³⁸⁷

Crítica's editors were so certain that readers could decode such linguistic markers as a reference to Jacobo's Jewishness that they never used the terms "Jew" or "Jewish" in the title or in the speech balloons over the period of the strip's publication. The anonymous translator(s) also refrained from using the words "Hebrew" and "Israelite," neutral stand-ins for "Jewish" commonly seen in newspapers, radio shows, and even Jewish institutions in the first half of the twentieth century in Argentina. Such certainty confirms that Jewish-Argentines of Eastern European descent enjoyed (or, arguably, suffered) from intense visibility – or, given the linguistic nature of their ethnic markers,

³⁸⁶ "Las matanzas de judíos mantienen en vilo a un popular barrio porteño."

³⁸⁷ "Don Jacobo en la Argentina", *Crítica*, August 30, 1930.

audibility – in the public sphere. The lack of the explicit term “Jew” or “Jewish,” together with the neutral physical appearance of the character, suggests that *Crítica*’s publishers thought readers (around 300,000 in 1929) could identify Jacobo as a Jewish-Argentine immigrant from linguistic markers of ethnic identity alone. Members of this ethnic group – at least for the newspaper’s readership – could be identified exclusively through a linguistic, or at least discursive, portrayal.

Though the strip’s translators regularly subverted stereotypes of Jews to establish this group’s assimilability, they occasionally deployed negative tropes for comedic purposes. Some of Jacobo’s actions can be traced to the colonial stereotypes and Catholic dogma. For example, Jacobo’s libidinousness references the historical circulation of the image of the sexually promiscuous Jew, as well the visibility of Jewish prostitutes and pimps in interwar Buenos Aires.³⁸⁸

DON JACOBO EN LA ARGENTINA



The above strip shows Jacobo as both lecherous and hypocritical. In the first frame, he complains about older women who dress like young girls, only to be ridiculed by his wife and daughter. The punch line, however, has him join his nephew in a trip to the cabaret. The graphic dimension of this strip offers no clue regarding the topic of the

³⁸⁸ Donna Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991). See also Myrtha Schalom, *La Polaca: inmigración, rufianes y esclavas a comienzos del siglo XX* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editores Norma, 2003).

original strip: it only determines with which characters Jacobo/Paw interacts, in what order, and their emotional state as expressed in their bodies. *Crítica's* translation determined both the theme and resolution.

Jacobo was often portrayed as cheap and stingy, once even refusing to enter a tailor's shop because he was "afraid of spending." He could also incarnate the stereotype of the cowardly Jew: he was often portrayed as afraid of his violent wife (but then, so was every other character in the strip). The trope of the violent wife and the submissive husband was ubiquitous in nineteenth and twentieth century comic-strips both in Argentina and abroad, regardless of the ethnicity of the characters.³⁸⁹ Jacobo's marital fears, then, were not enough to paint him as a coward. However, several running strips played on his fear of a dog. Just as often, however, *Crítica's* reinvention of the narrative subverted these tropes:



In the above strip, Jacobo finally overcame his fear of the dog and patted its head. The punch line justified this subversion (and nuanced it) by deploying a positive stereotype: Jacobo managed to make himself look daring not through inherent bravery but rather through (Jewish) wit. The last frame shows Jacobo walking away with a prop

³⁸⁹ See Manfredo Guerrerá, *Storia del fumetto, Autori e personaggi dalle origini a oggi* (Roma: Newton Compton, 1995).

“hand-on-a-stick,” and saying that he was not only “very brave,” but also “pretty intelligent.”³⁹⁰

Jewish stinginess was another negative stereotyped subverted in the strip:³⁹¹



Here, Jacobo’s wife became concerned when he failed to react negatively to her buying a new hat. His only reaction was to exclaim “I am glad, woman. It wouldn’t be worthy of me to deny a hat to my other half.”³⁹² The last panel nuanced the subversion by implying that Jacobo’s response was so out of character that his wife became suspicious that it was a tactic designed to hide something from her. Once again, it was the dialogue that conveyed the narrative of this strip. The graphics merely indicated which characters were interacting and, to a certain degree, their emotional state. Only *Crítica*’s editorial decision made the script revolve around Jacobo’s newfound financial liberality.

At times, the subversion of stereotypes was less ambiguous and more straightforward. In several strips, Jacobo showed an aptitude not merely for courage, but even for physical violence: he literally kicked his daughter’s suitors out of the house. On one occasion, he faced a bullying policeman and ridiculed him to his face. In at least one instance, the protagonist contradicted the supposed Jewish stinginess by buying his niece

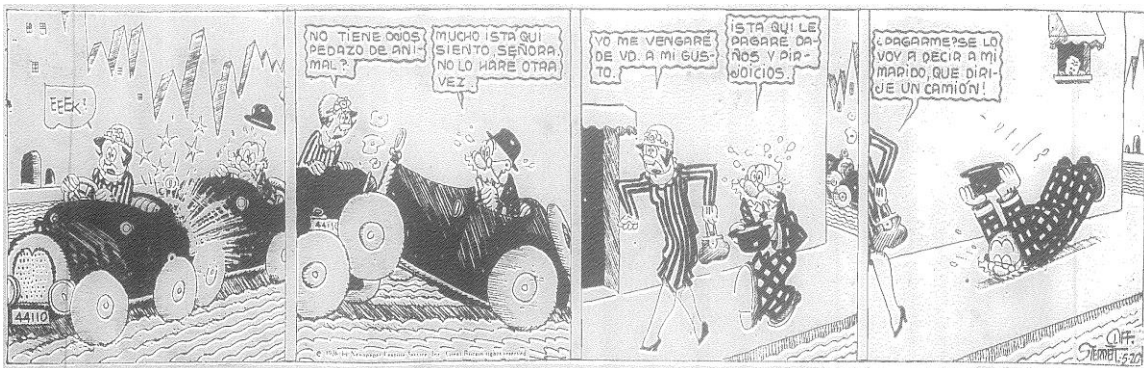
³⁹⁰ “Don Jacobo en la Argentina”, *Crítica*, September 28, 1929.

³⁹¹ “Don Jacobo en la Argentina”, *Crítica*, December 26, 1929.

³⁹² “Don Jacobo en la Argentina”, *Crítica*, December 26, 1929. My translation from the original Spanish.

presents to cheer her up.³⁹³

The challenging of negative stereotypes accompanied broader narratives that showed Jacobo and his relatives as fully integrated into Argentine society. The family enthusiastically embraced certain aspects of modernity typically promoted in *Crítica*'s pages. Although Jacobo could complain about older women dressing as young modern girls, he also bought himself a fur coat. This purchase represented not only adaptation to modern local fashion, but also social progress, a vital component of the assimilationist argument. Similarly, another strip emphasized the social and economic participation of modern women when Jacobo bought a car and crashed into the vehicle of a female driver.



The use of a woman driver dovetailed with *Crítica*'s views on modernity. The automobile section of the newspaper often portrayed women driving cars, and the section's advertisements offered vehicles specifically "for women" alongside masculinized sports cars and trucks. Of course, the appearance of a woman driver was not *Crítica*'s choice, as it was predetermined by the graphic dimension. Still, the end result coincided with the perspective on society that the newspaper celebrated.

Assimilation in "Don Jacobo en Argentina" went beyond embracing modernity: it also meant a commitment to the country's cultural mores and an eventual loss of ethnic

³⁹³ "Don Jacobo en la Argentina", *Crítica*, January 31, 1930.

suitor led him to endorse the Spaniard, thus giving a positive spin to the accusation of materialism, traditionally coded as a Jewish defect.

Don Jacobo also expressed knowledge of Argentine cultural traditions. In the strip of January 2, 1930, the first panel opened with him singing the tango “Niño bien (Rich kid)”. The choice contrasted with the accompanying graphics, where the character seemed to be flexing his muscles in preparation for some heavy lifting or fighting. The following panels explained the singing as a slight to Rebeca’s new suitor, a well-dressed young man. The lyrics Jacobo sang described a man who dressed and acted as a wealthy member of the oligarchy, but who was in reality of poor, plebeian origins.

The 1929 Christmas cartoon provides further proof of Jacobo’s growing integration into Argentine culture and behavior:³⁹⁵



The story portrayed Jacobo buying a Christmas tree. Of course, he went about it in a “Jewish” way: he asked the salesman for a “nice and cheap” tree. Still, such an action showed the internalized nature of assimilation: the tree was intended for the private enjoyment of his family, not for a public performance of Argentineness. This did not imply a process of conversion, as the religious tradition of Christmas and the narrative of the Nativity were completely absent. Jacobo’s embrace of the holiday was purely

³⁹⁵ “Don Jacobo en la Argentina”, *Crítica*, December 24, 1929.

cultural; the family engaged in a national, rather than a religious, tradition. As in previous examples, the characters' "assimilationist" behavior was constructed by the translator: the image of the shop offered no clues that it sold Christmas gifts or decorations, and the object that Jacobo purchased bore only a passing resemblance to a Christmas tree. Only through Jacobo's dialogue can the reader know that the object he purchased was in fact a Christmas tree.

Finally, the most powerful argument for integration in "Don Jacobo en la Argentina" relied on trans-generational progress. The former Polly, Jacobo's daughter Rebeca, engaged with every aspect of modern Argentina. Her clothes, usually short and revealing, differed from traditional Jewish religious garments; the original character was, after all, a flapper girl. Not one of the men she flirted with was coded as Jewish-Argentine (neither physically nor linguistically). The strongest sign of her Argentineness was Rebeca's lack of a Yiddish accent. The only linguistic marker of Jewishness of this daughter of immigrants was her biblical name. Rebeca's lack of noticeable "Jewish" traits echoed *Crítica's* article analyzed above: the children of Jews born in Argentina, thanks to the national education and environment, would no longer be Jews, but rather merely Argentines.

This narrative of transgenerational integration echoed the lyrics of Jevl Katz's songs. In one of them, the singer's character complained that he suffered from living in a different social and cultural context, to the embarrassment of his family. His daughter spoke only Spanish, and was ashamed that he could not; his wife prepared "local" meals, like "*milanesas*" and "ravioli," which upset his stomach; and he was divided between nostalgia for the life he was accustomed to and frustration that the country did not

measure up to the idealized myths that had convinced him to migrate. The narrator devised by Katz, in a satirical manner, criticized the incorporation of the local cuisine, culture, and language as an encroachment that followed him even into his home and family. “Argentineness,” in his lyrics, expanded even against the immigrant’s will, like a contagion. The editors behind *Crítica* and the Jewish-Argentine immigrant artist described the same phenomenon; one portrayal was positive, the other negative.

Moisés Patoff, Street Brawler and Horse Whisperer Extraordinaire, Joins Don Jacobo in the Fight against a Rising Argentine Right

Crítica’s liberal populism did not preclude the newspaper from joining the voices asking for a coup against increasingly unpopular president Hipólito Yrigoyen. Although the daily’s front page hailed the new de facto president, General José Felix Uriburu, Botana and his staff soon soured on the country’s new leader. The periodical regularly criticized the dictator and harshly opposed his support for xenophobic and red-baiting policies and repression, religious public education, and paramilitary and proto-fascist militias.

President Uriburu reacted by closing down *Crítica*, which had become his loudest critic, and jailing Botana, who later sought temporary refuge in Uruguay. The publisher’s wife, anarchist poet Salvadora Medina Onrubia, decided to keep the newspaper going. She gained the support of influential General Agustín P. Justo, head of the Army and leader of the large conservative republican (called “*liberales*” in Argentina) faction within the Armed Forces, who opposed the fascist sympathies of Uriburu and harbored a political ambition of his own. Together, Medina Onrubia and Justo relaunched the

newspaper under a new name, *Jornada*. The general's presence as director provided immunity against state-based censorship and repression, and intimidated the nativist militias away from physically attacking the periodical.

Jornada kept *Crítica*'s staff, design (including typography), and sections. Even the journal's liberal ideology remained unchanged, although it channeled its antipathy for the dictatorship through attacks on fascist abroad and local proponents of religious education, avoiding direct criticism of the Uriburu regime. *Jornada* even maintained its predecessor's translated American comic-strips on the last page, with a single exception: "Don Jacobo en la Argentina" was gone.

Under increasing pressure from the Army's liberal faction and the country's political elites, Uriburu relented and called for presidential elections on November 1931. General Justo took the opportunity to gather a large social and political coalition behind his candidacy. With the largest political party, the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR), banned from political participation, Justo won the presidency – although there were widespread accusations of electoral fraud.

The new president was inaugurated on February 20, 1932. The same day saw the end of *Jornada* and *Crítica*'s victorious return to the newsstands, with Botana back at the helm. In the newspaper's revived front page, its director launched a scathing criticism of vanquished dictator Uriburu, and his staff followed suit with regular attacks against the outgoing ministers, the former police chief, and the outgoing regime's allies in the militias. On February 22, the third daily edition of the periodical's new incarnation, "Don Jacobo en la Argentina" once more appeared on *Crítica*'s funny pages.

The comic-strip's banishment and reappearance was neither mentioned nor

commented in *Jornada* or *Crítica*; Jewish periodicals also failed to notice Don Jacobo's existence, sudden absence, and return. Although the archive is silent about this, the timing of the occurrence is significant. What explains the strip's disappearance and comeback around the coup and Uriburu's fall?

It is possible, although unlikely, that both events are unrelated; after all, correlation does not imply causation. A potential explanation lies in the coincidence of Don Jacobo's disappearance and return not with the closure of *Crítica* and regime change, but rather with Botana's exile: was the director in charge of the translation? Perhaps he alone liked the strip? Alternatively, Botana might not have been the only exiled member of the newspaper's staff, but the absence of the unknown strip's translator left no archival traces.

Despite the lack of evidence, censorship is the explanation that best fits the context of the comic-strip's departure and reappearance. Uriburu's dictatorship not only closed *Crítica* and jailed Botana, but also established broad powers for government censorship of the media, and took informal steps to curb transatlantic immigration.³⁹⁶ His government was allied with the corporatist Catholic movement of the Argentine Right, which espoused a strict definition of Argentine identity linked to Hispanic tradition and culture, and reactionary Catholicism.³⁹⁷ The disappearance of "Don Jacobo en la Argentina" along with the newspaper's closure hints that the government's censors, sympathetic when not outright members of the Argentine Right, disapproved of the premise of the comic – that Don Jacobo and his family were at once Jewish and

³⁹⁶ See José Luis Romero, *Breve historia de la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2008). David Brock, *Authoritarian Argentina: The Nationalist Movement, its History and its Impact* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

³⁹⁷ McGee-Deutsch, *Las Derechas*. Senkman, *El antisemitismo en Argentina*.

Argentine. The context of the strip's return, amidst a flurry of articles aggressively attacking the beaten dictator and his most infamous acolytes, signals that Botana and his staff were aware of their enemies' rejection of a likeable Jewish-Argentine character.

When he returned, Don Jacobo was not alone. On February 26, less than a week after Justo's inauguration and *Crítica's* restoration, and mere days from the comic-strip's reappearance, a new Jewish-Argentine immigrant debuted on the journal's sports section. Like his colleague from the funny pages, the man's Jewish identity was never explicitly mentioned, only implied by his name and the newspaper's version of a Yiddish accent. Moisés Patoff, another fictional character, became an on-and-off columnist covering the horserace tracks beat. His style of speech and his insider knowledge of such a uniquely *porteño* field became a new legitimizing narrative for Jewish-Argentineness and, through it, of the liberal, expansive conception of national identity that *Crítica* espoused.

Patoff's area of specialization was not an afterthought: turf was an extremely popular Argentine pastime, and the Palermo racetracks were a recurrent trope in tango lyrics. It was at the tracks where "real men," the protagonists of many famous tango songs, let their passions loose, learned to appraise horseflesh, and gambled away their fortunes. By virtue of being an expert on this sport, *Crítica's* new Jewish-Argentine columnist was making a claim to a recent but powerful myth of Buenos Aires, and established his credentials as a genuine *porteño*. The apparent contradiction between Patoff's immigrant character – expressed by his blatant Yiddish accent – and unimpeachable urban *argentinidad* – evidenced by his intense yet accurate use of specialized *lunfardo* – provided a new legitimizing narrative of Jewish-Argentineness based on both linguistics and prestige.

To be knowledgeable enough about horse racing to provide “*fijas*” – sure bets – for a national newspaper, one had to be a regular at the tracks; a connoisseur of horseflesh, aware of each animal’s ancestry; and someone with access to the beasts’ owners, jockeys, and caretakers. The turf expert also required, besides intelligence, cunning and shrewdness: *viveza*, as the locals called it, one of the most valued personal traits for in-the-know *porteños* (the polar opposite of the *vivo* was the *gil*, the slow-witted and gullible person who was often the victim of an enterprising *vivo*). A specialized language – full of mispronounced English terms and incorporated into the underworld street slang that gave birth to *lunfardo* – developed around the racetracks in Argentina, and fluency was a requirement for those claiming authority.

The immigrant character Patoff had the cleverness and insider knowledge that his position as a turf columnist in a widely-distributed popular daily demanded. He expressed these qualities in a jovial speech pattern distinguished by the jargon of turf and *porteño* street slang, combined with what the anonymous ghostwriter considered a strong Yiddish accent that at times made him almost unintelligible. The contrast between his mispronounced Spanish and his constant yet on point deployment of *lunfardo* terms and refrains was clearly conceived as comedic, but Patoff was never the butt of the jokes. *Crítica* portrayed him as a cunning, street-wise, courageous *porteño* who saw through deceit and bluster and exposed it to the readers, and was never afraid to face the enemies of the newspaper and the nation – who were, unsurprisingly, one and the same.

While both Jewish-Argentines and non-Jewish liberals relied on national myths to establish the legitimacy of their representations, the difference in their myths of choice sheds light on each group’s priorities, concerns, and goals. The Jewish-Argentine cultural

agents analyzed in the previous chapters subscribed to the central myth of the community institutions: the Jewish gaucho. Only musician and comedian Jevl Katz occasionally flirted with the image of the wised up urban immigrant, usually peddlers who had become savvy to protect themselves from the exalted cunning of the locals. Even this artist, however, as part of the “cleansed” character of his act, codified specific geographical areas of Buenos Aires – such as “Palermo,” a locus of lust and gambling – as dangerous and immoral in his songs.³⁹⁸ Other cultural actors refrained from venturing outside the boundaries of middle-class bourgeois morality: the *Matinee Radial Hebrea* radio show actively promoted these moral standards along with the proper social and cultural behavior of socially-ascendant middle classes concerned about their public image.³⁹⁹

The rural myth of the gaucho was a safer and more convenient choice from an intra-ethnic perspective. Nativists and xenophobes often shared with traditionalists and conservatives a distrust of the cosmopolitan as both origin and domain of corruption and vice, and an idealized vision of the rural world as the site of tradition, purity, and nationhood. The myth of the Jewish gaucho took advantage of the prejudices of those most likely to question the legitimacy of Jewish-Argentine identity, the genuineness of social and cultural integration, and the value of Jewish immigration.

Although the men who originally inspired the myth of the (non-Jewish) gaucho were outlaws – and seen with contempt by the modernizing elites of the nineteenth century, – *criollista* literature, theater, and cinema had since redeemed them as romantic,

³⁹⁸ See Chapter 1.

³⁹⁹ See Chapter 2.

popular heroes.⁴⁰⁰ The crafters of the Jewish gaucho narrative established an even more sanitized myth: the Jewish-Argentines of the Pampas were not nomadic, half-tame warrior bards of the frontier, but rather productive, hard-working colonists, enamored of the country and farming its land to contribute to the nation's progress.

It is not surprising that Jewish-Argentine cultural agents favored the rural myth over the urban myth of the cunning *porteño* popularized in tango lyrics. These characters were still linked, both in the genre's lyrics and its critics' outraged condemnations, to the cabaret, prostitution, and the subaltern and criminal underworlds. They had little incentive to establish the public image of Jewish-Argentines as gamblers with intimate knowledge of horse racing.

The writers and editors of *Crítica*, in contrast, did not share the concern and sensitivities of ethnic elites and cultural agents eager to represent themselves as exemplary citizens and yearning for social acceptance and advancement. The members of Botana's staff knew their readers and were well aware of urbanization as a major sociodemographic trend. For their goals, an urban – and not just urban, but *porteño* – representation of Jewish-Argentines that was edgy and unafraid of conflict was more interesting and relatable than an idyllic, sanitized image of earnest, hard-working farmers in traditional *criollo* garments.

Patoff, as a character wholly built by *Crítica*'s artists and writers, had certain advantages over “Don Jacobo en la Argentina” as a symbolic weapon against the Argentine Right. First, he did not suffer from the limitations imposed by a borrowed graphic dimension: each column was accompanied by a drawing made on-demand to

⁴⁰⁰ See Chapter 3 for Leopoldo Lugones's role in establishing the Martin Fierro and the gaucho myth at the center of an hegemonic construction of Argentine identity.

illustrate the anecdote that Patoff narrated. Second, the format was entirely textual, and the image merely reinforced the narrative, but did not drive or determine it. Third, the column's position within the "turf" section freed the narrative from the constraints of the family-friendly funny pages, and the narrator took advantage of the new discursive opportunities.

That said, the physical representation of the Patoff character was similar to how Don Jacobo was drawn:



Artist "Rodríguez" drew Patoff in a cartoonish style similar to Jacobo's.⁴⁰¹ The racetrack expert was thinner than his colleague from the funny pages, but they dressed alike. Both favored suits and bowler hats, although Patoff's had a fabric patch on his, which, in the visual language of comic-strips, signaled poverty or lack of wealth. *Crítica's* immigrant columnist's suit had a garish plaid pattern, which clashed with his striped pants. He sported a full beard, but no traditionally religious sidelocks, and his

⁴⁰¹ Moisés Patoff, "¿Qui Mi Cointas di las Fifis Ligionarios, Quiridos?" *Crítica*, February 26, 1932.

round nose was smaller than those of his nativist Argentine antagonists. Despite several differences, then, the newspaper portrayed both its Jewish-Argentine characters in a visually neutral way, without clear physical markers of ethnicity. Only Patoff's image had been designed by *Crítica*, but both characters might as well have shared the same strip.

In the above illustration, from the columnist's debut in *Crítica*, the Jewish-Argentine is punching an armed member of a right-wing militia, while another looks on in horror and begins to flee. Patoff's punch literally has his opponent seeing stars and planets, and makes him miss his shot. In the background, a policeman can be seen running towards the brawl.

This appearance set the style and tone of the columnist's contributions to the newspaper. Patoff's columns were structured as dialogues between the Jewish-Argentine and an anonymous interlocutor who asked him questions. The text opened after the putative beginning of the conversation (no greetings were ever exchanged), with a question from the narrator – who did not have a foreign accent – to the immigrant, about his latest adventure in Buenos Aires. After the story, usually a show of Patoff's *viveza* or bravery, the last questions (between a third and a quarter of the column's space) led the expert to share his knowledge of the sure bets for the upcoming races.

The titles read like excerpts of Patoff's conversation, written to reflect his Yiddish-accented *lunfardo*. The debut was titled “¿Qui Mi Cointas di las Fifis Ligionarios, Quiridos?”,⁴⁰² which can be roughly translated as “what is up with these delicate/effeminate Legionnaires, my dear?” The fictional reporter signed the columns,

⁴⁰² Patoff, “¿Qui Mi Cointas?”

which were headed by the message “Written by Moisés Patoff.”

Patoff debuted on the pages of *Crítica* in the midst of the newspaper’s quarrel with the *Legión Cívica Argentina*, a rightwing armed militia fashioned after the Italian Blackshirts. With Justo’s inauguration, the *Legión* lost its government backing but continued harassing its liberal opponents. In a matter of days, the group had locked horns with Botana’s journal, and issued invitations to witness the burning of the newspaper’s offices the night of February 25. The daily republished the threat and asked its supporters to come to its defense.⁴⁰³ The militia never showed up.

The following day, the Patoff character made its first appearance in *Crítica* with a story about how he single-handedly defeated a squad of *legionarios* who jumped him on the street. The tale differed from the accompanying image – pictured above – in that the Jewish-Argentine claimed to have been attacked by ten militiamen, not two, although he did not mention any firearms. After recognizing him as a writer for Botana’s periodical – explained Patoff, – the gang rushed him, only to flee after the columnist punched the lights out of the closest attacker.

The racetracks expert then joked that the salaries of his adversaries would not suffice to pay for the soap and bleach they would need to clean their garments. Just for their underwear, the *legionarios* would need “several tons” of soap, because – when they fled – they left a lingering smell, “and not of cologne.”⁴⁰⁴ The scatological character of the Jewish-Argentine’s discourse differed from the more bourgeois Don Jacobo’s, who could be at times mildly lewd, but never gross.

⁴⁰³ Unsigned article, “La Legión Cívica y los Policías Acusados Invitan a Presenciar el Incendio de CRITICA esta Noche,” *Crítica*, February 25, 1932, 3.

⁴⁰⁴ Moisés Patoff, “¿Qui Mi Cointas?”

Patoff's dual character as a Jewish immigrant and a street-wise, genuine *porteño* turned the story about his physical domination of a right-wing violent gang into a sharp and humiliating critique. The narrative not only painted the *legionarios* as full of bluster yet ultimately weak and craven, but also underlined it by weighing their manliness against that of a lone Jewish-Argentine. The Argentine Right represented the Jewish stereotype as lecherous yet effeminate, physically weak and degenerate. In anti-Semitic tropes, Jews were damaging to their host nations through trickery, treachery, and moral and financial corruption. A cowardly, backstabbing race, Jews operated in the shadows, and nativists disempowered them by exposing them and combating them.⁴⁰⁵

The story of an outnumbered Patoff facing, defeating, and breaking the charge of a *Legión* gang in broad daylight, in the middle of the street, subverted the stereotype of the weak and cowardly Jew and redeployed it against its original proponents. If, as the *legionarios* claimed, Jews were puny, craven parasites, what did it say about the militiamen that a single one of these creatures, unarmed and with one hand burdened with the leash of his dog (or duck), defeated a squad of them and made them flee?

Patoff returned to the pages of *Crítica* the following day, this time with a racetracks anecdote. He explained how, around the grounds outside the Palermo hippodrome, a con man had sold – after managing to gather a large crowd around him – fake betting predictions to the credulous gamblers nearby. “There are always *giles* to be found, my dear,” explained the expert, reinforcing his own status as a *vivo*.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁵ See: Senkman, *El antisemitismo en Argentina*. Leonardo Senkman and Sosnowski, Raúl, *Fascismo y nazismo en las letras argentinas* (Buenos Aires: Lumière, 2009).

⁴⁰⁶ Moisés Patoff, “Qui Maneiras di Mover la sin Hoisos, Esa Tipos,” *Crítica*, February 27, 1932.

Argentine Theater and the Normalization of Jewish-Argentines

Beyond *Crítica*'s construction and deployment of specific representations of Jewish-Argentines as part of a broader fight over the character of Argentine identity, public images of "the Jew" became increasingly common in the interwar years. From the late 1920s until the Second World War – and beyond, – Jewish-Argentine characters became a regular feature in portrayals of a population that "descended from the ships." Without the need of a political agenda, the authors who created immigrant characters and their local-born descendants contributed to a normalization of the ethnic-Argentine as part of the body politic. This section focuses on the fictional Jewish-Argentines as created by popular (non-Jewish) playwrights and portrayed in the city's popular theaters.

The theatrical genre most populated by hyphenated Argentine characters was the *sainete*. In its origins in the Spanish XVII century, this format described short comedic or morality stories with singing and dancing. In early XX century Argentina, the *sainete*, also called *sainete criollo*, developed into a short *costumbrista* comedy of errors, or situational play. Oftentimes the action took place in *conventillos*, lower-class tenant houses crowded with immigrants and poor Argentines. This type of play had become the most popular genre of the *porteño* stage in the interwar period, loved by theater-goers looking for a fun, light experience. For critics as well as some authors, however, it was as far from high, serious drama as theater could get.

Characters typically fell within expected gendered, ethnic, and social stereotypes – although with many instances of trope subversion for comedic sake, – with little room for development and complexity, and followed their basic desires, such as money, power, lust, and love. The genre's conventions demanded the exaggeration of the elements that

made up ethnic stereotypes – flaws, passions, personal qualities and behaviors, and language. Hence, Jewish immigrants typically sported long beards, had a pathological and often unscrupulous hunger for money, and mangled Spanish with heavy Yiddish accents – humorously sprinkled with the fashionable slang of Buenos Aires.

However, the “types” displayed in *sainete* were neither fixed nor static. There was room for variation and differentiation between the style of different authors, and even between plays of the same playwright.⁴⁰⁷ The meaning behind these stereotypes also evolved with social change: as immigrant figures became more common, their theatrical characters gained positive meaning, often signifying social progress.⁴⁰⁸

Lying and trickery were common tactics that characters (of every gender and ethnicity) deployed to reach their goals and satisfy their desires, and – in contrast with other morality-based genres, such as the *melodrama*⁴⁰⁹ – the most egregious offenders were as likely to get away with it as to pay the price for their deeds. Playwrights commonly resorted to the lowest common denominator for jokes and humor. To compensate for the sometimes convoluted accumulation of layers of betrayal and deceit, characters often broke off the interaction with each other to “secretly” address the audience and explain their true feelings, plans, and goals. This kind of play did not traditionally require excessive attention or deep analysis from theater-goers.

The disdain of elites and *connoisseurs* notwithstanding, theater owners and show business entrepreneurs displayed a growing preference for plays of this type, as they

⁴⁰⁷ Oscar Pellettieri, *El sainete y el grotesco criollo: del autor al actor* (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 2008), 100.

⁴⁰⁸ Oscar Pellettieri, *Historia del teatro argentino en Buenos Aires: La emancipación cultural (1884-1930)* (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 2002), 429-430.

⁴⁰⁹ Matthew Karush, *Culture of Class: Radio and Cinema in the Making of a Divided Argentina, 1920-1946* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

attracted the largest crowds, particularly of the lower and middle classes. This means that, despite their overreliance on obvious gags, stereotypes, and unidimensional characters, *sainetes* were immensely influential to the *porteño* understanding of Argentine society thanks to reach and popularity.

The common presence of ethnic-Argentine characters – however stereotyped – in these popular plays contributed to a normalization and *de facto* legitimization of hyphenated identities. Additionally, these comedies of errors often highlighted the differences in appearance, practices, and ideals between the immigrant generation and their local-born descendants, promoting a trans-generational understanding of social integration. On this point, the social narrative promoted by most *sainetes* were not unlike the one promoted by *Crítica*, and expressed – and feared – by Jewish-Argentine cultural agents and elites.

The action in *sainetes* typically took place in *conventillos*, spaces coded in popular imagination as loci of ethnic and linguistic intermingling, inhabited by immigrants from different – yet almost exclusively European – nations (and at times internal migrants to the country's capital). Unsurprisingly, the most common nationalities and ethnicities represented in *sainetes* as belonging in *conventillos* coincided with the largest immigrant groups: Spaniards, Italians, and (Eastern European) Jews.

The *conventillo*, as portrayed in plays, was the home of loud, meddlesome neighbors. The older generation was immigrant and their (adult) children were born in Argentina. This difference was conveyed, like it was for Don Jacobo and his daughter Rebeca, through linguistic markers: the young men and women, regardless of ethnic origin, had no foreign accents, while their parents – whether Spaniards, Italians, or Jews –

did. Regardless of accent, both younger and older generations incorporated the local slang to a certain extent. The amount of *lunfardo* in the speech pattern changed according to the author and the particularities of a given character.

Ensalada rusa, which debuted on April, 1930, provides a clear example of the use of language, slang, and accent to signal integration, ethnic origin, and social standing and aspirations. A play on words on a type of potato salad and the popular use of the term “Russian” as shorthand for Ashkenazi Jew, the piece, written by Juan Villalba and Hermido Braga, described the mostly immoral and sexually promiscuous inhabitants of a *conventillo* in Buenos Aires. The script includes Eastern European Jewish, Spanish, and Italian immigrants, each speaking the local *porteño* language with his own accent.⁴¹⁰

The authors established the status of “Salomón,” a Jewish immigrant, through physical, behavioral, and linguistic markers. He carried a long beard, and defined himself as “Russian” – i.e., Eastern European Jewish. Although his speech showed a strong Yiddish influence in pronunciation, his vocabulary bore the unmistakable stamp of Buenos Aires and the plasticity that such experience provided. When he chastised his daughter Olga for spending her time partying at the tango dance hall, he turned the *lunfardo* noun *carancanfunfa* (a tango dance style characterized by quick, successive breaks) into the verb *carancanfunfear*:⁴¹¹

SALOMÓN. – ¿Ti parece bonito? Mientras tu pobre padre trabaja como un chivo peludo, vos y el sinvirgoinza de tu marido, *meta carancanfunfea* y puro me caiga muerto. (Hace algunos cortes).

OLGA. – Así me gusta, *compadre*, que me lo diga en *criollo*. Pero...

¿quién ha dicho que usted es ruso?

SALOMÓN. – ¡Yo ti lo digo!

OLGA. – No *macanee*. Usted se afeita esa pera. (Le tira de las barbas.)

SALOMÓN. – Deja la barba in paz (deja los paquetes sobre una mesa.) y

⁴¹⁰ Juan Villalba and Hermido Braga, “Ensalada Rusa,” *La Escena: revista teatral*, May 8, 1930.

⁴¹¹ Villalba and Braga, “Ensalada Rusa.”

atiende la problema que ti voy a decir.

OLGA. – Pero *viejo*, usted sabe que yo de números *manyo* poco.

SALOMÓN. – Como se trata de “*manyar*”, (ademán de comer) lo vas a intender bien. Mirá: vos y tu marido suman dos; como hasta la fecha no hubo multiplicación, se tienen que dividir.

(The underlined terms above signal words altered by Salomón’s Yiddish accent – typically using the wrong vowel, the wrong gender, or swapping the “eu” and “ue” phonemes for “oy.” The italicized words above mark urban and rural Argentine *slang* terms. Both underlining and italicization were not present in the original texts, but added here for easier identification.)

SALOMÓN. – Do you think that is cute? While your poor father works like a hairy goat, you and your shameless husband just go out *dancing* [*carancanfunfear*] like maniacs? (Mimics some tango moves).

OLGA. – That’s what I like to see, *compadre*, that you talk to me in *criollo*. Now... Who ever said you were Russian?

SALOMÓN. – I say it!

OLGA. – Don’t *lie* [*macanee*], now. You will shave that chin. (She pulls his beard.)

SALOMÓN. – Let the beard be (leaves his packages on a table.) and pay attention to this problem I am about to tell you about.

OLGA. – But, *dad* [*viejo*], you know that I do not *understand* [*manyo*] much about numbers.

SALOMÓN. – Given that it is about “*manyar*” [*understanding/eating*], (mimics eating) you will understand well. Look: you and your husband add to two; given how you have not yet multiplied, you will have to divide.

(The italicized words above mark the translated slang terminology. The original *lunfardo* for each term follows the translation in brackets. The translation is mine.)

Olga celebrated her father’s dominion of the local slang in her exaggerated combination of urban *porteño* and rural *criollo* Spanish. She then shifted from approval at Salomón’s linguistic integration – accent notwithstanding – to goading him to shave his beard and lose that physical marker of Jewish Otherness. Her father refused, insisting that he was indeed “Russian” – meaning, in this context, “Jewish.”

Salomón further proved his mastery of the local dialect by teasing her daughter’s extraordinary appetite – repeatedly highlighted by Olga’s actions and sayings during the play – with a pun. The verb *manyar* arrived in *lunfardo* as a modification (and

resignification) of the Italian *mangiare*, “to eat.” In Argentine Spanish, however, the term means “to understand.” By combining both meanings, the Russian immigrant joked that his daughter found understanding difficult, but not eating. His familiarity with both definitions – the original Italian and the adapted *lunfardo* – taken together with his accent, bolstered his claim to hyphenated Argentineness. This particular example, additionally, hints at the complex character of linguistic (and cultural) integration of minorities in a context where cultural and speech patterns were undergoing swift, potent transformation under the massive migratory influx.

Olga’s Spanish, bereft of a foreign accent, was notable for her heavy yet accurate reliance on slang. The distance between her speech pattern and her father’s constituted a narrative of transgenerational integration. This linguistic gap resembled the one between Don Jacobo’s Spanish and his daughter’s, from *Crítica*’s funny pages analyzed earlier in this chapter.

Another similarity between both fictional, young Jewish-Argentine women could be found in their romantic choices. Although Rebeca’s suitors often showed signs of wealth and grooming and Olga’s husband Pancho was lazy, crooked, and willingly unemployed, both characters preferred Argentine men over immigrants. While Don Jacobo once tried to marry his daughter to a wealthy Spaniard, most bachelors in the constellation orbiting Rebeca displayed no accent, and no other markers of ethnicity, linguistic or otherwise. These similarities once more point towards a gendered understanding of assimilation, with women (in this case, daughters) as those who most eagerly embrace the host culture, language, and sociability, and men as more resistant to assimilationist forces and impulses.

Within *Ensalada Rusa*, Gregorio, the Jewish-Argentine son of Abraham (an older immigrant like Salomón), shared his father's Yiddish accent. This character's speech pattern established a contrast with Olga's exaggerated *porteño*. At the same time, Gregorio's prolific use of local slang expressions rivaled those of *Crítica*'s Moisés Patoff, lacking only the specialized jargon of horse racing. A notorious womanizer, Abraham's son took advantage of his father's used clothes business to conquer ladies with gifted dresses and negligees. Although never explicitly stated, the play implied that Gregorio pursued women of any ethnic background.

Ensalada Rusa established that Olga's speech pattern was a conscious performance on her part. During the XIII scene of the first act, she seduced Gregorio – in part, as a stratagem to obtain free clothes – and then expressed her inability to betray her husband. When Gregorio told her that she could untie herself from her spousal vows, her emotional distress made her lose control of her accent: “No *poido*. (Correcting herself.) No puedo [I cannot].”⁴¹²

Through Olga's linguistic slip, the authors portrayed her assimilation and putative abandonment of her hyphenated identity as a conscious performative choice. Besides her speech, Olga's performance of Argentineness included a love of tango dancing, a preference for native men – although she also seduced a Jewish-Argentine and a Spanish immigrant in the first act of the play, – and her predilection for pork products over other foods – stated by Olga in several occasions.⁴¹³

The linguistic contrast between Olga and Gregorio is further evidence of a gendered component in public representations of assimilation: where she chose –

⁴¹² Villalba and Braga, “*Ensalada Rusa*.”

⁴¹³ Villalba and Braga, “*Ensalada Rusa*.”

arguably, through effort and practice – to erase her Yiddish accent, Gregorio retained it, unconcerned about consequences, reactions, or repercussions. At the same time, his affairs with local women did not alter his external markers of Jewishness, while Olga’s relationship with her *criollo* husband Pancho developed exclusively on unhyphenated Argentine cultural, linguistic, and behavioral grounds.

Although not technically a *sainete*, *¡Mi tía está chiflada!* (My Aunt is Insane!), which debuted in March, 1928, relied on similar tropes, stereotypes, and comedic situations. The main difference – and the reason its author, Julio F. Escobar, labeled it a *juguete cómico* (comedic toy) – rested on the play’s setting: the large, upscale house of Pepote, an Argentine layabout who lived off his rich aunt. Although his life was far from the world of the immigrant *conventillo* – he even had a Spanish manservant, with his own foreign accent and the stereotypical nickname “Manolo” – Pepote’s refusal to work had left him heavily indebted, in particular to his Jewish-Argentine friend, Isaac Koifman.

Like Jewish-Argentine immigrants in *sainetes*, Isaac spoke in the accented Spanish that, according to Argentine comedic convention – whether in theater stages or newspaper pages, – signified a Yiddish accent and Jewish ethnicity. In the description, the author did not give him any physical markers of ethnic identity: there was no mention of beard, hat, sidelocks, or a long coat (although the tails he wore were a size or two too large for him). Besides his accent, Isaac’s main stereotypical Jewish trait was his love of money, which the actor performing him had to express by sighing loudly every time anyone mentioned money in his presence.⁴¹⁴

Despite the picturesque fashion in which Isaac expressed his love for money, his

⁴¹⁴ Julio F. Escobar, “¡Mi tía está chiflada!” *La Escena: Revista teatral*, April 19, 1928.

fiduciary passion was shared by several other characters, part of the genre's conventions. Pepote, the male lead and an unhyphenated Argentine, had been swindling money out of his aunt for years using a gamut of pretexts and lies to finance his way of life. He had also borrowed from Isaac heavily, convincing the lender to extend his credit against the putative inheritance he would receive after his relative died.

When Pepote's aunt announced, after many years, that she was visiting her nephew in Buenos Aires, the swindler mounted a façade, with Manolo's help, pretending – as he had told her – to be a married doctor. Pepote and Manolo then engaged in unlicensed (and untrained) medicine, with the latter even attempting to operate on his master's aunt – with the intent of accelerating Pepote's inheritance. Since the protagonist had sent his relative a picture of Isaac's spouse as a stand-in for his own non-existent bride, he needed the cooperation of the Jewish-Argentine and his wife Marta.

Isaac, however, despite his supposedly unfettered love for money, refused to involve his wife in this plan, even if it meant never collecting on Pepote's debts. Marta decided to help despite her husband's objections, because she wanted to help him. Interestingly, Marta had no Yiddish accent, and the play never clarified whether she was Jewish. Her lack of accent is no proof of non-hyphenated Argentineness, as the gendered character of assimilation in the representation of Jewish-Argentines has shown.

As in *Ensalada Rusa*, Jewish-Argentine characters – both immigrant and local-born – were protagonists in *El judío Blum* (1937). Although Oscar Beltrán chose to label his script a comedy rather than a *sainete*, he employed similar tropes, stereotypes, and dramaturgical conventions. Love and money acted as the central motivations of the

characters, Jews and non-Jews alike.⁴¹⁵

The play followed the winding story of friendship, competition, and enmity between two immigrant families: one Andalusian, one Eastern European Jewish. Once again, linguistic markers played a central role in the representation of immigrant status, for Jews and Spaniards alike. Following the pattern established by the previous pieces, speech patterns, and specifically accents, established a generational divide, with the local-born generation lacking any linguistic markers of ethnicity.

Pepe Trujillo and Israel Blum, the Andalusian and Jewish immigrants of *El judío Blum*, had strong yet clearly differentiated accents. Pepe's followed the stereotypical speech pattern of migrants from the Iberian Peninsula, while Blum mispronounced his Spanish in the same fashion as Don Jacobo, Moisés Patoff, Isaac Koifman, and Salomón. The Andalusian, however, relied heavily on expressions from his native Spain, while Blum had adopted the style of Buenos Aires.

The difference in the characters' repertoire of regional expressions could be either purposeful or meta-textual: in the former case, it would reflect the author's impression of how Spaniards and Eastern European Jews spoke Spanish. Given that immigrants from Spain already knew the local language, Argentine influence on their dialect would have been limited. On the other hand, for most Yiddish-speaking Jewish-Argentines, the first encounter with Spanish took place in Buenos Aires, so they would adopt *porteño* speech patterns.

Alternatively, the meta-textual explanation for Blum and Pepe's different use of slang expressions and terminology speaks to the author's uneven familiarity with

⁴¹⁵ Oscar Beltrán, "El judío Blum," *Nuestro Teatro: revista teatral*, March 11, 1937, 1-32.

immigrant Spanish-Argentines and Jewish-Argentines. If Beltrán had more personal experience with the former than with the latter, the knowledge differential would explain Pepe's use of Andalusian expressions and sayings and Blum's lack of phrases and terminology deriving from Yiddish.

Besides linguistic stereotypes, immigrant representations in *El judío Blum* relied on physical and behavioral markers of ethnicity. The author described Pepe as a person "with a bird's brain inside a horse's skull. Weak and impressionable spirit. His will is that of his wife."⁴¹⁶ In the same section, Beltrán portrayed Blum as a "traditionalist, irreducible Jew," with a matted beard and a hat he wore even for bed, always wearing the same short frock-coat that had clearly not been tailored to his body.⁴¹⁷

While the description of the Andalusian was based on a behavioral stereotype, i.e., the purported ignorance and stupidity of Spanish immigrants, the introductory sketch of the Jewish character relied on a mostly physical description. As the narrative unfolded, however, it became clear that Blum's personality was also shaped by traditional stereotypes: he proved to be cunning, clever, and unscrupulous, specifically in monetary matters.

The titular character, however, expressed a complexity unexpected for a light, short comedy. Blum had a soft spot for his granddaughter Sara, and showed an earnest desire to see her married and happy – as long as she wedded a Jew. Such an arrangement was complicated by her secret yet obvious love for Luis María, Pepe's only son.

Following the flight of the two lovers near the end of the play, Blum broke down:

BLUM: "Do you know what my granddaughter meant to me? She was more than life! Do you understand? More than my life! [... She was] more

⁴¹⁶ Beltrán, "El judío Blum," 2.

⁴¹⁷ Beltrán, "El judío Blum," 2.

than money... more than the blood in my veins!”⁴¹⁸
 BLUM: [...] She used to pull my beard with her tiny hands from inside her crib. Then... when she was older, I jumped around like a clown to make her laugh. I told her the Talmud legends that she liked [...] And now she is gone. I worked for her. I made money for her, so she could be rich, powerful, happy... and to make sure no one could hurt her [...] She is Jewish... Jewish... She is blood of my blood... the flesh of Israel. And she is gone. She is gone. She does not want money. She wants no money. She does not want anything. Everything, lost, [my] Surele...⁴¹⁹

In his expression of despair, Blum subverted the Jewish stereotype that the play had established. He had behaved, in financial matters, ruthlessly, cunningly using Pepe’s family’s greed and lies as a tool to take their – also unethically earned – riches. However, in the last scene Blum showed unexpected depth: money had never been an end to him, but rather a means to guarantee his granddaughter’s happiness, agency, and safety. He also implied that his wealth had been an attempt to assure that Sara would remain by his side. Even his materialism was directed by affect.

El judío Blum portrayed local-born generations of hyphenated Argentines without linguistic markers of ethnicity (with the exception of Moisés, analyzed below). When at all present, their ethnic status was expressed either physically or behaviorally. Luis María, Pepe’s son, had no signs of a hyphenated identity: his description at the beginning of the script was even left blank.

Only in the last scene does the script provide a physical description of Sara, Blum’s granddaughter: in his grief, the titular character recalled her white skin, blond hair, and blue eyes, traits coded as “European,” but by no means exclusively or even especially “Jewish.” Behaviorally, she had an ambiguous and dynamic relationship with her Jewishness. Her love for Luis María, together with her desire, during most of the

⁴¹⁸ Beltrán, “El judío Blum,” 31. My translation from the original Spanish.

⁴¹⁹ Beltrán, “El judío Blum,” 32. My translation from the original Spanish.

piece, to become his legal wife, spoke of her yearning for assimilation and unhyphenated Argentineness. However, she experienced a conflict between her individual desires and emotions and her understanding of her ethnic and social duties. Jewish belonging tied her with bonds of obligation. While she rejected the Jewish-Argentine suitors that Blum's matchmaker provided, she also repressed her feelings for Luis María – even though they are always clear for the reader (and, one assumes, the spectator). In the end, she returned to her grandfather's side, resigned to marry Moisés and fulfill the expectations her family and ethnicity place on her: "I have returned. I am Jewish," she said, as her only explanation.⁴²⁰

With Sara's return, every character on stage except for Sara partook in jubilant celebration before the curtains fell. Blum was so overjoyed that he ripped the contract he had ready for Pepe, which would have placed his old friend under his thumb. Instead, Blum merely gave him a check, to be returned "[...] whenever you can..."⁴²¹ The Jewish immigrant still remembered to add, as the last joke of the play, that when that "whenever" arrived, he would charge Pepe a ten percent interest. Only Sara refused to celebrate, her visage of "majestic pain" in sharp contrast with the joy around her.⁴²²

Sara's conflicting emotions towards her loved one and her ethnic belonging played around a Yiddish expression: "Gut shabes [Shabbos; good Saturday]." As David, the Jewish matchmaker, left Blum and Pepe's store in the first act, he wished her a "gut shabes." Sara clearly understood, but replied in Spanish: "buen sábado."⁴²³ Blum's granddaughter's refusal to engage with Yiddish expressed a rejection of at least the

⁴²⁰ Beltrán, "El judío Blum," 32. My translation from the original Spanish.

⁴²¹ Beltrán, "El judío Blum," 32. My translation from the original Spanish.

⁴²² Beltrán, "El judío Blum," 32. My translation from the original Spanish.

⁴²³ Beltrán, "El judío Blum," 11.

linguistic aspects of her family's traditions.

However, the event that both Sara and Luis María acknowledged as the birth of their love was also linked to this Yiddish phrase. One afternoon, he grabbed her hands and wished her “gut shabes.”⁴²⁴ His willingness to cross the linguistic and cultural distance between them became the synecdoche of their whole unspoken, unrealized relationship. Sara's Jewishness both manifested their love and constituted an impossible barrier to its realization.

Moisés, Blum's assistant turned business partner, offered a powerful contrast to Sara and a final example of the gendered character of assimilation in public representations of Jewish-Argentineness. A young local-born Jewish-Argentine, he also spoke without a Yiddish accent. His description, however, marked him not only physically, but also biologically as Jewish: the author provided no guidance about his clothes, yet defined Moisés as a “Jewish boy. Red hair. Freckles. High cheekbones and fleshy lips. Hooked nose. Not as dumb as he seems. 23 years old.”⁴²⁵ The author never expressed whether the young man wore a hat, had sidelocks, or grew a beard. Physiologically, however, he was marked as Jewish after the centuries-old caricature of a Jewish man.

More importantly, the script showed Moisés as a willing performer of his Jewishness. Not only was he a keen apprentice of Blum's financial cunning and profit-seeking talents, but he also surpassed the titular character in religiosity. In the first act, he complained how “the Shabbos is no longer observed here. We work, we light a fire, we

⁴²⁴ Beltrán, “El judío Blum,” 20.

⁴²⁵ Beltrán, “El judío Blum,” 2. My translation from the original Spanish.

eat hot food... this does not seem like a Jewish house [...]”⁴²⁶ Although the physical, linguistic, and behavioral markers of identity in the characters of Moisés and Blum can be linked to theatrical conventions – particularly so in the case of the stereotype-heavy *sainete*, – the lack of these markers in female characters like Sara hints at a broader explanation.

This divergence in how Sara and Moisés performed their identity – despite their shared local-born status and their similar daily lives – provides further evidence of a gendered disparity in the representation of Jewish-Argentines. Together with the linguistic and behavioral contrast between Olga and Gregorio in *Ensalada Rusa* and the assimilated character of Don Jacobo’s daughter Rebeca in “Don Jacobo en la Argentina,” the difference between Sara and Moisés shows how the public representation of local-born Jewish-Argentines in non-ethnic media portrayed men as more resilient to assimilatory forces than women. Except for Sara’s last-minute return at the end of *El judío Blum*, all three female characters willingly embraced non-hyphenated Argentine identities and romantic partners. The local-born men – albeit in dissimilar fashion – acted as loci for ethnic permanence.

Conclusion

The development of mass media and the massification of cultural industries such as popular theater were an integral part of the transformation of *porteño* society, along with mass transoceanic and internal migration. Media such as newspapers, theater, and film became vehicles for influencing public opinion; some cultural agents consciously

⁴²⁶ Beltrán, “El judío Blum,” 6. My translation from the original Spanish.

sought this goal – such as Natalio Botana and *Crítica*, – while others achieved it as a side-effect of aggregation. The agents with an agenda and those simply seeking to sell cultural goods both reproduced and subverted stereotypes and common wisdom.

Through an analysis of similar yet uncoordinated representations of Jewish-Argentines in the public sphere in Buenos Aires, this chapter has shown how non-Jewish cultural agents in different media and genres shared an understanding of assimilation as a transgenerational and gendered process. Representations of Jewish-Argentines as part of a broad community of diverse immigrant origins expressed a growing normalization of hyphenated identities in general, and of Jewish-Argentines in particular. An emphasis on linguistic markers of identity over other ethnic traits, and especially the contrast between immigrant and local-born generations, worked as essential narrative devices for this inclusive social conceptualization.

Furthermore, cultural agents like Botana, aware of the impact of their cultural production, deployed representations of Jewish-Argentines such as Don Jacobo and Patoff as powerful arguments for an expansive, inclusive conception of Argentine nationhood. Branded by nativists – who borrowed from a centenarian tradition of exclusion – as the ultimate pariahs, Jewish-Argentines became a key battleground in the struggle for the meaning and boundaries of Argentineness. By subverting the negative tropes about Jews, and producing representations of Jewish immigrants and their descendants as integrated into the nation, media like *Crítica* undermined the Argentine Right's case for an identity based on cultural, religious, and racial homogeneity. If even the unassimilable, harmful Jews could become productive Argentines, then everyone could.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation analyzed representations of minority groups in the contested process of national identity formation. Diverse constructions of ethnic, immigrant, racial, class, gender, or sexual identity influenced the struggle to define the nation and its boundaries. Minority as well as elite cultural producers (such as artists, journalists, entertainers, and intellectuals) disseminated these representations through mass media and other cultural channels in order to foster particular collective understandings of group identity for specific target audiences. Successful constructions established lasting stereotypes and prejudices (positive and negative), and could legitimize or condemn a minority's place in the nation's social body.

Different factions within the nation's political, cultural, and intellectual elites promoted diverse, often oppositional representations of the country's minority groups that ranged from worthy, assimilable members of the national community to nefarious, incompatible Others that had to be expelled from the social body. Minority cultural producers created their own constructions, some for internal consumption and others to influence the country's elites. The similarities between minority and elite representations functioned as windows into collective ideology, belief, and prejudice, while the disconnections highlighted sociocultural chasms in the experiences of different groups.

From the 1920s to the 1940s, the different factions of the Argentine Right – a nativist movement opposed to liberal democracy – increased their challenges to the liberal paradigm of the late nineteenth-century that established the official national identity and the country's migratory policies. The Right's intellectuals and propagandists

portrayed Jewish-Argentines who had migrated from Eastern Europe as the prime example of undesirable outsiders: they depicted them as harmful, immoral, and unassimilable parasites. These representations were contested by elite as well as marginal cultural producers, hyphenated and unhyphenated. Jewish-Argentineness thus became both the weapon and the battlefield in the struggle to define Argentine identity and the role of immigrants and their descendants in the national body politic.

Each case studied in this dissertation created its representations of Jewish-Argentines with a specific public in mind, and through a particular use of language as either a selection mechanism to connect with a desired audience or a symbolic device to convey “Jewish-Argentineness.” The Lithuanian-born musician and satirist Jevl Katz, beloved of the Yiddish-speaking masses, built a representation that reflected the experiences of the immigrant generations. His songs fostered a feeling of community through shared positive and negative experiences, such as attending a banquet or walking the city as a door-to-door peddler. Through humor, keen observation, and a knack for identifying popular songs and capturing the evolving character of the Yiddish of Buenos Aires, Katz created a transitional Jewish-Argentineness for immigrants to find solace and company, buttressed by the emerging myth of the agrarian colonies and the integrated “Jewish gauchos.”

The intensely-national and intensely-Jewish performances of radio show host Samuel Glasserman carved a symbolic space for the legitimate existence of hyphenated Argentines. The broadcasts of *Matinee Radial Hebrea*, in Yiddish and Spanish, targeted immigrants and local-born Jewish-Argentines alike. The show offered music and entertainment in the ethnic language to the former – couched both in the narratives of

nostalgia and as new local productions – and promoting intra-ethnic spaces of sociability to the latter. Glasserman’s central goal was to stop the perceived threat of assimilation, which he identified as the practice of intermarriage, for the local-born generations who did not speak Yiddish. His prepared comments for the national patriotic holidays redefined the relationship between Jewish-Argentines and their new host country, establishing this ethnic group as particularly Argentine and excluding their anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic opponents from the body politic. This daily radio show constructed Jewish-Argentineness as positional and variable vis-à-vis the national context: Argentina incarnated both the promise of the new *patria* and the seductive threat that could lead youths to discard their hyphenated identities.

The project incarnated in the magazine *JUDAICA* constructed a Jewish-Argentineness based on translation of Jewish literature into Spanish as both a process and an ideology. Publisher Salomón Resnick conceived of identity as an eminently cultural phenomenon, and of Jewish culture as the best possible device to convince the Argentine intellectual and political elites of the beneficial character of Jewish-Argentine presence in the country. The project rested on two underlying premises: first, that literature and non-fictional writings could impact political decision-making. Second, that the main threat against a sustainable identity for Jewish-Argentines was the ignorance – by non-Jews as well as local-born Jews – of Jewish history and tradition, and of Jewish contributions to modern civilization, the sciences, and the arts. From such a diagnosis, Resnick concluded that curation, translation, and dissemination of Jewish culture and tradition were the ideal mechanism to neutralize this threat. *JUDAICA*’s editor identified the same putative risks to Jewish-Argentineness as the producer and host of *Matinee Radial Hebrea*: potential

assimilation and negative representations about Jews reproduced by the Argentine Right. While the radio show devised different mechanisms to tackle this menaces – a re-definition of Argentine identity that included Jews and excluded xenophobes, and a socio-biological strategy that offered intra-ethnic spaces of sociability to the youth and radically opposed intermarriage, – the journal’s solution was exclusively cultural-linguistic.

The largest newspaper in Argentina in the late 1920s and early 1930s, *Crítica*, also disseminated its own representations of Jewish-Argentineness, incarnated in two fictional and comedic characters: Don Jacobo and Moisés Patoff. Their creators identified these men as Jewish-Argentines exclusively through their accents, forsaking any stereotypically ethnic physical or biological characteristics. With “Don Jacobo en la Argentina,” an American comic-strip adapted into a story of immigrant life and cultural integration in Buenos Aires, the newspaper reproduced and subverted typical tropes – positive as well as negative – about Jewish traits and behavior. The character’s adventures and interactions showed how, despite his accent, the immigrant adopted local traditions and became a (hyphenated) Argentine. Through the inclusion of Jacobo’s family, and particularly his daughter Rebeca, *Crítica* argued for assimilation as a trans-generational phenomenon with gendered characteristics. Patoff, in contrast, became a more direct tool to combat nativist rhetoric about immigration and the political and policy preferences of the Argentine right. The experiences of this character subverted anti-Semitic stereotypes about Jewish weakness and cowardice, and provided a counter-narrative to the idea of Jews as intrinsically alien and incompatible with Argentineness.

Not unlike *Crítica*'s characters, public representations of Jewish-Argentines in the popular theatrical genre of *sainete* (short, light comedies) also communicated "Jewishness" through linguistic markers – that is, through the deployment of a fictional Yiddish-accented Spanish. Like "Don Jacobo en la Argentina," these plays resorted to ethnic stereotypes and subverted them in their narratives. The comedies also agreed with the newspaper in their portrayal of assimilation as a trans-generational, gendered phenomenon, embodied in the love affairs of the local-born Jewish-Argentine daughters with non-Jewish Argentine men. That these popular plays as well as the best-selling national newspaper of the 1920s and 1930s relied on linguistic markers – that is, accents – to signal "Jewishness" hints to a particular understanding of the meaning of Jewish-Argentineness by a large segment of the Buenos Aires audience.

In their representations, ethnic cultural producers such as Samuel Glasserman and Salomón Resnick constructed anti-Semitic nativism as alien and irreconcilable with the Argentine character. They thus symbolically reimagined the local versions of these prejudices – which they grouped with fascism and Nazism – as the production of foreign agents or their unwitting or corrupt local patsies. Through this operation, these Jewish-Argentines turned the tables on the propagandists of the Argentine Right, redirecting the xenophobic attack against its creators. Similarly, *Crítica*'s Patoff subverted the anti-Semitic stereotype about the craven, weak Jew when the character's writers described how the Jewish-Argentine defeated a gang of nativist militiamen. By portraying the character as both braver and stronger than his foes, the newspaper established the men of the pro-fascist *Legión Cívica* as more cowardly and feeble than a lone, unarmed Jew.

The diverse representations of Jewish-Argentines and Jewish-Argentine identity analyzed in this study share several features: first, an emphasis on how the local and national environment influenced and changed Eastern European Jewish immigrants and their descendants, their culture, and their sense of self. Second, a narrative of progressive integration and even eventual assimilation, expressed as an existential concern by the Jewish cultural agents and as a sign of the success of the country's migratory policies by liberal non-Jewish actors. Third, a gendered component to this assimilationist narrative. That most Jewish and non-Jewish cultural agents, creating representations for Jewish and non-Jewish audiences (from Jevl Katz's songs in Yiddish to characters in non-Jewish *sainetes*), agreed on the gendered character of assimilation hints at the pervasive power of shared patriarchal understandings of social and gender roles.

Despite their commonalities, however, not all these cultural actors were in conversation with each other. For example, the events that followed the sudden, early death of humorist and musician Jevl Katz went practically unnoticed by best-selling daily *Crítica*, despite his funeral procession gathering several thousand mourners and blocking the traffic on one side of central artery Corrientes Avenue. Cultural magazine *JUDAICA* also failed to mention Katz's passing and burial, even though the periodical's director, Salomón Resnick, regularly commemorated the demise of unknown, foreign Jewish book publishers and translators.

While a linguistic gap can explain this absence in the popular Argentine newspapers, it cannot do so in the case of *JUDAICA*: Resnick and his local contributors were Jewish-Argentines fluent in Yiddish, and both major Yiddish newspapers (*Di Presse* and *Di Yiddishe Tsaytung*) of Buenos Aires devoted the covers of several editions

to Katz's death and funeral. *JUDAICA*'s editors, then, made a decision not to mention the funeral, either because they felt it was beneath the high cultural goals of the magazine, because they considered that their desired (non-hyphenated) Argentine elite readership would not be interested, or because they thought that publicizing Katz's act and his funeral in Spanish could be harmful to the standing of Jewish-Argentines with the national elites.

Similarly, no Jewish-Argentine cultural actor or periodical, as far as the archive shows, commented on widely distributed representations of Jewish immigrants such as "Don Jacobo en la Argentina." These disconnections speak of the persistence of sociocultural boundaries – even though they were increasingly porous – between minorities and unhyphenated Argentines or, at the very least, of the coexistence of partially overlapping public spheres that shared only certain themes, ideas, and events.

This study has analyzed various public and semipublic constructions of Jewish-Argentineness available in Buenos Aires from the Depression to the end of the Second World War. By examining these representations by and for Jews as well as non-Jews, this study has explored the role of minority groups in the symbolic construction of the Latin American nation. Through a focus on "marginal" or peripheral groups (both as cultural agents and as symbolic constructions), this analysis reassessed the relationship between minorities and ruling elites in the contested production of meaning and the construction of homogenizing national narratives.

Epilogue: A Comedic Jewish-Argentine Superhero, or the Convergence of Ethnic and Argentine in Mass Media

As the years passed, Jewish-Argentine integration both increased and – except for occasional spikes of anti-Semitism⁴²⁷ – became less conflictive. Opponents of immigration and militant right-wing nativists, while never vanquished, suffered progressive marginalization except for certain – arguably influential – enclaves, such as the Armed Forces and the Catholic Church. Jewish-Argentines continued to succeed (and fail) in diverse fields, such as academia, business and industry, science, the arts, and entertainment.

From the early decades of the twentieth century, Jewish-Argentines such as actress Paulina Singerman became successful artists and entertainers. With the end of the last and bloodiest military dictatorship in 1983 (a regime that placed virulent anti-Semites such as General Ramón Camps in positions of power⁴²⁸), famous Jewish-Argentines first began to perform their hyphenated identities on national television networks. That very year, during the transitional government of General Reynaldo Bignone, veteran comedian Tato Bores (born Mauricio Borensztein) debuted the character “el tío Josei” (Uncle Josei) on his show “Extra Tato” on Canal 13’s primetime. “Extra Tato” was one of the most popular shows of 1983, with an average share of 20 percentage points of Argentine households that owned a television (the average share of the show’s network, Canal 13, was 9.6 percentage points).⁴²⁹ For his “tío Josei” sketch, the comedian wore no special make up, nor did he remove his signature broad-rimmed glasses and wig: Josei, who was introduced as Tato’s uncle, merely wore a suit and a slightly out of fashion – yet by no

⁴²⁷ Raanan Rein, *Argentina, Israel y los judíos: De la partición de Palestina al caso Eichmann (1947-1963)* (Buenos Aires: Lumière, 2007). Daniel Gutman, *Tacuara: Historia de la primera guerrilla urbana argentina* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2012).

⁴²⁸ Jacobo Timerman, *Preso sin nombre, celda sin número* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 2000).

⁴²⁹ Ratings information from the magazine TV Guía, reproduced in “resiste un archive” blog. <http://resisteunarchivo.blogspot.com.co/2009/05/lo-que-supimos-ver-ratings-de-mayo-del.html> (accessed March 3, 2016).

means Jewish – hat. The uncle did replace the “eu” phonemes with the sound “oy”, but he never explicitly mentioned his Jewishness, did not talk about any topics that could be characterized as “Jewish,” nor did his behavior echo any Jewish stereotype.⁴³⁰

Almost a decade later, the TV comic went further. His 1991 show, “Tato, la leyenda continúa,” retained the coveted Sunday night spot on Canal 13, and earned the “Martín Fierro” TV award (the Argentine version of the Grammys) for “Best Comedy Show.” This time around, Tato’s excuse to portray Jewish characters was the first official visit of Carlos Saúl Menem, as president of Argentina, to Israel. In the sketch, Tato traveled to Jerusalem to learn what the Israelis had thought of Menem. Norman Erlich, another Jewish-Argentine comedian (more famous among Jewish-Argentines than with the general public), played the role of local informant, dressed like an Orthodox Jew, with black coat and hat, sidelocks, and a bushy beard. Ehrlich walked Tato through the president’s visit and explained its impact. His character spoke Spanish not like an Israeli, but rather with the Yiddish accent typical of representations of Jewish-Argentines in the Argentine media.

More importantly, to demonstrate the profound effect of Menem’s visit, the fake Israeli quoted the president’s electoral slogan, “*Síganme, no los voy a defraudar*” (Follow me! I will not let you down!), when he wanted Bores to walk with him. However, Erlich repeated Menem’s iconic phrase in Yiddish. Moreover, he did so not in standard Yiddish, but a clearly Argentine Yiddish: after initially saying “*Kum mit mir, ikh vel aykh nisht baavlen!*” (*baavlen* is a verb that comes from a Hebrew root, meaning to mistreat, or oppress), Bores corrected him and suggested “*ikh vel aykh nisht defraudirn.*”

⁴³⁰ Tato Bores, *Extra Tato* (segment), 1983. YouTube video, posted by “La Tele del Recuerdo,” April 12, 2008. <https://youtu.be/LQTnWb1-IJk> (accessed September 14, 2015).

“Defraudirn” was a Yiddishization of the Spanish verb “defraudar” (with the ending of the verb changed to the Yiddish infinitive “irn”). This was a popular practice of *porteño* Yiddish-speakers, who freely borrowed Spanish words even when their language already had a working equivalent. The sketch helpfully subtitled the phrase in Spanish using a large font size, but did not explain the switch between “*baavlen*” and “*defraudirn*.” The loud unscripted laughter that Erlich and Bores shared over their improvised Yiddishization was lost on most members of the audience.⁴³¹

There is a third remarkable moment of a Jewish-Argentine performing Jewish-Argentineness in public television. The comedian was Jorge Guinzburg who, not coincidentally, had been one of Bores’s scriptwriters for “Extra Tato.” His comedy show “*Peor es Nada*,” cohosted with comedian-musician Horacio Fontova, aired on Canal 13 on Tuesday nights, from 1989 to 1994. One of the sketches of the show was “Zukerman,” which followed the adventures of the Jewish-Argentine Superman. Like the Kryptonian, this ethnic superhero was “faster than a speeding bullet [and] more powerful than a locomotive,” but rather than “able to leap tall buildings in a single bound,” he had the inhuman stamina to “resist three straight hours locked in with his *Yiddishe mame*.”⁴³² Zukerman’s outfit was similar to Superman’s – although the spandex fit differently around Guinzburg’s squat, chubby frame – with a “Z” in the chest replacing the “S,” and a yarmulke on the hero’s head. The music accompanying the skit was a joyful instrumental klezmer song. As befitted a Jewish (Argentine) hero, ham was Zukerman’s

⁴³¹ Tato Bores and Normal Erlich, “Menem y la historia judía,” *Tato, la leyenda continua*, 1991. YouTube video, posted by “hagapatriapiense,” December 8, 2009. https://youtu.be/1IwV111_qJA (accessed September 14, 2015).

⁴³² Jorge Guinzburg, “Sukerman,” *Peor es nada*, c. 1990. YouTube video, posted by “Hd Rock,” February 20, 2015. <https://youtu.be/8X5LfCnKIYs> (accessed September 14, 2015). The words in cursive were in Yiddish in the original, the rest of the phrase is my translation from Spanish.

kryptonite, which made him weak and stole his powers. *Jamón ibérico* – Spanish *prosciutto* – worked on him in an equivalent fashion to Superman’s red kryptonite: where this irradiating mineral turned the Man of Steel evil, the curated pork product turned the penny-pinching Jewish superhero into a wild spender.

An exaggerated close-fistedness played for laughs was a clearly “Jewish” characteristic of Zukerman, along with his *kippah*, his debilitating reaction to *treyf* (non-kosher) pork products, his overbearing *Yiddishe mame* (who chased him around to give her bulletproof son a coat or a scarf to keep him warm), and his speech mannerisms. Guinzburg’s superhero did not speak in the stereotypical Yiddish accent constructed by non-Jewish writers: rather, his phrases sounded slightly off and, although he pronounced his words in unaccented Spanish, he sandwiched most of his sentences between exaggerated “Oy oy oy!”s.

While a generation younger than Bores, Guinzburg was old enough to be familiar with the traditional linguistic portrayal of Jews in Argentine media. His replacement of the stereotypical speech pattern, then, was a conscious decision based on the increasing rarity of Jewish-Argentines with Yiddish accents in 1990s Buenos Aires, and the comedian’s belief that younger audience members would not identify or decode that linguistic marker. The replacement of a Yiddish accent with parodied religious practices – basically, the ham-kryptonite – and ethnic familial stereotypes – the relentless, overprotective Jewish mother – as markers of ethnic identity speaks of the linguistic and cultural integration of Jewish-Argentines. Such a portrayal also hints to a public familiarity with a construction of Jewish-Argentineness that was quirky, yet compatible with the national character.

Guinzburg and Bores's comedic choice – as Jewish-Argentine artists on the primetime of Argentina's most watched television network – to create and perform Jewish-Argentine characters evidences a normalization of Jewish-Argentines in popular cultural representations. This representational normalization also articulated available social space for Jewish-Argentine cultural producers in the mainstream media to publicly express their hyphenated identities without fear of negative repercussions. Despite the worry of Jewish-Argentine intellectuals, artists, and cultural entrepreneurs in the interwar years, the threat of total assimilation still had not materialized sixty years later (although institutional leaders never ceased to warn against its impending arrival). Even despite the near-total loss of the Yiddish language, Jewish-Argentineness and other hyphenated identities had found legitimization as part of the nation in the hearts and minds of the Argentine public.

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