

IMMIGRANTS OF A DIFFERENT RELIGION:
JEWISH ARGENTINES AND THE BOUNDARIES OF ARGENTINIDAD, 1919-2009

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Immigrants of a Different Religion:

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This study explores Jewish and non-Jewish Argentine reactions and responses to four pivotal events that unfolded in the twentieth century: the 1919 *Semana Trágica*, the Catholic education decrees of the 1940s, the 1962 Sirota Affair, and the 1976-1983 Dirty War. The methodological decision to focus on four physically and/or culturally violent acts is intentional: while the passionate and emotive reactions and responses to those events may not reflect everyday political, cultural, and social norms in twentieth-century Argentine society, they provide a compelling opportunity to test the ever-changing meaning, boundaries, and limitations of *argentinidad* over the past century. The four episodes help to reveal the challenges Argentines have faced in assimilating a religious minority and what those efforts suggest about how various groups have sought to define and control what it has meant to be “Argentine” over time.

Scholars such as Samuel Baily, Fernando DeVoto, José Moya and others have done an excellent job highlighting how Italian and Spanish immigrants have negotiated and navigated the

competing demands of 'ethnic' preservation and 'national' integration in Argentina. However, Italians and Spaniards— who comprised 85% of the total immigrant population between 1870-1930— benefited from a religious, linguistic, and cultural familiarity with their host country that Jewish immigrants did not. The presence of Jewish immigrants and later Jewish Argentines challenged the efforts of Argentines to assimilate newcomers in ways Catholic immigrants and Catholic Argentines could not. Since the days of Alberdi and Sarmiento, Argentina has often championed itself as a nation of liberal secularism and religious tolerance, yet the overwhelming majority of Catholic immigrants were not in a position to test the civic and cultural boundaries of that rhetoric and reality the way Jews did. Jewish Argentines, more so than their Spanish and Italian counterparts, forced a diverse cross-section of Argentines to 'clarify' their definitions of civic assimilation, national integration, and the place reserved for minorities within their visions of Argentina and *argentinidad*.

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Introduction

In 2000, esteemed non-Jewish Argentine writer Joaquín Morales Solá remarked that “Argentina discovered that she had a Jewish community” only after the devastating 1992 and 1994 terrorist bombings in Buenos Aires of the Israeli Embassy and the Asociación Mutualista Israelita Argentina (AMIA or the central Jewish Argentine community organization).¹ On the surface, Solá’s comment is startling given Argentina’s longstanding immigrant tradition and the relative size and presence of her Jewish population. Of the 6.5 million newcomers who arrived in Argentina during the nation’s peak immigration years of 1870-1930, Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews numbered approximately 130,000 and, by the early-1960s, had surpassed a quarter-million.² Although those figures pale in comparison to the millions of Italians and Spaniards who emigrated to Argentina between 1870-1930— together they comprised over 85 percent of the total immigrant population— Argentine Jews still constituted by far the largest concentration of Jews in any single Latin American country.³

More importantly, Jewish Argentines figured more prominently in civic society than their overall population size might have suggested. One of the clearest such illustrations has been Jewish Argentine literary success over the course of the twentieth century. From Alberto Gerchunoff (who in 1910 famously penned *Los gauchos judíos* and was invited that same year to participate in Argentina’s grand centennial celebration), Samuel Glusberg (editor of the prestigious Argentine journals *América* and *Babel*), and César Tiempo (who became known throughout Latin America as a poet extraordinaire) to Bernardo Verbitsky (whom Argentines came to identify in the 1940s and 1950s, along with non-Jewish Argentine novelist Leopoldo Lugones, as the unofficial chronicler of *porteño* culture), Jacobo Timerman (renowned editor in the 1970s of the highly-popular newspaper *La Opinión*), and Marcos Aguinis (respected writer

whom President Raúl Alfonsín tapped in 1984 to head up the nation's noteworthy Cultural Democratization Program), Jewish Argentines have left an indelible mark on Argentine literature, journalism, and culture.⁴ The same has been true in business, finance, education, the arts, and the applied sciences where many Jewish Argentines— including Nobel Laureate César Milstein— have achieved national and even international prominence.⁵

Why then did Solá make such a claim in the years following the Israeli Embassy and AMIA bombings? There are several possible explanations: the sheer magnitude of the attacks that obliterated two buildings in the heart of Buenos Aires; the extensive television coverage of the two incidents that reached millions of Argentines and indeed the world at large; the fact that the 1994 bombing in particular struck at the historic epicenter of Argentina's longstanding Jewish community; and a feeling among many Argentines that the AMIA bombing represented an attack not only on the Jewish community but on the country as a whole. Moreover, the poor response of state emergency service units, sloppy police work in safeguarding and collecting critical pieces of evidence, and the perceived failure of President Carlos Menem (1989-1999), the police, and the judiciary in adequately addressing, investigating, and prosecuting those responsible only brought added public attention to the two still unresolved atrocities.

Jewish-led commemorative practices, which have garnered widespread attention since 1994, may also explain why Solá said what he did. For instance, following the AMIA bombing Jewish leaders organized a massive public march in the streets of Buenos Aires that brought together over 200,000 Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines. On the respective anniversaries of the two bombings, thousands gather each year to stage emotional public vigils at the sites where the buildings once stood. In 1997, the AMIA sponsored a national high school photo contest aimed at memorializing the 1994 attack and raising added awareness of the atrocity in non-Jewish circles. Finally, vocal Jewish protest groups have emerged since 1994, notably

Memoria Activa, which borrowing from the inspiring legacy of the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*, have rallied each Monday at the steps of the Argentine Supreme Court. By continuing to publicize the two atrocities, these and other Jewish-sponsored activities have helped catapult the Jewish community into the forefront of Argentine society.

So too have a number of Jewish controversies and scandals. The most notorious involved Ruben Beraja, who, as President of the Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (DAIA) from 1991-1998, served as the chief political link between the Jewish community and the Argentine government. As Jewish Argentines grew increasingly frustrated over Menem's handling of the bombing investigations, a growing number simultaneously began to criticize Beraja for failing to speak out and prod Menem sufficiently. Quiet criticism of Beraja reached dramatic new heights after *Memoria Activa's* Laura Ginsberg lambasted both Menem and Beraja, first, in 1997, at the third annual AMIA memorial and, again in 1998, following the shocking and devastating financial collapse of the Beraja-controlled *Banco de Mayo*, which wiped out the lifesavings of thousands of Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines.⁶

Together, these events and activities go a long way toward explaining why Solá remarked that "Argentina discovered that she had a Jewish community" only after the 1992 and 1994 bombings. At the same time, given both the rich and troubled history of Jews in Argentina, his comments remain puzzling for three principal reasons. First, like other immigrant communities in Argentina, Jewish Argentines have long and actively participated in diverse facets of national life, from education and politics to business and journalism; indeed, like Italian, Spanish, German, Arab, and Korean Argentines, they have greatly *shaped* Argentine society. Second, throughout the twentieth century Argentina has been plagued by periodic outbursts of virulent anti-Semitism— the notorious *pogrom* of January 1919 and the infamous 1962 Sirota Affair are the two most striking illustrations. Third, the remarkable ways in which

non-Jewish Argentines— long before the 1992 and 1994 bombings— have historically rallied behind the Jewish community following the most serious of such episodes pointedly suggest that Argentina has long been aware of the presence of its Jewish community.

This dissertation takes a closer look at four such episodes, all of which predate the 1992 and 1994 bombings, in an effort to better understand Solá's remarks. Focusing on Jewish and non-Jewish Argentine *reactions* to the 1919 Semana Trágica, the 1943 military government decree mandating compulsory Catholic education, the 1962 Sirota Affair, and the 1976-1983 "Dirty War," this dissertation explores the changing meaning of *argentinidad* over the course of the twentieth century, broadly-defined as a fluctuating and competing national effort among a diverse cross-section of Argentines to construct and develop a credible political and cultural narrative. Put differently, I examine how various Argentine groups have sought to define and control what it has meant to be Argentine and how the Jewish presence in Argentina has put those individual and collective constructs to the test. In this discussion of Argentine national identity, the four case studies speak to three broader, interwoven historical themes: 1) the real and imagined boundaries of national integration facing a non-Catholic minority— in this case, Argentine Jews— in a largely open, secular yet also decidedly Catholic country; 2) the legacy of Argentina's struggle to democratize over the course of the twentieth century; and 3) the development during that period of two predominant, yet competing views about how Argentine identity and the role of the state should be conceptualized, articulated, and practiced. Ultimately, this nuanced political and cultural exploration provides the necessary historical context to appreciate the centrality of the 1992 and 1994 bombings and simultaneously make clearer sense of Solá's turn-of-the-century remark.

My approach is two-fold. First, relying on Jewish and national newspapers and journals, congressional debates and records, community and national archives, government publications,

elementary and high school textbooks, and qualitative oral interviews with approximately seventy Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines, I intentionally focus on Jewish and non-Jewish reactions and responses to four physically and/or culturally violent historical events, all of which were traumatic and, in varying degrees, anti-Semitic in nature. It is fair to suggest that Jewish and non-Jewish reactions to the 1919 *Semana Trágica*, the 1943 military decree, the 1962 Sirota Affair, and the Dirty War may have been uncharacteristically emotive and, therefore, may not reflect everyday political, social, and cultural norms in twentieth-century Argentine society. Conversely, it is precisely the passionate and visceral nature of Jewish and non-Jewish reactions to each of these four events that is so compelling. They are reactions that arguably only surface during such traumatic times and, therefore, provide a unique opportunity to test the boundaries and limitations of more everyday Argentine perceptions and expectations. In short, these reactions reveal how various groups have thought about Argentine national identity over time, how they each have sought to impose their “authentic” expression of *argentinitud* on others, and how a religious minority has challenged and shaped both those efforts.

Second, my dissertation is not intended as a comprehensive history of the Argentine Jewish community or a history of anti-Semitism in Argentina. Several scholars, notably Haim Avni, Victor Mirelman, Ricardo Feierstein, and Raanan Rein, have already written provocative histories of the Jewish community in Argentina. That said, with the exception of Rein, most such histories have focused on the period of heightened Jewish immigration from 1880-1945; thus, a reader primarily interested in the Argentine Jewish community will nonetheless find this dissertation informative given the breadth of its historical analysis, beginning with the *Semana Trágica* in 1919 and concluding with the bombings of the 1990s. Instead, this dissertation, centered on the four episodes outlined above, explores more explicitly the experiences of a non-Catholic minority in an immigrant nation that at once has been progressive and secular as well

as decidedly Catholic and at times reactionary. A number of scholars, notably Samuel Baily, Fernando Devoto, and Jose Moya, have examined the challenges facing millions of (Catholic) Italian and Spanish immigrants as they sought to assimilate into Argentine society. By focusing on an immigrant group with a different religion, I aim to test the boundaries of secular education, religious tolerance, and other markers of national integration in ways that may not have been applicable or evident to my predecessors in their fine studies of predominantly Catholic immigrant groups. I therefore hope this dissertation illuminates as much about the historical nature of Argentine politics, culture, and identity as it does about the Jewish community and, by extension, contributes foremost to the existing rich Argentine historiography. Moreover, while not comparative in nature, I also hope that this dissertation will indirectly engender greater scholarly discussion about the experiences of other minority immigrant groups in Argentine society.

To make sense of the ongoing debate over the meaning and control of *argentinidad*, it is necessary to outline the philosophical origins of modern Argentina, including its secular, Catholic, and democratic character. As Nicolas Shumway astutely and eloquently argues in *The Invention of Argentina*— one of the most significant books on Argentine history of the past quarter century— the liberal, positivist, and elitist framers of Argentina’s modern 1853 Constitution sought to refashion their young nation “through imitation of Europe and the United States while denigrating [its] Spanish heritage, popular traditions, and mixed-blood masses.”⁷ Reacting to the “barbaric” political and cultural beliefs and practices of *caudillo* President Juan Manuel de Rosas (1829-1852) and the nation’s “unprogressive” and “racially inferior” rural *gaucho* masses, Juan Alberdi, Domingo Sarmiento, and Bartolomé Mitre— while not without their own ideological differences— all agreed in the mid-nineteenth century that the quickest and most effective way to “civilize” Argentina was through the economic development of the

nation's pampas grasslands and urban centers, the creation of an extensive and modern public education system, and, above all, large-scale (Northern) European immigration.

To those ends, Argentina's nineteenth-century positivist leaders actively courted foreign investors, backed the development of a vast railroad network, modernized the nation's ports, encouraged the commercialization of industry and agriculture, allocated significant state resources to attract European immigrants, and sponsored the construction of a series of impressive urban monuments, parks, boulevards, and theaters that led visitors and locals to dub Buenos Aires the "Paris of South America." Equally significant, they sponsored two pivotal legal directives in the second-half of the nineteenth century that also spoke volumes about their conceptual efforts to "Europeanize" and "Americanize" the nation. The first— Article 14 of the 1853 Constitution— explicitly guaranteed all the nation's inhabitants the right to work, to form unions and to strike, to enter and leave the country freely, to express and publish their ideas without fear of censorship, to own private property, to teach and learn, and to profess their religion freely.⁸ Modeled after the British, French, and U.S. founding charters, Article 14 was intended to signal to Argentines, prospective Argentines, and the international community at large this budding South American republic's embrace of Western progressive ideals such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Over the ensuing decades, that spirit of freedom and tolerance encapsulated in Article 14 of the 1853 Constitution came to constitute for many native and new Argentines a collective pillar of their young nation's invented liberal tradition. So too did the famous secular education law of 1884. Promulgated by Congress during Argentina's "Golden Age" from 1870-1914, Law 1420 (*Ley de Educación Común*) barred all religious— notably Catholic— instruction in all public classrooms during regular school hours.⁹ Intended by liberal positivists both to curb the influence of Argentina's traditional-minded Catholic Church and to inculcate in this land of

immigrants a non-parochial integrationist spirit, Law 1420, like Article 14, gradually emerged for many as a national symbol of openness and acceptance that they felt “modern” Argentina was predicated upon. Indeed, vocal public opposition to efforts by two of Argentina’s six twentieth-century non-democratic military governments to overturn Law 1420 (first in 1943 and again in 1976) suggested that the political and cultural importance of this national education law extended well beyond the classroom.

However, the promise and scope of Argentina’s invented liberal, secular tradition was tempered by three notable limitations. First, Alberdi, Sarmiento, and Mitre inserted two significant pro-Catholic clauses in the 1853 Constitution that ran counter to the very liberal-secular spirit they themselves actively sought to promote in both Article 14 (1853) and the subsequent 1884 secular education law (Law 1420). The first pro-Catholic constitutional clause— Article 2— stated that “the Federal Government supports the Roman Catholic Apostolic religion.”¹⁰ Although it was not immediately clear in 1853 what exactly such state “support” entailed, over time it came to mean the government’s financial backing of the Catholic Church, a measure of Church-State political and cultural cooperation, and, of course, the symbolic acknowledgement of Catholicism as the official religion of the Argentine Nation. No less significant, the second pro-Catholic constitutional clause— Article 76— asserted that the President and Vice-President of the Nation had to be Catholic, which remained in effect for over 140 years until it was finally discarded at the August 1994 Constitutional Convention.¹¹ Such explicit religious references reflected a non-liberal republican bias notably absent from the U.S.’s more liberal constitutional model, which Argentina’s positivist founders painstakingly had sought to emulate.

Third, Alberdi’s famous 1852 political and philosophical treatise (longwindedly entitled *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la república*) further underscored the

subtle contradiction between positivist calls for a modern, open, and secular society and one that simultaneously promoted and favored Catholicism. Together with Sarmiento's seminal 1845 work *Facundo*, Alberdi's *Bases* laid the conceptual groundwork for the pivotal 1853 Constitution. In it, Alberdi openly championed the national ideals of "civilization" over "barbarism" described above. Central to that civilizing mission— eloquently embodied in his legendary phrase "to govern is to populate"— was a state-directed policy aimed at attracting large-scale European immigration. Like Sarmiento, he believed that such a policy would help generate in Argentina a "mixing of races that would infinitely improve humankind."¹²

In *Bases*, Alberdi also championed the need to promote "la libertad religiosa" or "religious freedom" in an effort to construct a genuinely open and modern republic. It is here, however, that both his Christian and Catholic bias subtly clouded his broader secular positivist agenda. For one, his goal of religious freedom was aimed largely at the inclusion in Argentine society of Protestant Anglo-Saxon immigrants whom he, like other nineteenth-century Latin American positivists, held in such high regard; they were the presumed bearers of sought-after English civilizing norms and values. At no point in his 1852 discussion of religious freedom did Alberdi consider non-Christian religious groups. Second, while emphasizing the need to allow "other Christian [i.e. non-Catholic or Protestant] faiths" to exercise freely and publicly their beliefs and traditions, Alberdi underscored the need "to consecrate Catholicism as the religion of the State."¹³ Most revealing perhaps, he argued that "religious freedom is the way to populate this country [Argentina]. The Catholic religion is the way to educate those [immigrant] populations."¹⁴ In short, Alberdi's articulation of religious freedom did not include a clear, US-style separation of Church and State nor, to paraphrase historian Haim Avni, a true recognition of the principle of religious equality.¹⁵

In addition to the above Catholic provisions, positivist efforts to construct a truly modern, progressive republic were hampered by two other subtle contradictions. First, Argentina's positivist leaders sought to cultivate a strict integrationist spirit aimed at homogenizing the civic composition of their immigrant nation. One of the best such illustrations involved Sarmiento's pedagogical efforts as Superintendent of Education under President Julio Argentino Roca (1880-1886).¹⁶ While helping to craft and promulgate Argentina's 1884 secular education law (as discussed above, Law 1420 helped foster in Argentina a climate of tolerance and acceptance), Sarmiento simultaneously initiated a state campaign, in the words of historian Eduardo Jose Miguez, "to make public schools an instrument of 'Argentinization'," in large part by preventing immigrant communities— be they Spanish, Italian, German, Danish, or Jewish Argentines— from continuing to teach their children about "the language, history, and geography of the[ir] motherland."¹⁷

Such efforts reflected Sarmiento's (understandable) desire, like that of other leading positivists, to construct a unified "Argentine Nation" by bridging the cultural gap between immigrant and native-born inhabitants.¹⁸ At the same time, his public education initiative failed to appreciate fully the dual sense of ethnic identity that many newcomers genuinely felt. Indeed, many immigrant communities opposed Sarmiento's pedagogical efforts, not because they rejected their New World surroundings but rather because they simultaneously wished to impart their Old World traditions to their children. Sarmiento and other positivist leaders viewed such cultural ambitions with great skepticism, which only heightened their existing concerns that immigrants lacked a real sense of civic affiliation and by extension, to quote historian Matthew Karush, "threatened the integrity of the nation."¹⁹ In official and even non-official circles, a prevailing attitude thus emerged: while Argentine statesmen genuinely welcomed European immigrants, they rejected any cultural notion of *doble nacionalidad* (dual

nationality) or *doble lealtad* (dual loyalty). Although suspicion of hyphenated identities was not uncommon in other countries at that time, in Argentina it marked civic society for decades to come despite (or in spite of) the nation's palpable heterogeneous mix.

Second, Argentina's positivist visionaries failed to construct a strong, participatory democracy. Similar in spirit to their rejection of a pluralist cultural model, prominent nineteenth-century statesmen such as Alberdi and Sarmiento believed that most Argentines were not politically, economically, or intellectually able to participate in a democracy. Of the two, Alberdi's view was most draconian: while he supported a system that guaranteed civil liberties for all inhabitants, he believed that political liberties should be restricted to a small minority, notably the nation's small economic elite— a political model historian Tulio Halperín Donghi eloquently labeled “progressive authoritarianism.”²⁰ Sarmiento's rhetoric was a bit more egalitarian: he argued that only an extensive campaign of public education— whereby immigrant and native-born inhabitants would acquire a shared understanding of “national belonging” and the “common good”— would ultimately produce “capable citizens” prepared to participate in the nation's political system.²¹ Be it Alberdi, Sarmiento, or any other nineteenth-century Europhile Argentine positivist, Argentina's black, Amerindian, and rural gaucho populations— because of their dark skin color and perceived cultural backwardness— were deemed “uneducable” and excluded.

Despite Sarmiento's philosophical assertions about the need for educated or capable citizens, political participation in Argentina remained for decades to come an entirely elite affair. As a result, Argentina's democratic system proved far weaker than that of the United States or Northern Europe, further handicapping the nation's grandiose nineteenth-century hopes of constructing a truly modern, progressive republic. Only with the passage of the Saenz Peña Reform in 1912 was universal suffrage afforded to all native-born Argentine males, but, as we

shall see in chapter one, even that effort was born more out of factional elite power struggles than out of a fundamental national campaign for broad-based political participation.²²

To the casual observer at the turn-of-the-century, Argentina emerged as an open republic filled with subtle political and cultural contradictions. On the one hand, it justifiably posited itself as a secular and progressive democratic state; indeed, the liberal spirit of the 1853 Constitution, the nation's 1884 secular education law (Law 1420), the pace of economic development, and the country's impressive cultural heterogeneity underscored the republic's modernist ambitions. At the same time, Argentina's dismissal of civic pluralism, the Constitution's Catholic overtones, the gap between rich and poor, and the country's weak democratic foundation left it more vulnerable to reactionary, even incendiary political, social, and cultural acts. In many respects, the rich and at times troubled twentieth-century history of Argentina's Jewish community reflected both of those competing Argentine traditions.

¹ Joaquín Morales Solá, Prologue, in Diego Melamed, *Los judíos y el menemismo: Un reflejo de la sociedad argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2000), 11.

² For arguably the best quantitative study of the number of Jewish immigrants in Argentina, see Sergio DellaPergola, "Demographic Trends of Latin American Jewry," in Judith Laiken Elkin and Gilbert Merx, eds., *The Jewish Presence in Latin America* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 85-133.

³ For more on the total number of Argentine immigrants, see Diego Armus, "Diez años de historiografía sobre la inmigración masiva a la Argentina," *Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos*, 2:4 (1986): 431-455; Samuel Baily, *Immigrants in the Land of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City, 1870-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Fernando Devoto, "Las cadenzas migratorias italianas: Algunas reflexiones a la luz del caso argentino," *Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos* 3:8 (1988): 103-123; Gino Germani, "Mass Immigration and Modernization in Argentina," in Irving L. Horowitz, ed., *Masses in Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Haim Avni, *Argentina y la historia de la inmigración Judía* (Jerusalem: Editorial Universitaria Magnes/AMIA, 1983); Eugene Sofer, *From Pale to Pampa: A Social History of the Jews of Buenos Aires* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982); Juan Carlos Korol and Hilda Sabato, *Como fue la inmigración irlandesa en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Plus Ultra, 1981); and Ronald Newton, *German Buenos Aires, 1900-1930* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977).

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- ⁴ Rita Gardiol, "A Brief Overview of Argentine History Relative to its Jewish Population," in Rita Gardiol, ed., *The Silver Candelabra and Other Stories: A Century of Jewish Argentine Literature* (Pittsburgh: Latin American Literary Review Press, 1997), xix-xx.
- ⁵ Jewish Argentine César Milstein won the 1984 Nobel Prize for medicine.
- ⁶ Edna Aizenberg, *Books and Bombs in Buenos Aires: Borges, Gerchunoff, and Argentine-Jewish Writing* (Brandeis University Press: Hanover, NH, 2002), 11-12; Memoria Activa, *Cuatro años de impunidad* (Buenos Aires: La Página, 1998), 16; and Laura Ginsberg in Gisela Heffes, ed., *Judíos, argentinos, escritores* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Atril, 1999), 307-318.
- ⁷ Nicolas Shumway, *The Invention of Argentina* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1991), 214.
- ⁸ *Constitución de la Nación Argentina (1853)*, Artículo 14.
- ⁹ Ley 1.420, Ley de Educación Común, Anales de Legislación Argentina, Capítulo I, Artículo 8, July 8, 1884.
- ¹⁰ *Constitución de la Nación Argentina (1853)*, Artículo 2.
- ¹¹ *Constitución de la Nación Argentina (1853)*, Artículo 76.
- ¹² Juan Alberdi, *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la república argentina* (Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 1966).
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ *Nueva Sion*, October 20, 1984, 8-9. See also Avni, *Argentina y la Historia de la inmigración Judía*.
- ¹⁶ Having served as President of Argentina from 1868-1874, Domingo Sarmiento later became General Director of Schools for the Province of Buenos Aires as well as Senator of the Province of San Juan. After briefly holding the position of Minister of Interior in 1879, Sarmiento resigned and, in 1880, was appointed Superintendent General of Schools for the National Education Ministry under President Julio Roca. It was in his capacity as Superintendant that Sarmiento helped promulgate the secular education Law 1420 (discussed above); he also published the "El Monitor de la Educación Común" (one of the most significant works ever written on Argentine education), copies of which were distributed to school teachers throughout the nation.
- ¹⁷ Eduardo Jose Miguez, "Marriage, Household, and Integration in Mass Migration to Argentina: The Case of Tandil," in Samuel Baily and Eduardo Hose Miguez, eds, *Mass Migration to Modern Latin America* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2003), 184.
- ¹⁸ Natalio Botana, *La tradición republicana: Alberdi, Sarmiento y las ideas políticas de su tiempo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1984), 347.
- ¹⁹ Matthew Karush, *Workers or Citizens: Democracy and Identity in Rosario, Argentina (1912-1930)*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 19.
- ²⁰ Tulio Halperín Donghi, "Una nación para el desierto argentino," in Halperín Donghi, ed., *Proyecto y construcción de una nación (1846-1880)* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1995), 28; Karush, *Workers or Citizens*, 18.
- ²¹ Karush, *Workers or Citizens*, 18-21; Botana, *La tradición republicana*, 346-350.
- ²² Female suffrage was achieved in 1947 under President Juan Domingo Perón.

Chapter 1

The Semana Trágica

Introduction

In January of 1919, responding to a spate of labor strikes that had been disrupting Buenos Aires since December of the previous year, groups of armed civilians organized a collective effort to identify and punish the “anarchist” and “communist” instigators.¹ With support from the police and the military, these armed vigilantes, who were primarily nativist elites and their middle-class sympathizers, targeted immigrants, particularly “Russians” or *rusos*, a term colloquially used in Argentina to describe Jews.² Chanting “Foreigners Out,” “Death to the Anarchists,” and “Death of the Jews,” members of groups such as *Los Defensores del Orden*, *La Guardia Blanca*, and *La Liga Patriótica Argentina* attacked Jewish working-class neighborhoods in Buenos Aires, vandalized and burned Jewish businesses and institutions, and beat and harassed individual Jews.³ In short, during the final days of the bloody *Semana Trágica* (Tragic Week) of January 1919, Argentina experienced its first Jewish pogrom.⁴

This chapter examines Jewish and non-Jewish reactions to the pogrom. In January 1919, Jewish Argentines were quick to denounce the anti-Semitic attacks. The newly formed *Comité de la Colectividad Israelita*, a forerunner to the DAIA which was established in 1935, spearheaded efforts by writing letters to high-ranking public officials, publishing commentaries in Argentina’s principal newspapers, and even arranging an audience with President Hipólito Yrigoyen (1916-1922). The Comité’s message was clear: in condemning the attacks it sought above all to portray the vast majority of Argentine Jews as peaceful and hardworking patriots and, by extension, to underscore the successful integration of the Jewish community into Argentine society. In the process, however, the more mainstream Comité did not actively

embrace more radical, leftist Jewish labor groups. Responding to the events of the *Semana Trágica* and the Comité's more accommodationist approach, these Jewish leftists adopted a more critical and assertive protest strategy: they were quicker to denounce Argentine society and more willing than Comité members to affirm publicly their "Jewishness." These contrasting protest strategies revealed as much about the ambiguities and boundaries of what it meant to be "Argentine" in 1919 as they did about class and ethnic tensions within the Jewish community in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Responding to the pogrom and vigilante cries of "foreigners out" and "death to the Jews," the majority of non-Jewish Argentines proved quite sympathetic in January 1919 to the plight of their Jewish counterparts. Journalists, politicians, labor unions, professional groups, and immigrant organizations loudly spoke out against the anti-Semitic episodes and joined with the Jewish community in denouncing the nation's xenophobic elements. In the process, non-Jewish Argentines developed an added awareness and appreciation of Argentina's Jewish population— one positive result of the January tragedy.

At the same time, mainstream non-Jewish reactions to the events of January 1919 unveiled two disconcerting political and cultural trends that would continue to shape Argentine society long after the *Semana Trágica*. The first involved the response of the police and other state security personnel. Unable— some would say unwilling— to apprehend the pogrom's right-wing culprits, police intransigence led to widespread public cries of impunity. That specter of *impunidad*, denounced by many in January 1919, continued to manifest itself over the course of the twentieth century; in the process, many citizens came to regard it as a dubious, yet ever-present element of Argentine national identity. The second entailed the reactions of key political figures, including President Yrigoyen. Quick to condemn the atrocities and to shower the Jewish community with genuine sympathy and praise, Argentine politicians suggested, both

directly and indirectly, to Jewish leaders and members of the community that it was imperative for Jewish Argentines to culturally integrate themselves more fully into Argentine society lest they wish the nefarious recent events to repeat themselves. Their remarks, which disappointed Jewish Argentines, underscored their rejection— as was true of Alberdi and Sarmiento— of civic pluralism.

Jewish and non-Jewish reactions to the *Semana Trágica* not only provide a window into the fluctuating and contested meanings of *argentinidad* in January 1919 but also at other key moments in the twentieth century.⁵ One such illustration is the contrasting representations of the *Semana Trágica* put forth by Ricardo Feierstein in 1999 and Hirsch Triwaks in 1940. In *Historia de los Judíos Argentinos*, Feierstein, a noted Jewish Argentine historian, argued that the 1919 pogrom “marked the beginning of an anti-Jewish advance (*actividad*) which, with spurts of violence, would sustain itself over the following decades through an intense propaganda campaign.”⁶ Feierstein’s 1999 analysis— echoed by many of the Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines I interviewed in Buenos Aires between 2000 and 2002— was informed by his experiences and recollections of more recent Argentine tragedies like the “Dirty War” (1976-1983) and the 1992 and 1994 terrorist bombings in Buenos Aires of the Israeli Embassy and the AMIA.⁷

In contrast, Triwaks, a leader of the Asociación Mutualista Israelita Argentina (AMIA) and editor of the Yiddish weekly *Diario Israelita*, downplayed in 1940 the lasting significance of the *Semana Trágica*. In a special Spanish-language *Diario Israelita* commemorative issue entitled “Fifty Years of Jewish Life in Argentina,” Triwaks characterized the 1919 pogrom as an isolated and momentary aberration in Argentine history that “left no long-lasting imprints on Argentine life other than the regrettable episode itself.”⁸ Triwaks even argued that anti-Semitism had only recently made its way to Argentina, where it had been quashed in 1939 by

the Argentine Senate's "anti-Nazi" law intended to thwart "...the spread of hate crimes or the persecution of segments of the population for reasons of race, religion, or nationality."⁹

Triwaks' portrayal of the Semana Trágica was shaped by his and his colleagues' efforts to promote greater social and cultural acceptance for Jews in Argentina in 1940.

This chapter centers on Jewish and non-Jewish reactions to the Semana Trágica in 1919 and what those diverse reactions ultimately suggest about the meaning and control of argentinidad at that historical moment. Yet as Feierstein and Triwaks quietly illuminate, the historical meanings ascribed to and the public memories invested in that pogrom over the course of the twentieth century also shed light on the ongoing nature of the Jewish community's national integration and what it has meant to be "Argentine" at other key historical moments. Together, they underscore the legacy of Argentina's first pogrom.

Historical Background

The election of President Hipólito Yrigoyen in 1916 marked a turning point in Argentine history: for the first time, all native-born males were able to vote in a presidential election, signaling the rise of a more representative democracy in this South American republic.¹⁰ Before 1916, conservative elites— largely wealthy landowners whose commercial fortunes were tied to the country's export-based economy— unilaterally controlled the State. That is, under the guise of democracy, the "Oligarchy," as the ruling conservative elites were known, alone elected the nation's president and congressmen (every six and nine years, respectively), keeping the vast majority of Argentines from directly participating in the country's institutional political arena. Although many of these elites supported Argentina's liberal civic and cultural blueprint born in the nineteenth century— for instance, the 1884 congressional mandate calling for non-religious education in all public schools— they were not prepared, like many of their Latin

American counterparts around the turn-of-the-century, to relinquish any form of political control that might jeopardize their handsome economic profits and prestigious social standing.¹¹

Between 1890-1916, the Oligarchy faced for the first time serious challenges, on several fronts, to its political monopoly. The first arose within the elite establishment itself where a dissident aristocratic faction, in the aftermath of the nation's catastrophic financial crisis of 1890, grew increasingly disenchanted with the oligarchy's practices of political fraud and favoritism. Led by Leandro Alem and then Hipólito Yrigoyen, they founded in 1891 a new party called the *Unión Cívica Radical* in hopes of opening up the political process and making the system more transparent and constitutionally-friendly. After two decades of marginal success, Yrigoyen and the Radical Party finally captured the presidency in 1916 in what was Argentina's first broadly democratic election.¹²

The Radical Party's 1916 triumph stemmed from its ability to harness two new dissatisfied political constituencies. The first was the nation's burgeoning immigrant working-class population that between 1870 and 1930 profoundly altered Argentina's demographic and economic makeup. Recruited by government officials to work the rich, yet untapped pampas, over six million (mostly European) immigrants poured into Argentina, dramatically raising the country's population from 1.8 million in 1869 to 7.8 million by World War I.¹³ Not surprisingly, Buenos Aires felt the population transfer most. To the displeasure of the Oligarchy, large numbers of immigrants abandoned the pampas for Buenos Aires (or never left the capital after arriving at the Port of Buenos Aires), boosting the city's population almost ten-fold to 1.5 million by 1914; on the eve of World War I, one of every two residents of the capital was foreign, excluding the many Argentine-born immigrant children.¹⁴

After the economic collapse of 1890, immigrant workers, many of whom were familiar with the socialist, anarchist and trade-union currents circulating in the Old World, became

increasingly organized and politicized.¹⁵ By the first decade of the 1900s, notably in Buenos Aires and other urban centers, they regularly began to strike, protesting the callousness of the export-based economy, so dear to conservative elites. Although the Oligarchy was able to suppress these strikes rather easily, it steadily grew concerned about their disruptive “revolutionary” potential. As a result, the Oligarchy twice enacted stern anti-anarchist and anti-foreigner laws— the 1902 Law of Residency and 1910 Law of Social Defense— the second coming on the heels of a major workers’ strike in 1909 and the highly-publicized assassination that same year of Police Chief Ramón L. Falcón by (Jewish) anarchist Simon Radowitzky in the posh Recoleta neighborhood of Buenos Aires.¹⁶

Urban workers were not the only Argentine residents to voice their discontent with the conservative ruling-class during the first decades of the twentieth century. With growing conviction, middle-class groups demanded greater access to positions of bureaucratic, political, and intellectual power held almost exclusively by elites. For instance, a new generation of university students, many of immigrant origin, toiled for more than twenty years— until President Yrigoyen finally introduced the University Reform Act of 1918— to wrest pedagogical and administrative control from entrenched conservative academic cliques who viewed higher education as an elitist stepping-stone to professional prominence. Those middle-class students dreamed of a more open, modern, and socially responsible university system that would adhere to more objective standards of academic excellence and be geared, in the words of Luis Alberto Romero, to “the service of society’s problems.”¹⁷ Similarly, an expanding group of young middle-class officers, as their (failed) 1905 revolt within the military made clear, had become equally frustrated with elite control and the lack of social mobility available to them within the armed forces.¹⁸

Of all the nation's visible political players after 1900— namely, the Conservatives (or the Oligarchy), the Socialists, the Communists, and a budding group of *criollo* nationalists— the Radicals were best prepared to take advantage of those immigrant worker and middle-class frustrations with the ruling elite. In the decade leading up to the 1916 presidential election, the Radicals established, by way of classic patronage politics, an impressive and unparalleled network of local alliances throughout the country, particularly in and around the nation's urban centers. Furthermore, a growing number of party committees, which were integral to the success of the Radicals' emerging network, successfully reached out to previously untapped social groups (for instance, young professionals, doctors, lawyers, merchants, businesspeople, and small farmers) helping the party to further broaden its political base. As the Radical Party, with its message of opportunity and change, steadily grew in stature so too did the charismatic Yrigoyen, who gradually came to represent the face of hope, harmony, and democracy in Argentina.¹⁹

Yrigoyen and the Radicals got a major political break in 1912 when Conservative President Roque Sáenz Peña signed (after much debate in the conservative-dominated Congress) the historic Saenz Peña electoral reform mandating universal suffrage for all native-born males.²⁰ The 1912 law reflected a shift in political and economic attitudes taking shape within one faction of the Conservative Party led by Saenz Peña, Carlos Pellegrini, and José Figueroa Alcorta. First, a growing number of the reformist-minded conservatives feared that maintaining the political status quo heightened the prospects of labor unrest, which threatened their cherished economic interests, notably their ability to attract foreign investment and expand commercially overseas.²¹ Second, conservative reformers felt that not only did their party have to respond to the growing democratic expectations in Argentine society, but that relinquishing a small degree of political control through open and fair elections would only serve

to strengthen and legitimize their party and the government. Finally, they were confident, despite concerns among some traditional conservatives, that the Conservative Party would be able to secure a significant measure of mass support in an open political environment.²²

After Conservatives achieved victories in most provincial elections later in 1912, there was ample reason to believe that their strategy of democratization was working. Yet those electoral triumphs masked growing regional tensions brewing within the party. After 1912, the Conservatives formally split into two independent factions, one headed by Buenos Aires Governor Marcelino Ugarte and the other by Santa Fe political boss Lisandro de la Torre, who formed the neo-conservative *Partido Demócrata Progresista*. Having built an unprecedented network of local alliances and having courted underrepresented political constituencies over the previous decade, the Radicals were thus well positioned in the aftermath of the Saenz Peña reform to take advantage of the divide among conservative elites.²³ Between 1912 and 1916, the Radicals slowly began to capture political control of a number of provinces and districts, including Santa Fe and the heavily-populated City of Buenos Aires, and also won a number of seats in Congress. Then, in 1916, Yrigoyen decisively won control of the presidency.²⁴

Following Yrigoyen's remarkable victory— the first time in which all native-born males could vote in a presidential election— Argentina embarked on her first experiment in representative democracy. As thousands of Argentines filled the Plaza de Mayo to cheer *their* president, Yrigoyen ushered in this new chapter in the nation's political history with a rhetorical commitment to support the 1853 Constitution, political compromise, social reconciliation, economic progress, and added respect for the public's will. In sharp contrast to his predecessors, Yrigoyen also exhibited a "populist" political flair. In his bid to strengthen his appeal among the masses, Yrigoyen harnessed state power to help negotiate employer-

employee disputes and promote peaceful— and comparatively favorable— resolutions of worker grievances rather than continue to repress workers' strikes.

Yrigoyen's approach was not without its limitations. First, despite his rhetorical commitment to representative democracy, he simultaneously promoted a decidedly non-pluralist vision of the nation reminiscent of the past half-century.²⁵ That is, in this culturally diverse and socially volatile land of immigrants, Yrigoyen and other like-minded reformers tried, as will be discussed below, to inculcate a singular patriotic spirit aimed at unifying Argentina's heterogeneous mix of Italian, Spanish, French, German, and, in our particular case, Jewish newcomers. Second, despite his populist behavior and efforts to placate middle-class demands of greater political and social access, Yrigoyen was reluctant to upset Argentina's existing elite-oriented economic framework— from which he, most members of his party, and the conservative opposition derived their social standing and financial clout. From the outset, Yrigoyen walked a fine political line: he attempted to intervene on behalf of workers just enough to secure a reputation among unions as a friend of the working class— in order, as David Rock points out, to prevent labor from gravitating towards the Socialist Party— yet without threatening the nation's powerful traditional elites and key foreign investors, both of whom continually pressured him to eliminate popular unrest within the country.²⁶

For nearly two years, Yrigoyen successfully balanced these sharply competing interests. The Russian Revolution of 1917 and the economic downturn resulting from the end of World War I made that balancing act an even more difficult challenge. As unemployment rose and wages failed to keep pace with the sharp upturn in postwar inflation, workers, led by the major maritime port and railroad unions, began to mobilize in 1918 with greater vigor and frequency.²⁷ Hundreds of protests and strikes cropped up across the country, notably in Buenos Aires where Yrigoyen remained indebted to working class voters. As he had since coming to power, the

president avoided violently repressing strikes and, more often than not, intervened on the workers' behalf. Yrigoyen's labor practices increasingly agitated not only local conservative elites, but also their foreign counterparts, who began to reduce or outright withdraw their lucrative investments from Argentina, deepening local aristocratic resentment towards Yrigoyen. In response, conservative elites and foreign capitalists organized their most significant political alliance since at least 1916, aimed not only at stifling worker unrest, but, more significantly, curbing the Yrigoyen government itself.²⁸

On the eve of the *Semana Trágica*, the Radicals two-year experiment with representative democracy faced considerable, and increasingly organized and cohesive, elite opposition. As a consequence, labor groups and the Yrigoyen government came under far greater scrutiny than at any point since 1916, making it more difficult for either one to maneuver freely politically without risk of potential reprisals. It is in this context that Yrigoyen stepped into the most dramatic and challenging moment of his presidency.

The *Semana Trágica*

As the Great War came to a close, Argentina experienced a sharp rise in labor unrest—in 1918 and 1919 alone there were 563 strikes.²⁹ The most dramatic and violent strike began in December 1918, when approximately 2500 workers at the Vasena and Sons Metallurgical Factory, located at Cochabamba and Rioja Streets in the working-class neighborhood of Nueva Pompeya, walked off the job.³⁰ Rejecting their demands for higher wages, shorter workdays, a six-day week, and the right to unionize, Pedro Vasena quickly hired replacements.³¹ Confrontations over the “scabs” between management security forces and striking workers quickly followed, resulting in the deaths of several workers.

In an already tense national climate of economic and social unrest, striking Vasena workers took to the streets.³² On Saturday, January 4th at the intersection of Avenida Alcorta and Santo Domingo, armed Vasena workers intercepted several police-protected horse-drawn carriages carrying replacement workers and factory supplies destined for the Nueva Pompeya plant. A shootout ensued— the prominent daily *La Prensa* estimated 250 shots were fired in all— in which one officer was killed and several other officers and strikers seriously injured.³³ The next day, a similar confrontation erupted when strikers ambushed police-escorted wagons as they turned the corner from Alvenida Alcorta onto Pepirí Street. By Monday the 6th, however, police were prepared. As strikers attempted a third ambush, the police responded with what Mario Bravo, a Socialista member of Congress, characterized as “a true collective shooting,” killing four strikers, injuring twenty more, and escaping unharmed.³⁴ By that evening, it had become clear that what had begun as a localized strike with bread and butter demands was evolving into a national event.

In the history and memory of the *Semana Trágica*, Tuesday January 7 is often regarded as the “official” beginning of this Argentine tragedy.³⁵ To protest the recent violence directed at the strikers and to demonstrate support for Vasena workers, workers at the Port of Buenos Aires also went on strike. Their action interrupted the flow of imports and exports to and from the capital, further destabilizing the city’s and the nation’s already fragile economy and increasing conservative elites’ bitterness toward labor and toward the government for failing to repress the workers.

Under great pressure to restore order, President Yrigoyen worked tirelessly behind the scenes to negotiate a settlement to the Vasena strike. At the same time, he ordered Police Chief Elpidio González to position squadrons of heavily armed officers at strategic points throughout Buenos Aires, including units stationed at the Vasena plant, to guard against any

further aggression.³⁶ These police measures did little to bring calm to the city: shortly after 3PM on January 7, police opened fire on a crowd of protesting workers gathered at the Vasena plant after— it is not clear whether or not they were first provoked by the strikers— killing six and seriously wounding thirty-four in what the moderate pro-labor and pro-Radical daily *La Razón* called “a true battle.”³⁷ In short, the Semana Trágica had witnessed its first major bloodbath.

City workers from all trades spontaneously poured into the streets on January 7 to express their indignation over police aggression earlier that afternoon at the Vasena factory. After holding an emergency party meeting, Socialista Party members also voiced their solidarity by publicly declaring “the workers will not remain silent about the crime committed at the Vasena factory.”³⁸ The next day, the Federación Obrera Regional Argentina (FORA), the nation’s most prominent workers’ alliance called for a general twenty-four hour strike, set for Thursday January 9, to protest police brutality. The FORA had two principal demands: 1) a solution to the Vasena strike satisfactory to demands of the workers; and 2) the release of all prisoners recently detained as labor agitators. At the same time, the nation’s militant anarchist labor alliance also called a strike to begin on January 9, although it did not stipulate a twenty-four hour limit.³⁹

The events of January 9 proved the most catastrophic to date. At 1PM, skirmishes broke out at the Vasena plant among strikers, private armed security guards, and newly arriving replacement workers. To disperse belligerent strikers, security forces shot at them, as did armed replacement workers present inside the factory, an attack which particularly infuriated the strikers.⁴⁰ By 4PM, as many as 20,000 Vasena and non-Vasena strikers descended upon the Vasena plant and surrounded a building where 400 replacements were stationed.⁴¹ Hollering at the scabs, or *carneros* as they called them, the strikers doused the building with gasoline and set it on fire. Fortunately for the scabs, firefighters stationed nearby arrived in time to put out the blaze. Meanwhile, Pedro Vasena immediately contacted President Yrigoyen and requested

urgent police protection. Yrigoyen again dispatched the police, who were joined by independent right-wing civilian vigilante groups, and together they managed only to avert one potential human tragedy with another of their own. Along with the Vasena security forces, they opened fire on crowds of protestors killing twenty strikers and seriously injuring at least sixty more in the deadliest confrontation to date.⁴²

Earlier that day, a procession of armed workers left the plant for the Chacarita cemetery several miles away, carrying on their shoulders and on dollies the wooden coffins of their already fallen colleagues. As they made their way through the streets of Buenos Aires, they clashed repeatedly with police forces— confrontations near the 21st and 27th precincts were particularly violent. In one instance, on Avenida Corrientes near Yatay Street, police and workers exchanged fire after workers looted, ransacked, and burned the picturesque Sagrado Corazón Church.⁴³ For conservative-minded Catholics like police functionary Octavio Piñero, the desecration of the church unilaterally transformed the nature and heightened the magnitude of this conflict. He now saw it as “proof of [anarchist and foreigner] atheism and hatred of the Catholic faith,” which he regarded as a direct assault on what he believed was *argentinidad*.⁴⁴ In response to the church burning, police stationed on horseback at the Chacarita cemetery began to fire upon members of the working-class funeral procession as they finally arrived to bury their colleagues. The police killed twelve workers at Chacarita that day and subsequently denied the remaining workers the right to bury their dead at the cemetery that day.⁴⁵ The Chacarita calamity— in which police sources defended the officers as acting in self-defense— came to symbolize the nadir of the *Semana Trágica*.⁴⁶

By the end of January 9, transportation services had come to a virtual halt, shops and business had closed, and a general panic had set over Buenos Aires.⁴⁷ The next day, Police Chief González invited workers to end the hostilities, to which they responded by overturning and

burning his patrol car on the corner of San Juan and Loria Streets. Under increasing pressure to stem the violence, President Yrigoyen finally called in General Luis Dellepiane and the Armed Forces on January 10.⁴⁸ With 30,000 soldiers and hundreds of canons at his disposal, Dellepiane ordered the army to occupy the city, concentrating their focus outside government buildings, the stock market, police stations, banks, and the Jockey Club— the exclusive social quarters of the city's economic and cultural elite.⁴⁹ In a country where representative government had existed for only two years, the military's intervention, while lasting only six days, set a significant precedent for the future course of democracy in Argentina.⁵⁰

By January 13, Dellepiane had successfully restored a semblance of order to Buenos Aires. As commerce and transportation slowly resumed, newspapers like *La Prensa*, *La Nación*, and *La Época* praised Dellepiane and the armed forces for the “great help that they have provided...in the maintenance of order” and, in a growing show of patriotism, remarked that in all parts of the city they “have always been received with respect and affection.”⁵¹ While the nation's principal newspapers showered Dellepiane and the army with praise for restoring calm to the city, the quiet pressure that government negotiators applied to Pedro Vasena to reach a settlement with his workers was critical to Dellepiane's ability to succeed “militarily” and should not be overlooked. In return for security assurances from the government, Vasena finally agreed on January 11 to *all* of the workers' initial demands: a) a 20-40% wage increase, b) time-and-a-half pay for overtime work and double-time for holidays, c) an eight-hour workday, d) Sundays off, and e) the right to unionize.⁵² Finally, as part of the settlement, Police Chief González also agreed to release all political prisoners unjustly detained for labor reasons, the last of the worker demands.⁵³ The Vasena strike— and by extension all parallel strikes— effectively ended on the night of the 11th, yet not before hundreds of Argentines had been killed or injured.⁵⁴

The Jewish Pogrom

Although the strikes had ended, the *Semana Trágica* certainly had not. As Sandra McGee Deutsch argues, the very presence of Dellepiane's armed forces in the streets of Buenos Aires served to strengthen the perception among nativist members of the upper and middle classes that the government had lost control of the situation.⁵⁵ Like the police and military, nativists still feared the possibility of a working-class revolution and used Yrigoyen's January 10 call to Dellepiane and the armed forces as a pretext to take matters into their own hands.⁵⁶

Nativist vigilantes targeted immigrants as the "anarchist" and "communist" perpetrators responsible for the violent upheavals. José Moya demonstrates in his aptly titled book *Cousins and Strangers* that among their preferred "anarchist" targets were Andalusians and Catalans, the latter of which particularly suffered at the hands of these vigilantes during the *Semana Trágica*.⁵⁷ Beginning in 1909, when Russian-born Jewish anarchist Simon Radowitsky assassinated Police Chief Ramón L. Falcón, and escalating in the aftermath of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, their other chosen group were the *rusos* or (Eastern European) Jews.

Between January 10-14, with the army in the streets, armed nativist groups like the *Comité Nacional de la Juventud* (National Committee of Youth), *Los Defensores del Orden* (The Defenders of Order), *La Guardia Blanca* (The White Guard) and *La Legión Cívica* (The Civic Legion) posted flyers and held rallies in plazas throughout Buenos Aires denouncing anarchists, immigrants, and, particularly, Jews.⁵⁸ Crying "Foreigners Out," "Death to the Anarchists," and "Death to the Jews," protestors marched through the streets of the capital singing the national anthem and "caza al ruso" ("ruso hunt" or "Jew hunt") as they prepared to attack working-class, and primarily Jewish, neighborhoods such as *Once* and *Villa Crespo*.⁵⁹ On January 10 alone, the worst day of the pogrom, nativist vigilantes defaced many Jewish community institutions,

attacked the Jewish Theater Association, burned the Moises Hess Library and the offices of two Jewish socialist newspapers (*Avangard* and *Poalei Zion*), vandalized Jewish businesses and homes, and harassed, beat, and raped individual Jews in the streets.⁶⁰

Jews and non-Jews provided numerous first-hand accounts of the pogrom. José Mendelson, then a young Jewish immigrant reporter who would become a prominent intellectual within the Jewish community, recounted how vigilantes— reminiscent of the nineteenth-century pogroms in Eastern Europe— shaved the long beards of Orthodox Jewish men and forced older Jews to strip naked in the streets.⁶¹ Abraham Kóriman, the secretary of the Jewish Comité Central de las Víctimas de la Guerra (the Central Committee of War Victims) decried in the Yiddish press the anti-Semitic “...barbarians who acted so brutally, attacking homes, rounding up hundreds and hundreds of peaceful citizens, vilely swearing, merely because the Jew had the misfortune of having a beard; [they also] mistreated and beat defenseless women and children.”⁶² *La Razón* spoke of house “walls riddled from bullets, doors destroyed...pale-faced and gloomy women, and crying children....one could hardly believe that one was in Buenos Aires.”⁶³

In his 1929 memoir *Nightmare*, Pedro Wald, who in 1919 was a thirty year-old carpenter and Jewish socialist writer for the Yiddish-speaking *Di Presse*, described how vigilante mobs had ordered unconscious and semi-conscious Jews (whom they had already beaten) to sing the Argentine national anthem; when the Jewish victims failed to move or respond, they were further beaten.⁶⁴ In his 1951 memoir, the non-Jewish Argentine writer Juan Carulla recalled witnessing the pogrom on Viamonte Street in the heart of *Once*:

The sound of furniture and drawers violently being hurled onto the street was mixed with shouts of ‘Death to the Jews! Death to the Anarchists!’ From time to time, old bearded men and disheveled women would pass before my eyes. I will never forget the pale face and suppliant look of one as he was being dragged along by a pair of teenagers, as well as that of a sobbing child clinging to the ripped old black long coat of another one of those poor devils. Not without [a sense of] repugnance, I diverted my stare from that shocking scene, only to

fixate it on other similar scenes, given that the disturbances incited by the attack on Jewish homes and businesses had spread to various surrounding blocks.⁶⁵

Vigilante groups like the *Comité Nacional de la Juventud* (CNJ) and the *Defensores del Orden* (DDO) counted on the sympathy and even cooperation of the police and military. The CNJ often held their meetings at police and military installations, including one on January 11 at the *Centro Naval*— the navy’s headquarters in Buenos Aires— where the 800 members in attendance offered their services, in a public statement, to General Dellepiane and Police Chief González for the “maintenance of order.”⁶⁶ Sensing that the military already had the week’s violence under control, Dellepiane decided their help would not be required, yet nonetheless thanked them publicly for their “patriotic offering.”⁶⁷

Dellepiane’s response to the CNJ suggested that he recognized and respected the need for a democracy— especially a nascent democracy— to maintain a rhetorical boundary between official security forces and any armed civilian groups. In fact, by publicly honoring yet ultimately declining the CNJ’s “patriotic offering,” Dellepiane had skillfully avoided a military-vigilante union without ever alienating the CNJ politically or socially. At the same time, Dellepiane left open the possibility of a future military-vigilante partnership. In his concluding remarks, he “applauded, in the name of the people, the beautiful attitude that [the CNJ] had assumed” and “requested that they remain united in the event of unforeseen incidents.”⁶⁸ His request for future CNJ assistance should be taken seriously given that Dellepiane, while chief of government security during the *Semana Trágica*, also served as a personal advisor to the CNJ and sat on the board of the *Defensores del Orden*.⁶⁹

Among military and police personnel, Dellepiane was far from alone in sympathizing or joining with these armed civilian groups.⁷⁰ What is more, there was little attempt to hide these connections; on the contrary, as a reading of Argentina’s principal dailies over the course of the *Semana Trágica* demonstrates, many military and police officials openly associated with such

groups, whom they admired for their commitment to “order” and their expressions of “argentinidad.”⁷¹ In his 1952 account of the *Semana Trágica*, then police commissioner José Ramón Romariz even maintained that the Yrigoyen government “not only authorized police personnel to join the ranks of the Liga [Patriótica Argentina]⁷², but also permitted the Liga’s branches to meet in the respective precincts.”⁷³ Although Romariz’s remarks in 1952 were likely intended to discredit Yrigoyen historically, they represent the words of a high-ranking police figure who recalled a significant degree of sympathy and cooperation between the Buenos Aires police, the government, and right-wing vigilante groups at the time of the *Semana Trágica*.

Several first-hand accounts from January 1919 also pointed to unequivocal police cooperation and involvement in the pogrom itself. Mendelson reported in a Yiddish paper on January 10 of the violent abuses that took place at the 7th and 9th precincts in *Once* after police that day arrested scores of *suspected* Jewish “anarchists:”

[The police] beat and beat the Jews, methodically torturing them...to prolong their suffering without end. Because of the fatigue [involved in] whipping, fifty men alternated on each Jew, such that the beatings continued from morning until afternoon, from sunset through the night, and from night until daybreak...With matches, they burned the knees of arrested Jews while piercing their open wounds and white bodies with pins...In the 7th precinct, soldiers, vigilantes, and judges locked Jews in the bathrooms, where they urinated in their mouths. The torturers crudely cursed while the Argentine police and the soldiers completed their tasks.⁷⁴

In an open letter dated January 17 in the Yiddish newspaper *Di Presse*, Kóriman of the local Jewish Central Committee of War Victims held “the police responsible for the brutalities perpetrated.”⁷⁵ In particular, he criticized the police for “support[ing] the false patriots, who with Argentine flags in hand and humming the national anthem, marched through Jewish neighborhoods shouting ‘out with the Jews, the rusos, the foreigners’, etc. All these savage episodes were [either] committed or supported by the police...”⁷⁶

Writing in Yiddish to an exclusively Jewish audience, Mendelson and Kóriman likely enjoyed a sense of literary freedom, if not also a sense of personal protection, that enabled

them to speak out so openly and straightforwardly. Yet many Spanish-language accounts document the psychological and physical torment inflicted by the police upon Jews. One particularly ‘celebrated’ case involved Pedro Wald, the Jewish socialist writer who was falsely—many argued ridiculously—accused by the police of being the “future president of a maximalist republic” in Argentina. In a January 16 interview at her home with *La Razón*, Wald’s fiancée Rosa Wainstein recanted her experience in a police jail after she and Wald had been arrested walking together on Avenida Corrientes on January 10, the first day of the Jewish pogrom. Although never harmed physically, she spoke of being verbally tormented at the precinct about having been “imprisoned for being *rusa*” — which here meant for being Jewish— and described how officers continually insulted her as they flashed her “terrifying pictures of Tzarist Russia featuring soldiers and rural prisoners.”⁷⁷

Her fiancé fared even worse. In a January 24 congressional session largely devoted to the *Semana Trágica*, Socialista congressman Mario Bravo stood up and energetically spoke out against police brutality, notably the mistreatment of Argentine Jews. At one point, he graphically described the abuses suffered by Pedro Wald, who had become a *Semana Trágica* symbol of anti-Semitic police cruelty, at the 7th precinct in *Once*: “...and like that they jabbed his back with pins, slapped him in the face, pulled his hair, beat his fingers with a drawn sword, and then the punishment reached a point of such refinement, perversity, and sensuousness [that they] burn[ed] his nails with matches...”⁷⁸ The direct and violent nature of police involvement in the pogrom, coupled with the perceived lack of accountability and justice, played a major role in how Argentine Jews responded to the *Semana Trágica* and also greatly shaped the memories, expectations, and legacies that they carried forward.

Jewish Reactions to the Pogrom

On January 25, after nearly two weeks of sustained protest activity by a number of diverse Jewish groups, the leaders of the *Comité de la Colectividad Israelita*— a new Jewish umbrella organization founded on January 19— met privately with President Yrigoyen. In the name of Argentina’s “150,000 Israelitas,” they presented Yrigoyen with a three paragraph statement that decried “the atmosphere of hate directed at the country’s entire Jewish population” and respectfully implored the president and his government to “put an end to the false and terrible legend that has been created surrounding the Jewish community, placing in doubt her loyalty and peaceful spirit.”⁷⁹

Yrigoyen listened attentively and promised to take all necessary measures to see that the culprits of the pogrom were apprehended and that such an abhorrent episode never again occur. Yet before the Jewish delegation left his office, Yrigoyen also added that they should have come to see him “in the capacity of Argentine citizens and not in the name of the Jewish community.”⁸⁰ Surprised by the president’s remarks, Rabbi Samuel Jalfon, a principal leader of the delegation, reminded Yrigoyen that the vigilante attacks in neighborhoods like *Once* and *Villa Crespo* “had been directed against the Jewish population of the country” and not against “Argentine citizens.”⁸¹

That exchange illuminated two interrelated facets surrounding the nature and expectations of what it meant to be “Argentine” around the time of the *Semana Trágica*. First, it reflected the government’s, if not the nation’s non-pluralist civic ideal: on the heels of the country’s worst anti-Semitic moment in its then young history, the president enthusiastically received a Jewish delegation and rhetorically undertook to do all he could to protect the nation’s Jewish minority, yet delicately reminded the Jewish delegation of Argentina’s civic intolerance for what in the United States might be

described as hyphenated ethnic identity. Like other political and intellectual reformers in the post-1916 era, Yrigoyen's notion of representative democracy in this volatile nation made up of different races, ethnicities, and nationalities was imbued with a civic and culturally homogenizing patriotic quality. That is, given the massive number of immigrants in Argentina, Yrigoyen felt— not unlike what visionaries Juan Alberdi and Domingo Sarmiento had in the nineteenth century— that the success of the nation's democratic experiment hinged upon the cultural prospects of creating, to borrow from Matthew Karush, Argentine "citizens out of the country's heterogeneous masses."⁸²

Second, the exchange between Yrigoyen and the Jewish delegation suggested that the philosophical and strategic choices available to Argentine Jews were clearly being shaped by those very political, demographic, and cultural forces underpinning Argentina's nascent democracy. Although Rabbi Jalfon and the Jewish delegation objected to the president's efforts to curb their Jewishness, they had since the pogrom actively articulated a protest strategy predicated upon the seamless integration of Jews into national society, a strategy in which they themselves did little to accentuate their own Jewishness. Despite whatever reservations they may have had, Jalfon and the Jewish delegation appeared keenly aware of the growing connection among nationality, citizenship, and democracy in Argentina that strongly encouraged the acceptance of a non-pluralist patriotic spirit among all her inhabitants.

At the time of the pogrom, a central Jewish umbrella group did not yet exist; the Comité de la Colectividad Israelita was formed one week later and it was not until 1935 that the Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (DAIA) was established. As head of Argentina's oldest Jewish congregation (CIRA), which had been founded in 1862 by relatively well-to-do and secular-minded Western European immigrants, Rabbi Jalfon

stepped into that vacuum and assumed the lead among Jews in publicizing and protesting the recent vigilante attacks.⁸³ After receiving public assurances on January 12 from Police Inspector General Francisco Laguarda that “all necessary measures have been adopted to protect the Jewish community from any type of disorder”— assurances that proved a little premature given that the attacks on Jews continued until the 14th— Jalfon and CIRA helped sponsor, in partnership with the *Federación Sionista*, two public letters of protest, the first on January 12 and a second, far more significant one on the 15th.⁸⁴

The tone, contents, and target audience of both letters underscored the approach that Argentina’s more affluent, longstanding, and mainstream Jewish groups would adopt in name of the entire Jewish community; that approach was based on making the argument that the vast majority of Jews were hardworking and peaceful patriots. Both letters portrayed the Jewish population as an industrious, stable, and dutiful group of “merchants, professionals, peaceful artisans, and [agricultural] colonists who have worked for dozens of years in all areas [dedicated to] the progress of the country and whose children serve in the nation’s army.” Second, as they enshrined the Jewish population in age-old national values, they further urged that “the great Argentine community” not confuse those “extremist elements” present in all Argentine “foreign communities...with the large and peaceful Jewish citizenry of this country.”⁸⁵ The CIRA-led coalition appeared then just as willing as the next Argentine to cast blame upon the “anarchists” and “maximalists,” if it meant protecting and promoting its own social and cultural standing in Argentine society.

The goals and strategies of the CIRA-led coalition— which now came to include the *Federación Sionista*, the Moroccan *Congregación Israelita Latina*, the *Comité Central de la Educación Israelita en la Argentina*, Kóriman’s *Central Committee for Jewish Victims of War*, the

Juventud Israelita (Jewish Youth), the (Ashkenazi) Jewish burial society, and a number of mutual aid and educational organizations— crystallized in its remarkable letter of January 15.⁸⁶ In an unprecedented call to all Argentines entitled “150,000 Israelitas to the People of the Republic,” the coalition released a stirring declaration published by all the nation’s major newspapers which aimed to interweave the Jewish community into the social and cultural fabric of the Argentine conscience.⁸⁷ Borrowing verbatim from the Argentine Constitution, the letter opened by “invoking ‘the protection of God, source of all reason and justice’” and went on to call upon all Argentines to rally behind “the benefits of liberty” and “the institutions [that] we have invariably respected.”⁸⁸

Two things were immediately evident. First, the letter’s divine or spiritual injunctions— God was again mentioned later in the text— were neither expressly Jewish nor Catholic, but rather universal. That was telling of both the CIRA-led coalition and of Argentine society in 1919. As a relatively established, well-off, and secular-minded federation of Jewish groups whose objective was to promote greater social acceptance and integration of Jews into Argentine society, the coalition was less interested in dwelling on “things Jewish” than in embracing “things Argentine.” In a country where the making of patriotic Argentine citizenry constituted a quasi-official, if not also popular immigrant cultural program, this Jewish coalition preferred to endorse that national idea, particularly after the scare of the *Semana Trágica*. Moreover, it also recognized that while 90-95% of Argentines were Catholic and the Church held considerable economic, political, and cultural sway in the country, many Argentines, especially *porteños*, identified closely with liberal, secular norms embodied in Alberdi and Sarmiento’s civic-republican legacy and historic Law 1420 of 1884, which mandated non-religious education in all public schools.⁸⁹

Second, the letter skillfully appealed to freedom, the flag, and the Constitution, broad national values and symbols that crossed political and ideological boundaries.⁹⁰ Building on the letter's opening invocation, it went on to "praise the hospitable Constitution, the generous Flag [capital theirs], and the illustrious temperament of the young and virile people (pueblo) that *does not yet know how to hate*, and who protects *our* great dream of liberty."⁹¹ Repeated references to enlightened republican concepts such as liberty and constitutions arguably helped the authors gain legitimacy in the eyes of their targeted non-Jewish audience, notably upper-class Argentines, who historically esteemed things "European." In making immediate and repeated mention of the Constitution, the letter also potentially reinforced the cultural perception, accurate or not, of Jews as a law-centered people. Finally, their decision to pair "hospitable" with "Constitution" enabled the authors to laud the generosity of Argentines, while insuring that such generosity required the inclusion of Jews and other foreigners into the national fold. And in case any reader glossed over that nuance, the authors made it unmistakably clear when they proclaimed: "The Argentine Republic is our adopted homeland."⁹²

The Jewish coalition's decision to portray Argentines— on the heels of the previous week's "unforgivable crime"— as a "young and virile people that does not yet know how to hate" also speaks to the tendency among Argentine politicians and intellectuals in 1919 to sanitize the presence of anti-Semitism in Argentina. In one familiar instance on January 16, just a day after the CIRA-sponsored letter was published, Conservative Congressman Carlos Melo lobbied in the press for tougher new immigration laws that would require all prospective newcomers to arrive in Argentina with a clean criminal record; after putting forward his well-received argument, he concluded by asserting that "there is not nor has there ever been xenophobia in Argentina."⁹³ The CIRA-led coalition seemed aware that such sentiments and attitudes suffused the nation's collective consciousness, which likely contributed to its decision

to adopt as non-threatening, non-abrasive, and inclusionary strategy as possible; indeed, its January 15 letter was careful to address all non-Jewish Argentines “of all conditions, of all classes, [and] affiliated with all political parties.”⁹⁴

And yet if the coalition strategically avoided alienating any non-Jewish Argentines, it simultaneously excluded, or purposely chose not to include, Jewish working class groups among the “150,000 Israelitas” it purported to represent. Not a single representative of a Jewish worker group, writes Jewish Argentine historian and labor sympathizer Boleslao Lewin, figured in the CIRA-sponsored coalition.⁹⁵ That might explain why both CIRA-sponsored letters spoke only of Jewish “merchants, professionals, and artisans;” by tactically avoiding mention of, say, Jewish metallurgical, railroad, furniture, or textile factory workers, CIRA arguably felt that there was less of risk of further conjuring up images of Jews as “anarchists” and “maximalists” in the minds of non-Jewish Argentines so soon after the *Semana Trágica*.

Although it excluded urban workers in its two letters, the coalition nonetheless included Jewish agricultural “colonists” alongside “merchants, professionals, and artisans.” Were these farmers any less “working class” than urban factory workers? In short, socio-economically no, yet culturally yes. Although colonists living in rural towns like Moisesville were no better off economically than Jewish city workers, culturally they far better personified— as newcomers toiling the prized pampas— the genre of immigrants that Argentine officials historically and romantically associated with European ideals of “progress” and “development.” Far removed from the urban labor disturbances and bearers of more fabled cultural standing, colonists posed little social or cultural threat to Jewish merchants and professionals in Buenos Aires at the time of the pogrom. On the contrary, these *Yidishe Gauchos*— as famous (Jewish) Argentine writer Alberto Gerchunoff christened them at the time of the nation’s majestic 1910 centennial

celebration— arguably only facilitated Jewish merchant and professional access into higher Argentine society.

The coalition’s decision to exclude mention of Jewish factory workers from either of its two letters certainly was conditioned by the recent violence and bloodshed that gripped Buenos Aires. Yet it also reflected the more affluent Western European Jews’ longer-standing cultural aversion towards poorer Eastern European Jews— independent of the *Semana Trágica*.

Although Jews of Western European origin, notably French Jews, had provided Russian, Polish, Ukrainian, and Hungarian Jewish newcomers with considerable financial and social support after those latter groups had arrived in Argentina after the turn-of-the-century, they were uncomfortable, if not embarrassed by these poorer, untidy, religious-looking, and politically vocal *shtetl* immigrants.⁹⁶ In effect, they shared Argentine patriarch Juan Alberdi’s articulation of “Europe” and “European immigration” rooted in *Western* notions of “order, science, liberty, and the art of wealth” on display in cities like London, Paris, and Berlin and not Minsk, Lodz, or Kiev.

In *Welcoming the Undesirables*, Jeffrey Lesser explains how Caucasian Eastern European Jewish immigrants arriving in Brazil during the interwar period forced government officials and society in general to re-evaluate their notions of what it meant to be “white” and “European.”⁹⁷ A similar process was at work in Argentina where many Western European *Jews*, like their non-Jewish social and cultural counterparts, frowned upon the arrival after the turn-of-the-century of tens of thousands of Russian, Polish, Ukrainian, and Hungarian Jews precisely because these newcomers did not correspond to the vision of “European” that, say, Argentina’s founding fathers had in mind when they drew up Article 25 of the 1853 Constitution.⁹⁸ Western European Jews also came to fear— suggesting that they had internalized and projected non-Jewish Argentine ideas about *rusos*, yet from a place of insecurity— that the arrival of those

Eastern Europeans would provoke a rise in anti-Semitism and, thereby, undermine their more respected standing in Argentine society. The *Semana Trágica* suggests that their first concern held true.⁹⁹

Not surprisingly, Jewish labor groups reacted to the pogrom quite differently. In his valuable 1971 study of the *Semana Trágica*, Nachum Solominsky argues that Jewish working class groups responded more assertively and in decidedly more *Jewish* fashion than their CIRA-led counterparts. Pointing to a January 14 editorial in *Di Idische Tzaitung* that called upon all members of the community to “react calmly and consciously as proud Jews” and resist any temptation to “feel defeated,” Solominsky praises the Yiddish newspaper’s more “dignified” *Jewish* stance “before the enemy” just as he criticizes the CIRA-sponsored January 15 letter for being too docile and acquiescent.¹⁰⁰ Although Solominsky fails to take into account that the Yiddish newspaper had greater literary freedom to invoke notions of Jewish pride and solidarity precisely because its audience was entirely Jewish, he also expressed a sentiment shared among working-class Jews, some of whom adopted far more assertive and critical Spanish-language protests than those employed by the CIRA-led coalition. Days after nativist vigilantes torched the Poalei Zion library on Ecuador street in the Jewish barrio of *Once*, Marcos Paryszewski, director of the proletariat socialist Zionist group, spoke out forcefully in both *La Prensa* and *La Razón* against the specter of anti-Semitism in Argentina, notably the tendency to characterize Poalei Zion workers in particular and Argentine Jews in general as “elements of disorder.” Insisting that “Poalei Zion has never embraced...maximalismo,” he publicly lamented that “once again, we Jews have paid with our lives the ‘crime’ of being Jews— in many parts of the world because they hate us, here because they confuse us with maximalistas or with some other sect.”¹⁰¹

Like Paryszewski, the Jewish bundist-socialist worker association *Avangard* also condemned the “slanderous maximalista” ruse employed in Argentina “as a pretext to attack workers in general and Jews in particular.” Of all Jewish groups, Avangard, in part because one of its leaders, Pedro Wald, had been accused and tortured for being the president of a fictitious Bolshevik republic in Argentina, exhibited the least desire to placate police, government or public social and cultural sensibilities. Whereas the CIRA-led coalition appeared to dance around the question of police brutality, Avangard assailed “the police and military not only for permit[ting] the criminal pogrom against the Jews, but for [allowing] their weapons” to be used by vigilante groups “to perpetuate these savage actions.” Moreover, it castigated the Radical government for ‘allowing’ the “caza del ruso” or “Jew hunt” to occur on Argentine soil, symbolically comparing the Yrigoyen administration to the “Tsarist government of Russia” with its misplaced “pogromist policies.”¹⁰²

In continuing to describe, in the very same protest letter, the abuses arbitrarily arrested Jews, including Wald, suffered during the pogrom, Avangard employed the terms “inquisitorial treatment” and “inquisitionally tortured.”¹⁰³ That choice of words arguably reflected not only their current frustration with the police and the Yrigoyen administration, but, equally significantly, their bitter sense of disillusionment— as workers, immigrants (or children of immigrants) and, particularly, as Jews— with the “Argentine dream” in the aftermath of the *Semana Trágica*. Since the 1850s, Argentina’s patriarchs had always sought to project an air of freedom and equality on par constitutionally with the United States, England, and France. Most immigrants, perhaps Jews even more so given their or their predecessors past experiences in Eastern Europe, cherished the promises of liberty and protection made in the independence articles of 1811 that prominently declared that “each man has the liberty to remain in the territory of the State;” the Provisional Statutes of 1815 and the 1825 Constitution that

guaranteed all inhabitants “life, fame, liberty, equality, property, and security;” or the 1853 Constitution and 1876 Immigration Law that championed the right of all inhabitants “to freely practice their religion.”¹⁰⁴ Moreover, such constitutional guarantees could only have appeared more propitious to these immigrants following the recent passage of the Sáenz Peña Reform of 1912 and the onset in 1916 of representative democracy— particularly after the earlier passage in 1902 and 1910, respectively, of the restrictive anti-anarchist and anti-foreigner Law of Residency and Law of Social Defense.¹⁰⁵

No doubt, the atrocities of January 1919, on the heels of World War I, represented a violent psychological blow for all Argentines (immigrants included) that pierced the nation’s collective psyche. For pro-democratic forces, the arbitrary violence constituted a violation of the aforementioned constitutional guarantees and the political and electoral achievements in place since 1912. For pro-democratic forces of Eastern European Jewish descent like Avangard, they also symbolized the appearance on the streets of this *great* South American republic the buried specter of violent Russian anti-Semitism. Certainly there had been significant anti-Semitic episodes in Argentina before the *Semana Trágica*—Julian Martel’s 1890 publication of *La Bolsa* blaming Jews for the nation’s banking debacle and the mini-pogrom in *Once* on May 14, 1910 are two of the more infamous examples.¹⁰⁶ However the nature and magnitude of the recent violence, made worse by the visible cooperation between nativist vigilante groups and the police, signified a historical turning point for these and many other Argentine Jews.

By linking the *Semana Trágica* and the Spanish Inquisition, Avangard found a way to rationalize how such a tragedy could have occurred in “free, equal, and secure” Argentina. Rather than regard it as some freak aberration alien to her constitutional and cultural fabric, Avangard implicated Argentina by arguing that it was in fact a latent historical extension of her violent and discriminatory Hispanic past. Other Jewish voices joined Avangard in resuscitating

the Spanish “Black Legend:” to make the case that the events of the *Semana Trágica* were actually far worse than any Russian pogrom, the young Jewish immigrant reporter Jose Mendelson argued on January 10 (the worst day of the pogrom) that the events of January 1919 “could only be compared with the inquisitional methods that Argentina’s ‘motherland’ employed, which perhaps were transmitted to her by heritage.”¹⁰⁷ In disputing Argentina’s venerable national self-image as overly-righteous and artificial, both Avangard and Mendelson rejected Congressman Melo’s January 16 contention that “there is no nor has there ever been xenophobia in Argentina” as well as CIRA’s January 15 assertion that Argentines do “not yet know how to hate.”

Angered and disappointed as Avangard was with the Yrigoyen government, the police, and the nation’s constitutional guarantees, it was not prepared to renounce the “Argentine dream” nor its adopted homeland. On the contrary, Avangard concluded its protest with an upbeat, impassioned socialist call for “a better life in Argentina.”¹⁰⁸ Such constructive optimism suggested that however great their disillusionment with Argentina was after the *Semana Trágica*, Avangard not only still confided in its new *patria*, but appeared even more determined than before January 1919 to exercise its political and social rights as nationals to foster a more compassionate and just Argentina. And therein lies the letter’s great paradox: the very Argentine government that Avangard castigated so severely for allowing the “*caza del ruso*” to unfold was the same one that only three years earlier had brought broad-based representative democracy to all (male) Argentines, and the same one which now afforded less mainstream Jewish immigrant labor groups like Avangard the political tools to protest more openly and demand greater representation and a better life in Argentina.

Reactions of non-Jewish Argentines

In the week after they published the January 15 letter, CIRA and the Federación Sionista spearheaded the creation of the *Comité de la Colectividad Israelita* as an expanded version of the existing CIRA-led coalition (Jewish working class associations like Poalei Zion and Avangard, however, still chose not or were not invited to join). The Comité sought to establish a more formal institutional Jewish protective body as the turmoil of the Semana Trágica reached its end.¹⁰⁹ The Comité's first order of business was to compose and deliver to the nation's authorities a seven-point declaration in the name of the country's "150,000 Israelitas," which principally called upon the government to: 1) bring about an immediate end to the violence and suffering of the Jewish community at the hands of civilian and police groups; 2) immediately release all innocent Jews falsely arrested; 3) carry out a complete investigation into the pogrom and insure full justice; and 4) clarify for the Argentine public that the Jewish community was not responsible for the recent tragic events.¹¹⁰

In addition to meetings with the president, the Comité attempted to arrange individual audiences with high-ranking government officials. Enlisting the help of non-Jewish Socialista congressman Alfredo Palacios, they arranged for Palacios to accompany a Jewish delegation headed by *Diario Israelita* editors Leon Mass and Mauricio Sprinberg to meet with General Dellepiane.¹¹¹ Why have Palacios accompany the Jewish delegation? Of course, Palacios, a respected politician, lent instant credibility to the Jewish delegation. But as Sprinberg recalled in 1978— at ninety-one years of age— the 1919 meeting with Dellepiane, it may not only have been an issue of credibility, but also one of accessibility: "We [Comité leaders] immediately understood, that under the circumstances [the Semana Trágica], an exclusively Jewish delegation would not have had the chance to make itself heard."¹¹²

After meeting with the Comité delegation, General Dellepiane issued a remarkable internal memo addressed to the Central Police Department and all police precincts, which later

was made public. In it, he notified all police officers “to draw a clear distinction between...the peaceful and hardworking members of the Jewish community, who have contributed in every way to the progress and greatness of the Republic...[and] the criminals whose attacks we continue to suppress.”¹¹³ Coming from the commander of all security forces in Buenos Aires, Dellepiane’s message carried tremendous political and social weight— conceivably, it alone could have put a stop to the pogrom in *Once* and *Villa Crespo*.

It is difficult to assess the sincerity of Dellepiane’s support of the Jewish delegation, but it is worth recalling that at the very moment that he welcomed the Jewish delegation to his office, he also sat on the board and served as personal advisor for two nativist vigilante groups— the Comité Nacional de la Juventud (CNJ) and the Defensores del Orden (DDO). Moreover, just a day before praising the “peaceful and hardworking members of the Jewish community,” he had, as we have seen, publicly “applauded, in the name of the [Argentine] people, the beautiful attitude that [the CNJ] had assumed.”¹¹⁴ Although these apparently conflicting responses suggest a measure of ambivalence, perhaps they better illustrate that Dellepiane was not only an adept military leader, but also a skillful politician keenly aware of his particular audiences and the complexity of the situation.

Dellepiane’s underlying concern, however, was not the “peaceful and hardworking members of the Jewish community,” but the deleterious Jewish “anarchists” in their midst. During his same meeting with Comité leaders, he cautioned them against the dangers those “anarchists” posed, and then publicly reiterated his warning in a February interview with the Jewish monthly *Vida Nuestra*. When asked, as *Vida Nuestra* did of thirty prominent Argentine politicians and intellectuals, “do you believe that the Jewish community is responsible for the violent episodes of the last strike [the *Semana Trágica*],” Dellepiane replied: “I do not believe that the Jewish collective had anything to do with the incidents that occurred, but it would be

very timely, as I previously had the pleasure of communicating to one of the gentlemen [of the Palacios-Jewish delegation]...[to remind] the Jewish collective that it energetically reject those adventurers in its midst who are seeking to infiltrate it, and who risk upsetting the level of protection and tolerance she has enjoyed.”¹¹⁵

Dellepiane’s warning mattered for two reasons. First, it implied that the fate, safety, and acceptance of the peaceful and hardworking Jewish majority in Argentine society was inextricably tied to the violent and “anti-Argentine” Jewish “anarchist” minority; so long as the former did not work to expose and stifle the latter, the entire Jewish community remained at risk socially and culturally. The CIRA-led coalition’s failure to mention Jewish “workers” in its January 12 and January 15, and its efforts to denounce and distance itself from all “extremist elements within our community,” suggest that the coalition was not only aware of Argentine attitudes like Dellepiane’s, but possibly shared them as well.

Dellepiane’s warning also emphasized the murky boundaries between who were seen as anarchists and who as Argentine. This ambiguity became more evident following a January 21 Comité meeting, which was arranged with the help of sympathetic and outspoken Radical congressman Francisco Beiró, with Cornelio Moyano, Argentina’s Minister of Interior.¹¹⁶ As with Dellepiane, the Comité pressed Moyano to respond to their seven-point declaration. When the Minister promised them “the broadest and fairest investigation” of the pogrom, Comité leaders furnished him with a prepared list that purported to include a description of *all* Argentine Jews attacked during the recent pogrom, but which intentionally made no mention of persecuted Jewish “anarchists” and included only “good-standing” members of the community.¹¹⁷ A few weeks later, at the request of the Minister, Police Chief González

invited Comité leaders to the central Police Department. There, he informed the Jewish delegation that “50 percent of the Jewish victims mentioned on the memorandum delivered by the collective [Comité] to the Minister of Interior are anarchists and white slave traders.”¹¹⁸

In classifying half of those “good-standing” members of the Jewish community as anarchists and sex traffickers, González called into question the Comité’s definition of a culturally acceptable “Argentine,” and also underscored the challenges in determining who exactly the arbiters of that judgment were. Moreover, González’s remarks also called into question the Comité’s entire *Semana Trágica* protest strategy: even though it had repeatedly sought— in its letters of January 12 and 15, in its seven-point declaration, and, most recently, in its meetings with Dellepiane and Moyano— to distance itself from Jewish individuals or groups whom it perceived, or felt others might perceive, as threats to its social and cultural standing in Argentine society, González’s reaction revealed just how arbitrary and fragile such a strategy could be. Perhaps recognizing this, Comité leaders opted not to object, or at least not strongly object, to González’s exaggerated claim, yet the fact remained that González, Dellepiane, and Moyano had very different notions than Comité leaders about who belonged to that “peaceful and hardworking” Jewish majority.

The Comité’s decision not to contest González’s response did not sit well with Jewish labor groups like Poalei Zion and Avangard, particularly since some of their members were among those the police chief had classified as anarchists.¹¹⁹ Jewish labor groups responded by organizing their own adaptation of the Comité, which they called the *Partido Israelita Argentina* (PIA). In the weeks after the *Semana Trágica*, the PIA held a number of protests, speaking out on behalf of the Jewish community and denouncing the pogrom. Their most noteworthy protest, an open forum for all Jewish

Argentines held on February 26 at Garibaldi Hall on Sarmiento Street in the heart of Buenos Aires, was organized “to express the indignation of the Jewish Argentine community against the gratuitous slander that has been leveled against her, [namely] the accusation of having originated the notorious public occurrences that unfolded this past January.”¹²⁰

The Garibaldi forum illustrated the connection between the pogrom, politics, and national identity in Argentina. It featured three keynote speakers— prominent Congressmen Elias Danón, Juan José de Soiza Reilly, and Francisco Pinedo— each of whom, with the pending metropolitan elections on their minds, expressed their sympathy and support for the Jewish community. Speaking first, Danón, a member of the governing Radical Party, an Argentine Jew, and editor of the modest newspaper *Idea Nacional*, apologized for the events of the Semana Trágica, yet did so without politically implicating President Yrigoyen and his administration. Rather than blame the Radicals, he took aim at a far more convenient political and emotional target: Police Chief González. Without reminding his audience that Yrigoyen had been the one who had appointed González, he admonished the police captain for “disgracing the Jewish community by foolishly stating that [it was composed] of individuals of questionable legal character.”¹²¹ To the satisfaction of many of those gathered at Garibaldi Hall, he went on to accuse “the Chief of Police”— in regard to his recent claim that fifty percent of the Jews on the Comité de la Colectividad’s list of pogrom victims were anarchists and sex traffickers— “of inventing a lie.”¹²²

In line with Danón’s efforts to convince his voting audience that the Semana Trágica “does not implicate the [Radical] party,” the other two keynotes— Socialistas Soiza Reilly and Pinedo— also made valuable political use of the Garibaldi forum.¹²³ For

his part, Soiza Reilly, an esteemed Argentine journalist turned politician, praised the “socialist spirit” of the Jewish community, underscored the special bond it had forged with his Socialista colleague Alfredo Palacios, and concluded by urging Jews to exercise “their representation, their voice, and their vote.”¹²⁴ Given the political heat under which Yrigoyen and the Radicals found themselves during and after the *Semana Trágica*, Soiza Reilly hoped here to persuade Jewish workers (and Argentine Jews in general) to vote Socialista and, in the process, usurp some of the key urban working class support that the Radicals had enjoyed during the 1916 and more recent 1918 congressional elections.

In this new post-1912 era of universal male suffrage and representative democracy, Soiza Reilly’s efforts to persuade Jews to vote Socialista certainly reflected a savvy party strategy; it is quite conceivable that he delivered the same partisan message to all Argentine working class “ethnic” communities that he visited. Yet his remarks urging Jews to exercise “their representation, their voice, and their vote” also reflected a subtle push for the Jewish community to integrate further into Argentine society. Both he and, particularly, his colleague Francisco Pinedo regarded any efforts by the Jewish community to accentuate their cultural particularity, especially in the aftermath of the *Semana Trágica*, as detrimental to its future safety and well-being, not to mention antithetical to the nation’s non-pluralist, integrationist project.

Of the three speakers, Pinero best articulated his party and the nation’s vision of building a unified national community. Before the all-Jewish Garibaldi crowd, which certainly regarded Pinedo as a political friend, he boldly remarked that the existence of specifically Jewish groups— like, for instance, the very *Partido Israelita Argentina* which had organized this protest and invited him to speak— was “ideologically inconsistent

with the international socialist [movement] and *Argentine civismo*.”¹²⁵ Normally, the Argentine Socialist Party would never consent, he continued, to send a speaker to a “*Nacional idiomática*” organization— that is, a minority or immigrant organization practicing or promoting a foreign language, a foreign history, or any other “non-Argentine” traditions, beliefs, and values. The party made an exception here, he explained, because of the “special circumstance” surrounding this gathering, namely the recent pogrom.¹²⁶

As guest speaker, Pinedo was not about to offend the Jewish community in its own backyard and, therefore, tempered his comments further by adding, “in light of the particular Jewish situation, its organizations have the *right to exist*.”¹²⁷ But even that remark, like his earlier references to “*nacional idiomática*” and “*Argentine civismo*,” underscored the pro-Argentina civic and cultural ideal that he hoped, if not implored the Jewish community to embrace. In much the same way that Yrigoyen, back on January 25, had wished that Comité leaders would have approached him “in the capacity of Argentine citizens and not in the name of the Jewish community,” Pinedo similarly urged the Jewish community to abandon public efforts to promote ‘pre-Argentine’ practices— such as publishing Yiddish newspapers, organizing *Jewish* worker associations, or teaching Jewish subjects in Jewish schools.¹²⁸ For Pinedo, Yrigoyen, Soiza Reilly and other prominent figures, those efforts reflected and reinforced a certain separateness and otherness attached to “foreign” [read: “*nacional idiomática*”] groups who elected to continue doing things “non-Argentine” once in Argentina. In his closing remarks, Pinedo harnessed the budding memory of the month-old pogrom to make ever more clear the need for Jews to shed that ‘divisive’ label and to embrace unequivocally the tenets of Argentine civismo: “If the Jewish community does not want the events of

the Week of January to repeat themselves, it should unite itself with the free Argentine community (pueblo).”¹²⁹

While Yrigoyen, Soiza Reilly, and Pinedo urged the Jewish community to embrace Argentine *civismo*, a vocal minority of Argentines articulated a very different cultural program aimed at actively excluding Jews and other immigrant communities from the national fold. In response to the CIRA-led coalition’s January 15 letter— without a doubt the Jewish protest that reached the widest Argentine audience— a reactionary right-wing group calling itself the *Comité Pro-Argentinidad* plastered flyers and posters on city walls accusing Jews of being “assassins and anarchists.” It blamed Jews for the recent violence and death of soldiers, and called on the government to “carry out its duty and free the Nation of this contagion and pest.”¹³⁰ On January 19, the anti-Semitic Catholic daily *El Pueblo*, after publicly endorsing Congressman Melo’s recent call for tougher immigration standards, urged the nation “not to allow evil elements to penetrate into the Argentine homeland.”¹³¹ Monseñor Napal, leader of a prominent Buenos Aires church located at the intersection of Junin and Corrientes, was far more blunt in his assessment of Jews and the *Semana Trágica*: “Jews are the only ones guilty of the disturbances; they are unwanted castoffs of all countries.” Although put less boorishly, Conservative congressman Julio A. Costa expressed similar sentiments when he claimed that virtually all Russian (meaning Jewish) immigrants were “agitators.”¹³²

Alone, such isolated anti-Semitic rhetoric was not cause for great national concern; taken together with other xenophobic and jingoist remarks, however, they constituted part of a broader push among Nationalistas, reactionary Catholics, members of the military, and some conservative elites to reclaim their political and cultural standing in Argentina. Disgruntled with Yrigoyen’s democratic experiment and their relative loss of power since 1916, nationalists and conservatives— by no means a single political or ideological block— joined or fraternized with

vocal nativist groups such as the newly formed *Liga Patriótica Argentina*, founded in January 1919 by Vice-Admiral Domceq García, as a way to reassert, following the recent turmoil, their particular visions of what they thought the Argentine state should be.

A semi-organized coalition of disparate vigilante groups and individual members of the police, military, Church, and elite and middle classes, the Liga was bent on ridding Argentina of “anarchic elements foreign to our country.”¹³³ While certainly supportive of tougher immigration laws, the Liga went far beyond that, articulating a more determined and significant effort to lay political and cultural claim to the meaning of nationality. Championing “Fatherland and Order” as its motto, Liga members and sympathizers yearned for what historian Sandra McGee Deutsch describes as an “idyllic Argentine past blessed with social peace” where “conformity to the political and social status quo” defined *argentinidad*.¹³⁴ That vision did not in and of itself preclude Argentine newcomers: anyone who accepted the Liga’s rules and values would be welcomed. Anarchists, communists, socialists, union workers, and others who “advocated alien ideas” would, however, be regarded as dissidents, resisted politically and rejected culturally.

The great majority of Argentines, including many conservatives, spurned the ideas and cultural program put forward by the likes of the Liga, the Comité Pro-Argentinidad, *El Pueblo*, Monseñor Napal and Congressman Costa. Nevertheless, those more reactionary ideas, much like the January pogrom itself, invariably conditioned the responses put forth by supporters and sympathizers of the Jewish community. For instance, only days after the Liga Patriótica Argentina was founded, some 200 non-Jews and Jews replied by organizing their own *Liga Pro-Patria*, which, in a creative play-on-words, attempted to remove any jingoist or exclusionary connotation that the Liga Patriótica Argentina had ascribed to the term “patriotic.”¹³⁵ Whereas the Liga Patriótica was founded “to stimulate ‘above all’ the spirit of argentinidad,...to cooperate

with the authorities in maintaining public order, [and] to help guarantee the tranquility of [people's] homes...in the event anarchist-type movements or violent strikes perturb the peace of the Republic," the Liga Pro-Patria's "principal objective [was] to unite all Argentines, without regard to class, condition, or wealth, to cooperate towards a single objective: to encourage respect [for] the traditions and flag of our land, which is tarnished everyday by elements harmful to our culture."¹³⁶

Scores of non-Jewish Argentine individuals and organizations issued energetic statements supporting the Jewish community that mirrored efforts by the Liga Pro-Patria to counteract the ideas and actions put forth by nativist groups such as the Liga Patriótica Argentina. Still riding the emotional high of the 1918 University Reform Act that had finally endorsed a more democratic, less-elitist, and socially responsible pedagogical approach to (higher) education, the *Federación Universitaria Argentina* openly condemned the recent "barbaric reprisals," calling the *caza del ruso* "a disgrace to our culture."¹³⁷ In an article entitled "Xenofobia y Xenofilia," *La Nación*, Argentina's most established newspaper, reminded its readers "how much the country owes to immigrants" and affirmed that "the arrival of foreigners in no way destroys our nationality."¹³⁸ In an editorial on the *Semana Trágica* and the Jewish community, the positivist and elitist magazine *Mundo Argentino* claimed that "it is particularly unjust to blame any immigrant community" for the events of January 1919, while the left-leaning newspaper *La Época* praised, in an editorial of its own, the CIRA-sponsored January 15 letter for having displayed "all of the traits of an Argentine."¹³⁹

Those sentiments were echoed by many of Argentina's leading intellectuals and politicians, including Alfredo Palacios, Leopoldo Lugones, José Ingenieros, and Carlos Ibarguren, in a special post-Tragic Week edition of the Jewish monthly *Vida Nuestra*.¹⁴⁰ The Spanish-language publication invited prominent (non-Jewish) Argentines to respond, in writing, to a

series of five questions that centered on the role of the Jewish community during the recent *Semana Trágica* as well as its overall contribution to the development of the nation.¹⁴¹ In part reflecting the “loaded” nature of the questions, virtually every respondent claimed, in various ways, that the Jewish community “had nothing to do” with the strike, was in “no way” to blame for the recent violence, was comprised of “hardworking,” “peaceful,” “intelligent,” and “industrious” people, and deserved the right, like every other immigrant group, to full Argentine hospitality as established by the Constitution.

As they showered the Jewish community with praise, three interrelated themes emerged in *Vida Nuestra* that ultimately spoke to the legacy of the *Semana Trágica*. First, as Professor Juan Ramos remarked in his 1919 interview, and as Argentine writer Juan Carulla reminisced in his 1951 memoir of the *Semana Trágica*, the January pogrom and the ensuing Jewish protests made “semitism” — and not just anti-Semitism — more apparent in Argentina.¹⁴² That is, arguably for the first time in the nation’s history the Argentine public came to appreciate, as Ramos noted, “how the Jews who live in Argentina think and feel.” This was of particular importance to Ramos given that the Jewish community “lives so isolated from us (or us from it, I am not sure).”¹⁴³ As we shall see in this dissertation’s subsequent chapters, that growing sense of social and cultural awareness and understanding was also quite apparent in the aftermath of the compulsory Catholic education laws of 1940s, the 1962 Sirota Affair, the 1976-1983 Dirty War, and the 1992 and 1994 bombings of the Israeli Embassy and the AMIA.

Second, as Ramos also implied, *Vida Nuestra* respondents, while lauding the contributions and character of Argentine Jews, not surprisingly continued to underscore Argentina’s assimilationist ideal. Like Yrigoyen, Soiza Reilly, and Pinedo, Professor Roberto Giusti and other interviewees urged “the resident Jewish community in Argentina...to isolate itself less [and] immerse itself more within the current of Argentine life.”¹⁴⁴ Indeed, Giusti’s

remarks reflected not merely a growing expectation among a wide-range of Argentines that to participate in Argentine life Jews and other immigrant groups needed to integrate themselves fully, but, more importantly, that such integration was critical to ensure, as Congressman Enrique Dickmann eloquently wrote in 1921, “the formation of Argentina’s future national spirit.”¹⁴⁵ The public expectation or desire then for the Jewish community to shed— to revisit the terminology employed above— its “nacional idiomática” label was regarded by many Argentines both as a protective mechanism against any future pogrom as well as an indispensable condition to promote and maintain Argentine civismo.

Finally, respondents also took direct aim, first, at the “police complicity” apparent during the pogrom and, second, at the ensuing “lack of justice.” Not only were no vigilante perpetrators ever arrested or brought to trial after the *Semana Trágica*, but, as Congressman Nicolás Repetto declared, “there is not a single police record of anyone having been detained for those disgraceful actions that unfolded” in the Jewish neighborhoods of *Once* and *Villa Crespo*.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, the events of January 1919 raised in Argentina a troubling specter of *impunidad*, one that called into question, as Palacios put it, “all the rights accorded by the Constitution to all inhabitants of the country.”¹⁴⁷ For these members of Argentina’s “democratic majority,” that aura of impunity— an aura that shapes much of the twentieth century— jeopardized “the magnificent ideals of justice, truth, liberty, and tolerance” also at the heart of their vision of Argentina’s new, post-1916 democratic, non-pluralist, and egalitarian project.¹⁴⁸

Understood in this way, the *Semana Trágica* represents the story of competing visions of what the Argentine state should be. For nativist groups like the Liga Patriótica Argentina— and their police, military, ecclesiastic, and conservative sympathizers— it signaled an opportunity to reclaim what it meant to be “Argentine” by overriding Yrigoyen’s democratic experiment, rejecting “alien” (whether foreign or Argentine in origin) ideas and individuals, reclaiming the

political status quo, and even returning to an idyllic Argentine past where criollo ambassadors like the military and the Church served as the protectors of the nation's homes, values, and freedoms. For *Vida Nuestra* respondents, Liga Pro-Patria advocates, and other non-Jews and Jews who ascribed to the nation's budding experiment in representative democracy, it signaled an effort— complete with its own ambiguities and contradictions— to prevent nativists and their cultural allies from employing “argentinidad” to justify their anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic measures that ultimately threatened their modern, progressive, and integrationist project. Over the next eleven years, the democratic camp's nascent cultural narrative held political sway as the Radicals continued to maintain democratic power. Yet, as we shall now see, that all changed dramatically on September 6, 1930 after General José Uriburu and the military carried out the first of Argentina's many twentieth-century coups.

¹ As the Great War came to a close, Argentina, like many other countries, experienced a sharp rise in labor unrest. In 1918 and 1919 alone, there were 563 strikes in Argentina. In Argentina in 1919, communists and anarchists were often labeled “maximalists.” For quantitative details of the strikes by year, see Rodolfo Puiggrós, *El Yrigoyenismo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Jorge Álvarez, 1965), 209; Enrique Diaz Araujo, *La Semana Trágica de 1919* (Mendoza: Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, 1988), 18.

² Although conceivably the term *ruso* could have referred to Russians who were not Jewish (of which there were not many in Argentina at the time), the right-of-center magazine *Mundo Argentino* provided a nice illustration in January 1919 of how the term *ruso* had become virtually synonymous in Argentina with “Jew.” In its discussion of the *Semana Trágica*, the editors wrote: “having been [classified] as an anarchist movement, it can then [also] be called maximalismo, and given that maximalismo is considered to be *ruso*, and that the [Argentine] public refers to Jews as rusos, the responsibility of the [recent] events falls upon those [Jews].” *Mundo Argentino*, January 22, 1919, 2.

³ Jews were certainly not the only immigrant target of these armed civilian groups, although it appears that they were disproportionately singled out. In his excellent study *Cousins and Strangers*, José Moya discusses how Catalan “anarchists” were also a principal target of right-wing vigilantes. See José C. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 371.

⁴ In response to a recent police crackdown on anarchists in particular and workers in general in Buenos Aires, on November 14, 1909 eighteen year-old (Jewish) anarchist Simón Radowitzky assassinated Police Chief Ramón L. Falcón and his aide Alberto Lartigau (he threw a bomb at their coach) in the posh Recoleta neighborhood of the Argentine capital. Radowitzky was

sentenced to life in prison for his crime; in the process, he also became a *cause célèbre* among anarchist sympathizers worldwide. During this tense period of social unrest and anti-immigrant sentiment gaining steam in certain social and political circles in Buenos Aires, the Radowitzky attack produced, in what colloquially became known as *Semana Roja* or Red Week, a violent backlash against anarchists and, by extension, working class Jews. While serious in nature, any 1909 anti-Jewish backlash paled in comparison to the events of January 1919. For more on the Radowitzky incident, see Argentine (anarchist) historian Osvaldo Bayer's chapter entitled "Simón Radowitzky: mártir o asesino?" in Osvaldo Bayer, *Los anarquistas expropiadores: Simón radowitzky y otros ensayos* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Galerna, 1975). For a (translated) English-language account of the incident, see Osvaldo Bayer, "Simón Radowitzky," in Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo, eds., *The Argentine Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 219-230.

⁵ Throughout this chapter and dissertation, the term *argentinidad* refers not narrowly to nativist and nationalist "patriotic" (which sometimes included xenophobic and jingoist) expressions of who and what have constituted the spirit of the nation, but rather articulations across the political and ideological spectrum of what it meant to be "Argentine." In other words, I regard nativist and nationalist manifestations about *argentinidad* as one among many representations of Argentine national identity and not the benchmark (as nativists and nationalists have often successfully conveyed in Argentine history). For more, see page 4 of the dissertation's Introduction.

⁶ Ricardo Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2nd edition, 1999).

⁷ Founded as a mutual aid society in 1894, the AMIA has been the Jewish community's central social, cultural, and assistance organization throughout much of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

⁸ Hirsch Triwaks, ed., *Cincuenta años de vida judía en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1940). The commemorative edition included a series of articles, each authored by a different Jewish Argentine journalist, on such topics as the history of Jewish industry and commerce in Buenos Aires, the Sephardic presence in Argentina, and the transformation of Jewish education in Argentina over the past fifty years (1890-1940).

⁹ Triwaks, ed., *Cincuenta años de vida judía en la Argentina*.

¹⁰ As will be discussed below, beginning in 1912 all native-born males could also vote in municipal, provincial, and congressional elections.

¹¹ The 1884 congressional mandate calling for non-religious education in all public schools was known as Law 1420. As discussed in the Introduction, Law 1420 was and remains among the most famous and symbolic Argentine legislative pronouncements— for both those who did and did not (or do and do not) support non-religious education. The debate surrounding the symbolic meaning of Law 1420 are central to chapters 2 and 4 of the dissertation.

¹² The *Unión Cívica Radical* will henceforth be referred to as the Radical Party or, if referring to party members, the Radicals.

¹³ José Moya counts 6,501,000 new immigrants between 1820-1932. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*, 2 and 46. Of those 6,501,000, 4,771,013 arrived between 1857-1914. According to a special report published by Congressman Carlos Melo in *La Prensa* on January 16, 1919 and *El Pueblo* on January 17, 1919, the vast majority (80%) of those 4,771,013 were Italians (2,289,983) and Spaniards (1,492,848). Similar figures have been put forward by immigration scholars Diego Armus, Samuel Baily, Fernando Devoto, Gino Germani, Carlos Moya, among others. According to Melo, the remaining 20% were French (225,049); rusos— largely Eastern European Jews— (135,962); Otomanos— largely Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Turks and Arabs— (121,177);

Austrians (81,186); Germans (62,329); English (56,448); Swiss (33,326); and Belgians (23,091). See Armus, "Diez años de historiografía sobre la inmigración masiva a la Argentina;" Baily, *Immigrants in the Land of Promise*; Devoto, "Las cadenzas migratorias italianas;" Germani, "Mass Immigration and Modernization in Argentina;" Avni, *Argentina y la Historia de la inmigración Judía*; Sofer, *From Pale to Pampa*; Korol and Sábato, *Como fue la inmigración irlandesa en la Argentina*; and Newton, *German Buenos Aires, 1900-1930*.

¹⁴ The population of Buenos Aires (Capital Federal) in 1914 was 1,575,814 of which 777,845 (49%) were foreigners; that was noticeably higher than the Province of Buenos Aires (which excludes the Federal Capital) where 34% of the population was foreign-born (703,931 of 2,066,165). *La Prensa*, January 16, 1919, 5.

¹⁵ For more on the economic crisis of 1890, see Ricardo Ortiz, *Historia económica de la Argentina, 1860-1930*, vol. 1 (Buenos Aires: Raigal, 1955); A.G. Ford, "Argentina and the Baring Crisis of 1890," *Oxford Economic Papers*, 8 (1956): 127-150; and David Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987: From Spanish Colonization to the Falklands War and Alfonsín* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 155-159.

¹⁶ For details on the events of 1909 and Falcón's assassination, see Carl Solberg, *Immigration and Nationalism in Argentina and Chile, 1880-1914* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1970), 112-114; and Sandra McGee Deutsch, *Counterrevolution in Argentina, 1900-1932: The Argentine Patriotic League* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 35-36; Bayer, *Los anarquistas expropiadores*; and Bayer, "Simón Radowtizky," 219-230. For more on the Law of Residency and the Law of Social Defense and politics during the first decade of the twentieth century, see Natalio Botana, *El orden conservador: la política argentina entre 1880 y 1916* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1977), 217-316; Iacov Oveid, "El trasfondo histórico de la ley 4144 de residencia," *Desarrollo Económico*, 16:61 (April-June 1976): 123-148; and David Rock, *Politics in Argentina, 1890-1930: The Rise and Fall of Radicalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 34-39.

¹⁷ Luis Alberto Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, translated by James P. Brennan, (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 39. For more on the *Reforma Universitaria* of 1918, see Richard Walter, *Student Politics in Argentina: The University Reform and its Effects, 1918-1964* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 5-83; Joseph Tulchin, "La reforma universitaria— Córdoba 1918," *Criterio* (June 1970); Hebé Clementi, *Juventud y política en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veinte, 1983), 47-48; and Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, 200-201.

¹⁸ David Rock, "Radical Populism and the Conservative Elite, 1912-1930," in David Rock, ed., *Argentina in the Twentieth Century* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975), 71.

¹⁹ Ezequiel Gallo Jr. and Silvia Segal, "La formación de los partidos políticos contemporáneos— La U.C.R. (1891-1916)," in Torcuato Di Tella, Gino Germani, and Jorge Graciarena, eds., *Argentina: sociedad de masas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de la Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1965), 124-176; Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 25.

²⁰ For a more detailed look at the provisions of the Saenz Peña Law, see Natalio Botana, "La reforma política de 1912," in Gustavo Giménez Zapiola, ed., *El régimen oligárquico: materiales para el estudio de la realidad argentina (hasta 1930)* (Buenos Aires: Amorrortu, 1975), 232-245.

²¹ The irony here is that by excluding non-citizens, the Saenz Peña law continued to exclude the bulk of the Argentine working class from participating in the electoral process.

²² Matthew Karush, *Workers or Citizens: Democracy and Identity in Rosario, Argentina (1912-1930)* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 22-23; Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, 190.

²³ Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, 190; Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 25.

²⁴ It is important to note, however, that while Yrigoyen won the presidency, the Conservatives continued to maintain control of Congress. For instance, in the Chamber of Deputies (the Lower House of Congress), the opposition— predominantly Conservatives— won control of 70 seats to the Radicals' 45; in the Senate, Conservatives secured 25 seats to the Radicals 4. The Conservatives, therefore, continued to maintain a significant degree of political power despite losing the presidency to Yrigoyen.

²⁵ The Argentine version of “non-pluralist” is not based on models from the United States. It is non-pluralist in a civic sense; loyalty to anything but Argentina was not tolerated. Put differently, civic assimilation— whereby all are “Argentine” first— was the discursive and expected norm. While the political authorities tolerated foreign newspapers, clubs, hospitals, and other institutions, there was little civic tolerance for what in the U.S. was labeled “hyphenated Americans.” By extension, the politics of ethnicity that emerged— whereby ethnic groups openly used their ethnicity as a source of political strength— did not apply in Argentina. In Argentina, where the State’s emphasis was on assimilation and promoting and preserving Argentine values and traditions, all talk by Alberdi, Sarmiento, and now Yrigoyen was centered on Argentinization and Argentine civismo, not civic pluralism.

²⁶ Rock, “Radical Populism and the Conservative Elite, 1912-1930,” 78.

²⁷ According to Enrique Díaz Araujo, between 1914-1918 inflation rose 76% in Argentina. In some cases, workers also saw their wages reduced, inflation excluded. See Díaz Araujo, *La Semana Trágica de 1919*, 18.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁹ Puiggrós, *El Yrigoyenismo*, 209; Díaz Araujo, *La Semana Trágica de 1919*, 18.

³⁰ In the aftermath of the Semana Trágica, the Vasena factory changed its name to the Establecimientos Metalúrgicos TAMET. *Mayoría*, January 7, 1973, 7.

³¹ Among their specific demands, Vasena workers requested a 20-40% pay increase (their average hourly wage in December 1918 was fifty centavos), an eight rather than an eleven-hour workday, and time-and-a-half pay for overtime work and double-time for holidays. *Archivo General de la Nación*, Semana Trágica, Folder 1; *La Época*, January 8, 1919, 3; *La Razón*, January 8, 1919; Nahum Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Congreso Judío Mundial, 1971), 16; and *Mundo Policial*, 4:20 (July-August 1973): 14.

³² As early as November 27, 1918, the popular left-of-center publication *Nosotros* warned of potential violent social unrest. An editorial that day read: “Very soon Argentina will experience tragic days if it does not synchronize its step to the beat of the world and proceed to create a vast body of social legislation that unequivocally would work to reconcile class interests and to level the benefits and pleasures of all citizens.” *Nosotros*, November 27, 1918. Moreover, in an emergency congressional session on January 8, 1919, Conservative Luis Agote declared “we [Argentines] are reaping the dangerous harvest of the past three months.” *Cámara de Diputados de la Nación*, *Diario de Sesiones*, *Anales de la Legislación Argentina*, January 8, 1919.

³³ *La Prensa*, January 5, 1919, 10.

³⁴ *Cámara de Diputados de la Nación*, *Diario de Sesiones*, January 8, 1919.

³⁵ For instance, see Octavio Piñero, *Los orígenes y la Trágica semana de enero de 1919* (Buenos Aires, 1956), 34-35; Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 15; and Radiolandia 2000, January 6, 1978, 29.

³⁶ Elpidio González was the second Police Chief who formerly had served as the Argentine Minister of War; the first was Julio Moreno whom Yrigoyen had tapped as Police Chief in 1916.

³⁷ *La Razón*, January 7, 1919, 5th edition; *La Razón*, January 9, 1919, 4th edition.

³⁸ *La Vanguardia*, January 8, 1919. *La Vanguardia* was the official newspaper of the Partido Socialista.

³⁹ The official name of the anarchist labor alliance was the Federación Obrera Regional del V Congreso. To avoid confusing it with the more mainstream FORA (colloquially referred to as FORA sindicalista), the anarchist alliance was known as the FORA anarquista. While both FORA sindicalista and FORA anarquista demanded the release of all prisoners who had been labeled 'labor agitators', the FORA anarquista was also particularly dedicated to the release of imprisoned anarchist Simon Radowitzky (for more details on the Radowitzky episode, see endnote 4 above). For details on the two January 1919 FORA strikes, see *La Época*, January 9, 1919, 1; *La Nación*, January 9, 1919, 1; and *La Prensa*, January 9, 1919, 1.

⁴⁰ *La Vanguardia*, January 10, 1919.

⁴¹ *La Razón* estimated 20,000 strikers surrounded the Vasena plant. *La Razón*, January 9, 1919, 4th edition.

⁴² *La Vanguardia*, January 10, 1919; Piñero, *Los orígenes y la trágica semana de enero de 1919*; *Mundo Policial*, July-August 1973, 15; and *Mayoría*, January 7, 1973, 7 (commemorative article by Horacio Salas).

⁴³ There are discrepancies over who was responsible for the ransacking, looting, and burning of the church. Most sources attribute the acts to funeral procession goers. However, certain pro-labor publications, such as the Socialista organ *La Vanguardia*, argued that these destructive acts were perpetrated a couple of hours earlier that day by individuals foreign to the funeral procession demonstration. *La Vanguardia*, January 10, 1919.

⁴⁴ Piñero, *Los orígenes y la trágica semana*, 45. *Fray Mocho*, the right-of-center, elite-centered magazine of political satire, went a step further by casting blame for the Sagrado Corazón church burning on "Trotsky's co-religionists [*coreligionarios*]." See the caption (which read "moments after the assault committed by Trotsky's *coreligionarios* against the Jesus Sacramentado" Church) under one its photos of the desecrated church. *Fray Mocho*, January 21, 1919.

⁴⁵ *La Razón*, January 9, 1919; *Mundo Policial*, 4:20 (July-Aug 1973): 15; Radiolandia 2000, January 6, 1978, 29; *Nueva Presencia*, January 12, 1979; and Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 15.

⁴⁶ As recently as 1973, police sources continued to report that officers during the Semana Trágica acted out of self-defense. In a concise and informative piece on the Tragic Week's events, *Mundo Policial*, claimed that "to save lives, [police] made use of arms." *Mundo Policial*, (July-August 1973): 15.

⁴⁷ On January 9, ardent Conservative member of Congress Luis Agote, who distrusted the Yrigoyen government and the labor movement, remarked that "any citizen who passes through the City of Buenos Aires will believe that he finds himself in a country that has been in a war and where popular agitations have suppressed all [government] control and power." Although Socialista Congressman Mario Bravo was quick to retort that "such alarms are premature," Agote's (exaggerated) remarks highlight some of the fears upper and middle-class conservatives likely felt regarding any impending worker revolution. See Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, *Diario de Sesiones*, January 9, 1919.

⁴⁸ In 1919, General Dellepiane was Commander of the Second Division of *Campo de Mayo*. By then, Dellepiane had already enjoyed a distinguished career in both the military and police. In 1909, as then head of the Argentine Commission to Acquire Arms in Europe, Dellepiane succeeded Falcón as Police Chief (following the latter's assassination by anarchist Radowitzky). As Police Chief, Dellepiane helped prevent any incidents of violence or serious misconduct

occurred during Argentina's all-important 1910 Centennial celebrations. He also was a strong supporter of the 1910 Ley de Defensa Social that made it legal to expel all foreigners living in Argentina who broke the law. As a result, he had gained a reputation as an effective, "no nonsense" security expert— one that made him Yrigoyen's obvious choice to attempt to restore order during the Semana Trágica. Ironically, when the reformist-minded Saenz Peña became President in 1912— it was Saenz Peña's historic electoral law that enabled Yrigoyen to win the presidency four years later— Dellepiane tendered his resignation as Police Chief. However, Saenz Peña refused to accept Dellepiane's resignation. Undeterred, on November 15, 1912, Dellepiane simply "retired" as Police Chief. See Policia Federal Argentina, *Orígenes y Evoluciones, 1580-1974* (Buenos Aires, 1974), 111-112.

⁴⁹ To reestablish order during the Semana Trágica, federal troops were brought to the City of Buenos Aires from as far as Salta, Argentina's northwest most province. *La Prensa*, January 12, 1919, 5.

⁵⁰ Dellepiane and the majority of the troops stationed throughout the city returned to *Campo de Mayo* on January 16 following an official ceremony with Yrigoyen present. *La Razón*, January 16, 1919, 5th edition.

⁵¹ *La Prensa*, January 12, 1919, 5. Similar forms of praise are also cited in *La Nación* and *La Época* from January 12, 1919 onward.

⁵² Workers earning more than 5 pesos a day received a 20% pay increase, those earning between 4 and 5 pesos received a 30% increase, and those salaries of less than 4 pesos were awarded a 40% increase. *La Razón*, January 11, 1919, 5th edition; *La Prensa*, January 12, 1919, 5; and *La Prensa*, January 14, 1919, 8 (the two *La Prensa* citations also provide details of the labor negotiations and participants involved). Incidentally, in a series of January congressional sessions, Horacio B. Oyhanarte, a member of the governing Radical Party, repeatedly (and not surprisingly) asserted that government pressure on Vasena to accede to the demands of the workers proved most instrumental in bringing about an end to the strike and restoring calm to the city. See Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, *Diario de Sesiones*, January 8-15, 1919.

⁵³ *La Prensa* reported that 903 such prisoners were freed by January 16; *La Razón* counted 1400. The police continued to detain fourteen *rusos* allegedly for firing gunshots. It could not be verified whether those fourteen *rusos* were Jews. *La Prensa*, January 16, 1919; *La Razón*, January 16, 1919.

⁵⁴ It took until the afternoon of the 12th for the Vasena union to formally approve the January 11 agreement; it should also be noted that the port of Buenos Aires strike was only resolved in early February. See *La Vanguardia*, January 13, 1919. As to the number of casualties, estimates vary considerably. In his 1952 account of the week's events, José Ramón Romariz, police commissioner at the time of the Semana Trágica, claimed that between 60-65 people had died (excluding an additional eight police and military personnel) and between 120-130 had been wounded (excluding an additional eighteen police and military). In his 1956 study of the Semana Trágica, Octavio Piñero calculated a total of 141 deaths and 521 wounded, yet his count only began on January 9, 1919. *La Vanguardia* and *Nosotros*, two left-of-center publications, estimated 700 people died and between 2000-3000 were wounded; those numbers were similar to those published by the French Embassy in Buenos Aires. The U.S. Embassy released the most startling figures: 1,356 dead and approximately 5000 wounded. See José Ramón Romariz, *La Semana Trágica: Relato de los hechos sangrientos del año 1919* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Hemisferio, 1952); Piñero, *Los orígenes y la Trágica semana de enero de 1919*; *La Vanguardia*, January 14, 1919; *Nosotros*, January 1919; and (for French and U.S. Embassy figures) Edgardo Bilsky, *La Semana Tragica* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de America Latina, 1984).

⁵⁵ Sandra McGee Deutsch, "The Right Under Radicalism, 1919-1930," in Sandra McGee Deutsch and Ronald Dolkart, eds., *The Argentine Right: Its History and Intellectual Origins, 1910 to the Present* (Wilmington: SR Books, 1993).

⁵⁶ In a 1952 memoir about the *Semana Trágica*, then police commissioner José Ramón Romariz made reference to such police and vigilante fears and concerns when he wrote: in January 1919, "rumors [spread] of the possibility that the general strike would become revolutionary, with "soviet" workers and their soldiers taking over power." Romariz, *La Semana Trágica*.

⁵⁷ Moya, *Cousins and Strangers*, 371.

⁵⁸ *Mundo Argentino*, January 22, 1919, 2. These nativist-minded groups banded together on January 19, 1919 to form the *Liga Patriótica Argentina*. See endnote 72 below for more details on the *Liga*.

⁵⁹ *Nosotros*, January 1919, 9-10.

⁶⁰ The Moises Hess Library was located in the offices of *Poalei Zion*. Over the course of the January pogrom, one Jew died and 70 were wounded.

⁶¹ José Mendelson, "Der pogrom in Buenos Aires," January 10, 1919. Translated into Spanish by Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 20.

⁶² *Di Presse*, January, 17, 1919. Translated into Spanish by Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 41.

⁶³ Diaz Araujo, *La Semana Trágica de 1919*, 145.

⁶⁴ Wald's book *Pesadilla* (Buenos Aires: Ameghino Editora, 1998) was first published in 1929 in Yiddish. The 1929 version is cited in Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 18. For other particularly valuable first-hand accounts of the January 1919 pogrom, see the description by respected Argentine congressman and writer Juan José de Soiza Reilly in *Popular*, February 3, 1919. For more on the attacks on the Moises Hess library and other Jewish cultural sites in the barrio of *Once*, see the January 1919 accounts in the anarchist *La Critica* and the Socialista *La Vanguardia*. For valuable scholarly accounts of the pogrom, see Haim Avni, *Argentina and the Jews: A History of Jewish Migration* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991); Ricardo Feierstein, *Historia de los Judíos Argentinos*; Victor Mirelman, *Jewish Buenos Aires, 1890-1930: In Search of Identity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990); Eugene Sofer, *From Pale to Pampa: A Social History of the Jews of Buenos Aires* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1982); and Robert Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina: From the Inquisition to Peron* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1979).

⁶⁵ Juan Carulla, *Al filo del medio siglo* (Paraná: Ediciones Llanura, 1951), 159.

⁶⁶ *La Prensa*, January 12, 5 and *La Prensa*, January 14, 8, respectively. The *Liga Patriótica Argentina* also held its meetings at the *Centro Naval*.

⁶⁷ *La Prensa*, January 12, 1919, 5.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *La Razón*, January 11, 1919, 5th edition and *La Razón*, January 16, 1919, 3rd edition.

⁷⁰ McGee Deutsch, "The Right Under Radicalism," 38.

⁷¹ For instance, see *La Razón*, January 11, 1919, 5th edition; *La Razón*, January 16, 1919, 3rd edition; and *La Prensa*, January 20, 1919, 8. It should be noted that, at times, other prominent Argentine newspapers such as *La Nación*, *La Prensa*, and *La Época* also openly expressed their support for groups like the *Liga Patriótica Argentina*.

⁷² Under the banner "fatherland and order," the right-wing nationalist *Liga Patriótica Argentina* was founded on January 19, 1919 and brought together all the disparate aforementioned *Semana Trágica* vigilante groups. Led by Vice-Admiral Manuel Domceq Garcia, its first meetings were attended by military heads, police officers, legislators, and even upper-class women who

headed aid and relief societies. In contrast to the Nacionalistas of the late-1920s and 1930s who were, as McGee Deutsch points out, “more heavily influenced by European counterrevolutionary thought,” the Liga “represented largely homegrown reaction against the immigrant working class.” McGee Deutsch, “The Right under Radicalism,” 35.

⁷³ Romariz, *La Semana Trágica*.

⁷⁴ José Mendelson, “Der pogrom in Buenos Aires,” January 10, 1919. Translated into Spanish by Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 20.

⁷⁵ *Di Presse*, January 17, 1919. Translated into Spanish by Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 41.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *La Razón*, January 17, 1919, 4th edition.

⁷⁸ Mario Bravo, Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, *Diario de Sesiones*, Eighth Extraordinary Session, January 24, 1919.

⁷⁹ *Di Presse*, January 26, 1919; *Di Idische Tzaitung*, January 27, 1919. Translated into Spanish by Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 37-38.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *El Diario Israelita*, January 26, 1919; *Di Presse*, January 26, 1919; and *Di Idische Welt*, January 31, 1919. Translated into Spanish by Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 38. See also *Nueva Presencia*, January 19, 1919, 2.

⁸² Karush, *Workers or Citizens*, 32. For instance, like Roque Saenz Peña, Yrigoyen was very much influenced by intellectual legacy established by Alberdi and Sarmiento. Alberdi and Sarmiento both felt that the key to democracy in nineteenth-century Argentina was the formation of an integrated, non-sectoral citizen body in which individuals placed the national good above any private (be they class, ethnic, religious, etc.) interests. The principal difference between Alberdi and Sarmiento and Yrigoyen and Saenz Peña was that the latter two were operating in an era of universal male suffrage and thus truer representative democracy. For more on Alberdi and Sarmiento, see the dissertation’s Introduction.

⁸³ CIRA stands for Congregación Israelita de la República Argentina.

⁸⁴ The Laguarda quotation is found in Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 27.

⁸⁵ The quotations employed in this paragraph are drawn from the January 12 letter, yet were certainly echoed in the far more widely-read letter of January 15. The January 12 letter can be found in *Di Idische Tzaitung*, January 14, 1919; *Di Presse*, January 15, 1919; and *Di Idische Welt*, January 16, 1919. Translated into Spanish by Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 27-28.

⁸⁶ For a complete list of Jewish signatories, see *La Época*, January 15, 1919, 2.

⁸⁷ In the absence of an accurate or trusted census, CIRA placed the number of Jews in Argentina at 150,000.

⁸⁸ *La Nación*, *La Prensa*, *La Época*, and *La Razón*, January 15, 1919.

⁸⁹ A *porteño* refers to a resident of the Federal Capital (Buenos Aires).

⁹⁰ In this one page letter, the word “liberty” was mentioned three times, “constitution” or “constitutional” three times (counting the opening sentence which borrows verbatim from the 1853 Constitution), and “flag” twice.

⁹¹ *La Nación*, January 15, 1919; *La Prensa*, January 15, 1919; *La Época*, January 15, 1919; and *La Razón*, January 15, 1919. Italics mine.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *La Prensa*, January 16, 1919, 6. As we shall see in subsequent chapters of the dissertation, it was not uncommon for mainstream Argentine voices— following such “tragedies” as the Sirota

Affair, the Dirty War, or the bombings of the Israeli Embassy and the AMIA— to downplay energetically the existence of xenophobia or anti-Semitism in Argentina.

⁹⁴ *La Nación, La Prensa, La Época, and La Razón*, January 15, 1919.

⁹⁵ Bosleslao Lewin, *La colectividad judía en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Alzamor Editores, 1974).

⁹⁶ Bernard Ansel, "Discord Among Western and Eastern European Jews in Argentina," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* LX (December 1970): 151-158.

⁹⁷ Jeffrey Lesser, *Welcoming the Undesirables: Brazil and the Jewish Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

⁹⁸ Article 25 of the 1853 Constitution stipulates that "The federal government will foment European immigration [to Argentina]..." *Constitución de la Nación Argentina* (1853), Primera Parte, Capítulo Primero, Declaraciones, derechos, y garantías, Article 25.

⁹⁹ Such intra-religious or ethnic immigrant tension certainly is not uncommon. The cases of German Jews and Eastern European Jews in the Lower East Side of Manhattan before the turn of the twentieth century and Arab Argentine perceptions of Palestinian newcomers to Argentina after World War II are just two examples. It is also worth noting that Moroccan Jews of the Congregación Israelita Latina— in 1919, Argentina's oldest (1872), most affluent, most liberal-minded, and least religiously-observant Sephardic community— were the only Sephardim to sign the CIRA-sponsored January 15 letter. Like CIRA Jews, Moroccan Jews shared an affinity for nineteenth-century Western European positivist values such as "progress," "modernization," "order," and "science," which they (or their parents and grandparents) had been taught at institutions such as the Alliance Israelite Universelle, the famed nineteenth-century Jewish French educational academies empowered to "acculturate" and "civilize" Slavic, Turkish, North African, and Middle Eastern Jewish communities. For a valuable discussion of the Alliance Israelite Universelle schools, see Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *The Jews of the Balkans: The Judeo-Spanish Community, 15th to 20th century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

¹⁰⁰ Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 30. The *Di Idische Tzaitung* statement was published on January 14, 1919.

¹⁰¹ *La Prensa*, January 15, 1919, 9; *La Razón*, January 14, 1919. The latter is cited in Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 28.

¹⁰² *Di Presse*, February 11, 1919. Translated into Spanish by Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 30-31.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Estatuto Provisional Para La Dirección y Administración del Estado*, Buenos Aires, 1815; *Bases de Constitución Federal*, Buenos Aires, 1825; *Constitución de la Nación Argentina*, Buenos Aires, 1853; and *Ley de Inmigración y Colonización de la República de Argentina*, Buenos Aires, 1876.

¹⁰⁵ The two laws permitted the police to imprison or deport suspected anarchists. For more, see Oveid, "El trasfondo histórico de la ley 4144 de residencia," 123-148.

¹⁰⁶ In 1891, *La Nación*, Argentina's most important newspaper, had published (in fragments over the course of several weeks) all of Julian Martel's *La Bolsa*.

¹⁰⁷ José Mendelson, "Der Pogrom in Buenos Aires," January 10, 1919. Translated into Spanish by Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 20.

¹⁰⁸ *Di Presse*, February 11, 1919.

¹⁰⁹ The *Comité de la Colectividad*, established to confront the *Semana Trágica*, disbanded in February or March of 1919. Nevertheless, its emergency formation during a time of crisis arguably helped pave the way for the permanent creation in 1933 of the Jewish DAIA (Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas).

¹¹⁰ I have listed only the four most significant provisions. For all seven demands, see Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 33.

¹¹¹ A socialist, politician, writer, and academic, Alfredo Palacios was one of the most impressive political and intellectual figures of his day and continues to be regarded as one of the great congressmen in (twentieth-century) Argentine history. He demonstrated great knowledge of both the Hebrew Bible and Jewish history— he was even described as an “Hebraist”— and often contributed to Jewish Spanish-language publications such as *Vida Nuestra* and *Mundo Israelita*. A longtime ally of the Jewish community, he regularly denounced anti-Semitism (whether it unfolded in Argentina or abroad). In 1916, members of the Jewish community invited him to be a special guest at the Argentine Jewish Congress. In January 1919, he was the first member of Congress to defend publicly the accused Jewish maximalist Pedro Wald and served on the judicial commission of Comité de la Colectividad Israelita. Much of the information provided in this endnote stems from Alan Metz’s excellent paper, delivered at the 1989 Latin American Jewish Studies Association (LAJSA) meeting in Buenos Aires, entitled “On Their Behalf: Argentine Intellectuals Defend the Jews, 1900-1950.”

¹¹² Mauricio Sprinberg, “La Semana Trágica y los Judíos,” *Nueva Presencia*, 1978.

¹¹³ *Boletín Policial*, January 13, 1919, Archivo de la Policía (Lavalle Street); Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 34; and Abraham Huberman, *Nueva Presencia*, January 12, 1979.

¹¹⁴ *La Prensa*, January 12, 1919, 5.

¹¹⁵ *Vida Nuestra* asked all respondents the same five questions (detailed in endnote 141 below), the replies to which were published in *Vida Nuestra*’s January 1919 and February 1919 issues. The above excerpt from Dellepiane, dated January 29, is found in *Vida Nuestra*, February 1919, 170.

¹¹⁶ I am not certain that Minister Moyano’s first name was indeed Cornelio.

¹¹⁷ *La Prensa*, January 22, 1919; Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 39.

¹¹⁸ *El Diario Israelita*, February 17, 1919; *Avangard*, February 28, 1919; and Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 39.

¹¹⁹ For instance, Jewish labor advocate Ben Yehuda took particular exception that “those of the *Comité Oficial Israelita* [the derisive name he assigned to the Comité] even considered the humble workers of Poalei Zion to be anarchists.” *Avangard*, February 28, 1919, 2.

¹²⁰ Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 42.

¹²¹ *Avangard*, February 28, 1919, 2; *Nueva Presencia*, July 16, 1977, 6.

¹²² Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 43.

¹²³ *Avangard*, February 28, 1919, 2; *Nueva Presencia*, July 16, 1977, 6.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* Italics mine.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* Italics mine.

¹²⁸ Jewish schools generally held classes in the afternoons. Students who attended Jewish schools were required by law, like all Argentine children, to attend a public or national school each weekday morning.

¹²⁹ *Avangard*, February 28, 1919, 2; *Nueva Presencia*, July 16, 1977, 6.

¹³⁰ Bilsky, *La Semana Trágica*; Beatriz Seibel’s, *Crónicas de la Semana Trágica, Enero de 1919* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1999), 175-176.

¹³¹ *El Pueblo*, January 19, 1919. In his 1997 study of the *Semana Trágica* in general and the Jewish pogrom in particular, Emilio Corbière remarks that between November 10, 1918 and

January 19, 1919, the Catholic daily *El Pueblo* published “twelve editorials that were unmistakably anti-Semitic.” Emilio Corbière, “Pogrom en Buenos Aires,” *Todo es Historia*, 378 (January 1999): 7.

¹³² Corbière, “Pogrom en Buenos Aires,” 7-8.

¹³³ Domceq García, “Liga Patriótica Argentina” Circular, distributed on January 17, 1919. Circular is cited in Seibel, *Crónicas de la Semana Trágica*, 200; McGee Deutsch, “The Right Under Radicalism,” 39. Translation employed here is that of McGee Deutsch.

¹³⁴ McGee Deutsch, “The Right Under Radicalism (1916-1930),” 39.

¹³⁵ “Liga Pro-Patria” translates as “Pro-Homeland League.”

¹³⁶ For the Liga Patriótica statement, see García, “Liga Patriótica Argentina” Circular, January 17, 1919; Seibel, *Crónicas de la Semana Trágica*, 200. For the Liga Pro-Patria statement, see *La Época*, January 22, 1919, 3.

¹³⁷ Solominsky, *La Semana Trágica en la Argentina*, 36

¹³⁸ *La Nación*, January 20, 1919, 7

¹³⁹ *Mundo Argentino*, January 22, 1919, 2; *La Época*, January 16, 1919, 1

¹⁴⁰ The special *Vida Nuestra* edition was a double issue published half in January 1919 and half in February 1919.

¹⁴¹ The five questions were: 1) Do you believe that the Jewish collective [community] is responsible for the recent strike’s violent episodes?, 2) Do you believe that [Argentine] Jews, as inhabitants of this country, received from the outset [of the strike or pogrom] the necessary guarantees from the authorities?, 3) How do you evaluate the conduct of those who provoked disorder among the Jews? Can you justify or explain the patriotic exaltations of [such] indefinable and irresponsible elements?, 4) Do you believe that the Jewish collective [community] does not have the right to Argentine hospitality?, and 5) Do you believe that Jewish immigration is worthwhile or not to the country? What is your opinion of its contribution to the development of national life? *Vida Nuestra*, 2:7, January 1919; *Vida Nuestra*, 2:8, February 1919.

¹⁴² Carulla, *Al filo del medio siglo*, 22; *Vida Nuestra*, February 1919, 178.

¹⁴³ *Vida Nuestra*, February 1919, 178.

¹⁴⁴ *Vida Nuestra*, January 1919, 155.

¹⁴⁵ *Vida Nuestra*, March 1921, 196.

¹⁴⁶ *Vida Nuestra*, February 1919, 184.

¹⁴⁷ *Vida Nuestra*, January 1919, 149.

¹⁴⁸ *Nosotros*, January 1919, 11.

Chapter 2

Mandatory Catholic Education

Introduction

Unlike the *Semana Trágica* of 1919, the 1943 military government decree mandating compulsory Catholic education in all Argentine public schools was not a physically violent event; not a single drop of blood was spilled as a result of Decree 18.411. Yet, the nationalist-led government's directive on December 31, 1943 to institutionalize Catholic education— coupled in March 1947 with the decision by the nation's then democratically-elected Peronist majority to legalize the 1943 military decree— could be viewed as a *culturally* violent act of historical significance.¹ In overturning the historic Law 1420, promulgated by Congress back in 1884, the 1943 decree broke a sixty year Argentine tradition of non-religious public education, a tradition that had become a collective pillar for the nation's democratic majority as well as the Jewish community.

Law 1420 (*Ley de Educación Común*), the work of the nation's late-nineteenth century positivist and liberal-minded politicians and intellectuals known as the Generation of 1880, was intended to lay the pedagogical blueprint for Argentina as a modern, secular, and non-parochial state. Its most famous provision, Article 8, maintained that “religious education can only be provided in public schools by the authorized ministers of the different creeds to the children of their respective faiths, and [only] before or after class hours.”² By barring all religious— most notably Catholic— instruction in public classrooms during regular school hours, and by protecting non-Catholic children from forcibly receiving Catholic education at all on school grounds, the congressional majority that promulgated the law in 1884 had two goals: first, to curb the influence of the Catholic Church in civil society and, second, to inculcate in this land of

immigrants an integrationist and secular pedagogical spirit that retained some capacity to recognize and respect religious and cultural differences.

Law 1420 helped generations of Argentines nourish and sustain a popular national commitment to *educación laica*, or non-parochial multi-faith public education. In a country where the Constitution— namely Articles 2 and 76— granted Catholicism and the Church an important measure of political and cultural privilege, Law 1420 provided many Argentines a form of cultural insurance that the nation’s liberal, positivist political and cultural vision would continue to predominate.³ They perceived Law 1420 less as something decidedly anti-Catholic and more as an expression of openness, acceptance, and tolerance of foreign creeds that they felt modern Argentina was predicated upon. “We defend the law [Law 1420],” trumpeted a dissenting member of Congress during the extraordinary March 1947 debates that led to the ratification of the military’s 1943 Catholic education decree, “and with it the Argentine spirit that our nation always remains open to the best and most fecund possibilities of understanding and cordiality.”⁴ Arguably as significant as any article in the Constitution itself, Law 1420, especially after the 1912 Sáenz Peña Reform and the onset of representative government in 1916, came to symbolize for many a vital thread that held together the modern, progressive democratic Argentine dream. In 1943, that thread would be unwoven; in 1947, it would be broken.

This chapter examines the nativist Catholic challenge to Argentina’s liberal, secular tradition and its effects on articulations of citizenship and nationality in the 1940s and beyond. It begins by looking at how Decree 18.411 uprooted Argentina’s dominant nineteenth-century pedagogical and cultural vision and, in its place, imposed a radically different system of values that reflected what nationalists and other members of the far right, including influential Church and military leaders, believed the Argentine state should be: namely, a *nación católica*.⁵ Like

the *Semana Trágica*, this 1943 decree represented a major psychological blow for many Catholic and non-Catholic Argentines, who resented what they perceived as a domestic assault on the nation's constitutional and civic-republican legacy. That the order was issued in the midst of World War II by a nationalist-led government sympathetic to Mussolini and even Hitler, and was preceded earlier in 1943 by a series of other "pro-Catholic" and "pro-Argentine" educational decrees adversely affecting Jewish schools, made it a bigger blow for Argentine Jews.

This chapter then explores the March 1947 congressional debates that paved the way for the democratically-elected peronist majority to formally legalize Decree 18.411. Examining the opinions and attitudes of a cross-section of elected congressional officials offers a window into arguments over what they deemed to be socially, culturally, religiously, and historically "Argentine." Together, these 1943 and 1947 narratives underscore the tensions surrounding the competing articulations of *argentinidad* in the 1940s and the constant dialectic between the repression and expression of identity. In turn, these debates over the presence of Catholicism in public life reveal two things about Argentine society: 1) some of the ways in which minority groups, in this case Argentine Jews, were perceived and perceived themselves at that historical moment and how these Jewish Argentines confronted the dilemmas of "doble lealtad" (dual loyalty) and the paradoxes produced by Peronism; and 2) however successful mandatory Catholic education was in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s in reversing Argentina's longstanding liberal-secular norms, ironically it also worked to strengthen the present and future legacy of Law 1420 among large numbers of Catholic and non-Catholic Argentines.

Historical Background

Decree 18.411 was about far more than Catholic education in public schools. It signaled a determined effort by the nationalist-led, Church-backed military government that seized

power on June 4, 1943 to resuscitate the anti-liberal, nativist, Catholic, authoritarian, and even messianic vision of the nation articulated, yet never fully consolidated by General José Félix Uriburu almost thirteen years earlier.⁶ On September 6, 1930, Uriburu, a charismatic and wealthy traditionalist from Salta, headed Argentina's first coup of the twentieth century, deposing President Yrigoyen, who had been reelected in 1928, and abruptly ended Argentina's fourteen year-old democratic experiment.⁷ While the coup ushered in a thirteen year period in Argentine history known as the *Década Infame* or Infamous Decade, it also marked the beginning of a much longer, more significant fifty-three year historical cycle of repeated military intervention in Argentine politics and culture that culminated with the infamous "Dirty War" of 1976-1983.

The Uriburu coup dramatically altered the country's political, social, and cultural fabric. To right-wing nationalists and conservative elites, the principal beneficiaries of the coup, it signaled the rise of a golden age in Argentina. Although significant ideological and political differences divided nationalists and conservatives, both agreed in 1930 on the basic need to oust Yrigoyen from power, put an end to broad-based representative government, and reclaim full political power.⁸ They were also both determined, particularly since the events of the *Semana Trágica*, to eradicate all forms of "socialism," "anarchism," or "communism"— that is, any vestige of labor dissidence— plaguing the country. Finally, they regarded the September Revolution, as they termed the Uriburu coup, as a momentous opportunity to refashion the nation culturally by restoring Argentine "order," "character," "tradition," "hierarchy," and "morality" that had been tarnished after the Radicals came to power in 1916. In practice, these goals translated into renewed support of the Catholic Church and the growth of xenophobia.⁹

"For the democratic majority," writes Ronald Dolkart in his splendid account of the thirteen years between 1930 and 1943, "September 6, 1930 began a downward spiral toward

the crisis that now envelops Argentina.”¹⁰ For many, the coup signaled an abrupt and unprecedented breach of constitutional democracy and made military intervention an all too common occurrence throughout the remainder of the twentieth-century.¹¹ It also marked the beginning of repeated restrictions on speech, press, unions, and political organization, as well as the emergence of an uneasy socio-judicial climate in which guilt was often presumed rather than innocence. In challenging the cultural tenets of *liberalismo* and *laicismo*, the coup and the entire *Década Infame* came to symbolize for the nation’s democratic (and increasingly powerless) majority the perverse stamp of close cooperation among the military, the Church and the extreme right in Argentine society.¹²

After taking power, Uriburu (1930-1932) had initially promised to respect the Constitution, hold prompt elections, and promote “harmony and unity among Argentines.” Many sectors of public opinion believed him, but it quickly became apparent, even to his allies, that Uriburu had no such plans.¹³ Before the year was up, he had declared martial law, suspended many top federal judges, deported unionists, executed five anarchists, arrested Radical Party leaders, and imprisoned Yrigoyen.¹⁴ In place of a representative democracy, Uriburu moved to impose an Italian-style “faszi” corporate state in Argentina.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, his proposal encountered strong civilian opposition. Even more importantly, he gradually alienated influential forces within the military, namely the *legalistas* (officers loyal to Yrigoyen) and *justistas* (officers loyal to General Augustín P. Justo)— both of which favored a return to electoral rule.¹⁶

Under pressure from *justistas*, Uriburu conceded to hold provincial elections in Buenos Aires on April 5, 1931 and national elections on November 8, 1931. To his astonishment, the Radical gubernatorial candidate Horacio Honorio Pueyrredón handily won the Buenos Aires provincial election, a victory which proved to be the beginning of Uriburu’s

political end.¹⁷ Uriburu immediately annulled the results and decreed on July 24 that no Radical Party member who had previously served under Yrigoyen (1916-1922 and 1928-1930) could run for any political office in the upcoming November 1931 national election. In protest, the Radicals boycotted the November election and adopted a national policy of political abstention that lasted through 1935.

The Radicals' strategy backfired, however, when Conservative General Justo— whom the more nationalist-leaning Uriburu still supported since he regarded Justo as the candidate most likely to preserve his “revolutionary” program— filled the political vacuum and easily won the November presidential election, albeit fraudulently, as was common among Conservatives before 1916 and again throughout the 1930s.¹⁸ Unlike Uriburu, however, the more pragmatic Justo recognized the importance of incorporating civilian parties with a national political base into his government.¹⁹ To that end, he quickly organized the rightist-dominated *Concordancia*, a loose coalition of conservatives parties, Anti-Personalistas (Radicals who had opposed Yrigoyen in the 1920s), and a few Independent Socialistas (a splinter group of Socialistas who also had opposed Yrigoyen). While the *Concordancia* invariably required the support of the military— which at the time was a given since Justo was its most powerful and popular figure— it effectively terminated Uriburu's two-year period of direct military rule and, in its place, ushered in a new era in the 1930s of “constitutional government.”²⁰ In practice, however, the three administrations that spanned the *Concordancia* period— under Presidents Justo (1932-1938), Ortiz (1938-1942)²¹, and Castillo (1942-1943)— were far from constitutional as they were all consistently marred by electoral fraud and corruption and rarely represented or responded to the nation's “democratic majority.”

One of the primary beneficiaries of the Uriburu coup and the eleven subsequent years of *Concordancia* rule was the Argentine Catholic Church. Throughout the *Década Infame*, the

political influence of the Church and the influence of Catholic thought flourished unlike at any other moment over the previous half-century. Despite a number of important ideological and political differences that existed among the Uriburu, Justo, Ortiz, and Castillo governments surrounding the nature and extent of the “anti-liberal” cultural counteroffensive initiated on September 6, 1930, all four governments welcomed a return to stronger Catholic values in public life and increased power and privilege for the Church.²² Such unprecedented support of the Church and Catholicism permitted, to borrow from historian Loris Zanatta, a *nación católica* cultural tradition to grow and mature at the expense of the nation’s secular, multi-faith legacy embodied in historic Law 1420. Pro-Catholic efforts throughout the 1930s to reinvent the Argentine past and articulate a “new” vision of what the Argentine State should be culminated in 1943 with the Nacionalista Revolution and the promulgation of Decree 18.411.

The official struggle to Catholicize the Argentine past and present began the moment Uriburu selected Juan B. Terán as his first Minister of Education. An ardent conservative and staunch anti-*laicista*, Terán strove above all— as his famous motto suggested— to “spiritualize the classroom.”²³ Of course, spiritualizing the classroom implied more than simply religious education. Minister Terán repeatedly lobbied for the creation of a new moral standard in public schools rooted in a mix of patriotic, corporatist, and Catholic nationalist learning whose aim was to “unify” Argentines by arming them with a new set of “cultural values.”

Disgruntled with secular liberalism, notably its “failure” to combat “communism” among students and to incorporate “foreigners” into Argentine society, Terán exhorted all teachers— especially history and geography instructors— to promote vigorously the nation’s heroes and symbols in the classroom in order “to cure society of hedonism.”²⁴ That meant, for instance, that on 9 de Julio (Argentine Independence Day), students were now required to participate in government-sponsored military parades on school grounds and re-enact patriotic scenes of

Independence for family-members, friends, and neighbors on popular city street corners.²⁵

Terán did not, and arguably in 1930 could not yet, introduce Catholic education into the classroom nor revoke Law 1420. But he did succeed in laying the pedagogical groundwork for the formulation of a new and more circumscribed “Argentine” national tradition in all schools that was ever more responsive to the attitudes, concerns, and expectations of the Catholic Church.²⁶

While Uriburu was opening the political and pedagogical door to Catholicism, the Argentine Church also profited from increasingly close relations with the Vatican following Pope Pius XI’s 1929 decision to launch a universal Catholic revitalization program.²⁷ After the Vatican signed the 1929 Concordance with Mussolini, it set out to expand the presence and visibility of Catholic education in large part by reaching out to Catholic youth around the world. At the heart of the Pope’s plan was the establishment in many European and American countries of independent Catholic action groups called *Acción Católica* that, at least in Argentina, mirrored the Vatican’s increasingly right-wing ideological and political bent.

In 1931, Monsignor Antonio Caggiano founded the Argentine branch of *Acción Católica*, which quickly attracted a significant conservative and nationalist following of mostly teenagers and young adults. For many of its members, *Acción Católica* developed into a formative social and intellectual center that gradually sowed the seeds of their ideological and political growth; in turn, they worked to build a more active and better-organized Catholic nationalist political movement in Argentina. One of the group’s central goals was to work with the Church to lobby for the “clericalization of public life in Argentina” by strengthening Church-State ties (including Church-military ties) and spreading Catholic education.²⁸

To these ends, *Acción Católica* sponsored in the 1930s a radical Catholic pedagogical program called “Courses on Catholic Education.” Like its short-lived predecessor of the same

name founded in 1922 by prominent Catholic Argentine intellectuals Atilio Dell’Oro Maini and Tomas Casares, “Courses” sternly critiqued secular liberalism while seeking to vindicate and revitalize Catholic thought. The 1920s and 1930s editions also both counted on the participation of famous Catholic right-wing nationalists, including Julio Meinvielle, Gustavo Martinez Zuviria, and Virgilio M. De Filippo. Where they differed, however, was in their overall political ambitions. The 1920s edition focused on interjecting greater *pensamiento católico* (Catholic thought) into the national discourse. *Acción Católica’s* 1930s adaptation was more overarching and radical, if not also messianic: it believed that the answer to Argentina’s contemporary woes was to transform the country into a full-fledged *patria católica* or nativist-controlled Catholic State.²⁹

The articulation of a more radical Catholic nationalism in the 1930s can be attributed largely to the unprecedented political access enjoyed by the Church and *Acción Católica* in the years following the 1930 September Revolution. That should not imply that the Church enjoyed uniform and equal access under Presidents Uriburu, Justo, Ortiz, and Castillo; indeed, such access varied, at times considerably. That said, throughout the *Década Infame*, the Church and its supporters were able to embark on a remarkably more ambitious national Catholic program than at any point prior to September 6, 1930. For the first time in half-a-century, they could legitimately take aim at two of the nation’s hallmark 1884 liberal-secular laws, namely Law 1420 and Law 1565 (the latter of which which had stripped religious entities of the authority to sanction births and marriages).³⁰ In short, after 1930 the Church and its allies were in an increasingly formidable position not only to inject greater Catholic thought into public life but to overturn Argentina’s dominant cultural and political narrative of the past fifty years.

This burgeoning Catholic movement received a tremendous boost in 1934 when Argentina hosted the International Eucharist Congress.³¹ With Cardinal Paccelli (future Pope Pio

XII) in attendance, Argentina basked in the global limelight as the world's leading Catholic figures descended upon Buenos Aires. The pinnacle of the Congress came on Sunday October 14 when a final majestic Mass was held at the foot of the imposing Monument to the Spaniards in the well-to-do neighborhood of Palermo where upwards of a million Catholics received by radio the blessing of Pope Pius from Rome. Recognizing the political significance of this unprecedented mobilization of Argentines publicly embracing Catholicism, the ever-opportunistic President Justo decided at that time to sponsor officially the Congress in exchange for, in the words of historian Marysa Navarro Gerassi, "the Church's endorsement of his unpopular regime."³² After the Argentine Church enthusiastically agreed, Justo, in an unsolicited public gesture of good faith, conferred upon all of Argentina the "Sacratissimo Corazon de Jesus" Catholic blessing at that final Mass in Palermo.³³

This historical moment represented perhaps the most significant turning point in Church-State relations since the 1884 adoption of the lay education and civil marriage laws.³⁴ "From then onward," wrote Ernesto Palacio in 1960, the Justo administration adopted "an accentuated clerical disposition."³⁵ More than merely Church-friendly, Justo signaled that for his own political gain he was prepared to sacrifice the prevailing cultural separation between religion and politics that had long dominated Argentine political life.³⁶ Of course, Argentina had always exhibited a contradictory relationship with respect to Catholicism and the State; it long advertised itself (i.e. the 1853 Constitution, the Immigration Law of 1876, or Law 1420) as a liberal, secular, and multi-faith nation open and attentive to foreign creeds, while simultaneously maintaining (i.e. as expressed in Articles 2 and 76 of the Constitution) that the State must support (*sostiene*) the Catholic faith and that the President and Vice-President of the Nation must be Catholic.³⁷ Still any conflicts prior to September 6, 1930 were generally resolved in favor of maintaining a clear working separation between Church and State. The decision by

Justo— a Conservative and adamant supporter of the nation’s liberal economic model— to begin to publicly retreat from Argentina’s longstanding liberal cultural blueprint was a testament to the growing strength of the Argentine Catholic movement and the “Christianizing” political and cultural outlook of the nation and particularly the military during the 1930s.

The Church and its supporters were the main beneficiaries of Justo’s opportunism. For the first time in over fifty years, the Church reoccupied a central public political role; in doing so, it had succeeded in persuading Argentina’s ruling class— notably the military— to consider substituting “nación católica” for “secular-liberalism” as the dominant State expression of *argentinidad*. What is more, “this true formula of patriotism,” as the pro-Justo Catholic journal *El Pueblo* proclaimed following the Eucharist Congress, was shared not only by the ruling elites, but at least partially by the near million Argentines who attended that Sunday Mass in Palermo.³⁸ If indeed that were the case, it serves as another reminder that the success of the Argentine Catholic movement (and, in this particular case, the 1934 Congress) was not merely religious in nature, but surely ideological and political as well. From that moment forward, writes Loris Zanatta, “every struggle or debate that surfaced in the country was obligated to take into account the [expression of] ‘Catholic identity’ that had been displayed during the Congress, outside of which nothing was ‘nacional’.”³⁹

If the cultural seed of the *nación católica* narrative was firmly planted during the Eucharist Congress, then, to paraphrase Monseñor Santiago Luis Copello, the post-Congress years represented its period of harvest.⁴⁰ After the 1934 Congress, the number of Catholic institutions and organizations in Argentina greatly multiplied, membership in *Acción Católica* jumped 32% between 1934-1937, and Justo increasingly spoke out in public about Argentina’s Catholic essence or spirit.⁴¹ Moreover, Argentina’s Catholic and Nacionalista press entered its golden age, as demonstrated by the fact that the pro-Uriburu, pro-fascist and pro-Nazi *Criterio*

reached its literary apex in the three years after 1934.⁴² The more pro-Justo and comparatively less extremist *El Pueblo*— in effect, the mouthpiece of the archbishop of Buenos Aires— significantly expanded its circulation in the years following the Congress,⁴³ and a collection of other strongly pro-Catholic and pro-Nacionalista journals like *La Fronda*, *Bandera Argentina*, *El Pampero*, *Crisol*, and *Cabildo* enjoyed their most productive years immediately after 1934. The rise and influence of these various Catholic and Nacionalista publications were significant enough that “for the first time, Catholics succeeded in seriously putting the hegemony of the liberal newspapers into question.”⁴⁴

In the years immediately following the Eucharist Congress, public support for Catholic education grew. For starters, Argentine priests founded a new organization dedicated exclusively to the promotion of Catholic education.⁴⁵ More significantly, as historian Adriana Puiggrós points out, after 1934 “many [Catholic] teachers” who in the past were firm supporters of *educación laica* or secular education, now introduced Catholic symbols and rituals into their classrooms, much like they had national heroes and holidays under former Education Minister Juan Terán.⁴⁶ Similar to the supporters of the Eucharist Congress itself, the teachers’ embrace of things Catholic may have signaled more of an affirmation of national identity linked to Catholicism rather than a particular expression of religious conviction. It is also quite conceivable, however, that some teachers were simply acting out of fear: Justo had developed a reputation for pressuring, even harassing teachers who actively publicized their *laico* views— the most publicized case involved Florencia Fossatti whom Justo had fired and forced into early-retirement in 1936.⁴⁷

While fear of reprisals may have been at play, an increasing number of teachers were now open to, if not enthusiastic about Catholic education. Echoing the “Catholic Courses” of the 1920s and early-1930s, teachers, ecclesiastics, and Catholic activists (including members of

Acción Católica) organized in 1935 and 1936 a series of free “Catholic Education Days” open to all Argentines. Their largest gathering, held at the Teatro Coliseo in Buenos Aires, attracted over eight-thousand participants. Perhaps more important than the number of participants was the fact that the Teatro Coliseo reunion included an emerging number of “mainstream” Catholic Argentines, pointing to a growing desire among some Catholic nationalists to broaden the ideological scope of a movement that heretofore had been dominated by more “reactionary” right-wing groups.⁴⁸ Indeed, shortly after the Teatro Coliseo gathering, those relative “moderates” helped found the Federation of Catholic Teachers and Professors, championing their motto “Christian schooling, justice for the Catholic majority, [and] respect for dissident minorities.”⁴⁹ Significantly, in embracing a niche in the classroom for Catholic education that was careful not to discriminate against non-Catholic Argentines, the Federation appeared to advocate for religious instruction in schools while also attempting to safeguard Law 1420’s inclusive and tolerant legacy that it likely cherished.⁵⁰

The Spanish Civil War: A Turning Point in Argentina

However in the aftermath of the Eucharist Congress, moderate Catholic groups like the Federation of Catholic Teachers and Professors remained publicly overshadowed by more militant Catholic conservative and nationalist politicians, intellectuals, writers, and ecclesiastics. That became particularly evident in 1936 when Conservatives and Nacionalistas members of the Concordancia government (who more often than not in the 1930s remained politically and ideologically divided despite having briefly come together following the Uriburu coup) again momentarily joined forces following the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Just as members of the right had banded together during the *Semana Trágica* or following the September

Revolution to confront the perceived “anarchist” and “communist” threat, they united again in 1936 to prevent ‘Spanish-type’ leftist insurgencies from ‘spreading’ to Argentine soil.

In 1936, influential Nacionalista Senator Mátiás Sánchez Sorondo capitalized on this new wave of conservative and nationalist cooperation to push through Congress his “Repression of Communism” Law— something he had been attempting to do since the early-1930s.⁵¹ It provided up to five years in prison for anyone who “teaches or propagandizes the doctrine of ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ or any other doctrine based on the system of collective property and the abolition of private property.”⁵² In practice, the law primarily targeted immigrants and native-born children of immigrants who presented, what Ronald Newton has called, a “threat to criollo cultural hegemony.”⁵³ In one publicized case, the Justo government, in accordance with the terms of the new 1937 Residency Law— a direct outgrowth of Sánchez Sorondo’s 1936 law— deported to fascist-Italy five Argentines of Italian-descent alleged to be communists.⁵⁴ However, nativists like Sánchez Sorondo who regarded “Judaism and communism [as] a single problem,” targeted Jews as the single greatest menace to Catholic criollo control.⁵⁵ The Repression of Communism Law, therefore, became a pretext to perpetuate local historical stereotypes of Jews as Bolsheviks, and beginning in 1936, triggered an unprecedented wave of militant Catholic nationalism and anti-Semitism in Argentina.

Since the early-1930s, and particularly after the rise of Hitler in 1933, anti-Semitism in Argentina had become increasingly organized and multi-class in nature, if not widespread.⁵⁶ For instance, in 1932, philo-fascist groups formed Argentina’s first *Triple A*— the *Acción Antisemita Argentina*— which resembled the nativist vigilante group *Legión Cívica Argentina* that had roamed freely under Uriburu.⁵⁷ On April 5, 1933, three thousand Argentine Nazi sympathizers held a pro-Reich rally at the Teatro Colón, the storied beacon of elite cultural expression in Buenos Aires. Social and intellectual institutes such as the *Institución Cultural Argentino-*

Germana and the *Comisión de Cooperación Intelectual* increasingly became vehicles for anti-Semitic propaganda and counted among their members Gustavo Martínez Zuviria (Director of the National Library and later Minister of Education), Nobel biologist Bernardo Houssay, Juan Ramos (Dean of the University of Buenos Aires Law School), Mátias Sánchez Sorondo, and Carlos Ibarguren (lead advisor to the Banco de la Nación).⁵⁸ The 1930s also witnessed a proliferation of adamantly pro-Catholic, pro-Nacionalista and often virulently anti-Semitic right-wing publications and saw Jewish institutions and organizations frequently attacked and vandalized. To defend against such abuses, in 1935, Jewish leaders moved to establish the Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (DAIA), which today remains Argentina's official Jewish protective and political body.

With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, such anti-Semitic criollo attacks only intensified. In 1936 alone, Father Julio Meinvielle, curate of Nuestra Señora de la Salud de Buenos Aires and one of Argentina's most vocal anti-Semite, published his odious book *El judío*. On June 25, 1936, Tomas Amadeo delivered a vituperative anti-Semitic talk entitled *Las Razas* at the exclusive Jockey Club in Buenos Aires— it was so well received that the Jockey Club subsequently printed and distributed 150,000 copies of the speech. Beginning that same year, Father Virgilio M. de Filippo regularly broadcasted theological justifications for anti-Semitism on Argentine radio, many of which were subsequently published in *Clarínada*, whose very editor, Carlos Silveyra, himself had authored the unabashedly anti-Semitic book *El comunismo en Argentina*. On March 27, 1936, the magazine *Crisol* denounced the pending appointment of Dr. Moises Bentolila, an Argentine Jew of Moroccan descent, to the Army Medical Corps: “they want to introduce Jews,” read part of the editorial “even into the army.” Finally, reputed Argentine writer “Hugo Wast” authored *666*, the last volume of his sensationalist anti-Semitic trilogy that implicated Jews in an international capitalist conspiracy centered in New York City.⁵⁹

Significantly, “Hugo Wast” was the *nom de plume* of leading Argentine intellectual and Director of the National Library Martínez Zuviria, who, as Minister of Education seven years later in 1943, would become chief architect of Decree 18.411 that sought to overturn Law 1420 by making Catholic education mandatory in all public schools.⁶⁰

The intensification in 1936 of criollo anti-Semitism symbolized a much deeper transformation unfolding in Argentine political culture following the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. If the 1934 Eucharist Congress signaled the onset of the public “Catholization” of the Justo government, the military, and the Argentine State, then the Spanish Civil War represented the apex of that Church-State-military bond. The growing defense within the Church and the military of “traditional” Catholic criollo values— that is, to borrow from Ronald Newton, respect for “sanctions of place, family, class, status, and institutions” and contempt for “democracy and rule of mediocrity, anomie, irreligion, ambiguities of science and grotesqueries of art, [and] sexual license”— encouraged Justo to retreat even further from the nation’s dominant liberal-secular cultural vision.⁶¹ In 1936 that meant not only continuing to bolster political and cultural relations with the Church, but also increasingly opening the political game to Nacionalista sectors who “had heretofore [been] relegated to a marginal position.”⁶² Although Justo never worked “arm in arm” with Nacionalistas the way the Catholic clergy did in 1936, his political overture to the far-right still sufficiently energized the Catholic, Nacionalista, and military press to glorify more than ever the “magnificent bond between the Cross and the Sword” as the stylized pillars of Argentine *nacionalidad* just as it marginalized, if not outright vilified those— more often than not Jews— whom they considered to stand beyond its boundaries.⁶³

The Church-State rapprochement and the political aperture afforded to nationalists and other members of the far-right led to growing calls among certain political sectors for mandatory Catholic education. For instance, in his 1937 book *Hacia una nueva educación*

(*Towards a New Education*), well-known army General José María Sarobe argued for an outright end to *laico* education and, instead, pressed for state-sponsored Catholic learning in all the nation's public schools in order to ensure (in his words) the "argentinization" of growth and learning.⁶⁴ Sympathetic military journals like *Revista Militar* and *RdS*, as well as leading Catholic and nationalist publications like *Criterio*, *El Pueblo*, and *Crisol*, echoed Sarobe's call to promote and defend the sacred ideals of "God, Fatherland, and Home" (Dios, Patria, y Hogar) by way of Catholic instruction in the classroom.⁶⁵

Following the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, however, no intellectual or politician championed Catholic instruction as *the* tool of national rejuvenation quite like Manuel A. Fresco, the charismatic and influential Conservative governor of Argentina's most powerful and populated province.⁶⁶ A keen admirer of Mussolini and staunch supporter of Sánchez Sorondo, on October 6, 1936, Fresco mandated Catholic education in all of the Province of Buenos Aires' public schools.⁶⁷ Together with the governors of three smaller western Argentine provinces who passed similar decrees between 1936-1937, Fresco became the first Argentine political leader to effectively override Law 1420, establishing an important precedent that facilitated the national government's efforts in 1943.

Although ideologically Fresco certainly believed in the merits of mandatory Catholic education, his decision to implement non-lay instruction in the province's public schools appeared more politically than religiously motivated. With an eye on the presidency, Fresco recognized— almost a decade before the masterful Perón— that his charismatic and populist appeal among Argentina's non-elite classes could help him establish a broad-based rightist coalition by winning over Conservative and Nacionalista elites. By mixing authoritarian corporative labor tactics— like "legalizing [non-communist] unions and us[ing] the state's power

as an arbiter to protect workers” — with Catholic nationalist rhetoric, Fresco emerged as one of Argentina’s most visible and influential political figures during the mid-1930s.⁶⁸

The nature of that rhetoric gave added meaning to popular criollo slogans like “God, Fatherland, and Home,” one which Fresco himself had helped to popularize. After promulgating the 1936 decree, Fresco and his Minister of Government, Dr. Roberto Noble, issued a series of public statements explaining the need for Catholic education. The following passages are telling:

[W]e have implemented Roman Catholic learning in the classroom,” Fresco proclaimed, “because we consider indispensable [the need] to inculcate in the mind, heart, and conscience [*sentimiento primario*] of those young souls...the foundation of morality.”⁶⁹

The Government of [the Province] of Buenos Aires,” Noble added, “wishes to protect the classroom from all dangerous contaminants...It is why this government has and will continue to castigate every effort made to disrupt a child’s candor, credulity, and the sincere faith [*la buena fe*] with internationalist and destructive doctrines, be they inspired by communism or any other more veiled and cunning form of propaganda...”⁷⁰

Fresco’s Catholic 1936 decree and Sánchez Sorondo’s anti-communist-anti-immigrant law promulgated earlier that year were related; together they symbolized the legal apex of the right’s counter-liberal assault in effect since at least the events of January 1919. Both targeted the right’s political opponents and sought to protect Argentine criollo or nativist culture from any “dangerous contaminants.” Ultimately, however, Fresco took one significant further step: whereas Sánchez Sorondo and others before him largely portrayed those cultural violators as “communists,” “anarchists,” “and “foreigners,” Fresco, for the first time, also identified them explicitly as non-Catholics (and, in the context of European and Argentine developments in 1936, implicitly as Jewish). Also by claiming that only Catholicism could properly infuse a young *Argentine’s* “brain, heart, and conscience” the requisite “foundation of morality,” Fresco’s decree also spoke to the ways in which, in the mid-to-late-1930s, a growing number of politicians and others in positions of power, consciously or not, had come to marginalize

culturally, if not outrightly exclude *non-Catholic* Argentines from the provincial (and national) fold. Seven years later, Decree 18.411 would make such a (circumscribed) expression of Argentine identity that much more manifest and widespread.

Gradually, however, the Conservative-Nacionalista political alliance forged after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War began to dissolve: the divisions that separated those two groups before 1936 again came to overshadow their shared “anti-communist” or “anti-democratic” interests. Many of Fresco’s fellow Conservatives and more moderate members of the Concordancia government increasingly began to express reservations about his radical educational policy, reservations that ultimately forced Fresco, given his presidential ambitions, to abandon the decree. They had come to fear— even if privately many may have actually approved of Catholic education in the classroom— that uprooting secular education would “jeopardize other key elements of the nineteenth-century liberal state,” namely, close economic ties with Great Britain and political control of the government.⁷¹ In a sense, conservative supporters of Argentina’s longstanding liberal economic blueprint unintentionally had served to a degree to protect the nation’s liberal cultural legacy, underscoring in the process the challenges that Justo, Fresco, or any subsequent politician was likely to face if he attempted to abolish Law 1420 outright.

Meanwhile, as Justo and Conservative members of the Concordancia gradually began, in late-1936, again to distance themselves from Nacionalistas and other elements of the reactionary right, they encountered their first real challenge of the decade from the nation’s heretofore silenced “democratic majority.” In 1936, the Radical Party, after having ended in 1935 its four-year old policy of political abstention, won congressional seats in key national urban districts like the Federal Capital, Córdoba, Mendoza, and Santa Fe and, remarkably, managed to gain an overall majority in the Chamber of Deputies (Camará de Diputados). In the

months after their surprising electoral triumph, the newly-empowered Radicals also briefly banded together with members of the similarly rejuvenated Socialista Party and the Confederación General de Trabajo (CGT, Argentina's foremost labor union) to create a more formidable 'popular front' aimed at further opening up the political and social arena long-dominated by Justo and his Concordancia. This was particularly evident when, on May 1, 1937, together they held a joint Labor Day rally, during which they jeered "the heirs of the 6th of September" [the date of the 1930 Uriburu coup] and, at the same time, demanded the return of "liberty" and "real democracy" to Argentina.⁷²

Justo and leading members of the Concordancia, sufficiently alarmed at the popular front's growing presence, became ever-more determined to avoid their 1936 electoral miscue and ensure, as they had with virtually every other "democratic" election since 1931, the rigging of the upcoming presidential contest slated for September 1937.⁷³ Ironically, they also grew increasingly concerned with the corrupt and fraudulent image that the Concordancia government had acquired in Argentine society. To counter that popular perception, and also to help assuage rising tensions brewing within the administration itself, Justo unexpectedly tapped his Finance Minister Roberto M. Ortiz, who by Concordancia standards was a relative political moderate, to serve as his presidential successor. While some members of the government applauded the move, others, particularly leaders of the Concordancia's powerful Conservative majority, resented Justo's selection, in large part because Ortiz was an Anti-Personalista (a Radical who had opposed Yrigoyen in the 1920s) *with* democrat leanings. After heated exchanges, Conservatives finally forced Justo to accept Ramón S. Castillo, a staunch traditional conservative from the interior province of Catamarca, as Ortiz's running mate.

As expected, and indeed as insured through electoral fraud, Ortiz handedly defeated Radical candidate Marcelo T. de Alvear in the 1937 presidential election. Ortiz's "victory"

breathed new life into the Concordancia alliance, but it also provided Argentina's relatively powerless democratic majority with a renewed measure of optimism. For one, as Félix Luna points out, Ortiz "felt that repeated vote rigging was damaging for the country and set about eradicating it."⁷⁴ Following the presidential election, Ortiz made immediate overtures to Alvear to join him in cleaning up the electoral process, overtures that were met with immediate and vigorous resistance by powerful conservative figures, including Vice-President Castillo and Governor Fresco. In the end, Conservatives successfully prevented Ortiz from implementing any sweeping electoral reforms. Significantly, however, Ortiz had demonstrated a remarkable will to transform the image and policies of the government by distancing himself from rightist members of the Concordancia, including some who had helped him secure the presidency, as well as more reactionary figures like Fresco and Sánchez Sorondo.

In his efforts to reform the electoral process and reshape the Concordancia, Ortiz also chose to relax the press restrictions instituted years earlier by Uriburu and Justo. Argentina's democratic majority enthusiastically embraced this decision and members of the press and public began, almost immediately, to exercise their rediscovered freedoms in newspapers and journals, on the radio and at universities, and at workplaces and in the streets. Among the major issues that quickly captured their imagination was the growing Nazi influence in Argentina. That influence was due in no small measure to Senator Sánchez Sorondo's recent trip to Germany, where, as an official guest of the German government, he was warmly received by Hitler, who Sánchez Sorondo subsequently praised. As a result, Argentine newspapers and magazines began to scrutinize the local efforts of the German government to cultivate, through associations like the German-Argentine *Comisión de Cooperación Cultural*, its successor the *Institución Cultural Argentino-Germana*, and the posh German Riding Club in Buenos Aires, strong ties with Argentine criollo intellectuals and military leaders. Also of concern were efforts

to help expand to two hundred the number of German-language schools located throughout Argentina.⁷⁵

In November 1937, *La Prensa* journalist Ernst Alemann wrote a stirring anti-Nazi article detailing Misiones Governor Julio A. Vanasco's investigation of Nazi activities in Argentina's northeast province.⁷⁶ Alemann's article and Vanasco's report, both widely read, were alarming, albeit for different reasons to the Argentine public and German officials in Argentina. The two publications even caused enough of a public uproar that they indirectly prompted the cancellation of a concert by one-thousand German Argentine schoolchildren to be held at Teatro Colón. Not long after, the left-leaning journal *Crítica* published a series of critical articles on suspected Nazi subversion in Argentina and Uruguay. Finally, the Argentine press reported that on Christmas Day 1937, German officers aboard the Nazi battleship *Schlesien*— the first German warship with a swastika to visit and dock in Argentina—were transported by the Argentine Navy from the Port of Mar de Plata to Buenos Aires, where they celebrated the holiday at the local German Club, toured the influential Quilmes factory, and billeted with German Argentine families.⁷⁷

Public indignation over the apparent "Nazi presence" in Argentina came to a head on April 10, 1938 after Germans and Austrians living in Argentina celebrated the Austrian Anschluss by holding a "Day of Unity" rally at the popular Luna Park auditorium in the nation's capital.⁷⁸ U.S. Vice Consul W.F. Busser attended the rally as an observer and described the hearings as having "all the trappings...of the Berlin Sportpalast rallies: massed choruses of 'Deutschland über Alles'...the full panoply of Nazi organizations— Hitler Youth, Frontline Veterans, the SA— with their tossing standards, a high rostrum backed by *Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer* blazoned in giant Gothic letters on an enormous blood-red backdrop."⁷⁹ In response, Argentine socialists and students of the left-leaning *Federación Universitaria Argentina* held a vociferous counter-

rally at nearby Plaza San Martín, a symbolic center of Argentine independence and republicanism. Later that day in the adjacent city-center, counter-rally participants also burned German flags and vandalized German banks and the Instituto Cultural Germano-Argentino. When Argentina's Foreign Minister subsequently apologized to his German counterpart in Argentina, the liberal-leaning press and public only grew more disenchanted.⁸⁰

The Luna Park episode, Governor Vanasco's report, and the continuing press coverage of the presence of German-language schools throughout Argentina encouraged President Ortiz to take more direct action. Unlike his predecessor who had exhibited little overt concern over (the spread of) Nazi activities in Argentina, Ortiz ruled in 1938 that Germans and German Argentines were no longer permitted to adorn their businesses and cultural associations with swastikas or red-white-and-black flags in celebration of Nazi Labor Day (held on May 1).⁸¹ Furthermore, after the Governor of La Pampa complained to the Argentine Minister of Interior about the proliferation of German language schools in his province and their efforts to "transform Argentine children into foreign citizens," Ortiz launched, under the direction of the National Board of Education (the *Consejo Nacional de Educación* or CNE), a series of pedagogical directives aimed at 'protecting' and 'cultivating' the Argentine "national spirit" in private foreign language schools— not unlike prior efforts in the early-1880s by liberal, positivist politicians to "argentinize" Italian and other immigrant educational institutions.⁸²

Decree 4.071, promulgated on May 9, 1938, was the most important of those CNE educational directives. It mandated that: 1) "every foreign language and religious school" house an Argentine flag, maps of the country, and portraits of the nation's heroes, 2) teachers in foreign language schools provide a "sense of Argentine history and geography," including lessons and programs that conveyed "the symbols of the State, the stanzas of the National Anthem...and the National Constitution," and 3) no "propaganda in private forms or concealed

in racial or political ideologies” that runs “contrary to the essential principles and precepts of the Constitution and the laws of the country” would be permitted.⁸³ In an addendum published four months later, the CNE also stipulated that all teachers of “foreign language and religious schools” must pass a government exam in Spanish language and Argentine history and geography in order to receive their licenses.⁸⁴

Although five years later Argentine Jews would oppose the decree mandating Catholic education, they welcomed the May 1938 decree. Like many Argentines disturbed over the Nazi (or perhaps simply the German) presence in Argentina, the Jewish community approved of Ortiz’s efforts to curb the “anti-Argentine” practices of Nazi-sympathizing institutions, educational or otherwise. Since its inception in 1935, the DAIA had attempted to call greater attention to the proliferation of philo-fascist and anti-Semitic activity, be it vocal remarks of the likes of Julio Meinvielle, Gustavo Martínez Zuviria (Hugo Wast), Monseñor Gustavo Franceschi, or Sánchez Sorondo, German infiltration of criollo military and cultural circles, or the violent undertakings of groups like *Acción Antisemita Argentina* that had triggered a wave of recent attacks on Jewish institutions and synagogues in Buenos Aires.⁸⁵ In August 1938, the DAIA even sponsored Argentina’s “First Congress Against Racism and Anti-Semitism” that aimed not only to identify those “actively engaged in producing or disseminating anti-Semitic propaganda,”⁸⁶ but, by bringing together representatives from over fifty Jewish and non-Jewish political and cultural organizations— including such notables as Alicia Moreau de Justo, Ricardo Balbín, Arturo Frondizi, and Arturo Illia⁸⁷— to “elevate Argentine culture” to a level that the DAIA, like much of the nation’s liberal-minded democratic majority, felt was increasingly possible under Ortiz.⁸⁸

The 1938 decree, however, turned out to be a mixed blessing for the Jewish community. As CNE officials scrutinized the Nazi affiliation of German language schools, they also began to investigate private Jewish schools— in that they taught Yiddish, Hebrew, Jewish history, and

Jewish religion— as “foreign” bodies that similarly posed a threat to the “national spirit” that Decree 4.071 had intended to foment and protect. After “inspecting” various Jewish schools in 1938, the CNE decided to exclude some Jewish teachers from the Argentine school system (of which Jewish schools were a part), claiming that “Jews were an inferior race without a flag or law.”⁸⁹ Moreover, Minister of Education Jorge E. Coll barred Jewish teachers membership in such notable institutions as the Seminario Nacional del Profesorado Secundario and the Seminario de Lenguas Vivas.⁹⁰ Over the ensuing weeks, DAIA leaders, the superintendents of Jewish schools, and CNE officials negotiated a satisfactory end to this potential crisis: in exchange for reinstatement of ousted Jewish teachers, Jewish schools proposed to add a new course to their curriculum entitled “Temas Patrios” or “Patriotic Themes” in hopes of dispelling any notion that their teachings compromised or violated the cultural spirit of the nation.

The 1938 decree, therefore, left the Jewish community feeling somewhat ambivalent. After having enthusiastically saluted Ortiz’s educational proposal, to paraphrase one Jewish newspaper editorial, as a liberal and effective tool in helping to combat Jewish discrimination, members of the community came to lament the CNE’s decision to label Jewish schools as “foreign” entities, particularly in the same breath as German language schools with Nazi or fascist predilections. Perhaps the mainstream Jewish newspaper *Idishe Tzaitung* best captured the community’s simultaneous sense of pride and disappointment when it emphatically wrote: “Jewish schools are not connected to any foreign country and educate their students so that they be both Argentines and Jews.”⁹¹ Ultimately, the 1938 decree did not seriously harm or tarnish the Jewish community; still, it served as another vocal reminder of the contradictory nature of government policy and Argentine society, and, indeed, of the contradictory status of Jews in Argentina. Initially intended to combat discrimination and intolerance and to safeguard the constitutional rights and liberties of its citizens, the CNE decree ultimately proved culturally

myopic in that it relegated certain immigrant groups, in particular Argentine Jews, to the social margins of society by denying them unmitigated access, in the words of historian Efraim Zadoff, to the “central current of ‘argentinismo’.”⁹²

That said, the Jewish community and other members of Argentina’s “democratic majority” continued to enjoy under Ortiz in 1939 and 1940 a degree of political and intellectual freedom absent throughout much of the Infamous Decade (1930-1943). And many continued to exercise those freedoms, particularly after the 1938 DAIA-sponsored congress against racism and anti-Semitism, by openly denouncing Nazi and fascist sympathizers in Argentine society, including right-wing Catholic nationalist groups like the *Alianza de la Juventud Nacionalista*, the *Alianza Libertadora Nacionalista*, and the aforementioned *Acción Antisemita Argentina*, all of whom expressed their admiration for Franco, Mussolini, and even Hitler, advocated an authoritarian, corporatist, and Catholic state, and regularly chanted pro-nationalist and anti-Jewish slogans like “Neutrality and Argentines Yes, Jews No.”⁹³

In response, Jewish and non-Jewish sympathizers of democracy founded in 1939 and 1940 a number of political organizations, including *Acción Argentina*— whose name alone appeared a direct rejoinder to established reactionary groups like *Acción Católica* and *Acción Antisemita Argentina*— and the *Organización Popular Contra el Fascismo y el Antisemitismo*.⁹⁴ Moreover, they also openly supported legislative efforts like those of Socialista diputado Enrique Dickmann to push through Congress a resolution calling for the investigation of all “illicit activities of foreign organizations,” which here specifically meant Nazi and fascist pursuits in local schools, unions, scientific and cultural organizations, and the like.⁹⁵ Dickmann’s legislative efforts prompted Congress, first, to create the *Comisión Investigadora de Actividades Antiargentinas* and, then, pass an “anti-Nazi” law aimed at thwarting the spread of hate crimes in Argentina. Indeed, it was precisely in this more encouraging context that Hirsch Triwaks,

leading AMIA representative and editor of *Diario Israelita's* special 1940 commemorative issue "Fifty Years of Jewish Life in Argentina" (discussed in Chapter 1 above), opted to downplay the legacy of the *Semana Trágica* and write proudly and optimistically about the lack of anti-Semitism in Argentina.⁹⁶

Unfortunately for Triwaks, the Jewish community, and the nation's democratic supporters, President Ortiz, growing progressively ill from a debilitating case of diabetes, was forced, in July 1940, to delegate presidential authority to his staunchly conservative Vice-President Ramón S. Castillo.⁹⁷ While not a supporter of right-wing nationalists, Castillo quickly sought to reassert the traditional ways and procedures of Argentina's conservative oligarchy by closing the democratic opening afforded under Ortiz. In practice that meant Castillo was determined, above all, to expand and protect the highly profitable economic arrangement that landed elites had long enjoyed with Great Britain (and to some extent the United States) by returning to the fraudulent electoral and censorship practices prevalent under Justo in the 1930s. Therefore, after a little more than two years of political and intellectual flexibility afforded under Ortiz, the nation's "democratic majority" again largely found itself on the political-outside looking in.

As disappointed as advocates of democracy were to see that opening close under Castillo, Nacionalistas and other members of the far right, including the Church and a growing and vocal nationalist minority within the military, were arguably more dissatisfied with Castillo's unequivocal support of the political and economic status quo. With the outbreak of World War II and their burgeoning belief (or perhaps simply hope) that the Axis would emerge victorious, right-wing nationalists became ever more disgruntled with the nation's longstanding liberal, export-oriented economic arrangement and yearned to construct in Argentina an active corporatist (and Catholic) state modeled on those found in Italy, Spain, and Germany.⁹⁸ Their

anti-liberal, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperial convictions only grew stronger in 1942 after the U.S. flexed its diplomatic muscle by deciding (yet again) to reward Brazil commercially and militarily over Argentina after the latter refused to abandon its wartime position of neutrality and openly join the American and Allied cause.⁹⁹

By 1942 and 1943, Nacionalistas and their supporters within the military and the Church yearned more than ever to purify Argentina of Castillo's corrupt "democratic" system that they felt— as did the nation's liberal democratic majority, though for very different reasons— compromised "lo nacional" (read: "things Argentine"). Their sense of disillusionment peaked when Castillo tapped, in February 1943, wealthy sugar mogul Robustiano Patrón Costas, a leading figure within the Conservative Party and dedicated supporter of the nation's liberal oligarchic economic arrangement, as his presidential successor for the upcoming September 1943 elections.¹⁰⁰ As members of Argentina's democratic front struggled to find a candidate capable of challenging Costas (despite the strong likelihood that the Concordancia government would yet again rig the election), right-wing officers sympathetic to the nationalist cause from the Campo de Mayo military complex just outside of Buenos Aires marched on the Casa Rosada on June 4 and overthrew the conservative-dominated Castillo government in what amounted to the nation's second coup in thirteen years.¹⁰¹

The 1943 Nacionalista "Revolution"

For most Argentines, the 1943 coup— or, as the Nacionalistas termed it, the June 4 Revolution— "came like a lightning bolt on a fine day."¹⁰² Although it initially seemed to lack an identifiable leader or any detailed manifesto, members of the conservative oligarchy and the nation's "democratic majority" understood the threat the coup posed to their respective interests. Under provisional President General Pedro Pablo Ramírez, the new military-led

nationalist government moved swiftly to suppress all social and political “agitators,” notably communists, union leaders, and pro-democratic and pro-Allied progressive groups such as the aforementioned *Acción Argentina*.¹⁰³ After Nacionalistas quickly maneuvered to occupy significant upper and mid-level cabinet and administrative posts, the new government moved in the ensuing months to assert its authoritarian, corporatist, and Catholic messianic vision for a New Argentina.

For Nacionalistas, the June 4 Revolution symbolized their second golden opportunity—the first being the September 1930 Uriburu Revolution—to enact their national program of economic, political, and moral salvation. In what was perhaps Argentina’s most ideologically-charged government—left or right—of the twentieth century, the nationalist-dominated administration soon dissolved all political parties, placed strict limitations on press freedoms, and, to the great consternation of intellectuals and academic groups, actively intervened in the nation’s universities in an effort to silence its most outspoken critics. It also adamantly defended the nation’s position of wartime neutrality, which for Nacionalistas was as much an expression of Axis support as it was an impassioned manifestation of Argentine sovereignty against the United States and Great Britain whom they had come to detest as capitalist imperial powers that regularly interfered in domestic and hemispheric affairs.

Nowhere was the new government’s anti-liberal agenda more apparent than in the field of education. After helping to secure the placement of Nacionalistas in key judicial, police, cultural, and diplomatic posts within the new administration, President Ramírez cemented nationalist political and ideological control in late-1943 by successfully appointing in October noted right-wing enthusiasts Gustavo Martínez Zuviría (aka “Hugo Wast”) and General Luis Perlinger as Minister of Education and Minister of Interior, respectively.¹⁰⁴ With Zuviría and

Perlinger on board, the government quickly embarked on its own pedagogical and cultural program to “argentinize” all schools in the country.

Rather than single out Nazi or fascist-sympathizing educational institutions as Ortiz had done, Ramírez and the CNE (National Board of Education) broadly targeted private “foreign” schools that (they felt) included large numbers of non-native-born teachers. On September 29, 1943, the CNE issued a resolution that prohibited any teacher or school superintendent who had not previously been employed at a public school (*escuela nacional*) or was not CNE-certified from working at a private educational facility (*escuela particular*).¹⁰⁵ Less than two weeks later, on October 8, the CNE further decreed that at least “fifty percent” of all teachers at public and private schools had to be “native Argentine.”¹⁰⁶ Although these two declarations implied, as Efraim Zadoff has argued, that “immigrants could not inculcate in their students the appropriate sentiments of ‘argentinidad’,” on the surface they actually remained wholly consistent with the national integration strategies put forth by past governments from Sarmiento through Yrigoyen to Ortiz, all of whom had championed a non-hyphenated Argentine ideal.¹⁰⁷

It quickly became apparent, however, that the new administration believed certain immigrant groups were better equipped culturally to transmit effectively core “Argentine” beliefs and values than others. In early December, the CNE issued a monumental exception to its fifty percent “native Argentine” clause: in a new decree, it proclaimed that all Catholic schools were exempt from the recent October immigration stipulation, contending that Catholic schooling was “guided by a higher purpose of spiritual education” that fulfills the “highest interest of the Nation...by inculcating a profound feeling of argentinidad in future citizens.”¹⁰⁸ Unlike the governments of Sarmiento, Yrigoyen, and Ortiz, the Ramírez administration had articulated a vision of citizenship or nationality tied explicitly to Catholic learning, one which non-Catholics presumably could never fully impart or acquire. Although there had been various

attempts by past Argentine governments to marginalize or exclude (certain) non-native Argentines from the national fold— the 1902 Residency Law, the 1910 Social Defense Law, the 1936 Sánchez Sorondo Law, and the 1937 Residency Laws were prime examples— never before had the national government legislated Catholic faith as a cultural or religious attribute necessary to experience and transmit fully the essence of Argentine national and historical identity.

Moreover, in exempting Catholic schools from the fifty percent native Argentine clause, the Ramírez government also came to imply that, for the first time in modern Argentine history, *birth* alone was not a sufficient requisite for one to be considered fully “Argentine.” One vital way in which anti-anarchist and anti-immigrant proclamations such as the Residency Law and the Social Defense Law, both passed during the height of immigration in the first decade of the twentieth century, had sought to exclude undesirables was by making clear that birth in Argentina was required not only to be a citizen, but also to be culturally Argentine. Now in 1943, when the children and even grandchildren of most immigrants were native-born Argentines, the Nacionalista-led government refashioned membership in Argentina to include Catholic faith as a basic requirement to achieve full civic status. In the process, unintentionally or not, the government’s October and December educational decrees created a formal underclass of both Argentine immigrants *and* citizens.

No single Nacionalista educational directive better encapsulated the new government’s national messianic spirit than Decree 18.411 of December 31, 1943. Conceived by Education Minister Martínez Zuviría and issued on the very same day the Ramírez administration officially banned all political parties and strictly censored the press, Decree 18.411 mandated for the first time compulsory Catholic education in all public schools, in the process uprooting Argentina’s half-century old liberal-secular tradition. If indeed “the June 4 movement,” as CNE General

Secretary Dr. Jorge Joaquin Llambias declared in the months following the Nacionalista coup, “proclaimed as one of its essential principles the return of Christ to the classroom” and directed “all a teacher’s efforts...toward this transcendental end,” then nothing the Nacionalistas said or did more effectively conveyed that message than the December 31 proclamation.¹⁰⁹

In requiring Catholic education in the classroom, Decree 18.411 took direct aim at historic Law 1420 of 1884, which for its many supporters had long come to represent not merely a national symbol of non-parochial, non-religious education, but, more significantly, an expression of openness and tolerance that they felt modern Argentina was predicated upon. In two evocative pages, Decree 18.411 argued that Law 1420 “violated” and “adulterated the spirit” of the Constitution, notably the “Catholic Character of the Argentine State” enshrined in Articles 2, 67, and 76.¹¹⁰ Reminding Argentines of the Constitution’s explicit Catholic mandate—that the State must support (*sostiene*) the Catholic faith [Article 2]; that Congress has the obligation to convert Argentine Indians to Catholicism [Article 67]; and that the President and Vice-President must be Catholic [Article 76]—the decree maintained that any anti-Catholic or even non-Catholic educational doctrine violated the essence of the nation’s constitutional charter and, therefore, was not only “absurd,” but antithetical to the rights, heritage, and unity of the Argentine people. In short, Decree 18.411 served as the most vocal reminder yet that “the June 4 Revolution was carried out to put an end to...the deformation of the Argentine soul.”¹¹¹

The decree’s final paragraphs best illustrated how the government’s efforts to rejuvenate the national soul worked to exclude non-Catholics from being considered fully Argentine. The authors maintained that the absence of Catholic education in the classroom led not only to atheism, moral depravation, and the systematic denial of God, but also “for *us Argentines* the destruction of one of our strongest bonds of national unity.”¹¹² Precisely whom

they included among “us Argentines” crystallized in the document’s subsequent sentence: “Official school without religion is an anti-democratic and unconstitutional school that does not prepare a child for the supreme honor to which *every argentine can aspire*, that is, to be President of the Nation.”¹¹³ Of course, as Article 76 of the Constitution already established, not every Argentine could actually aspire to the presidency or vice-presidency, something which had been made perfectly clear in the decree’s preamble and upon which the decree’s entire Catholic education argument was predicated.¹¹⁴ Already legally barred from occupying the nation’s two highest political offices, non-Catholics had now been officially, if not somewhat unconsciously, excluded by the nationalist-led government from being regarded as true Argentines, if not Argentines altogether.

However, Martínez Zuviría and his collaborators did apparently recognize that their profound commitment to a Catholic vision of the Argentine State would engender strong opposition among longtime supporters of Law 1420, who for decades had championed *educación laica* or lay education. Hoping perhaps to dampen such opposition, the decree stipulated in a brief amendment that all non-Catholic students were permitted to attend “moral instruction” classes in lieu of Catholic education, so long as their parents “demonstrate their express opposition.”¹¹⁵ In practical terms, “express opposition” required non-Catholic parents wishing to excuse their child from Catholic education courses to present themselves before the school board and certify their choice by signing a waiver.¹¹⁶ While this exemption served perhaps as nothing more than political cover on the part of Martínez Zuviría and the government, its very inclusion by Argentina’s most ideologically-charged, adamantly pro-Catholic administration of the twentieth century arguably spoke loudly about Law 1420’s enduring national legacy.

Jewish reactions to the decree and its exemption were mixed. To the consternation of the traditionalist, AMIA-affiliated Jewish newspaper *Mundo Israelita*, some Jewish parents apparently did not care enough to take advantage of the exemption clause.¹¹⁷ While *Mundo Israelita* argued in 1944 that such attitudes reflected the high rate of Jewish apathy and assimilation prevalent at that time, the fact that some Jewish parents did not ask to have their child excused from Catholic education courses also suggests that these parents may not have regarded the decree's mandatory one-hour class in Catholic education as overtly threatening to their child's educational, cultural, or religious upbringing and/or may have felt, like other Argentines, that the 1943 nationalist-led government and Decree 18.411 represented "a fleeting act" in a country that long prided itself on liberal-secular education.¹¹⁸ For other Jewish parents, as Efraim Zadoff details in his study on Jewish education between 1935-1957, the deliberate and active process required to excuse their child from Catholic education classes— namely, to appear before the school board and sign a letter of intent— proved uncomfortable, unreasonable, and outright embarrassing and only served to reinforce their sense of "foreignness" as Argentines, particularly in light of the staggering news that began to emerge in 1943 regarding the destruction of European Jewry.¹¹⁹

Among those Jewish students who indeed attended the designated course in "moral instruction" rather than Catholic education, reactions were equally mixed. In a valuable series of interviews conducted by historian Haim Avni around the time Argentina was emerging from its infamous "Dirty War" (1976-1983), former Jewish Argentine students— all of whom were living in Israel at the time of the interviews— recalled their experiences in Argentine elementary and high schools shortly after the 1943 promulgation of Decree 18.411. A number of those interviewed remembered fondly their moral instruction classes, generally for one of two reasons: either because the teachers of those classes— described by one student as

“democratic, anti-clerical” individuals— tended themselves to oppose the idea of Catholic education in the classroom (and likely the nationalist-led government as a whole) or because the moral instruction classes offered those Jewish students a unique opportunity to become better acquainted with ‘current events’ not normally discussed in their regular classes.¹²⁰ One interviewee even proudly reminisced about how he was permitted in elementary school to play soccer rather than attend certain Catholic education classes, which, ironically, landed him a spot for the next seven years on the roster of the local Holy Anthony Church youth team after the soccer coach took note of his athletic prowess.¹²¹

Others among the Argentines Israelis whom Avni interviewed, however, spoke far less enthusiastically about their elementary and high school experiences following the promulgation of Decree 18.411. Many pointed to the “Catholic nature” of their moral instruction courses, maintaining, in the words of one former student, that “Christian morality was [nevertheless] taught, from books that were written by people who were militant Catholic teachers...[including] many who were anti-Semites.”¹²² Many also acknowledged, including some of those above who held fond memories of their moral instruction classes, that the very act of physically having to change classrooms to attend the “non-Catholic” courses while their Catholic (and some of their non-Catholic) counterparts remained in their original classroom to receive Catholic instruction accentuated a (prior) sense of marginality or otherness— something echoed by several Jewish Argentines whom I interviewed in Buenos Aires in 2001-2002 about their Catholic educational experiences in the 1940s. And yet despite any aggravation or embarrassment that Jewish students and parents may have felt, or any frustration that DAIA officials may have experienced in the first few months of 1944 after unsuccessfully attempting to negotiate with the CNE an automatic exemption for Jewish students, the mere existence of the non-Catholic exemption by a reactionary Nacionalista-led government again served as a

testament to the continued strength of Argentina's liberal-secular narrative during this profoundly undemocratic period.

Despite the government's general policy of political and intellectual censorship, Decree 18.411 still sparked a relatively vocal public debate about the nationalist-led government's restricted definition of *argentinidad*, one that heated up after new CNE Superintendent, Dr. José Ignacio Olmedo, published a series of controversial articles in early-1944 in Argentina's leading newspaper *La Nación* re-affirming the need for Catholic education in the classroom. Echoing two central tenets of the decree itself, Olmedo articulated, as the following passage illustrates, a two-tier classification of Argentines based expressly upon religion:

True argentines are not only those born in this land, but rather the lovers of her traditions, and therefore, the religion of our elders... [T]rue Argentines are not those who renounce our historical heritage, deceived by exotic doctrines [...and then] conspire to deform a child's soul, violating the religious and moral principles and precepts of our nationality, separating oneself in this way from the noble and permanent ideals of God, Country, and Home. ...Such a privilege means to grant *the full range of political rights to those Argentines who belong to the Catholic religion* ... it creates a *capitis diminutio* [diminished status] for non-Catholic Argentines.¹²³

Like Decree 18.411, Olmedo suggested, first, that birth alone in Argentina did not guarantee one to be fully Argentine and, second, that "true Argentines" [*verdaderos argentinos*] invariably had to pertain to the Catholic faith. At the same time, Olmedo, in his official capacity as head of the CNE, went one significant step further: whereas the authors of the 1943 decree denied non-Catholics a measure of cultural legitimacy by failing to recognize, consciously or not, that they in fact were not among the 'every Argentine who could aspire to the presidency', Olmedo clearly had relegated non-Catholics to a secondary or diminished class of citizenship that, on paper, threatened their full political and constitutional rights. In reality, Jews and other non-Catholic Argentines did not suddenly lose their civil liberties, yet Olmedo's remarks did represent an unprecedented layer of religious and cultural chauvinism that reminded Jewish Argentines in particular— given the news coming from Europe about the Holocaust and the

recent wave of attacks in select Argentine cities on various Jewish establishments— how outspoken and influential elements of the populace had more than once relegated them to the margins of Argentine society where they were tolerated rather than embraced.

In response to the decree in general and Olmedo's narrow conception of *verdaderos argentinos* in particular, Argentina's second-most prominent daily *La Prensa* published an incisive rebuttal in April 1944 entitled "Who Are Argentines," in which it underscored that birth in Argentina, and nothing more, guaranteed unequivocal and absolute citizenship. Drawing on Article 1 of Argentina's Citizenship Law of 1869, the newspaper reminded the nation that "all individuals born or to be born in the territory of the Republic, regardless of the nationality of their parents" are Argentine, and then emphatically added "Argentine, truly Argentine, without reservations nor limitations of any kind."¹²⁴ The daily criticized Olmedo for even implying that non-Catholic Argentines— whom it argued honored all the principles of the Constitution, served in the military like all others, and were prepared to die for the *patria*— were in any way less "Argentine." A committed advocate of the nation's liberal, secular, and democratic narrative and a vocal opponent of both the 1930 and 1943 military regimes— particularly after the Ramírez administration imposed strict limitations on press freedoms on December 31, 1943— *La Prensa* directly challenged Nacionalistas and their right-wing supporters who "insinuate that *argentinidad* is the patrimony of those who think in a given manner."¹²⁵

La Prensa also astutely recognized that both Decree 18.411 and Olmedo's remarks about *verdaderos argentinos* marginalized not only non-Catholics, but potentially Catholic Argentines as well. Two days before *La Prensa* published its bold April 23 editorial, Olmedo had also delivered an official speech in which he reaffirmed the government's commitment to mandatory Catholic education:¹²⁶ "it is with pleasure," he asserted, "that I announce that [mandatory Catholic] education, longed-for by all true Argentines, will be administered in the

current school calendar.”¹²⁷ *La Prensa* took particular exception to Olmedo’s insinuation that “all true Argentines” somehow only included Catholic Argentines who *supported* Catholic education in public schools and not, say, those who advocated the maintenance of lay instruction embodied in Law 1420.¹²⁸ Not only had Olmedo drawn a clear cultural wedge between *verdaderos* and *non-verdaderos argentinos* centered around Catholic faith, but, in the eyes of some Catholics, also a similar distinction between true and non-true Catholics that appeared to hinge upon support of the nationalist-led government’s messianic Catholic pedagogical vision. In this sense, Olmedo’s remarks and *La Prensa*’s swift reaction underscored that the debate surrounding Decree 18.411 represented above all a clash between competing ideological camps over the meaning and control of Argentina’s historical-cultural mandate.

La Prensa’s April 23 editorial was also precipitated by the highly-publicized CNE dismissal of high school math teacher Esteban Rondanina. On April 22, Assistant Secretary of Public Instruction, Manuel Villada Achával, fired Rondanina for having threatened, in Achával’s words, “the authentic meaning of the Constitution and Argentine tradition” after the latter had published an article in *La Nación* championing the legacy of Law 1420 and publicly denouncing Decree 18.411.¹²⁹ Rondanina’s article in part read:

Argentina’s national school system...was the cultivator of a common bond, a ‘common religion’: that of constitutional principles that did not exclude the practice of all faiths. [...] The school of tolerance...has served to unite into a single idea of homeland the children of the men who arrived from all parts and with the most diverse religions...¹³⁰

A defender of the Generation of 1880’s vision of national integration, Rondanina spoke for the larger body of secular and democratic-minded (Catholic) Argentines who “despite professing the Catholic faith, did not wish that it be established as a topic of instruction in official [public] schools.”¹³¹ Rondanina’s sincere, if romanticized outlook epitomized the stuff of the nation’s longstanding liberal dream, which despite some conspicuous hiccups— such as the *Semana*

Trágica— continued to represent the hopes and expectations of Argentina’s liberal democratic majority. The 1944 Achaval-Rondanina-inspired debate over the role of Catholic education in Argentine schools— which at its core represented a cultural dispute over the direction of the nation’s invented collective tradition— resurfaced in dramatic fashion in March 1947 after Congress, under Peronist control, sought to ratify Decree 18.411.

Perón and the Question of Catholic Education

Between 1944 and 1947, Argentina’s political and social landscape underwent a monumental transformation that continues today to shape the course of the nation’s still fragile evolution. Coronel Juan Perón, one of the leaders of the June 4, 1943 nationalist-led coup, had skillfully maneuvered by 1946 to become Argentina’s first ever working-class-backed president. After interim President Ramírez broke off relations with the Axis powers in early-1944, an angry military replaced him with Edelmiro J. Farrell. Under Farrell, Perón quickly rose to become Minister of War while continuing to head the heretofore neglected Department of Labor. As he climbed the political ladder and garnered the critical support of the labor movement that would soon “propell him to the presidency,” Perón, ever the pragmatist, also worked to remove from key government posts many reactionary Nacionalistas whom he did not trust and replace them with his own allies.¹³²

Perón’s political battle with right-wing nationalists culminated in July 1944 when, following a tense internal struggle for the vice-presidency, he defeated Minister of Interior and leading Nacionalista General Perlinger. Perón’s victory prompted Perlinger to resign from the government, taking many of his key Nacionalista supporters with him; in the process, Perón further solidified his support among key members of the military and dealt Nacionalista (June 4) revolutionary aspirations a devastating blow.¹³³ Together, Farrell and Perón gradually began to

loosen some of the authoritarian measures adopted by the Ramírez administration. For instance, press and free speech restrictions were eased (although not abandoned), universities regained a degree of their cherished autonomy, and the ban on political parties was lifted. In political deference to the Church and traditionalist sectors within the military, Farrell and Peron did not, however, overturn the Nacionalista decree of mandatory Catholic education in the classroom.

Moreover, as World War II slowly drew to a close and an Allied victory appeared inevitable, the military government headed by Farrell was finally obligated to declare war on the Axis and embrace, or at least seemingly embrace, American and, by extension, domestic calls for a return to democracy. With elections slated for February 1946, two political groups emerged in 1945 as the frontrunners for the presidency: Perón, the logical choice of much of the military (particularly among those young, and increasingly powerful, officers in the Grupo de Oficiales Unidos or GOU loyal to Perón), pitted against the *Unión Democrática*, a coalition of Radicals, Socialists, Communists, *Demiprogresistas*, and some Conservatives who together opposed Perón or any other military candidate. On September 19, 1945, the Unión Democrática sponsored its impressive March for Freedom and the Constitution, which brought together in the streets of the capital tens-of-thousands predominantly middle-class, and some anti-peronist working-class, supporters of democracy. Although the march helped cement the Unión Democrática's budding political alliance, it also led many conservatives, who had gingerly joined the coalition, and pro-peronist working-class Argentines, some of whom initially supported the democratic union, to feel less wanted or welcome.¹³⁴

The Unión Democrática's shortsightedness proved Perón's political gain. From the time he took over the Department of Labor in 1943, Perón worked to transform a neglected political office into the future backbone of his presidential bid. Unlike any other government minister

before him, he reached out to labor leaders, offering them higher wages, increased benefits, and union protection before hostile employers in exchange for their political support. Under his direction, unions grew significantly in both size and power, and though union leaders did not immediately trust or embrace Perón, by late-1945 he had come to garner their critical support, particularly after the more middle-class-minded Unión Democrática snubbed many worker groups leading up to the September 19 rally. Certainly Perón's confident physical demeanor and his romantic involvement with star actress Eva Duarte did little to harm his growing presidential ambitions among union leaders, pro-peronist workers, and other Argentines.

As he strengthened ties with the bulk of the labor movement, Perón also reached out to other key political constituencies. After helping to promote a split among Radicals (UCR), he formed an alliance with leaders of the newly-formed *UCR-Junta Renovadora* faction that at once served to undermine the Unión Democrática coalition and strengthen Perón's own political hand.¹³⁵ He also appealed directly to business and industrial leaders, playing on their enduring fears of an unorganized labor class and the 'persistent' threat of communism; Perón repeatedly sought to assure them that he was best positioned to guarantee labor stability in the postwar era. Similarly, Perón tried to convince his military colleagues, particularly his detractors, that he was most capable of combating any postwar social disturbances and of promoting a strong, stable corporatist state.¹³⁶

For the most part, business leaders remained skeptical of Perón. They regarded him, to borrow Alain Rouquié's evocative phrase, as a "pyromaniac fireman," in that Perón claimed to be able to put out any (labor) fire that, paradoxically, they felt he was responsible for igniting in the first place.¹³⁷ As Perón's popularity among the working class soared in the second-half of 1945, and he and Evita increasingly employed flamboyant pro-labor rhetoric in public, both liberals and right-wing nationalists within the military also grew ever more weary of the

colonel's rising stature and, particularly, his conviction that a strong state rested upon the shoulders of the popular classes.¹³⁸ Under growing pressure from the U.S. Embassy (and, to a degree, from the nation's vocal and now better organized "democratic majority"), Perón's critics within the military unexpectedly forced him to resign on October 8, 1945 and had him imprisoned in an effort to derail his presidential bid. As the military searched for a suitable replacement candidate, thousands of working-class Argentines, in an unprecedented show of popular force, poured into the Plaza de Mayo on October 17, 1945 and demanded their *líder's* immediate release. Aided by the backroom dealings of Perón's loyal supporters within the army as well as Evita's persistent rallying cries before the masses, energized workers that had gathered in the Plaza successfully managed to procure Perón's release; to the joy of his "jubilant subjects," a free Perón, on the evening of the 17th, suddenly appeared before them from the balcony of the Casa Rosada and announced his official candidacy for the upcoming February 1946 presidential elections. That October day— ever since immortalized in the Peronist calendar— clearly defined *peronismo* as a workers' movement and visibly accentuated the longstanding divisions between the masses and many middle and upper-class elites.¹³⁹

Building on the momentum of October 17 and buoyed by Evita's ongoing public rhetoric and uncanny popular appeal, Perón won an impressive majority in February 1946, marking the beginning of a new political and social era in Argentine history.¹⁴⁰ Perón's historic victory, however, rested on more than just his unparalleled ability to mobilize the heretofore neglected working-class; he had also skillfully gained the (implicit and explicit) support of other, more established political forces in society, including many conservatives, nationalists, and, particularly, the Church. Forced to choose between Perón and the Unión Democrática, many conservatives preferred to cast their lot with Perón rather than side with their longstanding political rival, the Radicals, who constituted the core block within the Unión Democrática.

Similarly, Perón also received, in the words of Félix Luna, “considerable invisible support” from Nacionalistas, despite the fact that, over the past two-and-a-half years, Perón had regularly worked to undermine their political strength. They largely recognized, however, that Perón was the only presidential candidate who would continue to support religious education and fight to defend Argentine sovereignty against foreign intrusion— two central Nacionalista concerns.¹⁴¹

While Argentina’s working-class and Perón’s loyal band of military followers were most instrumental in Perón’s political victory, the Catholic Church also provided Perón with a key measure of political support. Although Church leaders did not necessarily approve of Perón’s populist strategy, they, like many Nacionalistas, felt that Perón was best suited to protect Decree 18.411, undoubtedly the single most important political issue before the Church in the 1940s, if not the past half-century.¹⁴² For the Church, the 1943 decree not only had marked the end of sixty years of religious and cultural ‘amnesia’ dating back to 1884, but also served to bolster greatly Church-State collaboration. Therefore, on November 15, 1945— three months before the presidential election— Argentina’s governing clerical body instructed all priests to read aloud the following document at all Catholic churches across the country.¹⁴³

No Catholic can be affiliated with parties or vote for candidates who include in their program [any of] the following principles:

1. The separation of Church and State...
2. The suppression of...the rights of religion, and particularly the religious oath and the words in our Constitution that invoke the protection of God, source of all reason and justice; because such suppression is equivalent to a public and positive admission of national atheism.
3. Secular education.
4. Legal [civil] divorce.

Although the above statement made no direct mention of Perón, it was clear— given that Unión Democrática leader José P. Tamborini openly supported Law 1420, civil marriage, and increased separation of Church and State— that the Church was instructing all (“true”) Catholic Argentines to vote for Perón.¹⁴⁴ While Perón may have won the election without the tacit blessing of the

Church, its political endorsement helped Perón achieve a far more comfortable margin of victory (300,000 votes) in 1946.¹⁴⁵

As president, Perón's alliance with the Church proved all the more meaningful given his ambitious program of political sovereignty, economic independence, and 'social justice'. During his first term in office (1946-1952), Perón sponsored more significant reforms and legislation than practically any president before him. Those reforms centered upon, to paraphrase Donald Hodges, fortifying and extending peronist bureaucratic control over the nation's affairs and enlarging the public sector at the expense of local and, particularly, foreign capitalists.¹⁴⁶ Specifically, Perón promoted policies dedicated to the industrialization of the country and the development of a native industrial class; the political rise of organized labor and improved living conditions for the working class (funded in large measure by a war and post-war financial surplus); women's suffrage; government control of newspapers and broadcasting networks; tighter control of the courts and the deliberate appointment of judges, and the nationalization of foreign-owned companies that were in control of Argentina's electric, oil, and railroad resources. These and other reforms helped pave the way in March 1949 for the promulgation of a new Argentine Constitution that reflected and further consolidated the political, economic, social, and ideological goals of the burgeoning peronist movement. If the biggest winners of Perón's emerging corporatist-like state were his supporters within the military, the bulk of the working class, those tied to the public sector, the poor, and a budding national industrial class, then its principal losers were middle class liberals, the landowning oligarchy, native capitalists, foreign investors and all others among those various social groups who historically had placed a premium on things like civic freedom or unmitigated commercial ties with British and American merchants, companies, or financiers.¹⁴⁷

Recognizing that his national peronist project threatened some of the traditional interests of established and influential sectors such as the landed and commercial elites, the ever pragmatic Perón was eager to cement his domestic alliance with the Church. To that end, as president he quickly appointed several clerics to key government posts and regularly began to attend Catholic religious ceremonies in his official capacity as head of state. Moreover, he ordered *Día de la Virgen de Lujan*— a Catholic religious celebration dating back to colonial times— be made a national holiday and also incorporated, beginning in 1947, a Mass into the highly symbolic October 17 peronist “Loyalty Day” celebrations.¹⁴⁸ Yet nothing Perón said or did pleased the Church more than the remarks he made on a February 19, 1946— days before the presidential election— in a newspaper interview with *La Época*: “I have sworn to listen and satisfy the yearning of the Argentine people, and by overwhelming majority, they want religious [Catholic] education for their children; it must be maintained and increased with the greatest determination, which, moreover, corresponds to an intimate conviction of my spirit.”¹⁴⁹

A little more than a year later, in March 1947, Perón instructed the democratically-elected, peronist majority in Congress to ratify Decree 18.411.¹⁵⁰ In formally legalizing Catholic education by way of ‘democratic’ vote— Decree 18.411 would now become known as Law 12.978— Perón fulfilled his most important campaign promise to the Church and, in the process, secured the Church’s all-important institutional backing for his nascent and ambitious national movement.¹⁵¹ Perón motivations were largely political and less the result of personal religious convictions.¹⁵² In fact, Perón astutely recognized that traditional Catholic education— with its emphasis on values like “faith,” “family,” “authority,” “order,” and “morality”— provided him with yet another valuable vehicle with which to diffuse his peronist doctrine: through Catholic education and his alliance with the Church, he saw the opportunity to transmit to a new generation of “faithful subjects” his populist, corporatist vision of political sovereignty,

economic independence, social justice, and national order and unity that stood at the heart of the New Argentina he too aimed to construct— with himself, of course, planted firmly at the helm.¹⁵³

The heated congressional debates of March 1947 that led to the ratification of mandatory Catholic education reflected and reinforced Perón's underlying political and cultural agenda. At the same time, they also provide a lens into the opinions and attitudes of elected Peronist and non-Peronist officials— in spite of, or perhaps because of, Perón's express mandate to Peronists to secure the necessary congressional vote— regarding the role of religion in public life, their respective visions of the nation's history, and, most importantly, their understanding of what it meant to be "Argentine" at that particular historical moment. The five extraordinary parliamentary sessions held between March 6-14, 1947 spoke to the ways in which a cross-section of politically powerful Argentines conceptualized notions of race, ethnicity, citizenship, and nationality during the apex of peronism.¹⁵⁴ Their competing visions of *argentinidad*, which can be interpreted as a public contest over contending narratives of the nation's past, shed significant light on the meaning, boundaries, and limitations of Argentine identity in the 1940s, particularly the nuances surrounding the cultural notion of *doble lealtad* ("dual loyalties") and the paradoxes produced by Peronism.

Although Perón (and Peronists) and many Nacionalista officers, politicians, and intellectuals disagreed after June 4, 1943 over whether state power should rest on the shoulders of the popular classes, together they shared the belief, though not necessarily for the same reasons, that Hispanic cultural traditions embodied the supreme values of the nation and, by extension, the state. That is, both groups embraced an Argentine cultural spirit centered around ideas of "order," hierarchy," "morality," "homeland," "character formation," and "national purification," all of which were closely linked to a public affirmation of "Catholicism." The

ratification of mandatory Catholic education in March 1947, therefore, represented a pillar in their anticipated construction of, to borrow from nationalist-leaning Peronist and leading congressional proponent of Law 12.978 Joaquín Díaz de Vivar, an “authentic Argentine tradition” that would revive and preserve “our most genuine cultural values.”¹⁵⁵

In many ways, the animated congressional debates of March 1947 constituted an ideological and cultural referendum over precisely what was meant by terms like “authentic” Argentine and “genuine” Argentine. For congressional proponents of Law 12.978, such as Guillermo F. Lasciar and Manuel García, the debates signaled a renewal of *hispanidad* aimed at publicly discrediting Argentina’s longstanding liberal-secular tradition embodied in Law 1420; over the course of those five congressional sessions, they passionately argued that a vote for Catholic education represented far more than acceptance of religion in classroom, but a declaration of support for “the future of Argentine culture” and the maintenance of “our proper nationality.”¹⁵⁶ Congressional opponents of Law 12.978, such as Silvano Santander and Cipriano Reyes, countered by reiterating their support for the Generation of 1880’s sixty-year-old non-parochial, integrationist vision, insisting that ratification in 1947 of the controversial 1943 decree fundamentally threatened, in the words of Unión Democrática representative Antonio Sobral, “the principle of freedom of consciousness” at the heart of Law 1420, thus “pav[ing] the way for intolerance.”¹⁵⁷

In their efforts to champion a “Hispanic ethic” for the nation, the peronist majority and their nationalist supporters insisted that Catholicism constituted the “etiology of Western civilization.”¹⁵⁸ In a powerful and ironic historical twist, they refashioned (not unlike Ezequiel Martínez Estrada had done in his historic 1933 novel *Radiografía de la Pampa*) Sarmiento’s classic nineteenth-century articulation of “civilization” and “progress” to correspond now to an expression of unpatriotic “barbarism” and “backwardness.” Rather than equate mass

immigration and a liberal, positivist model of economic and political development with national eminence and growth, they traced the advent of true civilization, and, by extension Argentina's cultural legacy, back to the Roman Catholic Empire and especially through to the Spanish Catholic Conquest of the New World. In this sense, they came to regard the Congress of 1884 that had given rise to Law 1420 as a "fraudulent parliament" that had breached the nation's organic historical trajectory. In supporting Law 12.978, they set out to extinguish that sixty-year-old "amnesia of our authentic historical past" and return Argentina to her "true historical bedrock."¹⁵⁹

For proponents of Law 12.978, Argentina was— in terms of her history, her Constitution, and the collective religion of the overwhelming majority of her inhabitants— a Catholic republic, and, therefore, to deny Catholicism was to deny her inherent *nacionalidad*. "Our tradition is Christ," proclaimed Peronist diputado Guillermo F. Lasciar, "and to go against that tradition is to be against Christ. ...In that tradition we discover the Argentine soul and the singular traits shared by the civilized peoples of the world. To renege on that tradition is to renege [our] nationality."¹⁶⁰ Echoing Lasciar's quasi-messianic vision, fellow Peronist Manuel García declared: "I do not accept nor validate an Argentina that is not Catholic, because an Argentina without Catholicism is exactly equal to a dish of hare without the hare. Our origin, our tradition, our beginnings, our present, and our past are to be found in true Christianity."¹⁶¹ Like their colleagues who spoke out in favor of mandatory religious education, Lasciar and García ultimately equated the "resurgence of Argentine dignity" with the "resurgence of faith"— Catholic faith to be sure.

While Díaz de Vivar, Lasciar, García, and numerous other peronist and nationalist diputados championed an Argentine State rooted in Catholic Hispanic cultural traditions, they also sought to include in their framework of *argentinidad* the descendants of the nation's

largest, though not specifically Hispanic, immigrant group. For instance, after extolling yet again the “sacred laws of Christ that arrived in America with the first Spanish conquistador,” García made certain to recognize Italian Argentines as having more than met the indispensable cultural requisites of citizenship. “At the beginning of the century,” he proclaimed on the floor of Congress, “Argentina opened her doors to the world’s immigrants. On our soil there arrived children from all corners of the earth, none more significant than the children of Italy, who share our common Catholic-Latino heritage, which is to say, they contribute with their spiritual assets so that our pueblo does not lose her faith.”¹⁶² Loudly applauded by the peronist majority, García’s explicit embrace of Italian Argentines was motivated as much by Argentina’s demographic and political realities as it was by any shared sense of culture or tradition; still, the fact that proponents of Law 12.978 never once sought during the March 1947 debates to embrace, let alone acknowledge Argentina’s non-Latin Catholics or non-Catholic inhabitants, particularly in light of the nation’s longstanding immigrant tradition, served as another vocal reminder of the more circumscribed expression of ethnicity, citizenship, and nationality they wished to construct for their country at that historical moment.

Several peronist diputados pushing for the ratification of Law 12.978 also drew on the *Semana Trágica* to reinforce these and other pro-Catholic opinions and attitudes. Indeed, they continued to regard the events of January 1919 as added justification for their vision of *argentinidad* they felt best suited the vitality of the nation. In two powerful instances, peronist diputados Manuel García and Eduardo Colom reminded their congressional colleagues of the ideological about-face pulled by former diputado and prominent Argentine writer Estanislao S. Zeballos, who, after having initially voted in favor of Law 1420 back in 1884, later publicly came to “recognize his error” following “the events of the Russian Revolution, [notably] that tragic week in January.”¹⁶³ García and Colom each made reference in Congress to an article Zeballos

had published in *Revista de Derecho y Ciencias Sociales* not long after the *Semana Trágica*, in which Zeballos held that “schooling without religion is responsible for the failure of our [national] education and the premature corruption of our youth.”¹⁶⁴ Having learned from the ‘lessons’ of the *Semana Trágica*, García proclaimed that Zeballos came to understand that the premise of non-religious education “must be rectified because [otherwise] we risk losing everything.”¹⁶⁵ For the vast majority of Law 12.978 supporters, preventing such a “loss” rested upon overturning Law 1420 and, to borrow from García himself in this instance, “not accept[ing], nor justify[ing], an Argentina that is not Catholic.”¹⁶⁶

Congressional opponents of Law 12.978 immediately took aim at the apparent “dangers” inherent in what they regarded as a narrow articulation of *argentinidad*. They consistently argued that mandatory Catholic education represented a “medieval-type reform” that fundamentally threatened the nation’s modern multi-faith and multi-ethnic charter enshrined in (Article 14 of) the Constitution and Law 1420.¹⁶⁷ “We support that which we have always upheld,” proclaimed leading Unión Democrática advocate Silvano Santander, and “we defend the law and with it the Argentine spirit that our nation always remains open to the best and most fecund possibilities of understanding and cordiality...The Argentine school system has provided many generations of graduates of all creeds an environment of tolerance and respect.”¹⁶⁸ Paying specific homage to Sarmiento and the Generation of 1880’s integrationist vision, Santander subsequently added that “educational neutrality represents the best way to foster harmony among Argentines.”¹⁶⁹

Indeed, in adamantly arguing against Law 12.978 and for the preservation of Law 1420, Santander and his colleagues felt, as did proponents of mandatory Catholic education, that the credibility of the nation’s entire collective memory was at stake. Determined to protect and reinforce the nation’s longstanding liberal-secular legacy, they depicted Argentina, romantically

at times, as “a country of immigration” where “all races can take root” and live free of “racial and religious problems.”¹⁷⁰ As their positivist-minded predecessors had back in 1884, they took particular exception with any peronist or nationalist attempt to link Argentina’s historical past with a circumscribed expression of hispanidad; they flatly rejected any vision of national identity that sought to establish, by way of Catholicism, a continuous and impervious historical and cultural bond between imperial Spain and independent Argentina. “I do not wish to exaggerate any historical or political truth,” argued anti-Law 12.978 diputado Luis Dellepiane “but I am left with little choice but to affirm in this House that the doctrine of ‘hispanidad’ put forth here signifies the abolition of the authenticity of our America.”¹⁷¹ “Those ties were severed,” insisted opponents of mandatory Catholic education, after Argentina broke away from Spain in 1810 and set out to chart her own modern, republican course throughout the remainder of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁷²

In their struggle to block Law 12.978 and (re)assert a secular, more ‘tolerant’ vision of the nation, congressional opponents also took particular exception with the peronist government’s decision to re-introduce the controversial 1944 Catholic education student coursebook entitled “Religious Instruction and One Hundred Lessons of Sacred History.”¹⁷³ Commissioned in the months after the June 4, 1943 coup by the then Nacionalista-led National Board of Education (CNE) and endorsed by the Church, the two-hundred and forty-page textbook echoed much of the quasi-messianic, Catholic Hispanic national vision outlined above.¹⁷⁴ For instance, after proclaiming in the opening sentence of the prologue that “the Christian religion extends to all parts of the world and to it we owe our civilization,” it went on to assert that “those who ignore the professed religion exhibit a sense of confusion.”¹⁷⁵ The book’s introduction affirmed that “*the first obligation that all men have is to become acquainted with and practice that true religion,*” by which, of course, the authors meant Christianity in

general and Catholicism in particular, and not the plethora, in their words, of “false religions” (which they never identified).¹⁷⁶

Opponents of Law 12.978 were incensed that such a document, distributed to tens of thousands of students throughout the country, bore the official stamp of “a State entity, namely the National Board of Education.”¹⁷⁷ Yet what most disturbed them was that the Church and its supporters used the textbook to shape and attack not only lay education, but also other “civic laws of our country,” notably civil marriage.¹⁷⁸ For instance, in two sections entitled “Matrimonio Civil” and “El Concubinato,” the government-sponsored, Church approved textbook educated teachers and students that “only a religious marriage is valid and [he or she] who does not have it sanctioned by the Church is not [considered] married.”¹⁷⁹ Indeed, all marriages not consecrated by the Church— whether among Catholics or non-Catholics— were ultimately regarded in the textbook as “concubine unions.”¹⁸⁰

Such language led opponents of mandatory Catholic education not only to push harder to preserve the tenets of Law 1420, but also to defend more vocally and explicitly the constitutional and cultural rights of the nation’s non-Catholic minority. After reminding his congressional colleagues that “religious freedom is guaranteed by the Constitution,” Partido Laborista diputado and (non-peronist) labor advocate Cipriano Reyes spoke out against the specific hazards of the textbook’s marriage provision:

To introduce religious education would create problems for non-Catholic children that they would not be prepared to resolve mentally. [Indeed,] marriage is a sacrament. Yet for the Church, a marriage that has not been sanctified by a [Catholic] minister of God is not valid. A Jewish, Muslim, or Orthodox child would [therefore] view his parents as being immersed in a transgression of lust, as living in an irremediable state of sacrilege.¹⁸¹

The distinguished historian Emilio Ravignani, one of the leading and most articulate defenders of Law 1420, was even more blunt: “In no way should children be taught, given the moral

responsibility that we attach to the Argentine school system, that parents who do not profess the Catholic faith are concubines. It is pejorative... which makes such teaching unacceptable.”¹⁸²

Without ever disparaging the Catholic faith, these and other diputados underscored the responsibility of the nation’s schools to embrace a heterogeneity of beliefs, attitudes, and opinions while also expressing a commitment to traditional family values. The Argentine educational system, proclaimed Gabriel del Mazo, needs to be open to and considerate of “all Argentines of all faiths, [including those of] no religious faith at all.” “Public education,” he continued, “should not be a center of either religious or antireligious propaganda...It should promote a sense of tolerance and understanding; [however] not a tolerance of indifference, but rather one of affection towards distinct faiths and creeds much like that exhibited towards [different] sentiments and ideas.”¹⁸³ Building directly upon del Mazo’s address, Juan J. Noriega added that “in a country as expansive as our own, home to all types of climates and where all races can take root, it is a foolish mistake to implant but a single faith that is not shared by all.”¹⁸⁴ Why seek to mandate in Argentina such “religious homogeneity,” echoed Oscar López Serrot, “given how much harm it has caused and continues to cause Spain with her [history of] expulsion of Muslims, Jews, Protestants, and atheists.”¹⁸⁵

The congressional debates leave little doubt about the seriousness of these liberal-minded diputados— particularly after thirteen years of the Infamous Decade, the Nacionalista coup of June 1943, and, most recently, the advent of Perón and peronismo— to defend religious tolerance and protect the constitutional rights of Argentina’s non-Catholic minorities. That said, from time to time, even the staunchest defenders of Law 1420 exhibited a subtle Catholic bias that underscored Argentina’s decidedly Catholic character. In one instance, Silvano Santander— who, along with Emilio Ravnani, represented the most vocal and articulate congressional opponent of mandatory Catholic education— championed, as he had many times before and

would again later, national values like “freedom of faith,” “respect and tolerance of all creeds,” and the “guarantee of liberty for all.” Yet in the midst of his passionate discourse, Santander proclaimed that, indeed, “Catholicism is the religion to be supported by the State. In this matter there can be no discussion.”¹⁸⁶ Similarly, diputado Absalón Rojas, an ardent opponent of mandatory Catholic education, reminded all of his congressional colleagues, friends and foes alike, that “we [here] are all Catholic,” to which party cohort Angel V. Baulina immediately added “we are not against religion.”¹⁸⁷

Perhaps Santander, Rojas, Baulina, and other opponents of Law 12.978 felt that in order to best defend the nation’s liberal-secular tradition in a hostile Congress they needed first to acknowledge their Catholic cultural credentials. Even if indeed they were motivated by a sense of political showmanship or bravado, their remarks nonetheless suggest that, at a given moment, even these ardent supporters of Law 1420 accepted the necessity of a Catholic shading of public life. At no time during the congressional debates was this more evident than when prominent Radical diputado Horacio Honorio Pueyrredón took the floor.¹⁸⁸ In the opening lines of one of the most intriguing addresses during the five parliamentary sessions, Pueyrredón quickly let it be known that he was speaking out in his capacity “as a militant Catholic.”¹⁸⁹ Sensing that Pueyrredón, a high-ranking member of the Unión Democrática minority, was set to cast his support for mandatory Catholic education, the Peronist majority loudly applauded the former governor’s opening remarks.

About a third of the way through his protracted address, however, Pueyrredón dexterously asserted— to the chagrin of the Peronists and to the delight of his Unión Democrática colleagues— that that he would vote against Law 12.978 “because every man has the right to his liberty...and because, at its root, this reform [Law 12.978] is contrary to religious freedom and adds nothing to the progress of Argentine public education.”¹⁹⁰ Yet no sooner

after making those remarks, Pueyrredón added: “[Still] I want to remind everyone that lay schooling is not atheist schooling, but rather Christian schooling, profoundly Christian, where God is present even without the obligation of mandatory religious education because He is present in the home and in the Nation.”¹⁹¹ Before giving way, Pueyrredón then shared with his colleagues the words of, as he put it, a “humble [Catholic] priest of God:” “faith is a product of persuasion, and not of imposition.”¹⁹² Judging by the energetic applause— arguably the most vocal of the congressional sessions— afforded to Pueyrredón as well as the number of congratulatory handshakes he received at that moment from various diputados, it appeared as if he had struck a significant cultural chord that went beyond mere rejection or support of Law 12.978.¹⁹³ While it is difficult to gauge with any certainty the individual sentiments of the seated congressmen as they listened to a fellow diputado’s address, Pueyrredón’s vision of *argentinidad*— one which ultimately rejected *mandatory* religious education as insensitive of minorities, yet still welcomed a certain public Argentine expression of Catholicism or Christianity— resonated even among the most dedicated advocates of a liberal, secular, and integrationist-minded national tradition.

Public Reactions to Law 12.978

Given their historic significance, the congressional debates of March 1947 sparked great public interest, so much so that beginning in January diputados were required to hold a series of preliminary sessions to outline what regulations and security measures would be adopted in light of the large number of Argentines eager to attend the March sessions.¹⁹⁴ Indeed, the newspaper *Noticias Gráficas* reported in January 1947 that a “great number of people filled the balconies and reserve galleries” of the parliament building during those preliminary sessions as a result of “the general expectations that this important initiative [the upcoming March debates

over mandatory Catholic education] had generated.”¹⁹⁵ As expected, the visitors gallery was also filled to capacity during the five March sessions; interestingly, *La Prensa* noted that, indicative perhaps of the traditional private and public role of women in education, it “was predominated by ladies.”¹⁹⁶

In the weeks and days leading up to the debates, as well as during the debates themselves, various Argentine individuals, groups, and organizations employed newspapers, city walls, classrooms, and public rallies to voice their support for or opposition to the proposed Catholic education bill. On the eve of the first debate, the nationalist-leaning, right-wing *Acción Católica Argentina* and the far more moderate *Unión Popular Demócrata Cristiana* held respective marches in Buenos Aires— both of which culminated at the steps of Congress— in support of Law 12.978. That same day, the recently-formed *Acción Laíca Argentina* held a counter-rally in “Defense of Law 1420” at the popular Plaza Once, during which guest speaker and former diputado Fabián Onzari openly rebuked “the intervention of the Church in the schools” and reminded his sympathetic audience that “every parent, [whether] Jewish, Protestant, Muslim, or of any faith should have the right to choose for their children their religion without impositions of any kind.”¹⁹⁷ Police officers eventually were forced to cordon off the plaza in order to protect the *Acción Laíca* demonstrators after a pro-Catholic education group confronted them from across the street; whether *Acción Laíca* members were subsequently responsible for two separate attacks later that week on the Buenos Aires offices of the militant *Acción Católica* is not clear.¹⁹⁸

The majority of groups who spoke out in March 1947, like *Acción Laíca*, opposed the proposed Catholic education bill; in protesting Law 12.978, some also seized the opportunity to criticize publicly the peronist government which had sponsored it. For instance, as might be expected from a secular-minded group in direct competition with Perón for the political backing

of urban workers, the Socialist Party held an open pro-Law 1420 rally on March 14, during which present and future party notables such as Americo Ghioldi, Walter Costanza, Manuel Palacin, and Delfín Gallo individually denounced both the pro-Catholic law and the current peronist administration. The Socialistas also made their views clear in a public statement they released in the week before their March 14 rally. The statement reaffirmed the party's support of "the principles of tolerance" and castigated Peronists and their Nacionalista 'predecessors' for dismissing the 'Argentine' ideals embodied in Law 1420:

...workers in particular and citizens in general should reflect upon this lamentable episode [the proposed education law] and should realize that the political adventure brought upon by the June 4 [1943 nationalist coup] and February 24 [1946 election of Perón] movements has failed to reinforce the political and cultural assets of the [Argentine] people and, instead, has served to augment the power of what typically has been called the Altar and the Sword.¹⁹⁹

At this time, a collection of Argentine teachers and educators also began increasingly to voice their opposition to any bill intended to supplant the principles of Law 1420. Like many Unión Democrática diputados, these teachers and educators took particular exception with the militant anti-laicista attitudes adopted by the Ministry of Education, including its sponsorship (in close cooperation with the Church) of the aforementioned textbook "Religious Instruction and One Hundred Lessons of Sacred History." In protesting mandatory Catholic education as a troubling symptom of the growing intersection between Church and State in public life, these teachers simultaneously expressed their opposition to what they saw as attempts by the Peronist government to disseminate through public schools Peronist doctrines that would further undermine the legitimacy of longstanding liberal secular values that they felt modern Argentina was predicated upon. This rift between teachers and educators and Perón grew steadily after the March 1947 debates, leading Perón to respond as he knew best: later in 1947, he disbanded the existing teachers alliance and created a new official syndicate of educators—the *Unión de Docentes Argentinos*— which hired new teachers and rewarded existing teachers

loyal to the peronist cause while ostracizing, and sometimes outrightly persecuting, any educator who opposed Law 12.978 and other peronist party ideals.²⁰⁰

In addition to the expected anti-peronist individuals and groups opposed to Law 12.978, various groups with strong peronist predilections also spoke out against mandatory Catholic education. In the week leading up to the March congressional debates, the union of shoe workers (*Sindicato Obrero de la Industria del Calzado*) sponsored a public rally at 665 Pichincha Street in Buenos Aires where leader Manuel Armengo delivered a moving speech entitled “In defense of lay education law 1420.”²⁰¹ Later that week, the non-Peronist *Unión Sindical Argentina*, an umbrella group representing some 110 different labor unions, publicly expressed its opposition to religious instruction in the classroom while praising the “democratic” benefits of lay education.²⁰² Similarly, the *Confederación General del Trabajo* (CGT), Argentina’s largest confederation of union workers and strong supporter of Perón, published an article in its own journal opposing mandatory Catholic education.²⁰³ Although it is difficult to gauge indeed how representative such an article was of the attitudes of the confederation’s one million workers, Peronist diputado and vocal proponent of Law 12.978, Guillermo Lasciar, was quick to publicly denounce the CGT article in the nation’s major newspapers, arguing that it did not mirror the mass of worker sentiment on the issue.²⁰⁴

Peronist dissent was also evident in Congress itself. “If the great majority of peronists favor religious education,” wrote the newspaper *El Mundo*, such a view “is not unanimous.”²⁰⁵ Specifically, *El Mundo* pointed to twelve Peronist diputados participating in the March sessions who refused, in an expression of support of lay education, to take the congressional oath over the Bible and in the name of God, choosing instead only to be sworn in by paying homage to the “patria” or homeland. Although it appears that the majority of those twelve dissenting Peronists ultimately voted in favor of mandatory Catholic education— Perón instructed Peronist

diputados to ensure the passage of Law 12.978— their actions, publicized by various other news organs, again spoke to the living legacy of Law 1420 even among those whom one might not have been expected to support it in 1947.

Jewish Reactions

Unlike various Protestant groups who, around the time of the debates, openly expressed their opposition to mandatory Catholic education, the DAIA (Argentina's central Jewish political and protective body) did not make any public statements in the months immediately preceding or following the March congressional debates.²⁰⁶ The last public statement the DAIA made was in October 1946 when, shortly after the Radical Party filed a motion in Congress seeking to annul Decree 18.411 altogether, Jewish leaders Moisés Goldman and Benjamín Rinsky sent an official letter to Ricardo Guardo, President of the Chamber of Diputados, to express the community's opposition to mandatory Catholic education. Goldman and Rinsky argued that ratification of the 1943 decree would “damage in letter and spirit the legal equanimity of Argentine Jews, by segregating Catholic students from those who were not [Catholic] and limiting the [principle of] freedom of faith guaranteed by the National Constitution.” In the same letter, they also reaffirmed their express support of Law 1420, maintaining that it “contributed to a sense of national unity and belonging among all students.”²⁰⁷

When the Radical Party's October motion to overturn the decree ultimately failed, and it became increasingly clear that the Peronist-controlled Congress would push in early-1947 for its ratification, the DAIA adopted a strategy of public non-engagement on the issue rather than further risk upsetting or alienating Perón and his administration. In his provocative book *Argentina, Israel, y los judíos*, Raanan Rein suggests that “the adoption by the DAIA of an active

posture [on the issue of Catholic education] could have come to identify the [Jewish] community even more with the Radicals, which could have caused difficulties in her relations with the [Peronist] government.”²⁰⁸ Such an apolitical strategy, however, grew increasingly difficult after the emergence in 1947 of the *Organización Israelita Argentina* (OIA)— in effect, Perón’s “Jewish group” that briefly competed with the DAIA to represent the Jewish community before national authorities. Fortunately for the DAIA, the influence of the OIA proved more symbolic than real, in large part because Perón ultimately did not pressure the Jewish community to adhere to the pro-Peronist OIA.²⁰⁹

While the DAIA avoided “publicly” protesting Law 12.978, it did “privately” campaign within Jewish circles to educate Jewish parents further about the issue and to encourage them, as again was permitted under the 1947 law, to petition their respective school boards to have their children excused from Catholic education courses.²¹⁰ In the weeks following the March 1947 ratification of the decree, the DAIA published the following advertisement in various Jewish newspapers:

The Decree [now Law 12.978] on RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

In schools expressly leaves open the option for those being educated not to receive said education when they profess a different faith.

It is the RESPONSIBILITY of JEWISH PARENTS to ensure that their children make use of this right, thereby avoiding any conflict of conscience. Therefore, you must firmly demonstrate your willingness, in [your child’s] respective educational establishments, to exempt your children from the [Catholic] religion classes.

Those needing any clarification or consultation can visit the Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (DAIA) 633 Pasteur Street, 5th floor.²¹¹

Jewish leaders made similar public calls to Jewish parents in the months following the promulgation of the December 31, 1943 decree. Yet in 1947, DAIA’s pleas took on an added measure of urgency that reflected the seriousness with which community members viewed the power and appeal of Perón and peronismo in Argentine society. No doubt many Jews, like other Argentine supporters of Law 1420, were deeply concerned in 1944 over the Catholic education

decree, yet many also felt, particularly after Farrell replaced Ramírez as President in April 1944, that the Nacionalista-led government and, by extension, the decree itself, likely would not last. Conversely, after the Radicals failed in October 1946 to annul the then three-year old decree and the Peronist majority subsequently ratified it in Congress five months later, more Jews apparently came to see mandatory Catholic education less as a passing Nacionalista fantasy and more as a permanent reconceptualizing of the relationship between Catholicism and the State.

In 1947, *Mundo Israelita*, at the time the Jewish community's principal Spanish-speaking newspaper, sought to communicate this added sense of urgency. On the same day that the DAIA released its above statement, *Mundo Israelita* published a lengthy editorial imploring Jewish parents to act on behalf of their children not only for their children's sake, but for the well-being, if not survival of the entire community. The opening paragraph of the editorial read:

The conversion of the decree into law, which mandates Catholic religious education in all of the nation's educational institutions, from primary school to university, affects the Jewish community more intensely than any other group that does not support this act. If the imposition of the Roman Catholic faith for Christians of other denominations and for atheists is a matter of individual conscience [*conciencia individual*], then for Jews it is also a question that concerns them as a community. In effect, the Jewish religion, notwithstanding her universal character, pertains exclusively to the people [*pueblo*] of Israel, with which it is wholeheartedly identified...In this sense, the Jewish religion is a national religion, one that does not look to proselytize among gentiles. Religion is thus one of her principle features that, if it [alone] does not define the makeup of a Jew, then it determines his separation from the community in the event it is replaced by another faith.²¹²

Although *Mundo's* editors may have been guilty of exaggerating the 'unique' condition facing Jews— Muslim Argentines, for instance, arguably faced equally imposing obstacles in March 1947— their position reflects a degree of apprehension felt by many Argentine Jews in the postwar and, particularly, peronist era. *Mundo's* editors were even more determined than in they were in 1944 to reach out to "all fellow Jews, observant or not" in order to ensure this time around that as many Jewish parents as possible act to exempt their children from Catholic education courses. Concerned over

the apparent growing secularization, assimilation, and apathy of some Argentine Jews, they wished to dispel any thoughts, particularly among those Jewish parents who “had paid little attention” to the 1943 Catholic decree, that the 1947 peronist law be seen as a “fleeting” directive, as some Jews had “erroneously” assumed three years earlier; the editors argued that if such “indifference was inexcusable” back then, it was only that much more hazardous and reprehensible now that the decree officially “has been converted into the law of the land.”²¹³

Apart from these calls from *Mundo Israelita*, the DAIA, and other Jewish organizations such as the more literary-minded *Sociedad Hebraica Argentina*, public Jewish reactions in 1947 to the new peronist law were relatively muted. In Spanish and Yiddish-speaking Jewish newspapers, there were, for instance, a handful of letters-to-the-editor from individual Jews that openly expressed their opposition to mandatory Catholic education and, like one from a Jedidio Efron, made specific reference to “the many voices of approbation heard in the Jewish street in response to the much-appreciated [*Mundo Israelita*] editorial.”²¹⁴ Although the degree to which these individual Jewish accounts represented the sentiments of the larger Jewish community is unclear, they do resonate with what historian Haim Avni discovered in the series of interviews he conducted in the early-1980s with more than fifty Argentine Israelis about their recollections of Catholic education in the 1940s, as well as with the testimonials a number of Jewish Argentines shared with me on the subject in 2001 and 2002. While a small minority of Jews felt no ill-effects or, in a handful of cases, even experienced some unexpected benefits stemming from courses in Catholic or moral instruction, the majority of Jewish students and parents likely experienced something negative—

ranging from simple feelings of awkwardness or embarrassment to outright anti-Semitism— that accentuated a sense of marginality or foreignness as Argentines.

The historical record includes no specific documentation of public Jewish reactions to the March congressional debates or to Law 12.978. Yet two telling articles in *Mundo Israelita*— neither of which dealt directly with the issue of mandatory Catholic education, yet both of which spoke to contested questions of national identity — make it possible to imagine how those events may have influenced Jewish Argentine attitudes in 1947 about what it meant to be “Argentine.” One, published in September 1947, spoke out against the continued tendency among Jewish community groups to affix the term “Argentine” to their organizational name. “Every [community] entity that is based and operates in the Republic,” the newspaper argued, “is by definition Argentine.” Singling out the AMIA (Asociación Mutualista Israelita Argentina) for no explicit reason other than that it constituted the largest and most visible Jewish organization in the country, the article concluded by calling “the appendage of the [term] ‘Argentine’ to the name Asociación Israelita a redundancy.”²¹⁵

The second article, published six weeks before the much-anticipated March congressional debates on mandatory Catholic education, focused on the Jewish community’s response to a devastating January 1947 earthquake that ravaged Argentina’s San Juan province. Like many other Argentine organizations, a number of Jewish groups quickly voiced their solidarity with the people of San Juan and set out to raise over seventy thousand pesos to help the victims of the natural disaster.²¹⁶ As these funds were collected, members of the Jewish community wondered whether or not Jewish organizations should package their donation as a distinctly ‘Jewish contribution’ or include it as part of a broader ‘national offering’. *Mundo Israelita*

described that dilemma in the following editorial on January 22 entitled “Jewish Participation in the National Sorrow:”

Opinions have emerged regarding the best way to organize the contributions of the Jews [israelitas]. Some have suggested that the community, in this emergency, should act as such. Others are of the belief that any [Jewish] aid should not assume a distinctive character, but rather should be added to the general [relief] campaign that is being carried out in the country. With this in mind, we believe it is necessary to clarify certain ideas in hopes of guiding the activities of our fellow Jews and avoiding any discord or chaos.

In our opinion, it would be a mistake for the community to assume a special role in this relief campaign. We Jews do not constitute a foreign group within the country. We are all part of the Nation and are all Argentines, and even if it is true that we have certain specific interests as Jews, our decision to come together to support those [common] interests is not intended to imply that we embrace a certain foreignness...we are Argentine citizens, to the same extent and possessing the same attributes as any Catholic [citizen] or those of any of our other compatriots of distinct races and creeds.

In line with such thinking, we have always maintained that when it comes to any national activity Jews should not develop a separate pursuit...

In light of the tragedy of San Juan, Jewish sentiments should identify wholeheartedly with those of the Nation...and with the rest of our fellow Argentines. In much the same way, no one has suggested carrying out a special campaign to aid any Jewish victims of the [San Juan] catastrophe.²¹⁷

These two articles reflect the sense of preoccupation shared by all immigrant (including second and third generation) or minority groups, whether in Argentina or abroad, over how best to negotiate and navigate the competing demands of “ethnic” preservation and “national” integration. However given all that had happened since the *Semana Trágica*— the rise of the Catholic Church and the spread of isolated, yet virulent anti-Semitic currents in Argentina; the destruction of European Jewry; the continued uncertainty surrounding the status of Jewish war refugees; the rise of Peronism and the ratification of Catholic religious education; and the postwar debate surrounding the establishment of the State of Israel— those Jewish anxieties on display here suggest that Argentine Jews struggled over best to manage notions of “doble lealtad” or “dual loyalty” — whether they be self-ascribed or nationally-prescribed. Just as it had in

January 1919, the Jewish community appeared to face an additional burden that most other Argentines were not forced to confront at the time of the mandatory Catholic education sessions.

Conclusion

In an evocative 1995 article, Lila Caimari aptly refers to the years 1946-1949 as the “Catholic period” of peronism and the “peronist period” of the Church; during those years, both parties benefited substantially from their working political and cultural alliance.²¹⁸ Gradually, however, as Caimari also points out, their relationship grew more strained, particularly as Perón came to place public loyalty to the peronist cause above all else, including the specific interests of the Church. As early as 1948, Perón began to suggest that being a “good” Christian entailed being a “good” peronist. Over the ensuing years, the Church also came to frown upon Perón and Evita’s steady intervention in “traditional” Church affairs, notably public education and charitable activities.

The growing strain between Perón and the Church became increasingly evident in 1952 following Perón’s convincing November 1951 re-election, Evita Peron’s premature death in 1952, and the early success of his Second Five-Year Plan. Without abandoning his six year-old working alliance with the Church, Perón gradually disassociated himself and his movement from Catholic nationalist currents, including those put forth by his former ultra-nationalist Minister of Education Dr. Oscar Ivanissevich. Perón even sought to project a more tolerant and less confrontational vision of *peronismo* aimed, at least in rhetoric, at uniting “all Argentines.” For instance, beginning in 1952, Peron instructed elementary and high school teachers to pay greater

respect to the religious freedom of non-Catholic students and to stop pressuring students to participate in Catholic education courses. Then in 1953, he authorized the publication and distribution of new peronist textbooks to all public schools, which, for the first time in his presidency, openly promoted the principle of “libertad de cultos” or “freedom of religion” enshrined in the 1853 Constitution and Law 1420.²¹⁹

One evocative illustration of this new message of respect and tolerance is a dialogue that unfolded between two fictitious young girls, Beatriz and Esther, in the new peronist textbook intended for second-graders.²²⁰ After Beatriz, a Catholic, enthusiastically informs her Jewish friend Esther about her upcoming Communion, Esther shares with Beatriz her fears about the possibility that she might not like her new Moral Instruction teacher.²²¹ Beatriz reassures Esther and then reminds her that no child should be forced to attend religious classes or services that run counter to one’s religious tradition; in the same breath, Beatriz also speaks to Esther about the necessity for all human beings to respect their fellow man’s choice of faith. Reassured, Esther then proceeds to thank President Perón directly for also allowing her to be excused from school during the Jewish Holidays and for not forcing her to publicly conceal her Jewish identity.²²² The dialogue concludes with Beatriz similarly praising peronism, notably the sense of unity it fosters among all Argentines.

The conflict between Perón and the Church reached a head in 1954. Determined to assert further the political and ideological primacy of peronism, Perón launched, in what proved to be the biggest miscalculation of his presidency, a series of anti-ecclesiastic attacks that effectively squashed his longstanding working alliance with the Church. Following a publicized confrontation in Córdoba between two high school student groups— one expressly Catholic and the other staunchly Peronist— during the

city's Student Day demonstrations, Perón openly challenged, first, the moral integrity of select Argentine priests and, finally, the power of the Church itself. Ultimately between late-1954 and early-1955, Perón banned all (Catholic) religious processions, legalized civil divorce, permitted brothels to reopen, proposed a constitutional reform mandating the separation of Church and State, and, perhaps most significantly, abolished 1947 Law 12.978.²²³ As Luis Alberto Romero points out, "everyone in the Peronist movement, with few exceptions, suddenly discovered the great vices of the Church," underscoring the degree to which relations between Church and State had changed since their halcyon days in the early years of Perón's presidency.²²⁴

Perón paid dearly for those political transgressions. Throughout the remainder of 1955, the Church responded quickly and assertively to Perón's public assault. In addition to sponsoring a number of religious processions, including a major one on June 8 in celebration of Corpus Christi, the Church, as perhaps only it could have, openly began to criticize the government-controlled media and flooded the capital with anti-peronist leaflets and other vocal forms of propaganda. In what perhaps proved to be the clearest barometer of its dissatisfaction with Perón, in 1955 the Church directly entered national politics with the founding of the Christian Democratic Party.²²⁵

A number of high-ranking military officers, who long ago had become disgruntled with Perón's authoritarian style, his regime's constitutional abuses, the agitation of the masses, and the ubiquitous presence of Evita in the public sphere, took immediate advantage of Perón's political blunder against the Church to forge the most powerful anti-peronist alliance yet.²²⁶ The burgeoning Church-military alliance also came to include the nation's powerful landowners and industrialists who, from the moment Perón first took office in 1946, were outraged by the high taxes they felt they

were forced to pay and, in the words of Félix Luna, “Perón’s crassly and aggressive egalitarian tendencies.”²²⁷

If Perón had hoped, in adopting an anti-Church platform and abolishing hotly-contested Law 12.978, to win over the support of liberal-minded, middle class politicians and intellectuals, he was mistaken. However much Perón and peronism had changed in the years after November 1951, many liberal democrats continued, until Perón’s overthrow in September 1955, to view Perón’s authoritarian regime as a partial extension of the Infamous Decade of the 1930s and the 1943 Nacionalista Revolution that had put an abrupt end to the Radicals’ pre-1930 experiment in representative and secular democracy. In their eyes, Perón’s post-1951 efforts, genuine or not, to put forth a more tolerant vision of peronismo and reshape the national discourse by promoting harmonious pedagogical accounts like that of ‘Catholic Beatriz’ and ‘Jewish Esther’ were continually overshadowed by Perón’s strict control of the media, the courts, universities, Congress, and other elements which they regarded as central to an open and ‘truly’ representative democracy.²²⁸

In siding on September 16, 1955 with the various anti-peronist forces, liberal-secularists were not merely rejecting Perón’s government. They were simultaneously voicing their unequivocal support— even if that meant indirectly and momentarily aligning themselves with the military and even the Church— of the nation’s pre-1930 integrationist vision of *argentinidad*, despite any shortcomings and disappointments, enshrined in Article 14 of the 1853 Constitution and historic Law 1420 that, since 1884, had mandated non-religious education. Perón’s elimination in 1954 of Catholic education Law 12.978 and his other anti-Church measures ultimately were not enough to convince those middle class Argentines that the secular and democratic “system of

values” that they long cherished was politically and culturally secure. Indeed, in the years after Perón’s 1955 ouster, Jewish and Catholic liberals, emboldened by their shared disappointment with both peronism and the political and cultural partnership between Church and State that had developed over the past quarter-century, looked to resuscitate the legacy of Sarmiento and Yrigoyen and, in the process, refashion a more ethnically and religiously inclusive vision of Argentine society.

On June 16, 1955, eight days after the Church’s symbolic Corpus Christi procession, a group of anti-peronist naval officers launched a surprise and bloody coup attempt aimed at killing Perón. They heavily bombarded the Casa Rosada; in the process they killed over three-hundred peronist loyalists gathered across the street in the historic Plaza de Mayo. Unfortunately for them, they neither captured nor killed Perón. In immediate aftermath of the June 16 bloodbath, pro-peronist supporters, perhaps with Perón’s tacit approval, set fire to several prominent churches in Buenos Aires, including the city’s principal downtown cathedral.²²⁹

Once the turmoil subsided, Perón opted not to respond with more violence, choosing instead a conciliatory approach. He reached out to select political opposition leaders (including Radical leader and future Argentine president Arturo Frondizi), inviting them to discuss the possibility of a more open and representative democracy. By late-August, however, Perón felt increasingly threatened by the demands of opposition forces. Abandoning the path of negotiation, he now prepared to launch a new wave of fierce attacks, this time on all anti-peronist groups. In what proved to be his final speech from the Casa Rosada balcony until he returned to power eighteen years later (in 1973), Perón proclaimed to his loyal supporters gathered before him in the Plaza de Mayo that “for every one of ours who falls, five of theirs will.”²³⁰

Perón's celebrated words from the balcony that he had helped to make famous turned out to be anything but prophetic. Before Perón's offensive ever began in earnest, General Eduardo Lonardi, an influential anti-peronist officer and one of the leaders of the failed 1951 Menéndez uprising, spearheaded another military revolt, this time in the city of Córdoba. Unlike the Menéndez uprising, this one, on September 16, 1955, quickly inspired other anti-peronist civilian, military, and Church forces to mobilize, including immediate calls from anti-peronist naval officers to provide Lonardi with aerial support over the Argentine coast.

Such support was never required. Perhaps worn down by the persistent barrage of anti-peronist activity set off by the Church in late-1954, surprisingly Perón and his followers resisted only half-heartedly, which, in turn, only further galvanized anti-peronists. Eight days after the uprising broke out in Córdoba, Perón reluctantly agreed to Lonardi's demand for his resignation and then quickly took refuge in the Paraguayan Embassy en route to Madrid where he would live in exile for the better part of the next two decades.²³¹ The following day, on September 23, 1955, Lonardi proclaimed— before a large, yet now overwhelmingly anti-peronist crowd gathered in the Plaza de Mayo— that he was the country's new provisional president.²³²

It has generally been presumed over the past fifty years that Argentine Jews constituted part, whether actually or metaphorically, of that (diverse) anti-peronist crowd gathered in the Plaza on that September day. That is, as Kurt Riegner first concluded in a 1955 article written shortly after the fall of Perón, the Jewish community was always fairly united in its opposition to Perón (1946-1955).²³³ Although little has been written since Riegner's article fundamentally to suggest otherwise, over the past dozen years scholars such as Lawrence Bell, Emilio Corbière, Ignacio Klich, Jeffrey

Marder, Raanan Rein, Daniel Sabsay, and Leonardo Senkman have helped demonstrate that Jews did not invariably oppose all things peronist and that a number benefited substantially under Perón.²³⁴ For instance, they have shown how 1) some Jews were initially inspired by Perón's egalitarian, pro-worker rhetoric and policies; 2) Jewish leaders of the Organización Israelita Argentina (in effect, Perón's "Jewish group" that competed briefly, yet ultimately unsuccessfully with the DAIA for national representation of the Jewish community) established surprisingly close working relations with the president; 3) a select number of Jews, including Pablo Manguel (OIA leader and subsequent Argentine ambassador to Israel) and José Ber Gelbard (a prominent pro-peronist businessman who later became a close economic advisor to Perón), secured high-ranking diplomatic and policy positions within the administration; 4) illegal Jewish immigrants living in Argentina, like their non-Jewish illegal counterparts, benefited greatly from Perón's 1948 amnesty provision; 5) even though ultra-nationalist, philo-fascist figures such as education minister Oscar Ivanissevich and national immigration director Santiago Peralta figured prominently in the peronist government, anti-Semitic violence appeared to wane under Perón (arguably because Perón was quick to eliminate any sign of social disturbance perceived to threaten his overall political stability); 6) after 1949, Perón openly expressed his support for the State of Israel; and 7) despite their ongoing fears of peronism, many Jewish businesspeople achieved significant financial prosperity under Perón.²³⁵

Why then did the great majority of Jews apparently oppose peronism?— largely for the same reasons that various Argentine opposition groups did, notably members of that diverse "democratic majority." Although Perón unquestionably symbolized a new kind of Argentine leader who was sensitive to the needs of workers and the masses,

many Jews still saw him as a partial extension of the Infamous Decade and the 1943 Nacionalista Revolution that had put an end to the Radicals 1916 experiment in representative democracy favored by many immigrant and middle-class communities. Moreover, as was the case with other predominantly middle and upper-class Argentines in the postwar era, Jews grew progressively skeptical of Peron and Evita's "crass" and "cunning" egalitarian and nationalist rhetoric directed at winning over, say, the rural, poor, typically darker-skinned, and largely uneducated *cabecitas negras*; in this respect, Jews certainly shared some of the class and racist tendencies exhibited by other anti-peronists between 1946-1955.

Above all, it was Perón's authoritarian style that most alienated many Jewish (and non-Jewish) Argentines. His strict control of the media, universities, the courts, Congress, and other elements they regarded as central to an open and representative democracy greatly dampened their trust of Perón and his national movement. Repeated violations of civil and constitutional liberties invariably were compounded by the lack of a clear separation between Church and State throughout much of Perón's presidency— something which made anti-peronists more likely to associate the peronist government with the Infamous Decade and the 1943 Revolution than with, say, a postwar American-style democracy.

For Jewish and non-Jewish supporters of Argentina's longstanding liberal-secular narrative nothing better encapsulated that objectionable intersection between religion and politics than the 1947 legalization of mandatory Catholic education. Of course, not all Jewish parents exercised their child's right to attend Moral Instruction classes, yet that should not necessarily diminish the likelihood, just as it should not for even the most non-observant or passive or fearful Catholic Argentine supporter of

educación laica, that they opposed Law 12.978. As the documentation and analysis in this chapter suggests, these Catholics and non-Catholics recognized well before March 1947 that mandatory Catholic education was about far more than simply religious instruction in the classroom; it constituted a key part of a broader post-1930 political and ideological initiative— one that itself was further transformed by Perón— to refashion, in the words of Loris Zanatta, Argentina’s “system of values.” As admirable as Perón’s egalitarian efforts may have been, anti-peronists of all ethnicities and religions understood that support of Perón and peronism largely meant letting go of key tenets of the nation’s nineteenth-century liberal-secular and integrationist vision of *argentinidad* enshrined in Article 14 of the Constitution and Law 1420. Having to relinquish *that* Argentine (immigrant) dream, despite its own shortcomings and disappointments, was apparently too much to ask.

However successful mandatory Catholic education was in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s in helping to reconstitute the nation’s longstanding liberal cultural narrative, ironically it also worked to strengthen the present and future legacy of Law 1420 among large numbers of Catholic and non-Catholic Argentines. In a fascinating 1991 introspective, Leon Klenicki, an Argentine-born Jew and a leading international advocate in the 1990s of increased dialogue between Jews and Catholics, provided one small, yet potent illustration of this emerging reality. Disillusioned by the intellectual and cultural “emptiness” he encountered as a young Jew growing up under peronism, and similarly dissatisfied by the lack of Jewish spiritual depth he found among his parents and grandparents, Klenicki embarked on an existential odyssey of sorts that led him to the works of progressive Jewish writers like Martin Buber, Franz Rozenzweig, and Milton Steinberg. In the process, he also came into close contact in the 1940s and 1950s with groups of young Catholic Argentines— themselves “rabid opponents” of the Perón regime and

its supporters within the Church— who, in their own search for intellectual and spiritual meaning, turned to avant-garde Catholic French writers such as Jacques Maritain, Emanuel Mounier, and Gabriel Marcel.²³⁶ This sort of rapprochement between Jewish and Catholic Argentines, largely set in motion by their shared disappointment with peronism and the political and cultural partnership between Church and State, helped shape the post-Peron agenda of the nation's "democratic majority," including efforts to resuscitate the longstanding legacy of Law 1420 and, in the process, refashion a far more inclusive and multicultural vision of Argentine society.

¹ In 1947, Peronists held a roughly two-thirds majority in the Lower House of Congress. As we shall see, in March 1947 Law 12.978 supplanted Decree 18.411, upholding mandatory Catholic education in all public schools. See Decreto 18.411, *Registro Nacional de Leyes y Decretos*, Buenos Aires, December 31, 1943; Law 12.978, "Ley Sabio," *Anales de la Legislación Argentina*, Buenos Aires, April 29, 1947.

² Ley 1420, Ley de Educación Común, *Anales de Legislación Argentina*, Capítulo I, Artículo 8, July 8, 1884.

³ Article 2 stipulated that the State must support ("sostiene") the Roman Catholic faith and Article 76 stated that the President and Vice-President of the Nation must be Catholic. *Constitución de la Nación Argentina (1853)*, Artículos 2 and 76.

⁴ Congreso Nacional, *Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, Diario de Sesiones*, *Anales de la Legislación Argentina*, March 6 and 7, 1947, p. 587.

⁵ As we shall see, Nacionalistas in general and the 1943 Nacionalista government in particular represented only a fraction of Argentine political and public opinion. However, they successfully courted significant support among members of the Argentine military and the Catholic Church, arguably the nation's two most influential political institutions in the 1930s and 1940s. Loris Zanatta employs both the terms "system of values" and "nación católica." See Loris Zanatta, *Del Estado Liberal y La Nación Católica: Iglesia y Ejército en los Orígenes del Peronismo, 1930-1943* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, 1996).

⁶ In the 1920s, Uriburu and many of his associates had played active roles in the *Liga Patriótica Argentina* and other right-wing nativist organizations.

⁷ Yrigoyen served two separate terms as president. He was first elected in 1916 and completed his term in 1922; he was then re-elected in 1928, yet served less than two years before being deposed by General Uriburu and his military-civilian alliance on September 6, 1930. For pre-1930 biographical details of Uriburu, see Robert Potash, *The Army and Politics in Argentina: From Yrigoyen to Perón, 1928-1945* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1969), 4-5; David Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina: The Nationalist Movement, Its History and Its Impact* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 88-89.

⁸ Increasingly, historians such as Sandra McGee Deutsch, Ronald Dolkart, Luis Alberto Romero, Cristian Buchrucker, Fernando Devoto, Félix Luna, and Loris Zanatta have paid closer attention to the marked political, economic, ideological, and cultural differences between Conservatives and Nacionalistas, or as McGee Deutsch writes, between the “old right” and “new right.” The old right traditionally represented the landowning oligarchs, import-export merchants, and big bankers with longstanding and close commercial ties to Western Europe, notably Britain. They were descendants of the “liberal” elite of the nineteenth century that had created Argentina’s constitutional and institutional structures; they supported ousting Yrigoyen and the Radical party in 1930 in order to return to the pre-1916 days of “national harmony” when they controlled the fate of Argentine elections through a sometimes less than intricate web of fraud, bribery, and corruption. However, it was important to these Conservatives that a semblance of “constitutionality” and “representative government” exist.

Nacionalistas, or the “new right,” consisted largely of upper and middle class nativist-minded Argentines who yearned to establish, to quote Romero, “a hierarchical society, like the Colónial one, not contaminated by liberalism [re: the positivist ideas of the Generation of 1880], organized around a corporate State, and cemented by an integral [i.e. messianic] Catholicism.” Strongly sympathetic of Franco, Mussolini, and even Hitler, Nacionalistas represented a reactionary, yet emerging voice in Argentina whose primary political aim was to reach the military, if not also the Catholic Church. Ultimately, they put forth a quasi-messianic project of “national salvation”— often xenophobic and, particularly, anti-Semitic in nature— that sought, in Dolkart’s words, to reconstruct the “country morally, politically, and economically.”

Over the course of the 1930s and 1940s, Conservatives became increasingly suspicious of Nacionalistas and often regarded them as too extreme, both ideologically and economically. Conservatives were most concerned that any Nacionalista political advance would jeopardize their lucrative commercial relations with Britain; such concern grew after Nacionalistas publicly disparaged Conservatives as *vendepatrias* (national sellouts) following the 1933 signing of the Roca-Ruciman Pact, an embarrassing, yet economically unavoidable commercial agreement with the U.K. that required Argentina to purchase British manufactured goods from all the proceeds of its fixed beef sales to the U.K.

⁹ It is not my intention here to suggest that the revitalization of the Catholic Church in Argentina necessarily implied a growth in xenophobia.

¹⁰ Ronald Dolkart, “The Right in the Decada Infame, 1930-1943,” in Sandra McGee Deutsch and Ronald Dolkart, eds., *The Argentine Right: Its History and Intellectual Origins, 1910 to the Present* (Wilmington: SR Books, 1993), 93.

¹¹ Counting the Uriburu coup, there have been six military interventions in twentieth-century Argentina: in 1930, 1943, 1955, 1962, 1966, and 1976, totaling twenty-three years of explicit military rule between 1930-1983.

¹² Laicismo (the “ism” of laico) refers to the secular and multi-faith educational principles embodied in Article 8 of Law 1420.

¹³ Potash, *The Army and Politics in Argentina: From Yrigoyen to Perón, 1928-1945*, 94.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ The term “faszi” appears in Félix Luna, *A Short History of the Argentinians* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 2000), 133-138.

¹⁶ It proved relatively easy for Uriburu to keep the *legalistas* at bay since he and Justo— who was both a political ally and a political threat given that he commanded much respect among military officers— together were committed to dismantling Yrigoyen Radicals. In the end, *legalistas* were forced to accept Uriburu’s new regime, retire, or face ‘exile’ to the interior of

Argentina. Uriburu could not afford, nor did he want, to treat Justo in a similar manner. Indeed, on several occasions he offered Justo top cabinet posts, but Justo always refused, preferring not to be directly associated with the more corporate and Nacionalista-minded Uriburu regime. Instead, Justo pushed for a prompt return of national elections, calculating that he was well positioned to become the nation's next constitutional president. See Potash, *The Army and Politics in Argentina: From Yrigoyen to Perón, 1928-1945*, 61-70.

¹⁷ The April 5, 1931 election was a decisive event in the history of the *Década Infame* (1930-1943) not only in that it spelled the political death of Uriburu, but, as Romero argues, it ended any Conservative illusion that it could defeat the Radicals in a clean and fair election. The result was a Conservative policy of systematic electoral fraud throughout the remainder of the Infamous Decade, which, according to Félix Luna, came to embody "a deep skepticism that had spread through Argentinian society about the validity of democracy." See Luis Alberto Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 63; Félix Luna, *A Short History of the Argentinians*, 143.

¹⁸ Justo's election victory was marred by serious fraud, which included 1) intimidating opposition voters, 2) threatening polling clerks so that they abandon their positions thereby enabling Justo's supporters to "count" the votes, 3) allowing citizens to vote freely, only later to disregard or switch ballot boxes, and 4) political assassinations. For a more detailed description, see Luna, *A Short History of the Argentinians*, 142-143. On a different note, it should also be pointed out that the Radical Party's 1931 policy of political abstention not only cost it any chance of victory during the presidential elections, but also cost the party dearly in Congress where it lost not only its majority voice, but indeed almost any voice at all.

¹⁹ Potash, *The Army and Politics in Argentina: From Yrigoyen to Perón*, 112.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

²¹ Although Roberto M. Ortiz was officially President from 1938-1942, in July 1940, because of a severe case of diabetes, he was forced to delegate authority to Vice-President Ramón S. Castillo, a staunch traditional conservative from Catamarca. Therefore, Castillo was effectively president from July 1940 until the June 1943 Nacionalista Revolution.

²² With respect to their ideological and political differences, Justo, for instance, maintained a much closer association with Britain and was far less willing than the more corporatist-minded Uriburu to alter Argentina's liberal *economic* system that long-benefited conservative oligarchic commercial interests. Therefore, although Justo— as we shall see— would come to establish close political ties with the Catholic Church and even come to blur the traditional separation between Church and State, he was less willing than Uriburu to abandon nineteenth-century liberalism entirely and adopt an explicitly corporate, non-secular state. If Uriburu then was the most Nacionalista and fascist-leaning, Ortiz (who actually was an Anti-Personalista Radical and not a Conservative) was the most "progressive"— relatively speaking— of the four *Década Infame* presidents. Not surprisingly, the Church, in its campaign to infuse Catholicism into schools and public life, made only modest headway under Ortiz when compared to Uriburu and Justo. Castillo, the last president of the *Concordancia*, was an outright Conservative from Catamarca (which to this day remains one of Argentina's most traditionalist provinces) and resembled Justo in ideology and politics, if not more of a rightist. He too was very supportive of the Church.

²³ Adriana Puiggrós, *Que Pasó en la Educación Argentina: Desde la Conquista hasta el Menemismo* (Buenos Aires: Kapelusz, 1996), 87- 88

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ So much so that in 1939-1940 conservative and Nacionalista Catholic politicians, educators, and ecclesiastics would pay public tribute to Terán in the same breadth as Mitre, Urquiza, and Avellaneda— Argentina's non-liberal Catholic nationalist canon figures. See Puiggrós, *Que Pasó en la Educación Argentina*, 92-93.

²⁷ The Pope's decision to launch a universal Catholic revitalization program in part was intended to compensate for the political concessions he had made to Mussolini in their 1929 Concordance. In it, the Vatican had agreed 1) not to intervene directly in politics, 2) to focus squarely on its religious and spiritual obligations, and 3) not to elect any ecclesiastic officials opposed to fascism. See Alberto Ciria, *Partidos y poder en la Argentina moderna, 1930-1946* (Buenos Aires: Jorge Alvarez, 1968); Cecilia A. Pittelli and Miguel Somoza Rodríguez "La Enseñanza Religiosa en las Escuelas Publicas durante el Primer Perónismo, 1943-1955," in Hector Ruben Cucuzza et al. eds., *Estudios de Historia de la Educacion durante el Primer Perónismo, 1943-1955*, (Editorial los Libros del Riel: Universidad de Luján, 1997), 42.

²⁸ Zanatta, *Del Estado Liberal y La Nación Católica*, 18.

²⁹ Dolkart, "The Right in the Decada Infame, 1930-1943," 81.

³⁰ In 1884, the Argentine Catholic Church was so disillusioned with the passage of Laws 1420 and 1565 (Ley de Registro Civil) that the two laws led to a rupture in diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Argentina from 1884-1900.

³¹ The Vatican's decision to allow Argentina to host the Eucharist Congress also serves as an indicator of the increasingly close relationship in the 1930s between the Vatican and the Argentine Catholic Church; the former increasingly viewed the later as a model example of its ideological, religious, and political expressions.

³² Marysa Navarro Gerassi, *Los Nacionalistas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial J. Alvarez, 1969), 128. Of this unprecedented Catholic mobilization, Alberto Ciria writes, in no uncertain terms, that it "allowed the government of General Justo to understand the importance of a measure of Catholic backing [to compensate] for his politics of 'fraud and privilege'." Ciria, *Partidos y poder en la Argentina moderna, 1930-1946*, 228.

³³ In addition to help cement relations between Justo and the Argentine Catholic Church, the 1934 Eucharist Congress also served to solidify the Church's ties with the Vatican. The Vatican was so encouraged by 1) the Congress' success in mobilizing Catholic Argentines, 2) the ensuing Justo-Church alliance, and 3) the prospects and ideological direction of Argentina's revitalized Catholic movement that it awarded Argentina three new archbishops and, most significantly, Latin America's first ever Cardinal, Monsignor Santiago Luis Copello. In the Argentine Church, the Vatican had a close ally it could count on to fervently oppose ideas such as communism, materialism, agnosticism, secularism, religious pluralism, and emancipation of women while unwaveringly supporting religious and moral education in public schools, a strong sense of hierarchy, and, to borrow from Ronald Newton, "the stability of a traditional family and its entrenched gender roles." See Ronald Newton, *The "Nazi Menace" in Argentina, 1931-1947*, 130.

³⁴ That is, Law 1420 and Law 1565, respectively.

³⁵ Ernesto Palacio, *Historia de la Argentina, 1515-1943* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Revisión, 1960), 387. Similarly, J.C. Zuretti argues that the 1934 Eucharist Congress meant that "the cycle of official [read: State] laicismo practically had ended." J.C. Zuretti, *Nueva Historia Eclesiastica Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Itinerarium, 1972), 428; Pittelli and Rodríguez, "La Enseñanza Religiosa en las Escuelas Publicas durante el Primer Perónismo, 1943-1955," 43.

³⁶ It is important to note that earlier in 1934 the Socialistas had won the municipal elections in Buenos Aires (Federal Capital), an additional factor that convinced Justo in October of that year to adopt an unambiguously pro-clerical stance.

³⁷ Not to mention that the Argentine Constitution also explicitly stipulated that all immigrants should be “European” and that Congress had the responsibility to convert all Argentine indigenous people to Catholicism.

³⁸ *El Pueblo*, October 12, 1934.

³⁹ Zanatta, *Del Estado Liberal y La Nacion Catolica*, 156.

⁴⁰ Zanatta, *Del Estado Liberal y La Nacion Catolica*, 208. As mentioned above (endnote 33), in 1936 Monseñor Copello became Argentina’s and, indeed, Latin America’s first ever Cardinal.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Founded in 1928, *Criterio* was edited by influential Monseñor Gustavo Franceschi and subsidized by the German Pro-Mi. *Criterio* embodied Franceschi’s belief in a “Nacionalista crusade to purify Argentina” and often published anti-Semitic articles authored by Argentine and European writers.

⁴³ *El Pueblo*, October 8, 1936.

⁴⁴ Zanatta, *Del Estado Liberal y La Nacion Catolica*, 209.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁴⁶ Puiggrós, *Que Pasó en la Educación Argentina*, 91.

⁴⁷ Sara Ali Jafella, “Un ideario pedagógico en la formación superior,” in Hugo Edgardo Biagini, Carlos Alemián, and Arturo Andrés Roig, eds., *El pensamiento alternativo en la Argentina del siglo XX* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2006), 366; Adriana Puiggrós and Sandra Carli, *Escuela, democracia y orden (1916-1943)*, (Buenos Aires; Galerno, 1992), 139; and Adriana Puiggrós, *El lugar del saber: Conflictos y alternativas entre educación, conocimiento, y política* (Buenos Aires; Galerna, 2003), 185.

⁴⁸ Zanatta, *Del Estado Liberal y La Nacion Catolica*, 91.

⁴⁹ Pittelli y Rodríguez, “La Enseñanza Religiosa en las Escuelas Públicas durante el Primer Perónismo, 1943-1955,” 43.

⁵⁰ Here I have suggested that the Federation’s motto, “Christian schooling, justice for the Catholic minority, [and] respect for dissident minorities,” embodies a non-discriminatory ideological trajectory. One might argue, however, that the phrase “respect for dissident minorities” — a clause nineteenth-century Catholic nationalist Argentine politicians first employed in Congress in 1884 in their efforts to prevent the passage of Law 1420 — embodies a visceral cultural expression of repudiation and “otherness” in that it categorizes all non-Catholic Argentines as *dissident* minorities.

⁵¹ A leading Nacionalista throughout the 1930s, Sánchez Sorondo initially served as Minister of Interior under Uriburu, during which time he tried unsuccessfully to promulgate a similar law. Under Uriburu, he advocated for the creation of a corporate, fascist-like regime, supported by vigilante-style citizen “action” groups in the streets. Outspoken and a frequent contributor to right-wing Catholic and Nacionalista publications, he came to be regarded in Congress, to quote Ronald Newton, as a “Jew-baiter and a consistent advocate of reactionary causes.” In 1937, he traveled to Germany as an official guest of the Nazi government; while in Berlin, he was granted an audience with Hitler. Upon his return to Argentina, Sánchez Sorondo praised the Nazi leader as “the incarnation of the German *Volk* and the leader of a Christian land” — remarks that provided little comfort to the nation’s Jewish community and democratic majority during this turbulent political and social period. Lastly, during the presidency of Conservative Roman Castillo (1942-1943), Sánchez Sorondo was selected president of the all-important Banco de la

Provincia de Buenos Aires. See Ronald Newton, *The "Nazi Menace" in Argentina, 1931-1947*, 119.

⁵² Matías Sánchez Sorondo, *Represión del comunismo: proyecto de ley, informe y antecedentes* (Buenos Aires: Congreso de la Nación, 1937) cited in Dolkart, "The Right in the Decada Infame," 77.

⁵³ Newton, *The Nazi Menace in Argentina*, 129.

⁵⁴ The Ley de Residencia was first promulgated in 1902 and, coupled with the 1910 Ley de Defensa Social (Social Defense Law), served as the legal basis of a government counteroffensive against anarchists, communists, and immigrants in the years preceding Argentina's 1910 centennial. For discussion of the five deported communists, see Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 74.

⁵⁵ Carlos M. Silveyra, *La cuestión nazi en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Patria, 1939); Dolkart, "The Right and the Decada Infame," 79.

⁵⁶ Ronald Newton argues that Argentine anti-Semitism changed in two significant ways in the 1930s. First, it went from denouncing Jews as "well-poisoners, Christ killers, monopolists, usurers, white-slavers, socialists, anarchists, [and] Bolsheviks...to faceless symbols of all that was incomprehensible and intolerable in the modern world: democracy and the rule of mediocrity, anomie, irreligion, ambiguities of science and grotesqueries of art, sexual license, [and] disrespect for sanctions of place, family, class, status, and institutions." Second, he argues that anti-Semitism "took root in non-elite social sectors where it had hitherto been unknown." Newton, *The Nazi Menace in Argentina*, 132.

⁵⁷ Argentina's second and more widely known "Triple A" was the notorious "Argentine Anticommunist Alliance," a clandestine *anti-terror* force headed in 1974 by José López Rega. The *Triple A* of the 1970s is discussed in Chapter 4 of the dissertation.

⁵⁸ Newton, *The Nazi Menace in Argentina*, 112-113.

⁵⁹ *Oro* and *El Kahal* were the other two books that comprised the trilogy.

⁶⁰ Newton, *The Nazi Menace in Argentina*, 133-138.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁶² Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 75.

⁶³ Loris Zanatta argues that after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, "the clergy and the Nacionalistas worked arm and arm in the development of an unbridled propaganda campaign." Zanatta, *Del Estado Liberal y La Nacion Catolica*, 202. For reference to the "magnificent bond between the Cross and the Sword," see *Revista Militar*, March 1936.

⁶⁴ José María Sarobe, *Hacia la nueva educación: ensayo sobre la escuela y el problema económico social* (Buenos Aires: A López, 1937).

⁶⁵ For example, see L. Pablos, "La educación de las nuevas generaciones," *RdS*, November 1937 cited in Zanatta, *Del Estado Liberal y La Nacion Catolica*, 235.

⁶⁶ Fresco is among the most intriguing Argentine political figures of the 1930s. A physician of decidedly middle-class origins, self-proclaimed admirer of Mussolini, and close acquaintance of German Ambassador Edmund von Thermann, Fresco represented the right-wing voice of the Buenos Aires Conservative Party; he was not a Nacionalista per se. He also belonged to the Liga Patriótica Argentina (which had played a central role in the Jewish pogrom that unfolded during the *Semana Trágica* of January 1919) and the *Comisión de Cooperación Intelectual* (which included the likes of Gustavo Martínez Zuviria {"Hugo Wast"} and Sánchez Sorondo and served as a pro-Nazi propaganda vehicle in Argentina subsidized by the German government). As Governor of Buenos Aires, he staunchly supported Sánchez Sorondo's "Repression of Communism" Law and, on May 20, 1936, issued a (broadly-defined) decree banning all

“communist propaganda”— which afforded the provincial police widespread power to censor “whatever it chose.” At the same time, Fresco’s charismatic appeal, non-elitist origins, and “progressive” labor tactics gained him a strong degree of populist appeal; in many ways, he represented an early, limited, and unpolished version of Juan Perón. While Zanatta characterizes Fresco as Franco’s “Argentine imitator” and Luis Alberto Romero points to his “fascist militancy,” much like with Perón, Fresco was a complex and skilled politician who defies simplistic political and ideological categorization. A fresh biography of Manuel A. Fresco would be a welcome historiographical addition to help unravel the nuances of the *Década Infame*. For more on Fresco, see *Manuel Antonio Fresco: entre la renovación y el fraude* (La Plata, Provincia de Buenos Aires: Instituto Cultural, Dirección Provincial de Patrimonio Cultural, 2005); Rafael Bitrán, *El gobierno conservador de Manuel A. Fresco en la provincia de Buenos Aires, 1936-1940* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1991); and Ronald Dolkart, *Manuel A. Fresco, Governor of the Province of Buenos Aires, 1936-1940: A Study of the Argentine Right and its Response to Economic and Social Change* (University of California at Los Angeles, 1969).

⁶⁷ As a “Federal District,” the City of Buenos Aires does not officially constitute part of the Province of Buenos Aires.

⁶⁸ Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 78.

⁶⁹ Guillermo Fúrlong Cárdiff, *La tradición religiosa en la escuela argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Theoria, 1957), 121; Pittelli y Rodríguez, “La Enseñanza Religiosa en las Escuelas Públicas durante el Primer Perónismo, 1943-1955,” 50-51.

⁷⁰ Héctor Rubén Cucuzza, “El sistema educativo argentino, aportes para la discusión sobre su origen y primeras tentativas de reforma,” in F. Hilbert et al, eds., *El sistema educativo argentino* (Buenos Aires: Cartago, 1985); Pittelli y Rodríguez, “La Enseñanza Religiosa en las Escuelas Públicas durante el Primer Perónismo, 1943-1955,” 51.

⁷¹ Dolkart, “The Right in the Decada Infame, 1930-1943,” 86.

⁷² Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 74.

⁷³ Common forms of electoral fraud included intimidating voters, threatening polling clerks, sabotaging ballot boxes, and even assassinations. For more details, see endnote 18 above.

⁷⁴ Luna, *A Short History of the Argentinians*, 144.

⁷⁵ Ronald Newton contends that of two hundred German language schools in Argentina in 1938 only seven had declared themselves “free” of Nazi influences. “The rest,” he writes, “were more or less loyal to conservative German nationalism, if not Hitlerism.” Newton, *The Nazi Menace in Argentina*, 74, 188.

⁷⁶ *La Prensa*, November 9, 1937.

⁷⁷ Newton, *The Nazi Menace in Argentina*, 184.

⁷⁸ Depending on sources, there were anywhere from 10,000 to 20,000 participants at the rally, including members of Argentine fascist groups like Alianza de Juventud Nacionalista.

⁷⁹ Newton, *The Nazi Menace in Argentina*, 186.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁸¹ In previous years (during the Infamous Decade), the display of swastikas and red-white-and-black flags on businesses and clubs was always permitted together with the Argentine flag or colors. See Newton, *The Nazi Menace in Argentina*, 187.

⁸² For more on efforts to “argentinize” Italian schools in the 1880s, see Samuel Baily, “Las sociedades de ayuda mutua y el desarrollo de una comunidad italiana en Buenos Aires, 1858-1914,” *Desarrollo Económico* 21 (January-March 1982): 484-514; Samuel Baily, “The Adjustment of Italian Immigrants in Buenos Aires and New York, 1870-1914,” *American Historical Review*, 88, 2 (April 1983): 281-305; Samuel Baily, “Sarmiento and Immigration: Changing Views on the

Role of Immigration in the Development of Argentina,” in Joseph Criscenti, ed., *Sarmiento and His Argentina* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), 138-140; Fernando Devoto, *Historia de los italianos en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblios, 2006), Chapter 3; and Luigi Favero, “Las escuelas de las sociedades italianas en Argentina, 1860-1914,” in Fernando Devoto and Gianfausto Rosoli, eds., *La inmigración italiana en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblios, 1985), 165-207.

⁸³ Decree 4.071, May 9, 1938, Consejo Nacional de Educación (CNE), *Archivo del Ministerio de Educación*.

⁸⁴ The CNE addendum was dated September 28, 1938.

⁸⁵ In Argentina, the term “philo-fascist” was coined by historian Cristián Buchrucker in his influential study *Nacionalismo y peronismo: La Argentina en la crisis ideológica mundial, 1927-1955* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1987).

⁸⁶ In 1938, the DAIA prepared a list of 8000 people who were “actively engaged in producing or disseminating anti-Semitic propaganda.” For the above quotation, see Ronald Newton, “German Nazism and the Origins of Argentine Anti-Semitism,” in David Sheinin and Lois Baer Barr, eds., *The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America: New Studies on History and Literature* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 209.

⁸⁷ Arturo Frondizi and Arturo Illia were elected President of Argentina in 1958 and 1963, respectively.

⁸⁸ Just as the Jewish community had done in 1919 in its protests over the the Semana Trágica, the DAIA regarded the “First Congress Against Racism and Anti-Semitism” as a platform to reach out to non-Jewish Argentines and portray discrimination against Jews as an affront to the entire nation’s values and traditions. Judging by the high level of participation of non-Jewish groups, the 1938 Congress can be viewed as an attempt by the nation’s silenced “democratic majority” to reassert— during the more sympathetic Ortiz years— Argentina’s pre-1930 liberal political and cultural narrative. See Comité Contra el Racismo y el Antisemitismo de la Argentina, *Primer Congreso Contra el Racismo y el AntiSemitismo* (Buenos Aires: Compañía Editora Argentina, 1938), Actas.

⁸⁹ Newton, “German Nazism and the Origins of Argentine Anti-Semitism,” 210.

⁹⁰ Newton, *The Nazi Menace in Argentina*, 134.

⁹¹ *Di Idische Tzeitung*, May 11, 1938, 6. Cited in Zadoff, *Historia de la Educacion Judia en Buenos Aires 1935-1957* (Buenos Aires: Mila, 1994), 217.

⁹² Zadoff, *Historia de la Educacion Judia en Buenos Aires*, 220.

⁹³ For reference to “Neutralidad y Argentinos, si, Judios, no,” see Ray Josephs, *Argentine Diary: The Inside Story of the Coming of Fascism* (New York: Random House, 1944), 23; Dolkart, “The Right in the Decada Infame, 1930-1943,” 90-91. For more information on right-wing nationalist groups such as the *Alianza Libertadora Nacionalista*, see Navarro Gerassi, *Los Nacionalistas*, 172-173; Navarro Gerassi, “Argentine Nationalism of the Right,” *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 1,12 (1965): 182; Oscar Troncoso, *Los nacionalistas argentinos* (Buenos Aires, 1957), 62; and Richard Walter, “The Right and the Peronists, 1943-1955,” in Sandra McGee Deutsch and Ronald Dolkart, eds., *The Argentine Right: Its History and Intellectual Origins, 1910 to the Present* (Wilmington: SR Books, 1993), 100.

⁹⁴ In many respects, this play on words mirrored the January 1919 efforts by the democratic-minded *Liga Pro-Patria* to remove any jingoist or exclusionary connotation from the nativist *Liga Patriótica Argentina*’s narrow articulation of the term “patriotic” at the time of the Semana Trágica.

⁹⁵ Enrique Dickmann, an Argentine Jew, was (and continues to be) regarded by many moderate and leftist supporters of democracy as one of Argentina's most significant progressive politicians of the twentieth century. For details of the resolution, see Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, *Sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados de la Nación*, Anales de la Legislación Argentina, 1939, Volume 1, p. 133-34. For information of Nazi infiltration of Argentine institutions, including revealing confidential memoranda between the LCA and the German Embassy (in which the former congratulated Hitler on the Reich's recent military advances), see Dickmann's *La infiltración nazi-fascista en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: 1939); Dolkart, "The Right in the Decada Infame, 1930-1943," 88.

⁹⁶ Hirsch Triwaks, ed., *Cincuenta años de vida judía en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1940).

⁹⁷ In name only, Ortiz remained president until he died at age fifty-five in June 1942. Castillo's "official" term as president ran then from June 1942 until the June 4, 1943 Nacionalista coup.

⁹⁸ Similarly, Franco's victory in 1939 also buoyed nationalists convictions. In particular, it reinvigorated their sense of *hispanidad* that long characterized their movement.

⁹⁹ Upset by Argentina's refusal, at a January 1942 inter-American meeting of foreign ministers held in Rio de Janeiro, to abandon its stance of 'neutrality', the United States responded by excluding Argentina from arms funding that Washington accorded its principal Latin American wartime allies, notably Brazil. See Potash, *The Army and Politics in Argentina: From Yrigoyen to Perón, 1928-1945*, 169.

¹⁰⁰ Nacionalistas and their sympathizers were also particularly concerned that Costas would succumb to British and American pressures and abandon Argentina's position of wartime "neutrality"—a cherished Nacionalista policy issue. They had grown tired of American and British economic and political interference in Argentina and were determined to achieve a more significant leadership position for Argentina in hemispheric affairs, particularly after the January 1942 Rio conference. For further discussion, see Walter, "The Right and the Peronists, 1943-1955," 101.

¹⁰¹ These military officers were known as the Grupo de Oficiales Unidos (GOU) and included General Juan Perón among its leaders.

¹⁰² Luna, *A Short History of the Argentinians*, 153.

¹⁰³ General Arturo Rawson briefly served as president (for three days) before General Ramírez assumed the presidency on June 7, 1943.

¹⁰⁴ For more on the notorious appointments of Martínez Zuviría and Perlinger, see Enrique Díaz Araujo, *La conspiración del '43: El GOU: Una experiencia militarista en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1971); Potash, *The Army and Politics in Argentina: From Yrigoyen to Perón, 1928-1945*.

¹⁰⁵ *Monitor de Educación Común* #847-848-849, July-August-September, 1943: 191

¹⁰⁶ The October 8, 1943 ruling was Decree 10.173. See *Monitor de Educación Común*, #850-851-852, October-November-December, 1943: 178-179. It is also worth noting that between September 1943 and July 1946 (one month after Juan Perón assumed the presidency for the first time), the CNE did not issue a single new teaching certificate to a Jewish school teacher who required one, as the CNE law now stipulated, to teach at a private (Jewish) school. For more, see Zadoff, *Historia de la Educación Judía*, 348, 352.

¹⁰⁷ For quotation, see Zadoff, *Historia de la Educación Judía*, 349.

¹⁰⁸ Listed as Decree 18.368. See *Monitor de Educación Común*, #853-854, January-February 1944: 14-15; Zadoff, *Historia de la Educación Judía*, 349.

¹⁰⁹ *La Nacion*, April 29, 1944, 4.

¹¹⁰ Decree 18.411, December 31, 1943, 73-74.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Ibid [italics mine].

¹¹³ Ibid [italics mine].

¹¹⁴ Argentine women achieved suffrage in 1947.

¹¹⁵ Decree 18.411, *Registro Nacional de Leyes y Decretos*, December 31, 1943, 73-74.

¹¹⁶ Raanan Rein points out that that exemption from Catholic education classes did not necessarily exempt non-Catholic students from having to participate in other Catholic school activities (i.e. school trips to churches or school assemblies with an expressly Catholic content). Any non-Catholic parent wanting to exempt their child from such activities had to request, again through a signed waiver, exemption from each of those activities. See Raanan Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los Judíos: Encuentros y desencuentros mitos y realidades* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Lumière, 2001), 76-77.

¹¹⁷ *El Mundo Israelita*, June 3, 1944, 3 and August 12, 1944, 3.

¹¹⁸ See *Mundo Israelita*, March 29, 1947, 3.

¹¹⁹ Zadoff, *Historia de la Educación Judía*, 220.

¹²⁰ It is also conceivable that some Jewish students looked back fondly on “moral instruction” because they felt comfortable being in a class with other Jewish students.

¹²¹ Haim Avni, *Emancipation and Jewish Education: A Century of Argentinian Jewry’s Experience, 1884-1984* (Jerusalem: 1985), 169-174. The monograph is published in Hebrew. My thanks to Sarah Gubkin for her assistance with the translation.

¹²² Ibid, 171. Similarly, Mónica Esti Rein points out that some Jewish students felt that even their Moral Instruction courses contained a strong Catholic component. See Mónica Esti Rein, “The Struggle for Hegemony between the Cross and the Sword under Perón,” in Tzvi Medin and Raanan Rein, eds., *Society and Identity in Argentina* (in Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: University of Tel Aviv Press, 1997), 141-143; Mónica Esti Rein, *Politics and Education in Argentina, 1946-1962* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998); and Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los Judíos*, 76.

¹²³ *La Nación*, April 26, 1944, 6. [Italics mine]

¹²⁴ *La Prensa*, April 23, 1944, 3.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Olmedo’s remarks reaffirming the government’s commitment to Catholic education came shortly after the military replaced interim President Ramírez with Minister of War Edelmiro J. Farrell. The presidential change came about in large part because the military had grown frustrated with Ramírez’s growing desire in 1944 to abandon Argentina’s position of wartime ‘neutrality’ and, instead, adopt a more pro-Allied stance.

¹²⁷ Ibid [italics mine]. Part of the reason why *La Prensa* published its bold April 23 editorial was arguably because it, like other Argentine media outlets, felt that the presidential transition from Ramírez to Farrell represented a sign of Nacionalista political decline and with it the opportunity to put an end to the censorship and press restrictions instituted on December 31, 1943.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Héctor Rubén Cucuzza and Cristina Acevedo, eds., *Estudios de historia de la educación durante el primer peronismo, 1943-1955* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Los Libros del Riel, 1997), 58.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ *La Prensa*, April 23, 1944, 3.

¹³² Potash, *The Army and Politics in Argentina: From Yrigoyen to Perón, 1928-1945*, 240-241; Walter, “The Right and the Peronists, 1943-1955,” 104; Alain Rouquié, *Poder military y sociedad política en la Argentina, 1943-1973* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1982); and Donald C. Hodges, *Argentina, 1943-1987: The National Revolution and Resistance*, Revised and Enlarged Edition, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 24-26.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Luna, *A Short History of the Argentinians*, 161; Marvin Goldwert, *Democracy, Militarism, and Nationalism in Argentina, 1930-1966: An Interpretation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972), 91-93; and Samuel Baily, *Labor, Nationalism, and Politics* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1967).

¹³⁵ Perón later chose Hortensio Quijano of the UCR-Junta Renovadora to be his running mate in the February 1946 presidential elections.

¹³⁶ Luna, *A Short History of the Argentinians*, 161; Goldwert, *Democracy, Militarism, and Nationalism in Argentina, 1930-1966*, 91-93; and Baily, *Labor, Nationalism, and Politics*.

¹³⁷ Rouquié, *Poder military y sociedad política en la Argentina*.

¹³⁸ Hodges, *Argentina, 1943-1987*, 25.

¹³⁹ Hodges, *Argentina, 1943-1987*, 25; Luna, *A Short History of the Argentinians*, 162; Goldwert, *Democracy, Militarism, and Nationalism in Argentina*, 91-93; and Baily, *Labor, Nationalism, and Politics*.

¹⁴⁰ Perón garnered 52% of the popular vote versus the Unión Democrática's 47%. Peronists, however, claimed 13 of 14 provinces, two-thirds of the Lower House of Congress (Camara de Diputados) and almost all of the Senate.

¹⁴¹ Hodges, *Argentina, 1943-1987*, 25; Luna, *A Short History of the Argentinians*, 162; Goldwert, *Democracy, Militarism, and Nationalism in Argentina*, 91-93; and Baily, *Labor, Nationalism, and Politics*.

¹⁴² This is not intended to suggest that all Church figures shared all the messianic ideals of the Nacionalistas who took power on June 4, 1943. That said, most ecclesiastics celebrated the promulgation of Decree 18.411 on December 31, 1943.

¹⁴³ Ciria, *Partidos y poder en la Argentina moderna, 1930-1946*; Pittelli and Rodríguez, "La Enseñanza Religiosa en las Escuelas Publicas," 59-60.

¹⁴⁴ The Unión Democrática also included Communists in its midst, which only further repelled the Church. Incidentally, there is a specific reason why the November 1945 sermon made no mention of Perón: the Church had distributed the exact same statement to local parishes back in 1931 in support of General Justo (over moderate *Alianza Civil* leader Lisandro de la Torre) for president. Interestingly, a small group of liberal priests opposed the public reading of the pro-Perón Church statement; they were, however, a distinct minority. See Susana Bianchi, "La Iglesia católica en los orígenes del peronismo," *IEHS* (1990) 5:71-89.

¹⁴⁵ Perón won with a total of 1.5 million votes to the Unión Democrática's 1.2 million.

¹⁴⁶ Hodges, *Argentina, 1943-1987*, 26-27.

¹⁴⁷ By "all others among those various social groups who historically had placed a premium on things like civil liberties, intellectual freedom," I do not intend to imply that poor or working class Argentines did not value civil liberties or freedoms. Instead, I aim to refer primarily to those middle and upper class Argentine liberals who for decades had concerned themselves, in both rhetoric and practice, with such matters.

¹⁴⁸ Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los Judíos*, 74.

¹⁴⁹ It is worth noting here, as we shall later see, that the Church eventually turned on Perón in the 1950s, notably in 1954-1955. *La Época*, February 19, 1946. See also José S. Campobassi, *Ataque y defensa del laicismo escolar en la Argentina (1884-1963)* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Gure, 1964); Pittelli and Rodríguez, "La Enseñanza Religiosa en las Escuelas Publicas," 60.

¹⁵⁰ The formal legalization of Catholic education also provided the Church with important new streams of government revenue necessary to help administer and teach the religious instruction courses.

¹⁵¹ The ratification of Decree 18.411 required a two-thirds congressional majority, which was achieved by a single vote. See *La Prensa*, March 7, 1947, 12.

¹⁵² Indeed, Perón also employed Catholic education and his alliance with the Church as a form of patriotic and cultural leverage to combat native communists in their ongoing political battle for the support of the Argentine working class. On several occasions, Perón or Evita made reference in the same breadth to the “hogar argentino” and the “hogar cristiano” as a way, to paraphrase Raanan Rein, to convert religion into a pillar of national identity and, in doing so, demonstrate that communists, with their emphasis on atheism, lacked “Argentine spirit.” See Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los Judíos*, 75. Other scholars such as Cristian Buchrucker, Lila Caimari, Adriana Puiggrós, and Loris Zanatta also have made similar assertions.

¹⁵³ Specifically, Perón felt that his public support of Catholic education provided his government with an invaluable mouthpiece— namely school curricula— from which to teach and reinforce identifiably peronist beliefs, principles, and “traditions.” With the support of his newly-appointed Minister of Education Oscar Ivanissevich— a fervent Nacionalista and philo-fascist— Perón saw to it that 1) social science and history textbooks paid regular tribute to Juan and Evita as the voice of the people, 2) schools organized assemblies to honor and commemorate particular peronist government policies, such as the highly-publicized nationalization of Argentine railroads, 3) students regularly chanted, usually after the singing of the national anthem each morning, symbolic peronist hymns like the “Marcha del Reservista,” and 4) school field trips included visits to military battalions, often preceded or followed by a priest administering a Catholic blessing. Perón also encouraged the reading in classrooms of Catholic poems such as “El Niño Jesús” and “Oración del Niño Jesús” stemming less from any personal religious convictions and more because he felt they provided students with both a sense of obedience and submissiveness and omnipotence and sovereignty— values integral to the broader peronist doctrine. See Cristian Buchrucker, *Nacionalismo y peronismo: La Argentina en la crisis ideológica mundial, 1927-1955* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1987), 305-310; Pittelli and Rodríguez, “La Enseñanza Religiosa en las Escuelas Publicas,” 81-83; and Zadoff, *Historia de la Educación Judía en la Argentina*, 362-363.

¹⁵⁴ During the March 1947 debates, there were one hundred and forty representatives present in the Cámara de Diputados; sixteen additional diputados failed to attend the congressional sessions. Of the one hundred and forty diputados present, thirty-five ‘took the floor’ to speak out for or against Law 12.978.

¹⁵⁵ Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, *Diario de Sesiones*, Anales de la Legislación Argentina, March 6 & 7, 1947, p. 571.

¹⁵⁶ Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, March 6 & 7, 1947, p. 568.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 608.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 568.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 570-571.

¹⁶⁰ Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, March 13 & 14, 1947, p. 802.

¹⁶¹ Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, March 7, 1947, p. 626.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 625.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 626.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 635.

¹⁶⁸ Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, March 6 & 7, 1947, p. 587.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 589.

¹⁷⁰ In this sentence, I selectively brought together the shared ideas of three diputados who individually spoke out against Law 12.978: in order employed, Julio A Vanasco, Juan J. Noriega, and Santander. See Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, March 12, 1947, p. 723; March 14, 1947, p. 789; and March 6 & 7, 1947, p. 591, respectively.

¹⁷¹ Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, March 13 & 14, 1947, p. 793.

¹⁷² Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, March 6 & 7, 1947, p. 586.

¹⁷³ In 1947, the peronist government re-printed and distributed at least 80,000 copies of the coursebook to schools throughout Argentina. Authored by Galo Moret and Juan Scavia, *Instrucción Religiosa y Cien Lecciones de Historia Sagrada* (Buenos Aires: Consejo Nacional de Educación, 1944), the textbook is available at the Consejo Nacional de Educación, Buenos Aires.

¹⁷⁴ In 1944, the writing of the textbook was overseen by CNE Superintendent Dr. José Ignacio Olmedo. After initially being made available to teachers and students in 1944, the textbook was eventually withdrawn later that year after the political power of the nationalist-led administration gradually eroded.

¹⁷⁵ Moret and Scavia, *Instrucción Religiosa y Cien Lecciones de Historia Sagrada*, 5.

¹⁷⁶ Italics theirs. Ibid., 7-8.

¹⁷⁷ Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, March 6 & 7, 1947, p. 596.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Moret and Scavia, *Instrucción Religiosa y Cien Lecciones de Historia Sagrada*, 145-146.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, March 13 & 14, 1947, p. 775.

¹⁸² Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, March 6 & 7, 1947, p. 595.

¹⁸³ Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, March 13 & 14, 1947, p. 784.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 789.

¹⁸⁵ Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, March 13, 1947, p. 720.

¹⁸⁶ Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, March 6 & 7, 1947, p. 589.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 574. Unlike during earlier decades, including the 1930s, there were no Jewish diputados in Congress in March 1947. Although I cannot state with absolute certainty, there also appeared to be no Muslim or other non-Christian diputados. As for non-Catholic Christians, it cannot be readily determined.

¹⁸⁸ Back in 1931, after President Uriburu had reluctantly agreed to hold provincial and then national elections, Pueyrredón, a leading member of the ‘hated’ Radical Party, was elected Governor of the Province of Buenos Aires. Outraged, Uriburu annulled the results and subsequently decreed ineligible for public office all Radicals who had previously served under President Yrigoyen (1916-1922 and 1928-1930). Uriburu’s actions led the Radicals to adopt soon-after a policy of political abstention (which lasted until 1935) and paved the way for General Justo’s relatively easy presidential victory in November 1931. For more information, see pages 5 and 6 of this chapter.

¹⁸⁹ Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, March 13, 1947, p. 729.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 730

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ At times during and/or at the conclusion of a given diputado’s address on the House floor, fellow diputados would applaud the orator and chant aloud “Muy bien! Muy bien!” or “Well done! Well done!” At the conclusion of Pueyrredón’s address, the congressional record indicates the following as the reaction of fellow diputados: “Muy Bien! Muy Bien! Aplausos.

Varios señores diputados rodean y felicitan el orador,” meaning “Well done! Well done! Applause. Various diputados surround and congratulate the orator.” In few other cases during the five day sessions did a given diputado receive such pronounced praise or recognition. See *Cámara de Diputados de la Nación*, March 13, 1947, p. 730.

¹⁹⁴ The measures included 1) where the public and journalists were permitted to sit, 2) what entrance they should use to enter the congressional building, 3) a need for identification, 4) prohibiting the public from wandering to other branches of the building, and 5) insuring that security forces were in place both inside and outside of the building in the event of any social disturbances. See *Noticias Gráficas*, January 3, 1947, 6 and *La Prensa*, March 13, 1947, 12.

¹⁹⁵ *Noticias Gráficas*, January 5 and 6, 1947, 6.

¹⁹⁶ *La Prensa*, March 13, 1947, 12.

¹⁹⁷ *El Mundo*, March 5, 1947, 14.

¹⁹⁸ *El Mundo*, March 5, 1947, 7 and *La Prensa*, March 16, 1947, 11. The respective attacks took place at Calle Montevideo 842 and Calle Riobamba 981 in Buenos Aires.

¹⁹⁹ *El Mundo*, March 5, 1947, 14.

²⁰⁰ Puiggrós, *Que Pasó en la Educación Argentina*, 100.

²⁰¹ *El Mundo*, March 5, 1947, 14.

²⁰² *La Prensa*, March 14, 1947, 8.

²⁰³ For more on the CGT, see Baily, *Labor, Nationalism, and Politics*; Peter Ranis, *Argentine Workers and the Nature of Democratic Values* (New York: Columbia University, Institute of Latin American and Iberian Studies, 1990); Peter Ranis, *Class, Democracy, and Labor in Contemporary Argentina* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1995); Raimundo Ongaro, *CGT de los Argentinos: por una patria justa, libre y soberana, la patria socialista* (Buenos Aires: COGTAL, 2001); and Gustavo Beliz, *CGT, el otro poder: personajes, pactos, y políticas, crónica íntima y claves del nuevo sindicalismo* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1988).

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ *El Mundo*, March 5, 1947, 14.

²⁰⁶ Muslim Argentine reactions to the Catholic education bill would make for interesting future research.

²⁰⁷ The quotations employed here are from Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los judíos*, 75. The letter is reproduced in Hebrew in its entirety in Avni, *Emancipation and Jewish Education*, Appendix B, Document 4, 186-187. See also Raanan Rein, “Argentine Jews and Catholic Religious Instruction,” in Marjorie Agosín, *Memory, Oblivion, and Jewish Culture in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 169.

²⁰⁸ Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los judíos*, 76. As was the case with other predominantly middle-class immigrant groups, the ‘Jewish community’ traditionally supported the Radical Party— or at least that was the popular perception. The origins of that support no doubt lay in the Radicals being the first party to establish the nation’s first truly representative government in 1916 following the passage four years earlier of the historic Saenz Peña Law. For more on the Saenz Peña Reform, see Chapter 1, page 7 of this dissertation.

²⁰⁹ Although Perón initially helped create the OIA in an effort to win over the Jewish community to the peronist cause, after failing to do so in the 1948 (and subsequent) elections, he increasingly employed the OIA as a public relations vehicle through which he could formulate, as Raanan Rein points out, positive declarations towards Jews and, after 1948, the State of Israel. Despite the OIA’s failure to capture the Jewish vote for Perón, one thing Perón had working in his favor, whether he was fully aware of it or not, was the Jewish community’s growing sense of dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of the DAIA leadership. For instance, in August and

October of 1947, the centrist Jewish newspaper *Mundo Israelita* published two editorials openly questioning the DAIA, one of which read in part: “The community’s system of representation is poor, because, for one reason or another, many [Jews] are situated on the margins of the DAIA...” In a sense, editorials such as these speak as much about the shortcomings of the DAIA as they do about the community’s limited support of the OIA and peronism: despite the problems facing the DAIA in the 1940s (and, as we shall see, at other notable moments in the twentieth century), it still commanded far more support within the Jewish community than the pro-peronist OIA. For the above quotation, see *Mundo Israelita*, October 25, 1947, 3. For more detailed information on the effectiveness of the OIA, see Jeffrey Marder, “The Organización Israelita Argentina: Between Perón and the Jews,” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 20, 39-40 (1995): 125-152; Raanan Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los judíos*, 88-96; Leonardo Senkman, “El peronismo visto desde la legación israelí en Buenos Aires: sus relaciones con la OIA, 1949-1955,” *Judaica Latinoamericana*, 2 (1993): 115-136; and Lawrence Bell, “The Jews and Perón: Communal Politics and National Identity in Peronist Argentina, 1946-1955,” Doctoral Dissertation, The Ohio State University, 2002.

²¹⁰ Although non-Catholic parents were permitted to petition to have their children exempt from the Catholic education courses, it is important to recall that the alternate ‘moral education classes’ were still officially under the direction of the CNE’s Religious Instruction Board (*Dirección General de Instrucción Religiosa*). As noted above, approved classroom exemptions did not necessarily excuse non-Catholic students from having to attend, say, school field trips to Catholic churches or school gatherings replete with Catholic religious content.

²¹¹ Caps theirs. See for instance *Mundo Israelita*, March 29, 1947, 2

²¹² *Mundo Israelita*, March 29, 1947, 3.

²¹³ *Mundo Israelita*, March 29, 1947, 3. In particular, *Mundo Israelita* singled out the *Sociedad Hebraica Argentina*, a newer, more youthful and literary-minded social and cultural organization, as moving towards “the most perilous form of assimilation: assimilation stemming from ignorance.” Despite the fact that the *Sociedad Hebraica Argentina* opposed Law 12.978, *Mundo* leaders accused the group’s members of abandoning their ‘Jewishness’ and issues important to the larger Jewish community; the more left-leaning *Hebraica* preferred instead to fashion itself as a more modern, relaxed, youthful, and culturally secular Jewish Argentine organization more committed to national ‘integration’. For the quotation in this footnote, see also *Mundo Israelita*, January 29, 1947, 3.

²¹⁴ *Mundo Israelita*, April 5, 1947, 9.

²¹⁵ *Mundo Israelita*, September 13, 1947, 3.

²¹⁶ Among the principal Jewish organizations who donated money to the San Juan cause were the AMIA, DAIA, the *Asociación Filantrópica Israelita Argentina*, the *Corporación Comercial Israelita Argentina*, the *Consejo Central de las Organizaciones Sionistas*, CIRA, *Asociación Israelita Sefaradí de Beneficencia y Honras Postumas*, the *Asociación Sefaradí Hijos de la Verdad*, the *Asociación Comunidad Israelita Sefaradí de Buenos Aires*, the *Sociedad Hebraica Argentina*, and the *Congregación Israelita Latina*.

²¹⁷ *Mundo Israelita*, January 22, 1947, 3.

²¹⁸ Lila Caimari, “Peronist Christianity and Non-Catholic Religions: Politics and Ecumenism, 1943-1955,” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 20, 39-40 (1995): 105-124.

²¹⁹ Caimari, “Peronist Christianity and Non-Catholic Religions: Politics and Ecumenism, 1943-1955,” 105-124; Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 127-128.

²²⁰ The story of Beatriz and Esther can be found in the following two second-grade textbooks: Celia Gómez Reynoso, *El hada Buena* (Buenos Aires: Luis Lesserre, 1953), 54; Ana Lerdo de

Tejeda, *Un año más* (Buenos Aires: Luis Lesserre 1953), 12; Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los judíos*, 78; Raanan Rein, "Argentine Jews and Catholic Religious Instruction," 171.

²²¹ In the account, Esther's father had requested that Esther be exempt from Catholic education classes.

²²² Interestingly, beginning in 1952, Perón had ordered the armed forces to permit Jewish conscripts to take days off for the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah) and the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). Although relatively little is written about Argentine Jews in the military, the prevailing assumption is that while (virtually) all Jews, like (virtually) all Argentines, served their mandatory year in the military— it was not until 1995 that President Carlos Menem abolished mandatory conscription— very few Jews sought to join the officer ranks. That was largely the case, the presumption goes, because Jews a) did not appear overly interested in pursuing a career in the military and b) regarded the Argentine armed forces, rightly or not, as an Argentine institution where they were not particularly welcome. For more on Argentine Jews and the military, see Robert Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina: From the Inquisition to Perón* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 237.

²²³ See Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 128; Puiggrós, *Que Pasó en la Educación Argentina*, 108-109.

²²⁴ Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 128.

²²⁵ Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 128; Puiggrós, *Que Pasó en la Educación Argentina*, 108-109.

²²⁶ In what later became known as the Menéndez uprising, many of these same military officers had sponsored a failed 1951 coup against Perón.

²²⁷ Luna, *A Short History of the Argentinians*, 177.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 128-129.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 130.

²³¹ After fleeing to the Paraguayan embassy, Perón departed to Asunción. Following his short stay in the Paraguayan capital, Perón relocated to Caracas before moving on to Santo Domingo. He subsequently settled in Madrid where he spent the great majority of his eighteen years in exile.

²³² *Ibid.*, 129-130.

²³³ Kurt J. Riegner, "Argentina's Jewry under Perón," *Wiener Library Bulletin*, 9, 5-6 (1955): 51.

²³⁴ Bell, "The Jews and Perón: Communal Politics and National Identity in Peronist Argentina, 1946-1955;" Emilio Corbière, *Estaban entre nosotros* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Letra Buena, 1992); Ignacio Klich, "A Background to Perón's Discovery of Jewish National Aspirations," *Judaica Latinoamericana I* (Jerusalem: AMILAT, 1988); Marder, "The Organización Israelita Argentina: Between Perón and the Jews;" Raanan Rein, "Las imágenes conflictivas del peronismo en Israel (1946-1955)." *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 20, No 39-40 (1995): 153-176; Raanan Rein, *Argentina, Israel, and the Jews: Perón, the Eichmann Capture and After* (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2003); Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los judíos*, 88-96; and Senkman, "El peronismo visto desde la legación israelí en Buenos Aires." See also Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas, *El pensamiento del presidente Perón sobre el pueblo judío* (Buenos Aires: DAIA, 1954).

²³⁵ In *The Jews of Argentina*, Robert Weisbrot concluded that while "Perón [actually]...evolved into a president who was one of the most benevolent toward the Jewish community in modern Argentine history," the majority of Jews then as well as in subsequent decades have tended to

regard the Peronist era as a time of “irresponsible government” and “a tragic period” in Argentine history. Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina*, 239-240.

²³⁶ Leon Klenicki, “Rethinking the American Jewish Experience, Argentinian and Jew: The Ambiguity of Identity, *American Jewish Archives* 43 (1991): 56-57.

Chapter 3

The Sirota Affair

Introduction

On Thursday June 21, 1962 in the Nueva Chicago neighborhood of Buenos Aires, three young male members of the right-wing, Catholic nationalist group *Tacuara* abducted Narcisa Graciela Sirota, a nineteen year-old Jewish Argentine medical student, as she made her way to the University of Buenos Aires. After knocking her unconscious, the three youths transported Sirota in a gray minivan to a secluded apartment in the nation's capital where they tattooed a swastika on her breast and burned her seven times with a cigarette. Five hours later, they dumped Sirota, semiconscious, near the Primera Junta commuter rail station in the southwest section of the city. Although Tacuara at first denied responsibility for the attack, it later claimed that "this is in revenge for Eichmann," whom the Israeli Supreme Court, in May 1962, had sentenced to death for "crimes against humanity," two years to the month after the Israeli Secret Service had surreptitiously and illegally captured Eichmann in Argentina.¹

The Sirota affair, more than any other of the nation's two-hundred-plus anti-Semitic incidents between 1958-1964, shocked and consumed both the Jewish community and Argentine society at large. In the media and the streets, a diverse cross-section of non-Jewish Argentines joined their Jewish compatriots in repeatedly and vociferously denouncing the attack. Leading politicians, journalists, union workers, shopkeepers, physicians, lawyers, industrialists, students, intellectuals, and religious and community groups, thousands of whom took part in a June 28, 1962 Jewish-led work stoppage against "Nazi Aggression in Argentina," publicly branded the attack, among many other things, a "barbarous act," "one that defies all classification," and altogether "un-Argentine."

Many factors help to explain why the Sirota affair so galvanized Argentines. For one, Jews and non-Jews were appalled by its stark Nazi overtones, particularly in the aftermath of the Eichmann kidnapping of May 1960 which had forced Argentines to confront their country's role in harboring former S.S. officers. Second, Argentines were dismayed by Tacuara's decision to attack a defenseless young *woman* and, worse still, engrave a swastika on her *breast*. Third, Argentines resented the perceived police mishandling of the Sirota investigation, which, together with a series of egregious public remarks made by the chief of police and other high-ranking officers, reawakened for many the nation's shameful specter of *impunidad*. Finally, Argentines saw in Graciela Sirota— at a pivotal moment in the nation's history when the lofty ideals of liberal democracy, tolerance, and multiculturalism permeated the public discourse— a hardworking, middle-class, university-orientated Argentine youth in pursuit of the venerated Sarmiento dream.

Indeed, the Sirota affair, notably the ways in which Argentines reacted and responded to this brutal anti-Semitic attack, was both a product and reflection of the nation's changing political and cultural landscape over the previous four years. With the election of civilian Arturo Frondizi as president in February 1958, Argentina had embarked on a period of democratic, civic, and constitutional rule not seen since the 1920s, if ever before. For the nation's newly-empowered "democratic majority" in particular, Frondizi's victory signaled in 1958 the end of nearly three decades of military or authoritarian rule and, with it, the beginning of a liberal and secular political and cultural revival— aimed at both revitalizing Argentina's nineteenth-century ideals embodied in lay education Law 1420 and embracing the modern and progressive tenets associated with the democratic and industrialized West. In short, Frondizi's presidency, despite its many shortcomings, symbolized for many, including much of the Jewish community, the dawn of a new reformist era marked by truly representative government, rule of law,

intellectual freedom, a clear separation of Church and State, and the promotion of tolerance and respect.

From the outset, however, these efforts to resuscitate Argentina's liberal-secular past and redefine her present faced serious challenges. In order to secure a political majority in the 1958 presidential election, Frondizi was forced to reach out to the still-powerful Peronists, which invariably meant having to accept some of their exiled leader's pre-election demands.² Perón's demands came at a steep political price: they not only compromised Frondizi's liberal, modernizing agenda, but simultaneously incurred the wrath of leading military officers who remained as determined in 1958 as they had been in 1955 to neutralize Perón and quell all things peronist. Frondizi's constant efforts to balance such competing interests, not to mention revitalize a fragile and unpredictable economy, proved enormously taxing, ultimately leading to his political downfall at the hands of the military in March 1962.

The Church and its supporters also posed a significant challenge to Frondizi and Argentina's liberal democratic advocates. Both resented the government and the reformists' anticlerical orientation and sought, in the absence of a mandatory Catholic public education law, to pressure Frondizi to recognize, support, and fund private Catholic schools and universities. Ultimately, they succeeded in getting Frondizi to sign the 1958 Church-sponsored *Ley Domingonera*, yet not without sparking a heated national debate between Argentina's secular-minded majority and its pro-Catholic minority over the place of (Catholic) religion in the classroom and, more importantly, in the nation's political and cultural narrative.

That 1958 debate, since known as the *laica-libre* affair, also signaled the rise of a number of isolated, yet vocal and organized ultranationalist Catholic youth groups. Building on the Nacionalista legacy of the 1930s and 1940s and benefiting from the backing of the Church, groups such as the *Movimiento Nacionalista Tacuara* and *Guardia Restauradora Nacional*

helped mobilize students and other Argentines in support of the *Ley Domingonera* as well as the Church's traditionalist vision. Intent on undermining the liberal, secular, and democratic revival taking shape in academia, politics, and society at large, these bands of right-wing extremists initiated an extended campaign of intimidation and violence that targeted the government, reformists, and, above all, Argentine Jews. In the months and years following the laica-libre affair and, particularly, in the aftermath of the May 1960 Eichmann kidnapping, Tacuara and the GRN regularly attacked individual Jews and Jewish institutions, the most publicized incident being the Sirota affair of June 1962.

Rather than shy away from this wave of anti-Semitism, the Jewish community— which under Frondizi was as organized, prosperous, and politically confident as ever before— and their many non-Jewish allies employed these attacks as a springboard to promote further their liberal democratic national vision. Combining pre-Uriburu practices and modern progressive principles, together they rallied around these attacks, never more so than during the Sirota affair, to call for a more open, tolerant, inclusive, and just Argentina. Put differently, their collective reactions and protests were about far more than denouncing anti-Semitism or ostracizing the likes of Tacuara and the GRN; instead, they aimed to reassert what it meant (or did not mean) to be “Argentine” and, in the process, reclaim control of their nation's dominant cultural narrative, which, in their view, had been under siege ever since the first military coup of September 1930. By examining Jewish and non-Jewish responses to this new and unprecedented wave of anti-Semitism, most notably the Sirota affair, this chapter explores Argentina's democratic awakening of the late-1950s and early-1960s and, by extension, the changing and often still ambiguous meanings of *Jewishness* and *argentinidad* in this land of immigrants.

Historical Background

Less than two months after the military, with key support from the Church, industrialists, landowners, nationalists, and large segments of Argentina's frustrated and disenfranchised middle class, deposed Perón in September 1955, General Pedro Aramburu replaced General Lonardi as the nation's provisional president.³ That change in leadership was a product of an ideological struggle brewing within the armed forces that centered around one overriding question that would consume every subsequent government over the next two decades: what to do about peronism? That is, what to do about the corporatist peronist machine that had empowered the nation's working-class like never before and, simultaneously, shut out or marginalized many of the nation's traditional power brokers as well as much of the diverse middle-class. On the one hand stood a group of military "soft-liners," led by Lonardi, that wished to preserve much of Perón's social, economic, educational, and corporatist system—including, to the Church's great satisfaction, the restoration of mandatory Catholic education in public schools— yet eliminate some of its more corrupt practices; in effect, "soft-liners" hoped that Lonardi might assume Perón's position as popular president and erect a system of "Peronism without Perón."⁴ On the other hand, Lonardi's Vice-President, Admiral Isaac Rojas, headed a larger group of military "hard-liners" who wished to revive Argentina's 1932-1943 *Concordancia*-like political framework— including a return to lay education— and, above all, root out all vestiges of peronism in Argentine society, by extended military rule if necessary.⁵

Although Aramburu was more of a moderate than Rojas, his selection as president by the armed forces on November 13, 1955 reflected the political triumph of the "hard-liners." After assuming the presidency, Aramburu quickly set out "to dismantle Peronism."⁶ Over the next two years, Aramburu dissolved the peronist party, jailed or expelled peronist leaders,

expropriated peronist newspapers and other media outlets, prohibited the use of peronist slogans and insignias, abolished the 1949 (Peronist) Constitution, and even had (“Santa”) Evita’s remains surreptitiously removed from their resting place.⁷ Equally significant, he decreed an immediate wage freeze of workers’ salaries and sought to gain control of the nation’s most powerful union— the peronist-dominated CGT— as part of a determined government effort to ‘deregulate’ the economy and attract foreign investment.⁸

Aramburu’s assault on peronism, however, ultimately backfired. In June 1956, a marginal group of pro-peronist army officers and union leaders organized an anti-Aramburu revolt aimed at mobilizing sympathetic soldiers and workers and undermining, in some cases even assassinating, high-ranking government figures. State forces quickly crushed the revolt, yet Aramburu was determined to make an example of its ringleaders: over the next few days, he ordered twenty-seven peronists shot without the right to a trial.⁹ Even in a country that in recent decades had experienced three military coups, long periods of authoritarian rule, and repeated violations of civil liberties, Aramburu’s brutal act of vengeance was both unprecedented and long-lasting; according to Paul Lewis, “it fixed an unbridgeable gap between the Peronists and anti-Peronists and doomed any attempts to purge Peronism from the labor movement.”¹⁰

Rather than eliminate peronism, Aramburu’s repressive measures only served to reinvigorate the movement, including its continued faith in Perón. After the June 1956 fiasco, peronist militants stepped up their underground protest efforts— often referred to as *La Resistencia*— which included organized work slowdowns, acts of sabotage (i.e. destroying factory machinery), the spread of propaganda (i.e. popular slogans such as “Perón will return” were plastered on city buildings), heavy recruitment of new members, terror campaigns (i.e. the bombing of railroad tracks, oil pipelines, and government buildings), and even arms smuggling

operations routed through neighboring countries such as Bolivia and Paraguay.¹¹ By mid-1957, as militant peronists grew increasingly confident, they also gradually began to sponsor a number of open labor strikes and, then in September, established a new, radical syndicalist bloc within the CGT called *Las 62 Organizaciones* which became particularly effective in attracting a new generation of youths to the peronist cause.¹² It was no coincidence that the mounting success of the peronist labor movement also coincided with the growing demise of Aramburu's two year-old 'liberalizing' economic plan centered around cutting workers' wages, reducing government spending, eliminating price controls and food subsidies, privatizing state industries, and attracting investment from abroad.¹³

In the face of these and other formidable political and economic obstacles, Aramburu agreed, in the second-half of 1957, to relinquish power and, as he had initially promised when he assumed the presidency in November 1955, (finally) to hold general elections to restore democratic civilian rule. There was, however, one significant caveat— what Guillermo O'Donnell dubs the "impossible game"— that invariably weakened the nature of that democracy: Aramburu and the military "hard-liners" still had no intention of ending the ban on peronism or of allowing Perón to return to Argentina to participate in the presidential elections slated for February 1958.¹⁴ With Perón and the Peronist Party sidelined, the Radical Party appeared in great position to capture the February election, which proved politically acceptable to Aramburu and the military "hard-liners" who felt that they would still be able to exercise considerable behind-the-scenes control.

The Radicals and Perón, however, each threw a significant curve into the military's plans. Divided internally and unable to agree upon a single presidential candidate, The Radical Party (UCR) split into two independent factions: the liberal-right *Unión Cívica Radical del Pueblo* (UCRP) and the more left-leaning *Unión Cívica Radical Intransigente* (UCRI).¹⁵ Headed by

Ricardo Balbín, who had lost the 1951 presidential election to Perón, the UCRP, not unlike Aramburu and the military “hard-liners,” favored a complete break with the Peronists. Conversely, the UCRI, led by Balbín’s 1951 running mate and longtime political rival Arturo Frondizi, was more open to the possibility of working with the Peronists and even hoped to secure a measure of political support among union leaders and the working class. In what amounted to a potential preview of the February 1958 presidential election, Balbín and Frondizi faced off for the first time at the July 27, 1957 presidential convention. In a particularly close vote, Balbín and the UCRP edged Frondizi and the UCRI by three percentage points.¹⁶

Yet neither Balbín nor Frondizi won that July primary. Still very much in command of the Peronists from Caracas, the politically masterful Perón instructed his loyal followers to participate in the July primary by casting blank ballots at the polls.¹⁷ Remarkably, Perón achieved, by way of those blank votes, a slim victory over both of his Radical challengers: he “garnered” 24.3 percent of the total vote compared to Balbín’s 24.2 percent and Frondizi’s 21.2 percent, with the remainder divided among a number of smaller parties.¹⁸ Although the military never would have consecrated Perón’s victory had it occurred during the official February 1958 election, the July 1957 outcome no doubt greatly embarrassed Aramburu and his military colleagues. More importantly, the results also taught Frondizi, Balbín, and the other non-peronist candidates an invaluable political lesson: whomever managed to secure the peronist vote in the coming months would almost certainly capture the presidency in February 1958.¹⁹

Given his more pragmatic and conciliatory political approach, it was not surprising that Frondizi seized the opportunity. Although Balbín had greater name-recognition as well as Aramburu’s support, Frondizi possessed a fresher political profile and more broad-based public appeal. His modernist, development-minded economic and social platform— known as *desarrollismo*— had already captured the imagination of large segments of Argentina’s middle

and progressive classes as well as that of key manufacturers and industrialists dissatisfied with the nation's outdated commercial infrastructure and persistent economic woes. At the same time, Frondizi's talk of wage increases and land reform also proved attractive to working class groups and the rural poor, respectively. Determined to gain the political backing of Peronists, Frondizi, following the July 1957 presidential primary, discreetly sent a delegation to Venezuela to meet and negotiate directly with Perón. In exchange for Perón's electoral support in the upcoming presidential contest, Frondizi agreed, among other things, to lift the ban on peronism and allow Perón to return to Argentina.²⁰ Frondizi's bold political gamble paid off handsomely in the short-term when, on February 23, 1958, he handily defeated Balbín to capture the Casa Rosada.²¹ However his 'secret' pact with Perón, which many openly suspected, came at a high, long-term cost: he became partially indebted to Perón politically and, simultaneously, lost considerable trust within the military— particularly among "hard-liners"— who, from that moment forward, viewed Frondizi with added suspicion.²²

Over the next four years, Frondizi struggled to balance the conflicting and often-irreconcilable demands placed upon him by Perón and the military.²³ At first, he embraced a measure of Perón's populism by according union workers a sixty percent wage increase, freezing the prices of certain staple goods, and easing many of Aramburu's suffocating (anti-peronist) union restrictions.²⁴ He also submitted in May 1958— undoubtedly in part to repay Perón for his invaluable pre-election support— a bill to the Radical-dominated Congress that called for an end to the military's 1955 ban on peronism; after intense negotiations with disgruntled military officers, peronist symbols, activities, and organizations were finally legalized, yet the Peronist Party and Perón himself continued to be banned in Argentina.²⁵ Unfortunately for Frondizi, this attempted compromise on the thorny issue of peronism appeased neither Perón nor Aramburu, each of whom complained about Frondizi's lack of reliability.²⁶

By late-1958, Frondizi's early populist measures, notably the sixty percent wage increase accorded to union workers and the above-mentioned price freeze, proved economically unsustainable. To the particular satisfaction of military "hard-liners" and the liberal right (i.e. Balbín and the UCRP), Frondizi shifted political gears and adopted a stringent International Monetary Fund (IMF) austerity program aimed at reducing government spending, easing the country's trade deficit, replenishing the central bank's dwindling reserves, and boosting foreign investment.²⁷ In his bid to accelerate industrial growth, he also reversed a campaign promise not to turn Argentina's oil production and distribution over to foreign corporations and then, under considerable pressure from the military hierarchy, created CONINTES, a repressive anti-union government agency.²⁸ Frondizi's acceptance of the IMF plan as well as the more restrictive labor policies finally led Perón, six months after the outbreak of the Cuban Revolution, to withdraw his support of Frondizi. Perón's decision not only proved politically embarrassing for Frondizi, but also left him increasingly at the mercy of the military.

Yet thanks in large measure to the growing success of his modernizing *desarrollismo* program, Frondizi managed to keep the military and peronists at bay between 1959 and 1961. To the great satisfaction of many industrialists, manufacturers, entrepreneurs, and other key segments of the business community,²⁹ Frondizi's ambitious program of industrial and technical development spearheaded significant capital investment in the nation's fledging petrochemical, steel, oil, energy, and automotive sectors while decreasing the nation's reliance on traditional agriculture and expensive imports.³⁰ The initial appeal of his 'developmentalist' plan also went beyond merely boosting the nation's economic prospects: it provided Argentines, notably the nation's diverse middle class, with an important psychological lift. With its emphasis on openness, rule of law, national reconciliation, progressive education, and overall modernization, Frondizi's economic and social platform injected into Argentine society a renewed sense of hope

and optimism that was heartening to many after years of authoritarian, conflict-ridden, and circumscribed political rule. Indeed, for the first time in years, many Argentines sensed that Argentina was finally on the elusive road to joining the rest of the Western world by truly becoming a *país moderno* or “modern country.”

So long as the nation’s economic advance continued, the military hierarchy, despite isolated plots by select officers to oust Frondizi between 1959-1961, supported or at least tolerated the president.³¹ That all changed in the second-half of 1961 when the economy, as invariably seemed the case in Argentina, began to falter. Growing numbers of high-ranking generals, more openly and vocally than ever before, began to criticize Frondizi, tactically focusing on his “questionable” handling of foreign policy. In particular, they denounced his public and private expressions of sympathy towards Cuba and his less than full diplomatic embrace of U.S. hemispheric policy.³² Frondizi did little to restore the military’s trust in him when, in August 1961, he secretly met with Ernesto “Che” Guevara at the presidential palace in Buenos Aires and then, at a diplomatic summit of the Americas in January 1962, had Argentina abstain— against the express wishes of both the United States and the Argentine military— from expelling Cuba from the Organization of American States.³³

Following that key series of events, prominent military officers, including many who had previously supported or tolerated Frondizi, began to talk seriously about the need to remove him from office. The last straw for Frondizi came in March 1962 when, in the weeks leading up to that month’s all-important congressional elections, he took the political gamble of his presidency: after failing back in May 1958 to convince the military to legalize the Peronist Party, Frondizi now unilaterally decided to end Aramuru’s 1955 ban and finally allow Peronist candidates to participate in the upcoming March 18, 1962 midterm elections. Well aware of the potential pitfalls of such a political gamble, Frondizi and his advisors felt comfortable with it for

four reasons. First, given their party's strong showing during three recent provincial elections (in December 1961), Frondizi and his staff felt confident about the UCRI's prospects in the upcoming March congressional contests. Second, despite the country's current economic troubles, they believed that most middle and upper class Argentines, fearful of a Peronist victory and the prospect of Perón returning to power, would rally behind the UCRI. Third, with an eye on his own potential re-election in 1964, Frondizi found it increasingly difficult to justify the continued proscription of the Peronist Party while publicly championing national reconciliation, rule of law, and constitutional democracy. Finally, Frondizi hoped that decisive election victories in March 1962 would provide him and his party with the necessary political leverage to loosen the military's suffocating noose around his presidency.³⁴

Frondizi's political gamble proved disastrous. On March 18, Peronists, with a strong show of support among union workers and the rural poor, won political control of ten of fourteen provinces, including all-important Buenos Aires— the nation's population and military hub. Over the next ten days, Frondizi, leading military officers, other key political leaders, and even the United States struggled to find a political solution to this 'crisis'. After Frondizi refused to annul the election results, the armed forces— absolutely unwilling to accept a Peronist victory— stepped in on March 28 and ousted Frondizi.³⁵ Once again, Argentina's experiment in constitutional democracy had ended prematurely; "ironically," writes Robert Potash, "were it not for the political consequences, the March 18 election might be remembered as an example of Argentine civic culture at its best."³⁶

Assessing Frondizi's Legacy

Although not deserving of all of the blame, Frondizi had failed in several key and interrelated respects. For one, despite his ambitious and promising program of growth and

development, ultimately he had proved unable to fully resuscitate the country economically. Secondly, his four-year democratic experiment invariably had been compromised, as the election results of March 1962 helped demonstrate, by the continued exclusion of Perón and the Peronist Party— indeed, it had proved to be an “impossible game.”³⁷ Thirdly, he was incapable of overcoming the severe constraints placed upon him by Perón and the military; delicately balancing their conflicting and often-irreconcilable demands had proved too taxing politically. Finally, despite his inaugural appeals in February 1958 to have Argentines try and “eliminate hatred and fear from their hearts,” as well as his efforts to end political discrimination— his proposed amnesty in May 1958 of all past peronist and military crimes serves as one good example— in the end, Frondizi was only marginally more successful than his predecessors at helping Argentina surmount the profound sense of political divisiveness that had plagued her over the past two decades.³⁸ In short, if Frondizi were to be judged by his ability to have constructed, as his presidential slogan of 1958 had proclaimed, “un país en crecimiento sin conflictos,” then it would be difficult to rate his four years in power as anything but a disappointment.³⁹

Yet to evaluate his presidency solely on the basis of these major shortcomings overlooks the broader historical significance of Frondizi’s abbreviated tenure. For the first time since President Yrigoyen (1916-1922 and 1928-1930), an Argentine entirely from outside the ranks of the military legally took office, establishing Frondizi as a truly *civilian* leader in the eyes of his supporters as well as many of his detractors.⁴⁰ Moreover, after twenty-eight years of often authoritarian and repressive rule, his liberal democratic platform also signaled for many Argentines, particularly the nation’s diverse middle class, the dawn of a markedly new era in the nation’s turbulent history, one that (temporarily) brought to an end to the auspicious and less-than-democratic 1930-1958 political cycle. His commitment— not without its contradictions—

to the rule of law, reconciliation, civil liberties, and greater tolerance helped usher in a new climate of long-awaited political, cultural, and intellectual freedom in Argentine society. Indeed, one could argue that if the election of March 18, 1962, to extend Potash's analysis above, could have been remembered as a shining example of Argentine civic culture, then so too could have the entire Frondizi presidency that had given rise to it.

To his credit, Frondizi recognized early in 1958 that years of undemocratic rule required a substantially new political framework, one bent on promoting openness and mutual respect by bolstering public confidence in government institutions, law and order, the economy, the media, public education, and the Constitution. In a country where, particularly in the aftermath of the Nacionalista, Peronist, and Aramburu regimes, apprehension, suspicion, and distrust had grown widespread, Frondizi encouraged opposition parties to speak out openly, union workers to elect their own leaders without fear of outside interference, and journalists and academics to think and act freely.⁴¹ He also appealed for an end to political hatred and discrimination, and supported his rhetoric by forgiving past peronist and military crimes and by pushing for an end to Aramburu's suffocating anti-peronist restrictions.⁴² The fact that Frondizi, confronted with countless political obstacles, ultimately fell short in his bid to bridge the political and ideological gap between peronists and anti-peronists should not fully detract from his *efforts* to promote a more harmonious, uninhibited, and tolerant democracy not seen in Argentina for nearly three decades, if ever before.

At the same time, Frondizi helped introduce in Argentina a modernizing spirit that brought the country economically, socially, and culturally closer to the more industrial and democratic West. Through his ambitious program of *desarrollismo*, Frondizi set out to diminish Argentina's reliance on traditional agricultural exports by centering the nation's economic recovery around an unprecedented commitment to technological innovation and industrial

growth.⁴³ This transformation not only boosted foreign and local investment in the production of things such as steel, oil, cars, electronics, plastics, fertilizers, and clothing, but also helped generate a number of new middle-wage professional, manufacturing, and service jobs.

For better and for worse, it also brought about significant changes in the nature and direction of Argentine consumer, business, family, and gender culture. Many Argentines, particularly (but not limited to) those in the middle and upper classes with greater resources and opportunities available to them, eagerly embraced new, suddenly more accessible liberal American and European attitudes and fashions, ranging, for instance, from innovative advertising and marketing techniques, the study of new academic disciplines such as sociology and biochemistry, women in the workforce, and the advent of psychoanalysis to blue jeans, Elvis, birth control, and more open ideas about sexuality and marriage.⁴⁴ This social and cultural makeover that blossomed in the years after Frondizi took office was all the more significant when one considers the substantial inroads made over the previous quarter-century by those traditional and conservative Argentine forces that supported more hierarchical, formal, religious, and even prudish norms and values.

Frondizi's decision, among the most notable of his presidency, to undo state censorship further aided the spread of liberalism and (limited) democracy in Argentina.⁴⁵ After years in which the Nacionalistas, Perón, and Aramburu had suppressed or altogether banned political organizations, newspapers, radio stations, scholarly pursuits, and student associations that conflicted with their respective policies or viewpoints, Frondizi helped usher in a new climate of intellectual freedom, absent since the days of Yrigoyen, that revitalized and transformed Argentine political and social thought.⁴⁶ In particular, journalists, politicians, academics, workers, artists, and others seized the opportunity to speak out more openly and critically about past and present domestic and international happenings, a practice relatively common in North

America and Western Europe, yet rare if not perilous in 1930-1958 Argentina. Although this new sense of transparency and openness did not, as we shall continue to see, suddenly put an end to the tensions and divisions that had plagued Argentina since 1930, it proved instrumental among Argentines in helping to reconstruct a more uninhibited, free-spirited, and tolerant society, even after Frondizi was ousted in March of 1962.

Middle class liberals, at the heart of Ronald Dolkart's anointed "democratic majority," were at the forefront of this civic and intellectual revival. Politically marginalized over much of the past twenty-eight years, "they" set out, beginning with the fall of Perón in 1955 and notably after Frondizi's election in 1958, to reassert a decidedly more lay and embracing vision of *argentinidad*. They sought to mitigate, if not reverse, many of the anti-liberal and pro-Catholic gains of recent decades and replace them with a more 'enlightened' cultural narrative that combined much of the Generation of 1880s' national blueprint— including the all-important preservation of historic Law 1420— with other progressive elements emerging in the United States and Western Europe. In short, they were committed to building a society where open political debate, rule of law, a clear separation between Church and State, mass secular education, freedom of thought, social and cultural tolerance, and civilian and constitutional democracy prevailed.

This reformist surge was widely evident. Liberal newspapers such as *El Mundo*, *La Razón*, and *La Prensa*, all of which had been banned under Perón, greatly expanded their circulation after 1958 and, in conjunction with voguish upstart *Clarín* and the more established (and elitist) *La Nación*, helped revive Argentina's once impressive journalistic tradition.⁴⁷ At the same time, scores of new magazines filled local kiosks and bookstores, including popular titles such as *Que*, *Pasado y Presente*, *Cuadernos de Cultura*, *Tia Vincente*, *Claudia*, *Confirmado*, and *Primera Plana*. Like *El Mundo*, *La Razón*, *La Prensa*, and *Correo de la Tarde*, they shared a

penchant for questioning authority and the status quo, often taking aim at past political and cultural abuses prevalent under the military and Perón. They did more, however, than merely report news and ideas from a liberal or leftist vantage point. They also profoundly helped shape— notably new publications such as *Claudia* (dedicated to the “New Woman”), *Tía Vicente* (a popular magazine of political satire), *Primera Plana* (an Argentine version of *Time* or *Newsweek* founded by a young Jacobo Timerman), and *Mafalda* (Quino’s biting comic book named for its young, perspicacious, and often blunt *female* protagonist)— the imaginations of a generation of captive middle class readers while also “demonstrating,” in the words of Luis Alberto Romero, “just how close to the rest of the world Argentina was in those years.”⁴⁸

Similarly, a new crop of Argentine filmmakers became actively involved in this liberal project of political and cultural renewal. With the founding in 1958 of the *Instituto Nacional de Cinematografía*, they produced over the next several years a fresh wave of creative and provocative films, including “After the Silence,” “From Behind a Long Wall,” and “Prisoners of the Night.”⁴⁹ As the titles alone suggest, many of these new films spoke critically of the nation’s recent authoritarian past and, without ever reifying Frondizi, enthusiastically applauded the return of civilian constitutional democracy that his election helped spawn. This liberal-democratic revival also spilled into the streets of major cities like Córdoba, Santa Fe, and Buenos Aires where animated (and mostly middle class) Argentines flooded new nightclubs and music halls that proliferated after February 1958, dancing to the old sounds of Carlos Gardel and Benny Goodman and the new Argentine and American beats of Eddie Pequenino, Mr. Roll, Sandra de los Fuegos, Elvis Presley, and Bill Haley.⁵⁰

Perhaps nowhere was this civic transformation more apparent than in the field of (higher) education. Progressive-minded students, professors, and administrators became increasingly committed to regaining political and intellectual control of public education in

general and the nation's universities in particular, whose 'cherished' autonomy— enshrined, in their view, by the *Reforma Universitaria* of 1918— had come under steady attack ever since the nationalist-led coup of June 1943.⁵¹ Together they opposed not only the profound pedagogical shifts of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s (i.e. mandatory Catholic education, field trips to military battalions and churches, or the singing in schools each morning of peronist hymns such as the "Marcha del Reservista"⁵²), but also took particular exception at the authoritarian ways in which governments and the Church had stifled scholarly pursuits, fired or persecuted professors and administrators who opposed their political views, and stacked the nation's schools and universities with their supporters, including many staunchly (and often less-than-qualified) conservative Catholics.⁵³

Beginning in late-1955 with the selection of prominent Argentine historian José Luis Romero as rector of the prestigious *Universidad de Buenos Aires* and intensifying after Frondizi took office, liberal-leaning students, academics, and administrators set out to remove clerics, peronists, and nationalists 'unjustly' appointed to university posts over the course of the previous fifteen years and, in the process, reassert lay education Law 1420.⁵⁴ At the same time, they demonstrated a commitment to democratizing higher education by making colleges more financially accessible to all Argentines, and, in line with the broader transformation taking shape in other areas of Argentine society, "modernizing" the curriculum. That meant, for instance, a profound intellectual desire to revamp traditional disciplines such as economics, history, literature, and philosophy as well as introduce innovative new ones from abroad such as biochemistry, agronomy, psychology and sociology.⁵⁵ Their particular embrace of new quantitative and analytical methods and tools— for example, carrying out detailed marketing and sociological surveys of specific sectors of the population or making use of modern laboratories and procedures to examine chemical bonding agents— underscored their

bourgeoning faith and confidence in (social and applied) “science” and, by extension, open, critical, and secular thought.

The pioneering work of pre-eminent scholars Gino Germani and José Luis Romero on Argentine immigration nicely illustrates the nature and direction of this reformist transformation taking shape in academia and beyond. Drawing inspiration from the French Annales School (notably Fernand Braudel) and avant-garde North American social science and immigration scholars of the 1950s (notably Walt Rostow and Talcott Parsons), Germani and Romero systematically examined, for the first time in Argentine academic circles, the profound impact that the mass of (European) newcomers and their native-born descendants had had on the country’s economic, social, and cultural formation over the previous half-century.⁵⁶ Making impressive qualitative (Romero) and quantitative (Germani) use of new sources, notably national census data and microfilmed government archives, they pointed to the central role immigrants and their progeny had played in Argentina’s economic development and underscored the rapid and significant process of social and cultural “fusion” that had unfolded between newcomers and natives in Argentine society.⁵⁷ Not unlike Alberdi and Sarmiento a century earlier, Germani and Romero concluded that Argentina owed much of her ‘successful’ transition from a traditional to a modern society to those millions of European settlers.⁵⁸

Their claims had several important implications for Argentina’s past, present, and future. For one, Germani and Romero laid the groundwork for subsequent generations of Argentine researchers and scholars to pay closer attention to the processes and markers of immigrant assimilation, acculturation, and acceptance in Argentine society and, by extension, the role of newcomers in the making and shaping of national identity.⁵⁹ Second, as Fernando Devoto and Tulio Halperín Donghi each have pointed out, Germani and Romero conflated their liberal-modernist aspirations of the 1950s and 1960s, particularly their fondness of European

and American progressive scholarly ideas and attitudes, with their positive historical assessment of immigration, most notably the profound impact Europeans had on the nation's economic and cultural development.⁶⁰ Finally, by casting immigrants in a positive historical light, Germani and Romero also contributed to the growing rhetoric in the late-1950s and early-1960s of admiration, respect, and tolerance towards immigrant (and minority) communities which constituted an important part of the nation's broader modernizing progressive discourse.

As was the case politically with Frondizi, this liberal reformist project faced challenges from forces on both the Argentine left and, particularly, the right. For one, Peronists resisted post-1955 liberal efforts to purge Peronists from their university posts and took particular exception at the perceived "intellectualism" (some might say "snobbism") of certain liberal thinkers who, as Peronists saw it, failed to take into account sufficiently the needs and concerns of the peronist masses or, worse, simply dismissed peronism as a "barbaric aberration."⁶¹ Moreover, in the months and years following the outbreak of the 1959 Cuban Revolution, liberal-minded intellectuals and professionals also had to contend with the rise in Argentina of the radical New Left, a hodgepodge of Marxists, Socialists, and left-wing Peronists and nationalists who often appeared at odds among themselves.⁶² Disillusioned with Frondizi's 'developmentalist' concessions to foreign multinationals and the IMF as well as the 'idle chatter' of liberal reformists, the New Left, drawing inspiration from the likes of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, advocated national liberation through *revolution* (including a complete break from the 'imperial' United States), and not democratic *evolution*, as the only viable solution to Argentina's persistent economic and political woes.⁶³

However, the most serious challenge liberal reformists faced came not from the radical-left but the conservative and, particularly, far right. Having relished their political and pedagogical role over much of the past quarter-century, the Church and its right-wing Catholic

supporters quickly came to regard this liberal intellectual and political advance as a threat not only to public education, but, more broadly, to traditional notions of family, marriage, sex, and gender in Argentina.⁶⁴ Unable under Frondizi, himself a liberal-minded intellectual, to resuscitate mandatory Catholic education in public schools, the Church and its allies fought hard to curb the post-February 1958 cultural and pedagogical advance toward things modern, progressive, and secular. For instance, in the ongoing battle for control of the classroom and the curriculum, the Church helped spawn and support the growth of active Catholic nationalist youth organizations in high schools and universities throughout the country. Together they successfully pressured Frondizi to appoint Luis McKay, a militant Catholic nationalist, to become one of the president's top-ranked education advisors and, most significantly, got Frondizi to sign the controversial 1958 *Ley Domingonera*, which, for the first time in Argentine history, legalized private Catholic universities.⁶⁵

Although the *Ley Domingonera* did little more than provide private Catholic universities with access to government funds and the power to confer nationally-recognized college degrees, it nonetheless sparked— in what became known as the *laica-libre* affair— one of the most heated public debates of Frondizi's presidency, amounting to a virtual referendum over the popular legitimacy of two sharply-conflicting national cultural narratives.⁶⁶ Haunted by the memory of mandatory Catholic education of the 1940s and 1950s, yet buoyed by the recent advent of more open, constitutional democracy, a broad coalition of liberal-minded students, professors, and administrators energetically rejected even this limited incarnation of state-sponsored religious education. Perceiving it as a direct threat to their pedagogical and, indeed, secular national aspirations, they took to the streets, where they were joined by thousands of like-minded Argentines, to protest *Ley Domingonera* and, in the process, reaffirm their commitment to the spirit of Law 1420.⁶⁷ The Church and its allies countered with energetic

rallies of their own, looking to preserve Frondizi's recent decree (notwithstanding the fact that they largely opposed the political and ideological direction of Frondizi's presidency) and defend 'traditional' values in the face of this threatening modern, liberal offensive.⁶⁸

The laica-libre debate underscored several things about Argentine politics and culture in 1958. First, it made clear that the issue of Catholic education, with all its real and symbolic pageantry, continued to inflame and divide Argentines. Second, judging by public opinion at the time of the debates and protests, a sizeable majority of Argentines supported the secularist platform, providing the nation's liberal, democratic advocates with an important practical and psychological lift.⁶⁹ Finally, given that *Ley Domingonera*, despite strident secularist opposition, was ultimately upheld, the laica-libre affair simultaneously served as a vocal reminder of the Church's persistent influence in this new age of liberalism, not to mention a harbinger of the political hurdles that Frondizi and his government would be forced to confront in the coming years.⁷⁰

The Rise of the Far Right, Anti-Semitism, and the Reformist Response

Equally significant, the laica-libre affair signaled the dramatic rise of a number of isolated, yet vocal and organized groups of ultranationalist right-wing Catholics, none more (notorious) than Tacuara. Initially founded in 1955 as a youth organization by upper class traditionalist Alberto Ezcurra Uriburu, "Tacuara"—the name refers to the lance historically wielded by Argentine gauchos—represented a new, more aggressive ideological incarnation of the Nacionalista movement of the 1930s and 1940s. Taking a philosophical cue from such people as Julio Meinvielle, Gustavo Martínez Zuviría, and Mátias Sánchez Sorondo, Tacuara assumed an active role in mobilizing students and other Argentines in support of *Ley Domingonera* in particular and the Church's traditionalist vision in general.⁷¹ On the heels of

their success in helping to uphold the domingonera law, Tacuara and other groups of right-wing extremists embarked on an extended campaign to subvert, often through intimidation and violence, the liberal-secular revival taking shape in academia, politics, and Argentine society at large.

In their offensive against left-leaning reformists, Tacuara and its allies principally came to target Argentine Jews.⁷² Like their anti-Semitic, Catholic nationalist predecessors of decades gone by, they regarded Jews as the most serious threat to traditional “Catholic” and “Argentine” values. Yet beginning in 1958, Tacuara and other such groups grew doubly alarmed at the ‘inundation of Jewish Marxists’ in the nation’s universities and the Frondizi’s government.⁷³ In a perverted sense, Tacuara was right: never before in Argentine history had Argentine Jews enjoyed such a significant presence in higher education and national politics. For instance, prominent Jewish intellectuals such as David and Ismael Viñas, Noé Jitrik, León Rozitchner, and others worked at the University of Buenos Aires and, in 1958 alone, Frondizi appointed David Blejer as his Vice-Minister of Interior, Samuel Schumukler as his Executive Secretary, and José Mazar Barnett as President of the Central Bank. Frondizi also openly supported the gubernatorial cause of Luis Gutnizky in Misiones (he won) as well as the successful congressional campaigns of four Jewish diputados (all of whom were UCRI candidates).⁷⁴

However, it was not merely the unprecedented number of elected or highly-placed Argentine Jews during the Frondizi years that proved encouraging. In a 1961 article entitled “Jews in Argentine Institutional Life,” Jewish Argentine journalist Ignacio Winizky pointed out that as promising and telling as the heightened degree of Jewish participation was in, as he puts it, “the consolidation of the nation,” more impressive was the fact that “for the first time” in Argentina many of these prominent Jewish figures “openly identified as Jews” (*confesadamente judíos*).⁷⁵ Equally significant, as a whole the Jewish community enjoyed an unprecedented

rapport with Frondizi and, to paraphrase historian Haim Avni, Jewish Argentines as *individuals* came to enjoy in 1958 and 1959 an unparalleled sense of security as well as economic and social prosperity.⁷⁶

Beginning shortly after the laica-libre affair, Tacuara appeared determined to change all that. As a central part of its broader effort to undermine Argentina's liberal-secular movement, Tacuara and its sympathizers sponsored, between 1958-1964, a wave of violent attacks on individual Jews and Jewish institutions. Those attacks included the shattering the windows of the *Sociedad Hebraica Argentina* (a Jewish literary and recreational center) in Buenos Aires while shouting slurs like "Death to the Jews" and "Out with Blejer;" a brutal assault on a number of Jewish youths in the streets of Buenos Aires as they returned home from a local Zionist youth workshop; the planting of explosives at synagogues in the cities of La Plata, Córdoba, and Buenos Aires, including at the nation's oldest and most prominent one adjacent to the famous Teatro Colón; and storming and vandalizing an exposition at the University of Buenos Aires sponsored by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.⁷⁷

The government and virtually all opposition parties (notably, the UCRP, the Socialistas, the Progressive Democrats, and the Christian Democrats) publicly and privately denounced this rising wave of anti-Semitic violence. For instance, in 1959 and early-1960, Frondizi and his Minister of Interior Alfredo Vítolo met with DAIA leaders and representatives of the Israeli Embassy to reassure them that these "barbaric acts" were the isolated work of extremists and ran contrary to the progressive and tolerant goals and ideals of their administration and Argentine society at large. More significantly perhaps, Congress, at the conclusion of its January 12, 1960 session, condemned the recent wave of anti-Semitism and reiterated its stern opposition to all forms of religious and racial persecution and again proclaimed its commitment to democracy and human rights.⁷⁸ Between 1958-1960, the nation's leading newspapers and

magazines echoed those sentiments on several occasions, many of which the DAIA compiled and published in a special 1960 report.⁷⁹ That report, entitled “The Argentine Conscience in the Face of the Racist Danger,” represented not only a public inventory of recent anti-Semitic crimes, but arguably also a psychological affirmation for the Jewish community of the vitality of Argentina’s democratic institutions and the collective resolve of its people.

The Eichmann Kidnapping

Nothing seemed to test the strength of that resolve like the Eichmann episode of May 1960. As Argentines prepared to celebrate their 150th anniversary of self-rule, Israeli secret service operatives, without ever informing Frondizi, kidnapped Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann— who had been living in Argentina since 1950 under the alias Ricardo Klement— near his home on the outskirts of Buenos Aires. Nine days later, those same Mossad agents clandestinely transported Eichmann aboard a passenger airliner from Buenos Aires to Tel Aviv, where, on May 23, Israeli President David Ben-Gurion announced to his country and the world that the former Nazi officer had been apprehended and would be tried for “crimes against humanity.”⁸⁰

In an effort to protect Israel’s positive bilateral relationship with Argentina, and perhaps in the process tarnish the international reputation of Israel’s Muslim neighbors, the Israeli government deceitfully leaked word to the local and international press that Eichmann had been apprehended in an Arab country. However within days of Ben-Gurion’s announcement, foreign media outlets began to suspect otherwise. On May 26, international news wires reported that Eichmann may have been captured in Argentina. Two Argentine afternoon dailies, *La Razón* and *Correo de la Tarde*, carried those wire reports, ones that Israel’s ambassador to Argentina, Arie Levavi, claimed he knew nothing about.⁸¹ The following day, May 27, the *Daily Herald* of

London all but confirmed those initial reports. Then on June 1, *Time* magazine (USA) released a detailed account of Eichmann's capture in Argentina, transcripts of which appeared that same day in *La Nación* and other prominent Argentine dailies.⁸²

Israel's covert operation and deceptive announcement, coupled with its subsequent delay in issuing a forthright apology as well as its misleading account to Argentine authorities that an independent "group of [international Jewish] volunteers," and not Mossad agents, had carried out the kidnapping, put Frondizi in a quite a predicament.⁸³ On the one hand, he wished to preserve Argentina's positive rapport with Israel and convey to Israelis, Jewish Argentines, and the world at large that his government and people "understand perfectly well the emotions held by the Jewish people towards the accused [responsible] for the exterminations in the concentration camps."⁸⁴ At the same time, he was compelled— largely because Israeli authorities had failed to consult with him and because of mounting domestic political pressure from within the UCRP, the Church, the military, right-wing nationalist circles, and even his own foreign ministry— to defend Argentine sovereignty by publicly condemning Israel's flagrant breach of national and international law and even demanding that Eichmann be returned to Argentina to face trial.⁸⁵

After Israel refused, citing the exceptional and unique circumstances of this case, to hand over Eichmann and continued to offer only a veiled apology, Frondizi brought Argentina's grievance before the United Nations on June 10, 1960.⁸⁶ Following eleven days of intense debate and negotiations among Argentine, Israeli, European, and American diplomats, the UN Security Council, on June 22, unanimously approved a pro-Argentine resolution calling Israel's kidnapping "a violation of the sovereignty of the Republic of Argentina...that is incompatible with the United Nations' Charter...and fosters a climate of insecurity and distrust, incompatible with the preservation of peace." The UN resolution also "urged the government of Israel to

make adequate amends,” yet, significantly, did not call upon Ben-Gurion to hand Eichmann back over to Frondizi.⁸⁷

Over the next six weeks, Israel ‘made adequate amends’ in a number of ways. First, the Israeli government furnished Argentine authorities with specific details of its May 11 operation. Second, it clarified several less-than-straightforward claims it had previously made, including the bogus assertion that “a group of [international Jewish] volunteers” had apprehended Eichmann. Finally, Israel began to adopt a far more sincere, conciliatory, and apologetic public tone. Satisfied, and eager to put the issue to rest, Frondizi issued, on August 3, 1960, a joint public declaration with a group of high-ranking Israeli diplomats, in which Israel acknowledged that “the act committed by Israeli nationals was prejudicial to the fundamental rights of the Argentine State.” Equally important, both Frondizi and the Israeli representatives reaffirmed their countries’ longstanding friendship and desire for even better relations in the future.⁸⁸

The Argentine Congress and media reacted to the Eichmann kidnapping in much the same way as Frondizi. When news of Eichmann’s illegal capture first broke, and the initial correspondences between Israeli and Argentine officials were made public during the first week of June, congressional diputados and news networks both voiced their anger over Israel’s flagrant breach of Argentine sovereignty, downplaying at that moment Israeli claims about the “exceptional circumstances” surrounding the kidnapping. Without overlooking Eichmann’s past atrocities or the wartime horrors faced by the Jewish people, Congress called for UN sanctions against Israel and demanded that Eichmann be returned to Argentina at once.⁸⁹ The nation’s principal newspapers responded in similar fashion, as epitomized by the following *La Prensa* editorial of June 11, 1960:

The Argentine people, who have always shared the indignation and horror regarding the atrocities committed against the Jews in Germany, cannot approve of its sovereignty being ignored by ‘voluntary agents’ of a foreign nation, with or without that nation’s express

consent, who are dedicated to carrying out investigations, detaining individuals, and carting them off to a foreign jurisdiction, [all the while] forgetting that to obtain [the legal rights to] a criminal one must comply with the only method acceptable among western nations: extradition.⁹⁰

After the UN Security Council and foreign media outlets such as *The New York Times* came out (on June 22 and June 18, respectively) in support of Argentina, such attitudes appeared to soften. Gratified that the international community had sided with Argentina, and appreciative of Israel's increasingly apologetic stance, the Argentine press toned down its 'sovereignty' rhetoric and began to warm up to Israel. Rather than continue to focus solely on Israel's breach of Argentine and international law, *La Prensa*, *El Mundo*, *La Razón*, *Crítica*, *Correo de la Tarde*, and others introspectively began to consider, as Israel had first advocated in early-June, the potentially unique moral and historical circumstances surrounding the Eichmann kidnapping (not to mention Israel's other initial claim about the disproportionate number of Nazi war criminals who had or continued to reside in Argentina).⁹¹ Exhibiting a stronger sense of self-reflexive shame and anger, the national press increasingly began to criticize Argentina's role in harboring Nazis and questioned why the Nacionalista and Peronist governments of the 1940s and 1950s had ever permitted the likes of Eichmann to take refuge in Argentina in the first place.⁹²

Beginning in late-June of 1960, a cross-section of congressional diputados began to voice similar concerns. For instance, at a June 30 press conference, prominent UCRP diputado Silvano Santander, who back in March 1947 had been a leading congressional opponent of Law 12.978 mandating Catholic education in public schools, lamented Perón's postwar decision to permit, if not encourage former Nazi officers to settle in Argentina, remarking that if back then "our country did nothing of what it should have done about those war criminals...we should not place so much emphasis [today] in demanding [Eichmann's] return."⁹³ A day earlier, Ernesto Sanmartino, Antulio Pozzio, Nerio Rojas, and Facundo Suárez sponsored a motion in Congress

calling upon Frondizi's Minister of Foreign Affairs Diógenes Taboada to furnish information about the number and location of other former Nazis currently residing in Argentina and urged him "to demonstrate to the world, through concrete measures, that this country is not a refuge for the majority of war criminals."⁹⁴ Although partly intended as partisan jabs at the UCRI government, these measures reflected a growing desire among a number of diputados in the latter stages of the Eichmann controversy to confront Argentina's Nazi past and, in the process, reaffirm their commitment to a more open, tolerant, and progressive vision of Argentine society, both at home and abroad.⁹⁵

This was especially evident during the congressional session of August 11, 1960 when diputados debated the Eichmann affair for the seventh and final time.⁹⁶ Coming a week after Israel had formally apologized to Argentina and Frondizi had attempted to put the issue finally to rest, members of Congress exhibited a remarkable new sense of empathy towards Israel, indeed acknowledging the "extraordinary circumstances...that characterized this case" and even suggesting, as Ben-Gurion had in his June 3 letter to Argentine authorities, that "in certain cases one has to accept that justice should be placed above the law."⁹⁷ More than in any of the previous six sessions, the nation's diputados not only rebuked the wartime atrocities committed by the likes of Eichmann, Josef Mengele, and Gerhard Bohne— all of whom had emigrated to Argentina under Perón— and paid added homage "to the millions of victims who were sacrificed in the concentration camps," but simultaneously underscored at length, in the words of diputado José García Flores, Argentina's "democratic determination."⁹⁸ Before overwhelmingly approving a congressional resolution that praised Argentina and Israel's shared "ideals of liberty, democracy, and mutual respect," a cross-section of diputados passionately spoke out against any efforts aimed at sparking a "bonfire of racial discrimination and anti-Semitism in the country" and reaffirmed their collective commitment, to paraphrase diputado Juan Isaías

Nougués, to promote a cohesive and integrated Argentina free of religious, racial, or intellectual intolerance.⁹⁹

A New Wave of Anti-Semitism

In articulating this democratic, prejudice-free, and even pluralist vision of *argentinidad*, diputados were also responding to a recent incident in the Argentine city of Paraná where a group of, to borrow from congressman Carlos Perette, “anti-Semitic fanatics” had superimposed a swastika and a Jewish Star of David on an Argentine flag for all to see.¹⁰⁰ That act represented one of the approximately two hundred anti-Semitic incidents that unfolded in Argentina between 1958 and 1964.¹⁰¹ Taking advantage of the Eichmann episode, extremist groups such as Tacuara and the recently-formed *Guardia Restauradora Nacionalista*— both of whose members underwent military-like training— stepped up their attacks on individual Jews and Jewish institutions in the period after May 1960, overshadowing those which they had carried out in the two years between the 1958 laica-libre affair and the 1960 Eichmann kidnapping.

In their new anti-Semitic offensive, Tacuara and the GRN employed tactics both old and new. For instance, immediately following the Eichmann kidnapping, they held a number of impromptu rallies and demonstrations, including two at the steps of the Foreign Ministry and the University of Buenos Aires, where typically between fifty to a hundred protestors gathered and chanted inflammatory slogans such as “We Want Eichmann Back,” “Sovereignty and Homeland Yes, Jews No,” “Jews to Israel,” “Out with the Jews,” and “Death to the Jews;” during the first-half of the 1960s, such slurs also regularly appeared on public buildings and on the walls of Jewish schools, synagogues, community centers, and private homes. In 1961 and 1962, probably the two worst years of anti-Semitism in Argentine history, right-wing extremists also began tossing Molotov cocktails and other incendiary devices through the windows of Jewish

schools and Jewish institutions and at such places as the *Frey Mocho* theater, the Argentine Press Association building, and the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) which they believed were saturated with Jews. Between 1960-1964, members of Tacuara and the GRN also carried out dozens of brutal attacks on individual Jews, including the August 17, 1960 shooting of fifteen year-old Edgardo Manuel Trilnik outside the University of Buenos Aires (he ultimately survived); a nighttime raid in June 1961 on a group of Jewish teenagers asleep at the “Berl Katzenelson” Zionist agricultural youth camp in the Province of Buenos Aires; a vicious assault on two Jewish youths walking the streets of the capital on Rosh Hashanah 1961; and the fatal, point-blank February 29, 1964 shooting of thirty-two year-old Raúl Alterman at the doorway of his parents’ Buenos Aires home.¹⁰²

Many Argentines, particularly those who called for a more democratic and tolerant Argentina, energetically responded to this new wave of violence. For one, Frondizi and his Minister of Interior Alfredo Vítolo denounced these anti-Semitic acts, notably after the August 17, 1960 Trilnik shooting, insisting both privately to Jewish leaders and publicly to all Argentines, that drastic measures would be adopted to combat the rising number of attacks; that the wave of anti-Semitism persisted throughout Frondizi’s presidency spoke in part to the political fragility of his government as well as the tacit support that groups like Tacuara and the GRN enjoyed among sectors of the Church, military, police, and the traditional upper class.¹⁰³ Like his brother and Vítolo, Risieri Frondizi, rector of the prestigious University of Buenos Aires, publicly condemned the wave of hate crimes, arguing in 1960 that they signaled an attack not only on Argentine Jews but on the tenets of liberal-secular education.¹⁰⁴ Between 1960-1964, high school and university students regularly took to the streets to protest the rise of anti-Semitism while news organs such as *La Prensa*, *La Razón*, *Crítica*, *Clarín*, *Correo de la Tarde*, *Primera Plana*, and *Tía Vincente* frequently denounced such attacks and, as they had in the two years prior to

the Eichmann kidnapping, called upon Argentines to promote a more open, accepting, and inclusive society. Moreover, in 1961, both houses of Congress repudiated the surge in anti-Semitism and publicly rejected all “expressions of hatred and aggression based upon a person’s race, color, viewpoint, or religion.”¹⁰⁵

As was the case in 1958 and 1959, the Jewish community, which was as organized and cohesive as it ever had been, took great comfort in these expressions of support. At the same time, members of the community had grown increasingly alarmed in the months and years following the Eichmann kidnapping at the precipitous rise in anti-Semitic violence. As a result, they began to respond in a variety of new, more proactive ways. For one, groups of Jewish parents worked to establish in the early-1960s the first in a series of nationally-accredited private Jewish schools where Jewish children were to receive under one roof all their Argentine curriculum requirements as well as their particular Jewish instruction.¹⁰⁶ Second, in 1960 and 1961, a number of Jewish youths began to organize for the first time, with the quiet support of the Israeli Embassy, armed Jewish self-defense leagues aimed at ‘protecting’ the community against further Tacuara and GRN attacks.¹⁰⁷ In another bold, and this time nonviolent move, community members also began to speak out not only against groups such as Tacuara and GRN, but the perceived lack of police action in arresting those responsible for the attacks. In one particularly scathing denunciation of the police following the August 1960 Trilnik shooting, the mainstream Spanish-language Jewish daily *Mundo Israelita* proclaimed that the police “never discover nor punish [the offenders]” despite knowing “who they are, who their leaders are, the places where they gather, [and] the teachings they rear.”¹⁰⁸ These and other Jewish measures reflected the community’s simultaneous sense of apprehension and confidence during this renewed age of Argentine democracy— a combination that greatly shaped the community as

well as the nation's spirited response to what became the most highly-publicized anti-Semitic episode of this era.

The Sirota Affair

Between 1958-1964, no single anti-Semitic episode shocked and consumed Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines like the Sirota affair of June 1962. Both the Jewish and non-Jewish press deplored Tacuara's brutal June 21 assault on nineteen year-old Graciela Sirota more vociferously than they had any previous or subsequent incident.¹⁰⁹ From the left-leaning *Nueva Sion* to the centrist-right *Mundo Israelita*, Jewish newspapers branded it, in the words of the Sephardic weekly *La Luz*, "an infamous act without precedent."¹¹⁰ Similarly, *La Prensa* called it "an unheard-of assault" while *Noticias Gráficas* labeled it "an act that defies all classification."¹¹¹ In a June 26 editorial, *Clarín* urged Argentines "to condemn the act and reject that which it signifies," while *La Nación* invoked Sarmiento's famous nineteenth-century dialectic by dubbing it "a barbarous act" that "diminishes our community to the level of a primitive people."¹¹²

Echoing *La Nación*, Argentina's new Minister of Interior Carlos Adrogué proclaimed, in a nationwide radio and television address, that the Sirota attack "is unsuited to the ways of Argentines and unacceptable to the standard of our civilization."¹¹³ The nation's principal political parties, particularly the UCRI, the UCRP, the Socialists, and the Christian Democratic Party, publicly repudiated the assault, labeling the three male perpetrators "nazi-fascists" and "assassins and cowards."¹¹⁴ Risieri Frondizi issued a formal statement underscoring the University of Buenos Aires' "most energetic condemnation of this new and criminal violation of human dignity;" student and faculty groups at the UBA also issued similar condemnations of their own.¹¹⁵ Even relatively apolitical groups such as the Buenos Aires Association of Lawyers, the Association of Plumbers, Fitters, and Hydraulicists, the Association of Municipal Physicians,

the Christian Women's Association, labor's 62 *Organizaciones*, the Commercial and Industrial Center of Córdoba, and the newly-formed Metropolitan Association of High School Students, none of which had previously spoken out against anti-Semitism, issued public remarks rebuking the Sirota attack.¹¹⁶

For many Argentines, the Sirota affair signaled not merely an attack on a young Jewish woman or the Jewish community, but a larger blow against the democratic and tolerant collective narrative that they had struggled to assert under Frondizi. It served as a springboard for Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines not only to speak out like never before against the wave of anti-Semitic violence plaguing Argentine society, but also to debate and define what it meant to be "truly Argentine." For members of the nation's diverse "democratic majority" in particular, the Sirota affair emerged as a modern-day struggle between "civilization" and "barbarism," in which they looked to isolate those "nazi-fascists" by articulating and asserting their vision of Argentina as a progressive, compassionate, and pluralist *país moderno*. In condemning the Sirota attack and everything its perpetrators stood for, they ultimately wished to demonstrate, to borrow from a *Clarín* editorial, that this heinous crime "has nothing to do with us. This is not Argentine."¹¹⁷

Why did the Sirota affair stir Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines more than any other anti-Semitic episode of this era? For one, the swastika on Graciela's breast, coupled with Tacuara's subsequent claim that the attack was carried out to avenge Eichmann's recent execution, resonated loudly with Argentines still grappling with their country's past and present role in harboring former Nazi officers. Oswaldo Bayer, head of the Argentine Press Syndicate, perhaps best captured this sense of shame and outrage when he bitterly and sardonically wrote in an op-ed piece just days after the attack:

How can we be surprised [at what took place] if our country is the only one that holds the sad honor of possessing streets named after Nazi war criminals, like Baumbach and Hanna

Reitsch, in the Buenos Aires provincial locale of Lomas del Palomar. How can we be surprised if all those German citizens in our country, who previously had served Hitler, today occupy the most prominent positions on the board's of [local] German companies.¹¹⁸

As we shall soon see, it was no accident that Jewish leaders elected "Closed in Protest of Nazi Aggression in Argentina" as the motto of their June 28, 1962 work-stoppage, aimed at galvanizing as many Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines as possible.¹¹⁹

Second, the fact that Sirota was a young woman, in what historically can be described as a "machista" society, further helps to explain the dramatic Jewish and non-Jewish response. In a 1987 interview with the Jewish weekly *Nueva Sion* on occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Sirota attack, Isaac Goldenberg, former President of the DAIA in 1962, claimed that the placement, as much as the presence, of the tattooed swastika contributed to the public's outcry. "Until then," he remarked, "those crosses of infamy had only been painted on walls. Now the walls had been replaced with the breast of a Jewish girl."¹²⁰

Media reports in 1962 also subtly invoked the sanctification of the female body. In the days and weeks following the June 21 attack, Argentine newspapers commonly referred to Sirota as "la joven Sirota," "la señorita," or "la joven estudiante."¹²¹ Although such terms are linguistically innocuous, especially in Spanish given the language's gendered grammatical construction, their recurring use, notably the persistent accent on Graciela Sirota as a *young* female, helped generate among Argentine readers an added degree of sympathy and support for the Sirota cause. Perhaps such analytic conjecture takes on added significance when one considers the case of Ricardo Herald D'Alessandro. On June 28, 1962, a week after the Sirota attack, five members of Tacuara tattooed three swastikas on the cheek of this half-Jewish, male university student. Although the D'Alessandro incident was later shown to have been a hoax, the Jewish and non-Jewish media paid it strikingly less attention when word of it first surfaced.¹²²

The importance of gender in the Sirota case was evident elsewhere. In a July 1962 interview with the Argentine daily *La Jornada*, retired Navy Commodore Juan José Guiraldes, a well-known and outspoken nationalist and later director of the magazine *Confirmado*, unequivocally condemned the Sirota attack and admonished its three perpetrators. He did so, however, by invoking what might be described as a classical tenet of machismo: “those youngsters,” he proclaimed “are neither Argentines nor men, because they have disavowed the traditional virility of the Argentine male which is never to attack women.”¹²³ Although it is difficult to gauge how representative his gendered remarks were of Argentine society as a whole, they do help illuminate how the Sirota affair, in no small part because Graciela Sirota was a woman, touched a cultural chord among an ideological cross-section of Argentines. It is also worth noting that *Mundo Israelita*, eager to project widespread public condemnation of the attack, reprinted Guiraldes’ remarks in its July 14, 1962 issue, pleased to count an outspoken, right-wing military officer among the ranks of Sirota protestors while un-selfreflexively overlooking his chivalrous chauvinism.¹²⁴

The actions (and inactions) of the police in the days after the June 21 attack also dramatically help to explain why the Sirota affair galvanized Argentines like no other attack. Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines grew frustrated, if not irate at the perceived police mishandling of the Sirota investigation as well as tactless public remarks made by the nation’s Chief of Police and his subordinates. Three days after Graciela’s father Marcos Sirota and the DAIA first reported the attack to officers at the 42nd precinct, they grew concerned that the officers (apparently) had yet even to initiate a dossier on the matter, nor, as was customarily the case, inform the media of the crime.¹²⁵ As a result, on June 24, DAIA leaders decided to distribute a press release of their own; coincidentally or not, the police immediately followed suit, issuing its first public statement about the Sirota attack.¹²⁶ That same day, DAIA leaders

also sent new Argentine President José María Guido— whom the military had appointed to replace Frondizi after the latter had been ousted in March of 1962— a telegram informing him directly of the details of the attack and urging him to take immediate action against those “nazi-fascist groups who offend...human dignity...and irremediably damage Argentinean prestige.”¹²⁷

On June 25, Guido’s office responded to the DAIA, repudiating the attack and affirming its commitment to prevent any others that might similarly threaten the nation’s social balance.¹²⁸ A week later, Minister of Interior Adrogué followed up with a radio and television address to the nation, entitled “A Call to Responsibility,” in which he decried the attack on “our Jewish compatriots” and praised “the fecund and laborious spirit of our hundreds of thousands of Jewish citizens.”¹²⁹ Lip service or not, Guido and Adrogué had at least said the right things.

The same could not be said for Chief of Police Enrique Green. In the first in a series of public relations gaffes, he accused the DAIA on June 27 of threatening “to carry out justice with its own hands.”¹³⁰ In a personal reply to Green, DAIA leaders “categorically rejected” any such accusation and then sought, in a more diplomatic tone, to assure Green of their unwavering commitment to the “constitutional and legal norms and principles” of the nation.¹³¹ In that same letter, they requested, as they did several times thereafter, to meet with Green personally to discuss the Sirota attack; all such requests went unanswered.¹³² Making matters worse, the commissioner of the 42nd precinct sarcastically asked Sirota during her eventual deposition, “could it not be that you were at a little party [the day of the attack] and since they [Tacuara] could not do some other thing with you, they did this [the swastika]?”¹³³ The commissioner’s remarks were published in *La Prensa* on June 30.

That same week, Green challenged Sirota’s credibility by labeling her a communist and even suggested that the “meticulousness” with which the swastika had been tattooed on her breast left “something to wonder about.”¹³⁴ Moreover, in an internal police communiqué dated

June 30, Green remarked that members of the Jewish community had been manipulating the Sirota attack for “ideological and political ends” and separately warned, as historian Raanan Rein points out, against exaggerating the presence of anti-Semitism in Argentina.¹³⁵ During a July 2 television interview, Capitan Raúl Angelini, who had just resigned his post as chief military coordinator of security in Buenos Aires, echoed Green’s sentiments by claiming that Jews had fabricated the Sirota affair to serve as a “smokescreen” to conceal a recent, purported series of accounting violations involving the country’s *Banco Popular Israelita*.¹³⁶

Jewish leaders had expected right-wing extremists to challenge the legitimacy of the Sirota attack. Indeed, before Tacuara ever distributed its first public circular refuting the presence of a swastika on Sirota’s chest or Radio Saporiti, a fringe media outlet, first reported that, “according to the medical report,” the young Sirota “is in perfect health and one doubts whether such an attack really occurred,” DAIA leaders had hired, immediately following the June 21 assault, a photographer and two psychologists, one Jewish and the other non-Jewish, to corroborate Sirota’s claims.¹³⁷ They appeared less prepared however, or perhaps simply more disturbed, to hear the likes of Green, Angelini, and other law enforcement officials make similar public assertions. Remarks such as theirs, coupled with the fact that no arrests had yet to be made, fueled Jewish, and non-Jewish, anxieties over the police handling of the Sirota investigation and revived in their collective eyes the shameful specter of *impunidad* that had frequently reared its ugly head in Argentina and epitomized much of what their more open, law-centered, and modern democratic vision struggled to overcome.

The nation’s political and economic climate in mid-1962 further exacerbated the tensions surrounding the Sirota affair. For one, unlike most anti-Semitic incidents of the previous four years, the Sirota affair unfolded in the period after Frondizi’s experiment in liberal democracy had been abruptly derailed by the military in March of 1962. Under provisionally-

appointed President Guido (1962-1963)— in essence, a political puppet— the military repeatedly threatened to dissolve Congress and other key democratic institutions that had blossomed under Frondizi.¹³⁸ Although Congress was not ultimately disbanded, congressional representatives, political parties, and members of the nation's middle and lower classes saw their political clout dwindle as the military asserted greater control during Guido's sixteenth months in power from March 1962 to July 1963.

During those sixteen months, Argentina also experienced one of her worst economic recessions in decades. The GNP contracted by nearly nine percent, the value of the Argentine peso fell precipitously, currency speculation was rampant, and several financial institutions had or were on the verge of collapse. The nation's industrial and manufacturing sectors were hit particularly hard, notably the metallurgical, electronic, automotive, and textile trades. As could be expected, Argentina's poor and working class suffered badly, yet so did, unlike at any other moment in recent memory, the nation's relatively sizeable middle class as many small businesses, firms, and shops went bankrupt. During this time, Argentina also experienced her first great *fuga de cerebros* or brain-drain, as a range of professionals, intellectuals, and technicians, including a large number of Jews, abandoned the country for greener and more stable pastures.

Complicating matters, two competing military factions, at odds over the kind of government each felt should rule Argentina in the aftermath of Frondizi's ouster, frequently clashed, at times openly and violently. On the one hand stood the military "hardliners," known as the *Colorados*, who favored the establishment of a permanent, corporatist-style dictatorship reminiscent of the Uriburi and Nacionalista regimes of 1930 and 1943, respectively. On the other hand were the military "moderates" or *Azules*, who, like the *Colorados*, were committed to annulling the march 1962 Peronist election victories, yet who favored the creation of a

military-led, limited democratic government that was amenable to an eventual, though unspecified return to civilian rule. The two factions clashed repeatedly, both privately and publicly, with the worst of the fighting coming in September 1962 when rival tanks squared off in the streets of Buenos Aires. Eventually the “moderates,” who supported Guido, won out, in no small part because a leading groups of military officers did not want to jeopardize the steady stream of Alliance for Progress dollars that Argentina had been receiving from the United States.¹³⁹

After four years of (relatively) open, representative, and progressive rule, the advent of the Guido-led military government, though not nearly as suffocating or repressive as past (or future) military regimes, proved unsettling for the nation’s “democratic majority.”¹⁴⁰ For Argentine Jews in particular, many of whom had supported Frondizi and the Radicals, it also marked the end— at least until Dr. Arturo Illia, a Cordoban physician and politician, was elected President in July 1963— of the community’s unprecedented rapport with the nation’s president and government. Whether by phone or in person, Jewish leaders had developed an open line of communication with Frondizi and came to regard him as sympathetic friend as well as an outspoken critic of anti-Semitism. Jewish leaders, like many of their non-Jewish allies, lacked that same relationship with Guido and the military. This new political reality— coupled with police attitudes and remarks, the fact that Sirota was a young woman, and the stark Nazi imagery associated with the June 21 attack— played a tremendous role in shaping how Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines responded to the Sirota affair of 1962.

The Jewish-Led Work-Stoppage

On June 28, 1962, DAIA leaders organized the most significant public demonstration of the Sirota era, if not one of the most astute and effective Jewish-led protests in Argentine

history. After informally polling a number of Jewish institutions to gauge individual Jewish support for its protest plan— according to DAIA President Isaac Goldenberg, Jewish support proved remarkably strong— the DAIA went ahead with its proposal to sponsor a half-day Jewish-led work-stoppage aimed at galvanizing as many Argentines as possible.¹⁴¹ In an impressive show of both Jewish and national unity, thousands of Jewish and non-Jewish factory-owners, manufacturers, shopkeepers, workers, students, educators, and others took part in a half-day strike to protest, as store-front banners proclaimed, “Nazi Aggression in Argentina.”¹⁴²

The event’s success lay in the inclusive strategy DAIA leaders adopted. Rather than frame the Sirota protest around anti-Semitism or something particularly “Jewish,” they constructed it around what it meant, or did not mean, to be “truly Argentine.” Their well-conceived approach was encapsulated in an open letter, entitled “To Argentine Public Opinion,” which they distributed to all major Argentine newspapers just prior to the June 28 work-stoppage.¹⁴³ As the letter’s title and opening paragraph made clear, Jewish organizers aimed— as some of their Jewish counterparts had done back in January 1919 following the *Semana Trágica* pogrom— to be as embracing of non-Jews as possible. At the same time, they subtly worked to remind their compatriots that the ways in which they judged and reacted to the Sirota affair would go a long way towards shaping and defining the post-1958 democratic collective narrative that many Argentines had hoped to build and nurture.

To these ends, the DAIA letter contained an intertwined, two-pronged strategy. First, DAIA leaders blamed the Sirota attack not on Argentine anti-Semitism, but on “Nazi terrorism.” In trying to reach out to as many non-Jewish Argentines as possible, they felt that it would be most effective to avoid offending any national sensibilities by tying the swastika on Sirota’s breast with some longstanding Argentine tradition of hate or intolerance towards Jews. Second, by equating the Sirota affair with “Nazi terrorism,” Jewish leaders also attempted to link in the

public's imagination the Sirota crime with that of Norma Beatriz Melena, a young *Catholic* Argentine woman who earlier in June had been fatally shot by another band of right-wing extremists as she delivered a commemorative speech at a university bar in honor of a group of peronist youths who had been slain back in June 1956. Rather than call attention to any of the numerous other anti-Semitic incidents that had occurred since 1958, including several in the two weeks between the Melena shooting and the Sirota assault, DAIA leaders purposefully invoked the Melena murder as a way to weave together the national tragedies of, in their words, a "joven cristiana" and a "joven judía" and underscore, above all, that "both were Argentines."¹⁴⁴

The remainder of the DAIA's open letter, reprinted in virtually every major Argentine newspaper, continued to underscore the nation's professed integrationist spirit re-popularized under Frondizi, while also neatly underpinning the central place of Jews in Argentine society. For instance, rather than portray the Sirota affair as solely an attack on the Jewish community or a violation of Jewish rights, DAIA leaders consistently framed the assault as a violation of "human dignity" as well as a breach of "human rights that endangers the entire population."¹⁴⁵ On those rare occasions when the letter did make specific mention of "anti-Semitism" or "the Jewish community," it did so not parochially, but to remind, if not instruct its readers that the Sirota affair "signals the end of all guarantees, which affect *without distinctions* all those within the Argentine pueblo."¹⁴⁶ By deliberately casting all Argentines as potential victims of arbitrary hate, the DAIA conveyed a seamless link between Jews and non-Jews whereby the "colectividad judía" stood as an "indivisible part" of the "comunidad argentina."¹⁴⁷

In a final effort to reinforce that Jewish-non-Jewish bond and underscore the nation's spirit of integration and inclusion, the letter harnessed one last issue around which many Argentines could surely unite: that of impunidad. Reminding President Guido and the nation's

authorities that “public opinion...reflects the surprise and alarm at the impunity that the perpetrators and instigators of *these acts* have enjoyed up until now,” DAIA leaders justifiably and opportunistically stroked a longstanding source of national frustration and embarrassment to advance the Sirota cause.¹⁴⁸ Building on that momentum, the letter then concluded by inviting all Argentines— “without distinction of any kind”— to join on June 28 with members of the Jewish community in publicly demanding “the full vigilance of [the nation’s] constitutional guarantees.”¹⁴⁹ That strategic crescendo not only helped inspire non-Jewish Argentines to action, but also neatly encapsulated all that DAIA leaders had hoped that the work-stoppage would come to embody among Argentines: not some sectarian Jewish protest, but rather a broad national outcry against intolerance, impunity, and injustice aimed at stirring Argentines to continue to demand an open, progressive, and democratic society.

The Non-Jewish Response

The non-Jewish response to the Jewish-led work stoppage was overwhelmingly positive. On the evening of June 28, the Buenos Aires daily *Noticias Gráficas* noted that “silence and total inactivity” swept through “the commercial zones of our city,” which included “numerous businesses whose owners do not profess the Hebrew faith.”¹⁵⁰ Such solidarity was not limited to the nation’s capital. As the DAIA itself noted, the success of the June 28 work-stoppage extended “from Salta and Jujuy in the north to Tierra del Fuego in the south,” adding that “not only have the businesses in [the predominantly Jewish neighborhood of] Villa Crespo closed, but so too have [many non-Jewish ones] throughout Argentina, from one end of the country to the other.”¹⁵¹

In addition to the thousands of non-Jews who participated directly in the work-stoppage, an array of commercial, political, social, and intellectual groups publicly expressed

their support for the Jewish-led strike, including the aforementioned Buenos Aires Association of Lawyers, the Association of Plumbers, Fitters, and Hydraulicists, the Association of Municipal Physicians, the Christian Women's Association, labor's *62 Organizaciones* (Peronist), the Commercial and Industrial Center of Córdoba, and the Christian Democratic Party. On June 28, the newly-formed Metropolitan Federation of High School Students even held a parallel "work-stoppage" of its own, called "The March of Silence," which was aimed explicitly at denouncing the Sirota attack and reaffirming its support of the Jewish community.¹⁵²

And yet as DAIA leaders had hoped, non-Jewish support of the work-stoppage against "Nazi Aggression in Argentina" came to symbolize far more than *mere* support of the Jewish community. For non-Jews, many of whom had already condemned the June 21 Sirota attack, the June 28 strike served as a national springboard to renew their calls for a more democratic, accountable, and tolerant Argentina, particularly in the aftermath of the military's recent decision to oust Frondizi and reclaim political power. They came to regard the work-stoppage in particular and the Sirota affair in general as a discursive symbol of the broader, ongoing national conversation about the meaning of *argentinidad*, which included discussion about where Jews and other minority groups fit into the nation's political, social, and cultural landscape.

Not surprisingly, in their calls for a more open and tolerant Argentina, non-Jews were quick to target nativist groups like Tacuara and Guardia Restauradora Nacional. On the day of the work-stoppage alone, a coalition of physicians decried the alarming presence of "extremist elements" in Argentina while the nation's principal metallurgical union admonished those "politically organized gangsters of nazi-fascist affiliation."¹⁵³ Such public outcries persisted well beyond the June 28 strike, particularly as groups like Tacuara continued to proclaim— most notably in a 32-page booklet it distributed to news kiosks throughout the country— that the

Jewish community had provoked the Sirota attack in a sinister effort to debase Argentine nationalism.

While certainly preoccupied with Tacuara and the GRN, non-Jews increasingly began to speak out against governmental and other institutional forces—ones that held far greater sway over the political and cultural performance of the nation. That is, while continuing to take aim at extremist groups, non-Jewish Argentines began to focus their Sirota-related protests at the “passivity of the [nation’s] authorities” and the “complicit police” who, in their view, “take no measures against the assassins.”¹⁵⁴ Disturbed as they were with the presence of a swastika on Sirota’s breast, non-Jews, like their Jewish counterparts, came to regard the Sirota affair as a larger symbol of police ineptitude and insensitivity, the military’s unconstitutional and undemocratic ways, and the (alleged) ties between those two groups and the perpetrators themselves.

For instance, on the day of the work-stoppage, the left-leaning, Catholic lay magazine *Criterion*—not to be confused with the 1930s pro-Nacionalista and often virulently anti-Semitic Catholic journal of the same name—published an evocative editorial entitled “Crime without Punishment.” In it, *Criterion* together lamented, just as the DAIA had in its open letter published that same day, the Sirota and Melena hate crimes, admonishing their shared “racist, anti-Semitic, anti-Marxist, paramilitary, and pseudo-Catholic” character.¹⁵⁵ Taking specific aim at the police and the military government for failing to adequately investigate and prosecute those responsible, *Criterion* piercingly concluded that in Argentina “la impunidad appears to be the rule, an opportunistic rule.”¹⁵⁶

Tia Vincente, Argentina’s ever popular journal of political satire, similarly targeted the lack of police action and the air of impunity surrounding the Sirota affair. In its July 1962 issue, it published two sardonic cartoons that perfectly captured the growing sense of frustration and

embarrassment felt by many Jews and non-Jews in the days and weeks after the June 21 attack. Under the heading “I’ve come to make a denunciation,” the first cartoon, which appeared on the cover of the magazine, depicted a man, presumably Jewish, with a swastika tattooed on his cheek, standing, and profusely sweating, before the chief of police. Sitting high atop his imposing and comically oversized office desk, the police chief dauntingly stares down at the visibly shaken Jewish victim. Off to one side, a trash receptacle looms, overflowing with discarded, crumpled denunciations presumably made by other, past (Jewish) victims.¹⁵⁷

On page six of the same issue, the second cartoon captured the sense of impunity and police inaction in even more dramatic fashion. Two police officers stand guarding the doors of a Jewish Argentine institution marked prominently by two Stars of David. Dressed in a trenchcoat embroidered with an oversized, highly-visible swastika, a third man emerges directly in front of the Jewish building “guarded” by the two policemen. As this third man then prepares to set off an explosive, one of the two officers, appearing jittery, shouts out to him, “Quickly!” while urging his partner to “Look the Other Way.”¹⁵⁸

In the days and weeks after the June 28 work-stoppage, many prominent public figures also stepped forward to question the prevailing aura of impunidad. In a June 30 interview with *Mundo Israelita*, Ricardo Balbin, leader of the UCRP and presidential runner-up in 1958, criticized “the complicit silence” of the nation’s authorities while praising “the energetic reaction of all sectors of Argentine public opinion” working to break that silence.¹⁵⁹ In the same issue of *Mundo Israelita*, outspoken and respected Socialista Americo Ghioldi remarked: “I do not believe that this issue is a very complicated one to investigate. With all certainty, the forces of repression [the police] already know what this is about and who they [culprits] are...let us hope that general political difficulties do not convert themselves into an excuse to bury that which took place.”¹⁶⁰ Of course, in making those remarks in a Jewish newspaper, both Balbin

and Ghioldi, two veteran politicians, were keenly aware of their audience and likely anticipated that such expressions of sympathy could translate into future Jewish electoral support—assuming, as many did, that sooner or later the military would allow for a return to civilian democracy.

An ideological cross-section of other prominent Argentines expressed similar consternation. Silviano Santander, outspoken congressional opponent of the 1947 Catholic education law and former member of the *Comisión Investigadora de Actividades Antiargentinas* charged with investigating the Nazi presence in Argentina, wrote a letter-to-the-editor that appeared in *La Prensa* in which he castigated “the official passivity” of the nation’s authorities and called for the destruction of “the infernal machine” that allows the perpetrators of such crimes to go unpunished.¹⁶¹ A group calling itself “The Argentine Association for the Freedom of Culture,” composed of leading intellectuals, moderate politicians and priests, and even retired military generals, condemned the “false nationalism” of Argentine extremists whose “methods of moral and physical terrorism” aim to construct “racial and religious barriers [that] foster chaotic and publicly intimidating situations.”¹⁶² Another similar group of prominent intellectuals and politicians, which included former President Pedro Aramburu, Jorge Luís Borges, Eduardo García, Adolfo Lanús, Isaac Rojas, and Ernesto Sammartino, released a signed statement in early-August 1962, published in the nation’s leading newspapers, expressing its solidarity with the Jewish community and repudiating the “perfidious and treasonous aggressions” of the Sirota perpetrators.¹⁶³ Finally, the recently-formed *Confraternidad Judeo-Cristiana de la Argentina*, whose creation was significant in its own right, condemned the attack and pledged greater Jewish-Christian cooperation in fighting future acts of religious, ethnic, and racial bigotry.¹⁶⁴

Jewish Confidence and Apprehension in post-Sirota Argentina

These swift and unequivocal non-Jewish responses to the Sirota affair greatly comforted the Jewish community. Never before had such a diverse cross-section of Argentines so quickly and categorically come to the defense of Argentine Jews during such a crisis, simultaneously embracing them as both Jews and as Argentines. Equally significant, non-Jews often did so by rhetorically coming to the defense of their own nation, characterizing the attack against Sirota not only as, in the words of UCRP diputado Carlos Perette, “an aggression against the brave and laborious Jewish community, [but also] an affront to the essential principles of democracy, culture, and civilization.”¹⁶⁵ Indeed, as part of the post-1958 modernizing, progressive, and tolerant discourse still taking shape in Argentina, it proved as important to the nation’s democratic advocates to demonstrate that “this was foreign to Argentine sensibilities.”¹⁶⁶

The manner in which the Jewish community responded to the Sirota affair proved equally telling. In particular, the DAIA’s June 28 open letter to Argentines and the corresponding work-stoppage underscored the mounting sense of confidence and acceptance Jews felt in post-1958 Argentina. That Christians and Jews stood together under the banner of the *Confraternidad Judeo-Cristiana*, or that thousands of non-Jews from across the country energetically participated in the DAIA-led strike, or that Minister of Interior Adrogué delivered a primetime national radio and television address repudiating the Sirota attack while repeatedly lauding “the laborious spirit” of “our Jewish compatriots” and “our Jewish citizens” speaks volumes about the nature and effectiveness of Jewish protest strategies as well as the growing respect and acceptance of religious and ethnic minorities in Argentina.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, by coming into closer contact and, in the process, learning more about one another during this time of both crisis and opportunity, Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines together were able to advance

the spirit of acceptance and tolerance that many among the nation's "democratic majority" had been openly advocating over the past several years.

At the same time, the Jewish community, like many in Argentina, remained apprehensive about conditions in Argentine society. For starters, the three Tacuara perpetrators who had attacked Sirota remained at-large, perpetuating suspicions about the commitment of the police and the specter of impunidad. Indeed, it was not until August 27, 1962, when three other Argentine youths were apprehended for firing dozens of bullets at a predominantly Jewish theater in Buenos Aires, that the police made their first anti-Semitic-related arrests in the twenty-seven months since the May 1960 Eichmann kidnapping.¹⁶⁸

Second, as implied, right-wing extremists continued to carry out anti-Semitic attacks on individual Jews and Jewish institutions in the weeks and months following the Sirota affair. Although none galvanized the Argentine public like the Sirota attack, these new crimes, like the above-mentioned August theater shooting and a separate assault that same month of a group of Jewish students exiting the Manuel Belgrano High School in Buenos Aires, continued to remain a major source of concern for the Jewish community.¹⁶⁹

In addition to their concerns over the police handling of the Sirota investigation and the ongoing wave of anti-Semitism, members of the Jewish community were also troubled by the perceived ambivalence of the Catholic Church. Although Church officials did issue a statement in July 1962 repudiating "the succession of armed attacks against individuals and institutions," *Mundo Israelita* harshly criticized Argentina's Catholic authorities in July 1962 for not making specific mention of the Sirota affair or any of the other recent string of attacks against Argentine Jews.¹⁷⁰ Similarly, in July 1962, the Sephardic weekly *La Luz* took particular exception with the recent published remarks of Héctor O. Oglietti, a priest and seasoned public relations official within the Church.¹⁷¹ When the non-Jewish Argentine monthly *Nuestros Hijos* asked Oglietti in a

June 1962 interview, as it did representatives of four other major Argentine faith groups, “what he thought about religious intolerance?” Oglietti was the only one of the five, according to *La Luz*, not “to adhere openly and unconditionally to the principle of religious tolerance and fraternal equality among all creeds.” While Oglietti acknowledged in the *Nosotros* interview that “we all have the obligation to search for the path of truth that leads to the house of the Father,” he added that “religious freedom does not signify religious indifference, nor does it signify that all religions are equally truthful.”¹⁷² *La Luz* harshly criticized Oglietti, contending that “when someone assumes to be the exclusive bearer of the truth, discarding any intention of coexistence, the zeal and thirst to impose that absolute truth will reign.”¹⁷³ Apparently *Nuestro Hijo* shared *La Luz*’s overstated concern, placing the following words of nineteenth-century Argentine pioneer Juan Alberdi in the subtitle of that June 1962 interview-article: “Spanish America, committed to Catholicism at the exclusion of other creeds, represents a solitary and silent convent of monks. The dilemma is critical: either remain exclusively Catholic and unpopulated or populated and prosperous, and tolerant with respect to religion...”¹⁷⁴

At times, Jewish apprehensions such as those were less apparent or obvious, though no less intense. Taking nothing away from the tremendous show of courage and confidence that Jewish leaders and community members exhibited during the Sirota affair, the DAIA’s private deliberations in planning the June 28 work-stoppage illuminate some of the hurdles, real or imagined, that Jews had to consider in 1962 Argentina. Looking to frame, as we have seen, the Sirota debate as an “Argentine” rather than merely a “Jewish” issue and, thereby galvanize as many non-Jewish Argentines as possible, DAIA leaders long pondered what the storefront motto or slogan of the June 28 work-stoppage should read. Reminiscing about the Sirota affair in 1987 interview, Isaac Goldenberg (DAIA president in 1962) claimed that the board’s decision ultimately to go with “Closed in Protest of *Nazi* Aggression in Argentina” — and not, say, ‘Closed

in *Protest of Anti-Semitism in Argentina*’ — reflected a conscious desire, based upon its appreciation and understanding of Argentine history and culture, to paint the protest target “as specific as possible” in order to “avoid any [sweeping] generalizations” that might potentially alienate or offend non-Jewish Argentine sensibilities.¹⁷⁵ Put differently, Goldenberg recalled that “if we [had] closed in protest of anti-Semitism, vast sectors [of the population] themselves could have felt targeted. The accusation would have appeared diffuse. It had to be as precise as possible. For that reason, we limited it to something specific, [namely] at the Nazis...[We aimed] to summon all the forces of Argentine democracy.”¹⁷⁶

Indeed, even some of the Jewish community’s most ardent supporters during the Sirota affair, who quickly condemned the June 21 attack and communicated their unquestionable support of democracy and tolerance in Argentina, were unwittingly ‘guilty’ of issuing public statements that lent credence to Goldenberg’s above concerns. For instance, after unequivocally praising the Jewish-led work-stoppage and underscoring the widespread public condemnation of the Sirota attack, the left-leaning *Noticias Gráficas* went on to remark that the issue at hand is not about “the problem of anti-Semitism or pro-Semitism. Those sort of issues have never had any real force in our country.”¹⁷⁷ After also remarking on the spontaneous and energetic public condemnation of the Sirota affair and the rejection of all that it symbolized, *Clarín* similarly maintained in a June 26 editorial that an act like the Sirota affair “is not part our [Argentine] way of being, it is not part of our sentiments, it is not part of our traditions. We are a youthful country, an unsoiled country, full of hopes and dreams. We do not have the calling for hate nor do we give way to intolerance, which engenders persecution and supports misconduct...none of this has anything to do with us. This is not Argentine.”¹⁷⁸ Perhaps Marcelo Acosta, Subsecretary of the Interior of Argentina’s 1962-1963 military government, best captured the subtle paradox of this professed Argentine narrative, one that made Jews

simultaneously feel both remarkably confident and quietly apprehensive about their standing in Argentine society and the parameters of argentinidad at that time. After publicly applauding the constructive efforts of Argentine Jews on occasion of the centennial celebration of the nation's oldest synagogue, Acosta concluded his June 30, 1962 remarks at the *Congregación Israelita de la República Argentina* (CIRA) by asserting that "the Argentine is respectful of all creeds...This is not a land of persecution."¹⁷⁹

In an October 5, 1962 editorial entitled "The Stormy Year on its Way Out," *La Luz* neatly captured this dual sense of Jewish apprehension and confidence. Published on occasion of the Jewish New Year, *La Luz* proclaimed in its opening sentence: "For Argentine Judaism, the year which we have just left behind was the saddest in its hundred-year existence in the country." Taking particular aim at the police and the government for failing to "to lift a finger" to capture those responsible for the Sirota and other anti-Semitic attacks, *La Luz* maintained that those crimes have fomented "a real environment of panic and terror in the heart of our [Jewish] community and, psychologically, have created a pogrom climate."¹⁸⁰ To my knowledge, no one within the Jewish community, since the days of the *Semana Trágica*, had publicly employed the word "pogrom" to describe the situation relating to Jews in Argentina. The October editorial then went on to call into question the future of Jewish life in Argentina, indeed arguing that the Jewish Argentine immigrant dream had suffered, as we first saw back in January 1919, a dramatic psychological blow.

Those October 1962 fears and frustrations contrasted sharply with *La Luz's* 1961 pre-Sirota remarks. In celebration of its 30th anniversary in 1961, *La Luz* published a special issue that paid tribute to Jewish life in Argentina and the nation's liberal, democratic tradition. It read in part:

Until today there have been two tendencies at work in Argentina: one reactionary chauvinistic, whose symbol is the [nineteenth-century] dictator Rosas, and the other, liberal

and patriotic, whose serene figure is Sarmiento. The first, which constitutes a minority in the country, is for the most part anti-Semitic. The second, [comprising] the immense majority of the country, is democratic and liberal. Yet however small the reactionary [“Rojas”] sector, it can cause, from time to time, unpleasant surprises.¹⁸¹

That most unpleasant of surprises was, of course, the *Semana Trágica*, yet even in discussing the events of January 1919 *La Luz* remained remarkably upbeat, claiming, not unlike *Diario Israelita* editor Hirsch Triwaks had back in 1940, that Jews had “only suffered a scare.” Two paragraphs later, *La Luz* strikingly concluded that in 1961 “Argentine anti-Semitism is perhaps the world’s smallest and weakest. And [Argentina’s] liberal tradition, which has profoundly rooted itself, is a sufficient guarantor that the growth and development of the Jewish community will not be disturbed.”¹⁸²

The contrast between the (1961) 30th-anniversary issue and the (1962) post-Sirota Rosh Hashanah editorial were palpable: hope, pride, and optimism in 1961 seemed to have given way to a sense of anguish, frustration, and ‘shattered dream’ in October 1962. And yet as striking as that emotional swing appeared, *La Luz*’s subsequent display, in the final paragraphs of its October 1962 Rosh Hashanah editorial, of continued confidence and trust in Argentina and her liberal, democratic principles and traditions was all the more remarkable. Ultimately labeling those who saw little or no future for Jews in Argentina as “pessimists” and “irresponsible”—here *La Luz* was taking particular aim at the leaders of foreign Jewish communities who, in the aftermath of the Sirota affair, had called for the mass exodus of Jews from Argentina—*La Luz* harnessed its patriotic zeal and reiterated its “faith in the democratic reserves” and “generous hospitality” of their country.¹⁸³

There are several possible explanations that account for *La Luz*’s abrupt shift in its October 1962 editorial from fear and apprehension to faith and confidence. For one, timing may have been a factor: written on occasion of the 1962 Jewish New Year, the editorial’s closing optimism may be attributed to the spirit of hope, conviction, and good wishes that typically

surrounds the Jewish holiday. Alternatively, *La Luz's* concluding remarks may have stemmed, as suggested above, from a sense of patriotism or nationalism in the face of foreigners, be as they may Jewish foreigners, urging Argentine Jews to leave their homeland where they were born and raised. Finally, that closing sense of optimism may be attributed to *La Luz's* longstanding sense of pride, one arguably shared by the bulk of the Jewish community, in Sarmiento's nineteenth-century liberal, secular vision for the country as well as the renewed sense of democratic hope and promise that many Argentines, particularly middle class Argentines, felt after the 1958 election of Frondizi. Despite the fact that Argentina was in the midst of one of her worst economic recessions in decades, the military was yet again in power, and the police appeared totally inept in the face of persistent anti-Semitism, *La Luz*, like many Argentine Jews, took comfort in the tremendous show of Jewish-non-Jewish unity and support for the principles of tolerance, acceptance, and democracy so vividly on display during the Sirota affair.

Conclusion

In many ways, this parallel demonstration of confidence and apprehension reflected the Jewish community's persistent struggle to balance the cultural demands of being both "identifiably Jewish" and "unmistakably Argentine" in this overwhelmingly Catholic land of immigrants. Since arriving on the shores of the Río de la Plata, Argentine Jews (have) had to grapple, in both their own eyes and those of their non-Jewish compatriots, with the real and imagined challenges brought upon by such a dual sense of identity. In a country where the government has often promoted a unified civic ideal, it has been a persistent challenge for Jewish Argentines to adhere to that cultural standard.

At the same time, the Sirota affair, more than any other event of the era in question, revealed how much the political, social, and cultural dynamics surrounding that dual sense of

identity had changed since the days of the *Semana Trágica* and the Catholic education debates of the 1940s. Argentine society had undergone a major political and cultural transformation since the fall of Perón in 1955 and, particularly, since the election of Frondizi in 1958. Despite all her recent troubles— such as the ongoing economic crisis, the military interlude of 1962-1963, the continued peronist proscription, the persistent wave of bigoted and violent crimes, and the air of impunity surrounding events such as the Sirota attack— Argentina had just experienced a modern and democratic awakening, culturally as much as politically. Frondizi's election victory had given birth to a period of relatively open and constitutional rule, seemingly having put an end to the authoritarian political cycle of 1930-1958. Even after the military cut short Frondizi's democratic experiment in March 1962, many among the nation's "democratic majority," as well as many of the military "moderates" themselves, felt that the Guido-led military government was but a political interlude that sooner rather than later would give way again to civilian democracy. The relatively prompt election of Arturo Illia in July 1963 only appeared to validate their belief that the extended period of pre-1958 authoritarian rule potentially was a thing of the past.¹⁸⁴

As democracy took hold under Frondizi, so too did the nation's liberal-secular ethos, embodied in the resurgence of lay education Law 1420. Despite the Church's success in legalizing private Catholic universities in 1958 (*Ley Domingonera*), Argentina's "democratic majority" had succeeded in doing away with religion in public classrooms and in reestablishing a clear separation between Church and State, vital precursors they felt towards reasserting the nation's 'authentic' political and cultural narrative. In seeking to revive the nation's liberal-secular past, they also embraced what they perceived to be the future, appropriating many of the modern and progressive norms and values of the industrialized and democratic West. From politics and business practices, education and journalism, and music and fashion, they aimed to

construct a more avant-garde and inclusive Argentina in hopes of finally transforming their country into that elusive *país moderno*. The ways in which non-Jewish Argentines reacted to the Sirota affair, with their unequivocal expressions of support for the Jewish community and the principles of freedom and democracy, underscored the nature and extent of this ongoing political and cultural transformation.

At the same time, the Jewish community had also evolved markedly since the days of the *Semana Trágica* and the Catholic education debates of the 1940s. For one, by the late-1950s and early-1960s, Argentine Jews were far better-off economically than ever before. As university-educated journalists, architects, lawyers, doctors, scientists, publicists, and merchants, many had attained solid middle class standing while others, especially those in manufacturing, industry, international trade, and banking, had leapfrogged into the world of the decidedly rich. Second, influential Jews came to occupy important political posts under both Frondizi (1958-1962) and his democratic successor Arturo Illia (1963-1966), not to mention the record number of Jews who were elected to Congress during those same years. Third, according to a study commissioned by the American Jewish Committee in May 1963, 87% of Argentine Jews between the ages of twenty-four and thirty-five were now native-born, providing them with an important practical and psychological lift that many of their predecessors in 1919 and 1947 did not enjoy. Fourth, the Jewish community was as well-organized and spirited as ever: in 1963, 64% of Jews were members of some Jewish Argentine institution (i.e. the AMIA, a synagogue, a school, a club, a youth group, etc.); 60% said they observed some Jewish religious traditions (i.e. attending synagogue, observing the Sabbath, keeping kosher, etc.); and a remarkable 87% of Jewish parents considered sending their children to Jewish schools. Fifth, Jewish Argentines, unlike their counterparts in 1919 and 1947, were also able to take added comfort in the existence of the State of Israel— 88% claimed that Israel's existence contributed

to their sense of security in Argentina. Finally, while the wave of anti-Semitic violence persisted after the Sirota affair and 64% of Argentine Jews in May 1963 continued to characterize anti-Semitism as a significant national problem, 62% still felt that the Jewish community had a promising future in Argentina.¹⁸⁵

Encouraging developments such as these within both the Jewish community and Argentine society at large greatly shaped how Jews and non-Jews had reacted to the Sirota affair and how, in the ensuing months and years, they reconstrued and responded differently to the recurring “question” of Jewish *doble lealtad* or dual loyalty. One of the most intriguing examples in the post-Sirota period was the remarkable Argentine Congressional debate of August 13, 1964, during which diputado Roberto Galeano, by no means an ideological extremist, unintentionally set off a cultural maelstrom in the Chamber of Deputies about what it meant to be “Jewish” and “Argentine.” Like the Sirota affair, this debate continued to reveal the changing scope and nature of Jewish apprehension and confidence in the early-to-mid 1960s and, in the process, the shifting parameters of national integration and ethnic relations in Argentina.

The 1964 debate began when, in the midst of an uneventful discussion about Argentine oil contracts, Galeano impulsively referred to fellow congressman Eduardo Schaposnik as a “diputado of Jewish blood.”¹⁸⁶ All talk of oil contracts promptly ended, as a number of congressmen, including five of the nation’s six Jewish diputados, took immediate aim at Galeano’s careless, yet perhaps telling assertion.¹⁸⁷ Over the remainder of the day’s session, one diputado after another passionately voiced his individual thoughts about the place of Jews in Argentine society, including whether or not Jewish diputados “have constitutional inhibitions about occupying a position in this Chamber [of Deputies].” While a small number of diputados, notably Isaías Nougués, Alberto Serú García, and Pascual Tarulli, articulated a rather circumscribed vision of *argentinidad* somewhat reminiscent of the 1930s and 1940s— Nougués

went so far as to call native *criollos* Argentina's truly persecuted race— the majority, including Galeano himself, embraced Jews as fully Argentine.¹⁸⁸

The five Jewish diputados who spoke out, none of whom shied away from his Judaism, were active participants in the congressional debate. For instance, while claiming that he had never joined a Jewish organization because he “did not feel Jewish” but rather felt “Argentine,” Schaposnik— who, ironically, was the least demonstrative of the five about his Jewish heritage— subsequently remarked that “nevertheless I assume all the responsibility of my last name and assume all responsibility in the defense of Jews.”¹⁸⁹ Like Schaposnik, (Jewish) diputado Juan Scaliter demonstrated a measure of what might be described as strategic apprehension. In calculated deference to his Christian colleagues, Scaliter declared that he was “proud to belong to the same race” of not only Moses and Einstein but also “of Jesus, founder of religions, exemplar of love and compassion.” As he attempted to fashion an age-old Judeo-Christian bond, Scaliter went on to proclaim “my pride in being a citizen of this magnificent country, where my grandparents and parents— as well as the grandparents and parents of many other Argentine citizens of Jewish descent— found refuge fleeing the terrible and brutal czarist persecution.”¹⁹⁰

The three other Jewish diputados to speak— David Schapira, Hugo Minsk, and Oscar Murmis— were more unequivocal and direct. Responding to the ambiguous question posed earlier of whether or not Jewish diputados had any “constitutional inhibitions about occupying a position in this Chamber,” Schapira declared:

I am a diputado of the Nation, with all the prerogatives, duties, and responsibilities [that come with being] a member of this Chamber. I also have Jewish ancestry and am trustee of a millennial tradition that contains an ethical code of which I am proud. Like all other diputados, this in no way affects my condition as an Argentine. It is for this reason that I cannot permit the insinuation here of such a concept that I regard as discriminatory.¹⁹¹

Like Schapira, Minsk and Murmis sought to dispel, in their words, any suggestion of “the doble nacionalidad of the Argentine Jew.”¹⁹² Pointing to the recent diffusion of such rhetoric “on the radio, in public and private meetings and discussions,...and on television,” Minsk argued that the debate at hand was in fact about far more than Galeano’s “superficial assertion.”¹⁹³ The propagation of such “doble nacionalidad” talk, he maintained, “in Argentina, our Argentina” represented an institutional hazard that ran counter to the:

expression[s] of human solidarity” upon which the country was founded. “Since the hour of her liberation, when she came to light as a nation,” Argentina has welcomed “all the world’s persecuted peoples; persecuted for [reasons of] economic misery... moral misery...political domination...and religious intolerance. This is our Argentina, which, in spite of everything, feels generous and fraternal.”¹⁹⁴

Similarly, Oscar Murmis, who of the five Jewish diputados most assertively embraced his Judaism, invoked Argentina’s professed nineteenth-century liberal, integrationist narrative in an effort to dispel any *doble lealtad* stigma:

When my father came to *this country*, many, many years ago, he did so protected by that part of the Preamble of the National Constitution which asserts ‘to assure the benefits of liberty for us all, for our posterity, and for all the people of the world who wish to inhabit the Argentine soil; invoking the protection of God, source of all justice and reason’. That God is everybody’s God...¹⁹⁵

A small number of right-leaning, non-Jewish diputados, including some with documented anti-Semitic track records, took willful exception to the remarks of their Jewish colleagues. For instance, after Murmis finished speaking, Alberto Serú García challenged his ‘when my father came to this country’ assertion, derisively remarking that “what you call ‘this country’ is our country.” Murmis responded by twice asserting, “I am speaking of my country, your country,” to which Serú Garcia finally replied “I simply wanted to correct you.”¹⁹⁶ Earlier in the debate, Cornejo Linares, a right-wing Peronist and Argentine Arab League supporter, curtly asked the five Jewish diputados, after all had proudly affirmed their Judaism, are you Jewish “of

race or religion?"¹⁹⁷ Finally, just as Murmis prepared to take his turn to address his colleagues,

Pascual Tarulli interrupted him and agitatedly declared:

We want to work. Enough with these *cuestiones de privilegio* [the congressional term used here to denote a diputado's turn to voice his opinion]. The [Argentine] people expect from us efficacious work, patriotic work. We want to work...for the good of the country...We are abusing the patience of the diputados...;we are abusing the patience of the Argentine people,

to which Murmis immediately replied, "I believe that those diputados who, at this moment, exclaim worriedly and exasperatedly that this Chamber is not working are mistaken."¹⁹⁸

The majority of non-Jewish diputados did not share the cursory sentiments of Serú García, Linares, and Tarulli. Many who spoke-up criticized Galeano's initial "of Jewish blood" assertion while others simply told the likes of Serú García, Linares, or Tarulli to "shut up."¹⁹⁹ On more than one occasion, non-Jewish diputados cheered or applauded the statements of their Jewish colleagues and, in the case of Minsk, warmly surrounded him and took turns shaking his hand after he had finished speaking.²⁰⁰ Américo Ghioldi, respected Socialista and long-time friend of the Jewish community, spoke for many of his colleagues when he called upon "this Chamber to reaffirm that the Argentine character is [based on] the equality of the human person, above all racial discrimination, religious convictions, or sectarian politics."²⁰¹ Echoing Ghioldi, Horacio García first lamented the ongoing wave of anti-Semitism that had served "to open up a perspective of hate in our Nation" and then emphatically added that "there cannot remain the impression that the shadow of a terrible hatred...can darken the horizon of the Republic."²⁰²

For Jewish diputados and their non-Jewish supporters, this emotionally-charged congressional debate concluded on a promising note. The "Chamber of Deputies of the Nation" pledged to monitor defamatory radio and television broadcasts and formally declared "that in the Argentine Nation there are no, nor can there be, differences of racial or religious nature."

The spirit of these declarations was intended to provide Jews (and other minorities) with a measure of real and symbolic protection and, perhaps more importantly, to underscore that Jews were to be regarded as fully and unmistakably “Argentine.” Yet as we witnessed during the Sirota affair, these good intentions also quietly called attention to the nation’s longstanding unitary civic ideal, which, ironically, had been partly responsible for nurturing Jewish *doble lealtad* presumptions in the first place. Ultimately, events like the Sirota affair and the 1964 congressional debate vividly displayed the growing sense of Jewish confidence and acceptance in Argentine society in the late-1950s and early-to-mid-1960s, yet not without reminding the reader of a persistent degree of Jewish apprehension that, justified or not, continued to speak to the boundaries of *argentinidad*.

¹ “Cronología de la comunidad judía en la Argentina,” *Todo es Historia*, 179 (April 1982): 42-43; Leonardo Senkman, “El antisemitismo bajo dos experiencias democráticas,” in Leonardo Senkman, ed., *El antisemitismo en la Argentina*, volume 1 (Buenos Aires: 1989): 37-43; and Raanan Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los Judíos: Encuentros y desencuentros mitos y realidades* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Lumière, 2001), 267-268.

² Although Perón lived in exile, he unquestionably remained the political and mythical symbol of Argentina’s peronist movement.

³ After reluctantly agreeing to Lonardi’s demand for his resignation, Perón quickly took refuge at the Paraguayan Embassy in Buenos Aires before leaving for Caracas, Venezuela and eventually Spain where he lived in exile for the better part of the next two decades before returning to Argentina in 1973 to reassume the presidency.

⁴ The expression “Peronism without Perón” grew popular in the 1960s.

⁵ In his book *Guerrillas and Generals*, Paul H. Lewis employs the terms “soft-liners” and “hard-liners.” They can be a bit misleading because the military “soft-liners” were actually more to the right politically and ideologically than the “hard-liners.” The former, a minority within the military, consisted largely of Nacionalista-minded officers while the latter was more liberal right in ideological and political orientation. See Paul H. Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals: The “Dirty War” in Argentina* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 8. For a closer look at the two military factions, see Alain Rouquié, *Poder Militar y sociedad política Argentina, 1943-1973* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Emecé, 1982), 122-124; Paul Lewis, “The Right and Military Rule, 1955-1983,” in Sandra McGee Deutsch and Ronald Dolkart, *The Argentine Right: its History and Intellectual Origins, 1910 to the Present* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1993), 150-155; and Robert Potash, *The Army in Politics in Argentina, 1945-1962: Perón to Frondizi* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980), 214-230. For a discussion of Lonardi’s pro-Catholic and

Aramburu's pro-laica education leanings, see Virginia Leonard, *Politicians, Pupils, and Priests: Argentine Education since 1943* (New York: 1998), 167-168.

⁶ Luis Alberto Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 135.

⁷ Issued in November 1955, Decree 4161 prohibited the use of peronist symbols, songs, insignias, and even using Perón or Evita's name publicly. For a more detailed account of Aramburu's assault on peronism, see Gary Wynia, *Argentina in the Post-War Era: Politics and Economic Policy in a Divided Society* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1978), 147-159; Marcelo Cavarozzi, "Sindicatos y política en Argentina, 1955-1958," *Estudios CEDES*, 2,1 (1979). For an intriguing account of the story of Evita's remains, see Tomás Eloy Martínez, *Santa Evita* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997).

⁸ Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 136; David Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987: From Spanish Colonization to the Falklands War and Alfonsín* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 335-336.

⁹ Potash, *The Army in Politics in Argentina, 1945-1962*, 230-234.

¹⁰ Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 9. Peronist activist and Argentine journalist Rodolfo Walsh, who was kidnapped and executed during the "Dirty War" by clandestine government forces after he boldly published an "Open Letter" on March 24, 1977 criticizing the military junta, was the first to investigate and denounce the bloody June 1956 atrocity. See Rodolfo Walsh, *Operación Masacre*, 3rd ed. (Buenos Aires, 1972). In 1971, Jorge Cedrón produced a film of the atrocity based on Walsh's book; due to the climate of censorship that pervaded Argentina in 1971, Cedrón was forced to film much of the documentary in secrecy.

¹¹ Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 76-80; Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 11.

¹² For a more complete look at *La Resistencia*, see Marcelo Cavarozzi, "Sindicatos y política en Argentina, 1955-1958;" Tulio Halperín Donghi, *La larga agonía de la Argentina peronista* (Buenos Aires; Ariel, 1994); Alain Rouquie, *Poder Militar y sociedad política Argentina, 1943-1973* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Emecé, 1982); and Juan Carlos Torre, "Sindicatos y clase obrera en la Argentina post-peronista," *Revista Latinoamericana de Sociología*, 1 (1968): 108-144.

¹³ Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, 336-337.

¹⁴ Guillermo O'Donnell, "Un 'juego imposible': Competición y coaliciones entre partidos políticos, 1955-1966," *Revista Latinoamericana de Sociología*, 7 (1970): 103-131.

¹⁵ Although more conservative than the UCRI, the UCRP still formed part of Argentina's diverse liberal political camp. Perhaps best described as "liberal right," the UCRP was a particularly strong advocate of free market policies, which in the late-1950s largely meant that they opposed state intervention in the economy, were committed to keeping workers' wages low, favored large-scale foreign investment, and supported rapid industrial growth.

¹⁶ For a more complete look at the Radical Party split and the 1957 July primary, see Nicolás Babini, *Fronzizi, de la oposición al gobierno* (Buenos Aires: 1983); Peter Snow, *Argentine Radicalism* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1965), 71-77; and Celia Szusterman, *Fronzizi and the Politics of Developmentalism in Argentina, 1955-1962* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), 52-53.

¹⁷ After arriving in Asunción in 1955, Perón subsequently relocated to Caracas where he met Fronzizi's delegation in the second-half of 1957. Perón later moved on to Santo Domingo before finally settling in Madrid where he resided for the great majority of his eighteen years in exile.

¹⁸ For a closer look at the events surrounding the July 1957 primary, see Isidro Odena, *Libertadores y desarrollistas* (Buenos Aires: 1977), 75-78; Szusterman, *Frondizi and the Politics of Developmentalism in Argentina*, 64-70.

¹⁹ Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 138-139.

²⁰ Although shortly after taking power, Frondizi lifted the proscription against peronists, it was not until early-1962, as we shall see below, that he ended the ban against the Peronist Party. It should be noted that, under great pressure from the military, Frondizi never allowed Perón to return to Argentina.

²¹ Frondizi received approximately 4 million votes to Balbín's 2.5 million.

²² Potash, *The Army in Politics in Argentina, 1945-1962*, 266-267; Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, 337-338; and Szusterman, *Frondizi and the Politics of Developmentalism in Argentina*, 70-73.

²³ Of course, Frondizi also had to contend and balance the interests of other powerful forces in Argentine society, namely those of the Church (i.e. its continued push of Catholic education), traditional landowners (some of whom opposed Frondizi's shift away from traditional agriculture), Nacionalistas (who opposed Frondizi's growing ties with foreign corporations, particularly after he campaigned around the idea of greater national sovereignty), and even rivals within his own UCRI party (who came to compete intensely for key cabinet and government posts within the administration).

²⁴ Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, 338.

²⁵ Nelly Casas, *Frondizi: Una historia de política y soledad* (Buenos Aires, 1973), 62-63; Potash, *The Army in Politics in Argentina, 1945-1962*, 283; and Catalina Smulovitz, *Oposición y gobierno: Los años de Frondizi* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de America Latina, 1988).

²⁶ In his private correspondences between June and September 1958 with John William Cooke (his former deputy and then current representative in Argentina), Perón complained about Frondizi's unreliability after Frondizi did not end the ban on the Peronist Party nor allow Perón to return to Argentina. See Juan Domingo Perón, *Perón-Cooke correspondencia*, 2 vols., (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Papiro, 1972), 58-64, 105-109; and Potash, *The Army in Politics in Argentina, 1945-1962*, 283.

²⁷ The liberal right, from which Balbín and the UCRP drew much of its support, was a particularly strong advocate of liberal free market economics (see endnote 15 above). Together, Balbín, the UCRP, and the liberal right all welcomed Frondizi's shift in economic policy and, from that moment forward, provided the president with an important measure of political support that lasted until early-1962. See Leonardo Senkamn, "The Right and Civilian Regimes, 1955-1976," in Sandra McGee Deutsch and Ronald Dolkart, *The Argentine Right: its History and Intellectual Origins, 1910 to the Present* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1993), 121.

²⁸ CONINTES stood for (*Plan*) *Conmoción Interna del Estado*.

²⁹ Susana Torrado points out that while the number of high and middle wage earners engaged in industrial activities, commerce, heavy manufacturing, and white-collar professional services increased significantly during this period of economic development, the number of small manufacturers and owners of small businesses declined. See Susana Torrado, *Estructura social de la Argentina, 1945-1983* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 1992); Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 159.

³⁰ To help promote industrial and technical development, Frondizi also sponsored the creation of the *Consejo Nacional de Desarrollo* (CONADE) and the *Consejo Nacional de Educación Técnica* (CONET). See Adriana Puiggrós, *Que Pasó en la Educación Argentina: Desde la Conquista hasta el Menemismo* (Buenos Aires: Kapelusz, 1996), 114. For more information on the details of the capital investment, see Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, 341.

³¹ For a closer look at the economy under Frondizi, see Wynia, *Argentina in the Post-War Era*, 102-104; Clarence Zuvekas, "Argentine Economic Policies under the Frondizi Government" (Ph.D. diss., Washington University, 1967).

³² The military also took exception with Frondizi's policy of "*no intervencionismo*," which opposed the intervention of powers like the United States and Great Britain to battle "communists" in Argentina. The military took this to mean Frondizi's support of communists.

³³ Argentina joined Brazil, Mexico, Chile, and others in opposing the expulsion of Cuba from the OAS; the United States and thirteen Latin American nations voted in favor of expelling Cuba. Less than a month after the January 1962 vote, however, the Argentine military successfully pressured Frondizi to break off all diplomatic relations with Cuba. See Potash, *The Army in Politics in Argentina, 1945-1962*, 329, 343-348; Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 144.

³⁴ Potash, *The Army in Politics in Argentina, 1945-1962*, 356-357; Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, 342.

³⁵ After ousting Frondizi, the military transferred him to Martín García Island off the Argentine coast where he was imprisoned. Donald Hodges, *Argentina, 1943-1987: The National Revolution and Resistance* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 50; Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, 342.

³⁶ Potash, *The Army in Politics in Argentina, 1945-1962*, 361.

³⁷ O'Donnell, "Un 'juego imposible'."

³⁸ Frondizi's speech to a joint session of Congress on May 1, 1958 is a particularly valuable source that outlines his presidential aspirations. A copy of the speech can be found in Nelly Casas, *Frondizi*, 407-434; also see, Potash, *The Army in Politics in Argentina, 1945-1962*, 279-281; Smulovitz, *Oposición y gobierno*.

³⁹ "Un país en crecimiento sin conflictos" translates as "A growing country without conflicts."

⁴⁰ Potash, *The Army in Politics in Argentina, 1945-1962*, 272.

⁴¹ Frondizi's speech to a joint session of Congress on May 1, 1958 is a particularly valuable source that outlines his presidential aspirations. A copy of the speech can be found in Nelly Casas, *Frondizi: Una historia de política y soledad* (Buenos Aires, 1973), 407-434.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Some elements of Frondizi's developmentalist economic strategy had been articulated in the 1950s by famed Argentine and ECLA economist Raúl Prebisch. For instance, see Raúl Prebisch, *The Economic Development of Latin America and Its Principal Problems* (New York: United Nations, 1950). The above article was originally published in Spanish in 1949. See also, Raúl Prebisch, *El desarrollo económico de la argentina* (ECLA: Santiago de Chile, 1957-1958); Raúl Prebisch, *Análisis y proyecciones del desarrollo económico. V. El desarrollo económico de la argentina* (Mexico City: U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1959). For more on Prebisch's overall contribution to international economic development, see Luis Eugenio Di Marco, ed., *International Economics and Development: Essays in Honor of Raúl Prebisch* (New York: Academic Press, 1972).

⁴⁴ Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 23-24; Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 160-161.

⁴⁵ As discussed above, the Peronist Party continued to be banned throughout almost all of Frondizi's presidency.

⁴⁶ Szusterman, *Frondizi and the Politics of Developmentalism in Argentina*, 171-175.

⁴⁷ In the case of *La Prensa*, Perón banned the newspaper only in 1954, one year before the military ousted him in 1955.

⁴⁸ Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 162; Oscar Terán, *Nuestros años sesentas* (Buenos Aires: Puntosur Editores, 1991), 81-85; and Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 23.

⁴⁹ In addition to *Después del Silencio*, *Detras de un Largo Muro*, and *Prisioneros de la Noche*, other post-1958 films of this political genre included *Rosaura a las diez*, *Hijo del Hombre*, *La Mano en la Trampa*, *Tres Veces Ana*, and *Crónica de un Niño Solo*.

⁵⁰ María Alonso, Roberto Elisalde, and Enrique Vazquéz, *Historia: La argentina del siglo XX* (Buenos Aires: AIQUE, 1997).

⁵¹ Szusterman, *Frondizi and the Politics of Developmentalism in Argentina*, 171-175.

⁵² Cristian Buchrucker, *Nacionalismo y peronismo: La Argentina en la crisis ideológica mundial, 1927-1955* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1987), 305-310; Cecilia A. Pittelli and Miguel Somoza Rodríguez "La Enseñanza Religiosa en las Escuelas Publicas durante el Primer Perónismo, 1943-1955," in Hector Ruben Cucuzza et al. eds., *Estudios de Historia de la Educacion durante el Primer Perónismo, 1943-1955* (Editorial los Libros del Riel: Universidad de Lujam, 1997), 81-83

⁵³ Puiggrós, *Que Pasó en la Educación Argentina*, 93-105.

⁵⁴ The choice of José Luis Romero as rector was itself indicative of this liberal, secular makeover. Under Perón in 1953, Romero founded an innovative scholarly journal called *Imago Mundi* committed, among other things, to lay the intellectual groundwork to create an alternative university that would replace the 'suffocating' Peronist university system once Perón had left the presidency. Romero's post-1955 contribution to the liberal cause is discussed below.

⁵⁵ Leonard, *Politicians, Pupils, and Priests*; Silvia Sigal, *Intelectuales y poder en la década del sesenta* (Buenos Aires: Puntosur Editores, 1991), 86-87; and Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 162-164.

⁵⁶ See Gino Germani, *Estructura social de la Argentina: análisis estadístico* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Raigal, 1955); Gino Germani, *The Process of Urbanization in Argentina* (United Nations: Economic and Social Council, 1958); Gino Germani, *La sociología científica: apuntes para su fundamentación* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1962); Gino Germani, *Política y sociedad en una época de transición: de la sociedad tradicional a la sociedad de masas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós, 1962); José Luis Romero, *A history of Argentine Political Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963); and José Luis Romero, *El desarrollo de las ideas en la sociedad argentina del siglo XX* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1965).

⁵⁷ Among the principal reasons they cite for this "fusion"— by which they meant less a strict "melting pot" phenomenon and more of "two-way" process of integration and acculturation between newcomers and natives— were a) the high percentage (or "demographic weight") of immigrants as part of the overall Argentine population (roughly double the ratio in the United States at that time) and b) the pronounced integrationist strategies— i.e. in the public education curriculum— of past governments. See Germani, *Estructura social de la Argentina*, 82-87; Gino Germani, "Asimilación de los inmigrantes en el medio urbano: Notas metodológicas," *Revista Latinoamericana de Sociología* 1, 2 (1965): 158-175. For a valuable discussion of Germani and Romero and their pioneering contributions to Argentine immigration scholarship, see Fernando Devoto, *Movimientos migratorios: historiografía y problemas* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1992), 9-15.

⁵⁸ Their work focused almost exclusively on Europeans, who comprised the overwhelming majority of immigrants who arrived to Argentina.

⁵⁹ For instance, see Oscar Cornblit, *Inmigrantes y empresarios en la política argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1966); Carl Solberg, *Immigration and Nationalism: Argentina and Chile, 1890-1914* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1970); Francis Korn, *Buenos Aires: Los huéspedes del veinte*

(Buenos Aires: Editorial Suramericano, 1974); Samuel Baily, "Marriage Patterns and Immigrant Assimilation in Buenos Aires, 1882-1923," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 6, 1 (February 1980): 32-48; Mark Szuchman, *Mobility and Integration in Urban Argentina: Cordoba in the Liberal Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980); Herbert Klein, "The Integration of Italian Immigrants Into the United States and Argentina: A Comparative Analysis," *American Historical Review* 88, 2 (April 1983): 306-339; Fernando Devoto and Gianfausto Rosoli, eds., *La inmigración italiana en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblios, 1985); Diego Armus, "Diez años de historiografía sobre la inmigración masiva a la Argentina," *Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos*, 2, 4 (December 1986): 431-455; Fernando Devoto and Eduardo Miguez, *Asociacionismo, trabajo e identidad étnica: los italianos en América Latina en una perspectiva comparada* (Buenos Aires: CEMLA, 1992); and Jose Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁶⁰ Devoto, *Movimientos migratorios*, 14-15; Tulio Halperín Donghi, "Un cuarto de siglo de historiografía argentina," *Desarrollo Económico* 25, 100 (1986): 435-488.

⁶¹ Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 166

⁶² Although the New Left's presence was certainly felt during the Frondizi years, it grew in stature and significance, as we shall see in Chapter 4, in the mid-to-late-1960s.

⁶³ For a closer look at the New Left, see Sigal, *Intelectuales y poder en la década del sesenta*; Terán, *Nuestros años sesentas*; and Claudia Hilb and Daniel Lutzky, eds., *La nueva izquierda argentina, 1960-1980* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1984).

⁶⁴ Luis Alberto Romero notes that the Church also "had little interest in strengthening democratic institutions." Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 169.

⁶⁵ Puiggrós, *Que Pasó en la Educación Argentina*, 113-115; Mónica Esti Rein, *Politics and Education in Argentina, 1946-1962* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 154-155.

⁶⁶ Puiggrós, *Que Pasó en la Educación Argentina*, 115; Rein, *Politics and Education in Argentina, 1946-1962*, 173.

⁶⁷ Argentine Law 1.420, Ley de Educación Común (1884).

⁶⁸ For a comprehensive account of the conflict over the founding of private Catholic universities and the 1958 laica-libre affair, see Rein, *Politics and Education in Argentina, 1946-1962*, chapters 6-8.

⁶⁹ Puiggrós, *Que Pasó en la Educación Argentina*, 115.

⁷⁰ Rein, *Politics and Education in Argentina*, 155-157; Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 164.

⁷¹ Leonardo Senkman, "The Right and Civilian Regimes, 1955-1976," in Sandra McGee Deutsch and Ronald Dolkart, eds., *The Argentine Right: Its History and Intellectual Origins, 1910 to the Present* (Wilmington: SR Books, 1993), 126-127; Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina*, 205-206; and Robert Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina: From the Inquisition to Perón* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 250.

⁷² For instance, Tacuara enjoyed the support and protection of the openly anti-Semitic *Arab League in Argentina* (headed by Hussein Triki) and, according to Juan José Sebeli, the Argentine Air Force. See Juan Jose Sebeli, *Los deseos imaginarios del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Legasa, 1983), 169; Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina*, 206.

⁷³ Juan José Sebeli, *La cuestión judía en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Tiempo Cont., 1968), 250.

⁷⁴ As we have seen in Chapter 2, Perón had also appointed a number of Jews to political posts, yet rarely to such prominent positions as Vice-Minister of Interior, Executive Secretary to the President, or President of the Central Bank. Moreover, under Perón no Jewish diputados—

Peronist or not— were elected to Congress. Finally, for more information on David Blejer, Samuel Schmukler, and José Mazar Barnett, see Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los Judíos*, 197-198.

⁷⁵ Ignacio Winizky, “Los judíos en la vida institucional argentina,” *La Luz*, special edition 1931-1961, 25.

⁷⁶ Haim Avni, *Emancipation and Jewish Education: A Century of Argentinian Jewry’s Experience, 1884-1984* (Jerusalem: 1985), 133; Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los Judíos*, 199.

⁷⁷ Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los Judíos*, 200-201; Leonardo Senkman, *El antisemitismo en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: centro Editor de América Latina, 1986).

⁷⁸ It is also worth noting that in May 1960— before word of the Eichmann kidnapping (discussed below) was made public— the Argentine Congress saluted the State of Israel on occasion of its twelfth anniversary. Specifically, it praised “the democratic significance and transcendence of this fruitful act [the founding of the State of Israel] for humanity and the freedom of all peoples.” *Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, Diario de Sesiones*, May 12, 1960, 231.

⁷⁹ See Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas, *La conciencia argentina frente al peligro racista* (Buenos Aires: DAIA, 1960).

⁸⁰ For details on the story of Eichmann’s capture, see Mariano Reyna, “El caso Eichmann,” *Todo es Historia*, 116 (January 1977): 6-21; Guillermo F. de Nevares, “El secuestro de Adolf Eichmann y la soberanía argentina,” *Historia*, 26 (June-August 1987): 15-40; Zvi Aharoni and Wilhelm Dietl, *Operation Eichmann: The Truth about the Pursuit, Capture, and Trial* (New York: J. Wiley, 1997); Peter Malkin, *Eichmann in My Hands* (New York: Warner Books, 1990); Moshe Perlman, *The Capture and Trial of Adolph Eichmann* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963); Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los Judíos*, Ch. 6; and Neal Bascomb, *Hunting Eichmann: How a Band of Survivors and a Young Spy Agency Chased down the World’s Most Notorious Nazi* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009).

⁸¹ Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los Judíos*, 220.

⁸² *La Nación* was the only Argentine newspaper to report previously news of the *Daily Herald* report. See *La Nación*, May 27, 1960.

⁸³ In an official letter dated June 3, 1960, Israeli Ambassador Arie Levavi informed Frondizi and his Foreign Minister Diógenes Taboada about the “group of volunteers.” For a detailed look at the letter, which was made public on June 7, see de Nevares, “El secuestro de Adolf Eichmann y la soberanía argentina,” 29.

⁸⁴ Those sentiments were included in Argentina’s official reply to Israel’s letter of June 3. For a copy of the Argentine reply, delivered by Argentina’s ambassador in Israel Rodolfo García Arias and made available to the Argentine media on June 8, see de Nevares, “El secuestro de Adolf Eichmann y la soberanía argentina,” 29-30.

⁸⁵ In an interview with historian Félix Luna shortly after he was ousted in March 1962, Frondizi discussed these and other conflicting pressures he was forced to take into account during the Eichmann episode. See Félix Luna, *Diálogos con Frondizi* (Buenos Aires: 1963), 130-131.

⁸⁶ In his excellent chapter on the Eichmann affair, Raanan Rein illustrates how Frondizi, through one of his emissaries, discreetly informed the Israelis that Argentina had no real intentions of seeing Eichmann returned and hoped that by bringing the matter before the United Nations, the episode could quickly be resolved and then promptly forgotten. See Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los Judíos*, 225.

⁸⁷ The UN resolution was issued on June 22, 1960. For a complete copy of the resolution, see de Nevares, “El secuestro de Adolf Eichmann y la soberanía argentina,” 32.

⁸⁸ For a copy of the August 3 declaration, see de Nevares, “El secuestro de Adolf Eichmann y la soberanía argentina,” 34-35.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 30.

⁹⁰ *La Prensa*, June 11, 1960. See also *La Nación*, June 10, 1960.

⁹¹ On June 18, 1960, *The New York Times* published an editorial that called Israel's actions "a clear violation of Argentine sovereignty and international law," while also maintaining that "[n]o immoral or illegal act justified another." Israel made both claims in her June 3 letter to Argentine authorities, which Israeli Ambassador Arie Levavi made public on June 7.

⁹² Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina*, 248-249.

⁹³ de Nevares, "El secuestro de Adolf Eichmann y la soberanía argentina," 36.

⁹⁴ *Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, Diario de Sesiones*, June 29, 1960, p. 892.

⁹⁵ Many of the sponsors of the June 29 congressional motion were members of the opposition UCRP. As Frondizi already knew, the UCRP attempted to use the Eichmann episode not only as a political tool to criticize Perón's past administration, but also Frondizi's current UCRI government.

⁹⁶ Among the seven total sessions in June, July, and August 1960, the one on August 11 was also the longest.

⁹⁷ *Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, Diario de Sesiones*, August 11, 1960, p. 1920.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 1922-1923.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 1917, 1920, 1924, and 1932. Eighty-four of one-hundred and three diputados present voted in favor of the aforementioned resolution.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 1929.

¹⁰¹ For an overview of Anti-Semitism during this period, see Abraham Monk, "The New Wave of Anti-Semitism in Argentina," American Jewish Committee Files, October 25, 1961.

¹⁰² Monk, "The New Wave of Anti-Semitism in Argentina;" Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina*, 251-252; Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los Judíos*, 255-258; Senkman, *El antisemitismo en la Argentina; La Razón*, February 9, 1961; *Diario Israelita*, June 7 and 25, 1961; *Clarín*, June 25, 1961; *The New York Times*, January 18, 1962; *La Prensa*, March 16, 1962; and *La Nación*, March 3, 10, and 12, 1964.

¹⁰³ Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los Judíos*, 256.

¹⁰⁴ *Mundo Israelita*, December 2, 1960; Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los Judíos*, 257.

¹⁰⁵ For instance, see *Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, Diario de Sesiones*, August 14, 1961, p. 5739 and *Cámara de Senadores de la Nación, Diario de Sesiones*, September 14, 1961, p. 985-986.

¹⁰⁶ Until then, Jewish students, like their non-Jewish counterparts, were enrolled in the public school system where they received general Argentine instruction. If their parents wished, Jewish children could attend in the afternoon, (after the end of the public school day) a private Jewish school where they received Jewish instruction. In the early-1960s, approximately 20% of Jewish students chose to attend the new nationally-accredited Jewish schools. See Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los Judíos*, 258-259; Haim Avni, *Emancipation and Jewish Education*, 188-190. Avni's monograph is published in Hebrew.

¹⁰⁷ David Schers, "Anti-Semitism in Latin America," in Salo Baron and George Wise, eds., *Violence and Defense in the Jewish Experience* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1977), 251; Avni, "Jewish Leadership in Times of Crisis: Argentina during the Eichmann Affair (1960-1962)," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, 1 (1995): 124-125; and Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los Judíos*, 260.

¹⁰⁸ *Mundo Israelita*, August 20, 1960.

¹⁰⁹ By "previous and subsequent incidents," I am referring to anti-Semitic attacks that occurred during the period between 1958-1964.

¹¹⁰ *La Luz*, June 29, 1962, 15.

¹¹¹ *La Prensa*, June 26, 1962; *Noticias Gráficas*, June 25, 1962, 5.

¹¹² *Clarín*, June 26, 1962, 23; *La Nación*, June 26, 1962.

¹¹³ For a complete transcript of Adrogué's declaration, see *La Nación*, July 4, 1962, 2.

¹¹⁴ *Noticias Gráficas*, June 29, 1962.

¹¹⁵ *La Nación*, July 1, 1962, 2; *Noticias Gráficas*, June 29, 1962.

¹¹⁶ Labor's 62 *Organizaciones* does not qualify as an apolitical group, but was still among those in June 1962 to rebuke the Sirota attack. For details on the remarks made by these various groups, see *La Nación*, July 1, 1962, 9; *Noticias Gráficas*, June 29, 1962.

¹¹⁷ *Clarín*, June 26, 1962, 23. Various groups used the term "nazi-fascists" (or some variation thereof) to describe the Tacuara perpetrators as well as "pueblo civilizado" (or some variation thereof) to refer to those who opposed the attack and Tacuara's politics and ideals. See, for instance, *Noticias Gráficas*, June 29, 1962.

¹¹⁸ *Noticias Gráficas*, June 26, 1962, 7.

¹¹⁹ The June 28 Jewish-led work stoppage is discussed in detail below where I offer other possible explanations for the decision to employ the "Closed in Protest of Nazi Aggression in Argentina" slogan.

¹²⁰ *Nueva Sion*, "A 25 años del "Caso Sirota," June 6, 1987. Although never stated as vividly as Goldenberg, several of the approximately seventy-five Argentines that I interviewed in 2001 and 2002 regarding the Sirota Affair similarly emphasized gender as having had a major impact on the degree of publicity that the episode received in the Argentine press in 1962.

¹²¹ "Joven" is young. "Joven estudiante" is young student.

¹²² It would be worthwhile to explore if the Jewish community's tepid response to the D'Alessandro case also stemmed from the fact that he was only partly Jewish. For mention of the D'Alessandro case, see *Mundo Israelita*, June 30, 1962, 1; *Noticias Gráficas*, June 29, 1962; and *La Prensa*, June 29, 1962, 3.

¹²³ *La Jornada* (Chubut), July 1962 cited in *Mundo Israelita*, July 14, 1962, 5.

¹²⁴ *Mundo Israelita*, July 14, 1962, 5.

¹²⁵ At that time, it was common practice for the police regularly to inform the media of any crime or attack committed against Argentines or those living in Argentina. Some newspapers even included a "police log," which listed and described all reported crimes.

¹²⁶ This explains why it took until June 25, 1962— four days after the attack— for word of the Sirota attack to appear in most major Argentine newspapers.

¹²⁷ *La Luz*, June 29, 1962, 15 (note: *La Luz* was a weekly newspaper). Below, I discuss the significance of Frondizi's ouster and Guido's ascension to the presidency with respect to the Sirota Affair.

¹²⁸ *La Luz*, June 29, 1962, 24.

¹²⁹ Adrogué's radio and television address began at 9pm on July 3. The portion quoted here is reprinted in *La Nación*, July 4, 1962, 1.

¹³⁰ *La Nación*, June 28, 1962, 43; *La Prensa*, June 29, 1962, 3; and *La Luz*, July 13, 1962, 6.

¹³¹ *La Prensa*, June 29, 1962, 3; *La Luz*, July 13, 1962, 6.

¹³² See the June 28 DAIA letter to Green reprinted in *La Luz*, July 13, 1962, 6.

¹³³ *La Prensa*, June 30, 1962, 4.

¹³⁴ *Noticias Gráficas*, June 29, 1962, 11.

¹³⁵ Green's communiqué is available at the *Biblioteca de la Policía* (Lavalle Street), Police Minutes, June 30, 1962; *Rein, Argentina, Israel, y los Judíos*, 268.

¹³⁶ Angelini appeared on “Canal 7,” July 2, 1962 at 10pm; his remarks are summarized in *La Luz*, July 13, 1962, 6. Angelini was likely referring to the recent financial scandal at Banco Popular Israelita, a Jewish-oriented, national bank managed predominantly by Jewish Argentine bankers. Not unlike the crises that unfolded at the Banco de Mayo and Banco Patricios in the late-1990s, a shady solvency crisis at the Banco Popular Israelita in 1959 and 1960 caused many Jewish and non-Jewish depositors to lose part or all of their personal savings. In the midst of another wave of anti-Semitic violence in 1964, right-wing Peronist congressman Juan Carlos Cornejo Linares and Brigadier Gilberto Hidalgo Oliva would echo Angelini’s 1962 remarks. In a book entitled *El Nuevo orden sionista*, Linares and Oliva maintained that “Jewish organizations were taking advantage of these [anti-Semitic] aggressions to provoke a lot of noise that would conceal the scams and economic crimes that Jews have committed against the State.” Linares and Oliva were alluding to a recent series of loan concession irregularities at the Banco Central unearthed in 1962-1963 in the midst of Argentina’s latest economic crisis; Mazar Barnett, an Argentine Jew, was president of the Central Bank at the time of those presumed irregularities. For more on Linares and Oliva’s remarks, see Juan Carlos Cornejo Linares, *El Nuevo orden sionista* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Tacuari, 1964), 24-25; Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los judíos*, 269.

¹³⁷ Radio Saporiti issued those claims in a published statement on June 26, 1962; they are reprinted in *La Luz*, July 13, 1962, 6. With regard to DAIA leaders hiring a photographer and two psychologists, see *Nueva Sion*, “A 25 años del “Caso Sirota,” June 6, 1987.

¹³⁸ As President of the Senate during Frondizi’s presidency, Guido was selected to be Argentina’s next (and provisional) President.

¹³⁹ Lewis, “The Right and Military Rule, 1955-1983,” 156-158; Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, 344; and (for a comprehensive look at the Guido Interlude) Robert Potash, *The Army and Politics in Argentina, 1962-1973: From Frondizi’s Fall to the Peronist Restoration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 1-62.

¹⁴⁰ Guido himself was a civilian. He was appointed by the military to lead the 1962-63 military government.

¹⁴¹ For reference to the informal DAIA poll of June 1962, see DAIA President Isaac Goldenberg’s remarks in *Nueva Sion*, “A 25 años del “Caso Sirota,” June 6, 1987, 84.

¹⁴² Placed in thousands of school windows and storefronts, the full sign read: “Closed in Protest against Nazi Aggression in Argentina.” For specific references to the spirit of Jewish unity on the day of the June 28 work-stoppage, see *La Luz*, July 13, 1962, 5; *Mundo Israelita*, June 30, 1962, 1.

¹⁴³ For the full text of the DAIA letter, see for instance *La Prensa*, *Clarín*, *La Nación*, and *Democracia*. Depending on the newspaper, the letter was published on June 27 or June 28, 1962.

¹⁴⁴ DAIA, “A la opinión pública argentina.”

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. Italics mine.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. Italics mine.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ *Noticias Gráficas*, June 28, 1962, 4. Note: *Noticias Gráficas* was an evening daily.

¹⁵¹ Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los judíos*, 271; Judith Elkin, “Antisemitism in Argentina,” in Jehuda Reinharz, *Living with Anti-Semitism: Modern Jewish Responses* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1987), 339-340.

¹⁵² *Mundo Israelita*, June 30, 1962, 1.

- ¹⁵³ These selected quotation fragments represent the broader reactions of various Argentine groups and organizations immediately following the June 28 strike. They appeared in *Noticias Gráficas* on June 28 and 29, 1962, 4 and 11, respectively.
- ¹⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵⁵ *Criterio*, June 28, 1962, 456.
- ¹⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁵⁷ *Tia Vincente*, July 16, 1962, coverpage.
- ¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 6.
- ¹⁵⁹ *Mundo Israelita*, June 30, 1962, 6.
- ¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 7.
- ¹⁶¹ *La Prensa*, June 27, 1962, 8.
- ¹⁶² *Mundo Israelita*, August 11, 1; *La Prensa*, July 7, 1962, 3.
- ¹⁶³ Rein, *Argentina, Israel, y los judíos*, 272. It should be noted that some of those who signed this August 8 statement also formed part of the aforementioned “Argentine Association for the Freedom of Culture.” At the very least, Aramburu, Lanús, and Rojas were part of both groups.
- ¹⁶⁴ *La Prensa*, July 1, 1962, 3.
- ¹⁶⁵ Interview with Carlos Perette in *Mundo Israelita*, June 30, 1962, 6.
- ¹⁶⁶ Interview with Americo Ghioldi in *Mundo Israelita*, June 30, 1962, 7.
- ¹⁶⁷ In a July letter to Dr. Adrogué, the DAIA expressed its profound gratitude for his July 3 address to the nation, noting “the great satisfaction that his words generated in the heart of the [Jewish] community.” The DAIA letter is reprinted in *Mundo Israelita*, July 21, 1962, 1.
- ¹⁶⁸ *La Luz*, September 7, 1962, 17.
- ¹⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁷⁰ *Mundo Israelita*, July 7, 1962, 2.
- ¹⁷¹ Oglietti had previously worked under Monseñor Miguel de Andrea, an advisor to the Archdiocese and director of Church radio and television.
- ¹⁷² Oglietti’s remarks, originally published in the June 1962 issue of *Nuestros Hijos*, as well as *La Luz*’s criticism of Oglietti, can be found in *La Luz*, July 13, 1962, 20.
- ¹⁷³ *La Luz*, July 13, 1962, 20. In defense of Oglietti, it is worth noting that members of the Jewish community might also have felt that ‘not all religions are equally truthful.’ That is, as may have been true of members of many religious groups, Jews might have felt that Judaism held greater ‘religious truth’ than other religions.
- ¹⁷⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁷⁵ Interview with 1962 DAIA President Isaac Goldenberg in *Nueva Sion*, “A 25 años del “Caso Sirota,” June 6, 1987, 84.
- ¹⁷⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷⁷ *Noticias Gráficas*, June 28, 1962, 4.
- ¹⁷⁸ *Clarín*, June 26, 1962, 23.
- ¹⁷⁹ *La Nación*, July 1, 1962, 4.
- ¹⁸⁰ *La Luz*, October 5, 1962, 3.
- ¹⁸¹ *La Luz*, 30th anniversary special edition, 1931-1961, 15.
- ¹⁸² Ibid.
- ¹⁸³ *La Luz*, October 5, 1962, 3.
- ¹⁸⁴ However, in agreeing to a return to civilian democracy in July 1963, the military, as it had since 1955, continued to ban Perón from Argentina and favor the proscription of peronism. In this sense, Argentine democracy was still not without its limitations and contradictions.

¹⁸⁵ All these statistics from the American Jewish Committee's May 1963 study, "Que fisonomía tendrá el judaísmo argentino en el año 1980?" are published in *La Luz*, October 4, 1963, 14-15.

¹⁸⁶ Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, *Diario de Sesiones*, Anales de la Legislación Argentina, August 13, 1964, p. 2598.

¹⁸⁷ León Patlis was the only Jewish diputado not to make a statement during said congressional debate.

¹⁸⁸ Cámara de Diputados de la Nación, August 13, 1964, p. 2607.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2599.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2604.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2601.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 2603.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2606. Italics mine.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.* In the 1960s, under the confrontational leadership of non-Argentine Hussein Triki, the Argentine Arab League adopted openly anti-Semitic positions, including close relations with Tacuara, that differed from what might be regarded as 'universal anti-Zionist Arab nationalism'. For more on the Argentine Arab League, see Victor Mirelman, "Attitudes Towards Jews in Argentina," *Jewish Social Studies*, 37, 3/4 (Summer/Fall 1975): 212-216. For information on Tacuara's earlier ties with the Argentine Arab League, see DAIA, *Actividades antijudías de los arabes en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires; 1958). For Triki's version, see *He aquí Palestina: el sionismo al desnudo* (Madrid: Afrodisio Aguado, 1977).

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2605.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ For instance, see *Ibid.*, p. 2603, 2604, 2607.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2602.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

Chapter 4

The Legacy of the Dirty War

Introduction

On the evening of July 26, 1984— nearly eight months after civilian democracy had been restored in Argentina following the military’s infamous seven-year-long “Dirty War”— the “Truth Chapter” of Argentina’s Jewish anti-defamation league organized a small public forum in Buenos Aires during which invitee Oscar Murmis recalled for those present the aforementioned August 13, 1964 congressional debate. Murmis, one of six Jewish Argentine diputados who had taken part in that heated 1964 interchange, urged members of both the Jewish community and Argentine society at large to preserve the memory of what had transpired, largely because so many of the “themes and issues” aired in 1964 are “as relevant now as they were then.”¹

If the rhetoric and reality surrounding previously discussed issues like Jewish “doble nacionalidad” were— as Murmis and another former (Jewish Argentine) diputado José Jaritonsky both claimed during the “Truth Chapter” forum— as germane in 1984 as they had been in 1964, Argentina’s political and cultural climate, in the aftermath of the Dirty War, had been altered dramatically. Most significantly perhaps, for the first time since the Uriburu coup of 1930, the nation’s military had lost its political, moral, and institutional legitimacy in the eyes of most Argentines. That is, following the brutal 1976-1983 dictatorship during which upwards of 30,000 people were abducted, tortured, and executed, few Argentines could again fathom welcoming the military back to power to “salvar la Patria” or “rescue the Homeland” from economic, political, or social crisis— as more than would like to admit had done back in March of 1976 and during other previous military coups.

The military junta's seven-year reign of organized, systematic, and clandestine state terror ruptured— especially as detailed accounts of their abuses were increasingly publicized and digested after 1983— the long-internalized collective presumption that a coup was an acceptable option to restore national “order” and “stability.” If during past coups Argentines might have colloquially uttered, as Argentine journalist and psychologist Alfredo Moffatt put it in 1984, “I don’t agree with the military, *but* it’s good that they at least put things in order and clean up...” or “what we need here is a Franco,” such sentiments became unthinkable after the triumphant restoration of democracy in December of 1983.² For the Dirty War, as political scientist Alejandro Horowicz argued in 1984, “was something entirely different,” something which appeared to break Argentina’s 1930-1983 historical cycle— a periodization Argentines were quick to draw in the immediate aftermath of the Dirty War— of repeated, if not anticipated military intervention in public life.³

With the euphoric election of Radical Party leader Raúl Alfonsín as President of Argentina on December 10, 1983, Argentines were bent, in the words of Luis Alberto Romero, on extirpating the “‘little fascist’ who lurked in the national soul.”⁴ That entailed a concerted, multifaceted, and unprecedented effort among a diverse cross-section of Argentines— from the president, major political parties, journalists, educators, and students to lawyers, workers, community organizers, cultural associations, human rights activists, and many others— to root out all vestiges of authoritarianism, corporatism, and violence associated with the Dirty War explicitly and, indeed, much of the 1930-1983 period. In their place, many Argentines sought to reconstruct, to borrow from Edna Aizenberg, a “national imagined community” where governance, civil society, and rule of law would be explicitly and permanently grounded in ethical, peaceful, authentic, and open forms of representation and accountability.⁵

The making or remaking of that “verdadera democracia” or “true democracy,” as Argentines came to call it after 1983, was constantly and inextricably linked to the searing memory of the Dirty War. The famous 1984 government-sponsored publication *Nunca Más* (Never Again), which publicly exhumed the testimonials of thousands of the nation’s recent *desaparecidos* or “disappeared ones,” coupled with the 1985 Nuremberg-esque *Juicio de las Juntas* trial, during which the principal junta leaders were convicted of state murder, best illuminated this emerging societal movement.⁶ Yet the persistent link in the minds of many Argentines between the post-1983 construction of a new national political and cultural landscape and the ever-present memory of the Dirty War went well beyond the celebrated *Nunca Más* report and *Juicio de las Juntas* trial. Indeed, in their pursuit of real and sustained democracy, the Dirty War had prompted many Argentines to embark on a period of unprecedented individual and collective self-reflection that invariably led many to ask one recurring question: what was it about “Argentine culture” that had made such a horrific tragedy possible?

There were many possible “answers” to such an open-ended and nuanced question, yet two Argentine responses, both articulated in a provocative July 1984 article in *El Porteño*, resonated loudly in the immediate aftermath of the Dirty War. First, Alfredo Moffatt argued that the root of the problem lay in the rigidly bifurcated “black versus white” or “good versus evil” dogmatic and authoritarian worldview emblematic not only of the recent military junta, but of much of political and cultural life over the previous half-century. If Argentina truly were to build a new and lasting democratic tradition, he maintained, Argentines increasingly would need to recognize and embrace society’s “spectrum of grays,” namely by actively encouraging the open expression of multiple and divergent opinions that in the past had often been neglected, marginalized, or outrightly suppressed.⁷ In the months and years after the end of the

Dirty War, that meant a deeper appreciation in both practice and rhetoric of values such as ethics, equality, free speech, citizen participation, and political and cultural pluralism and tolerance.

Like Moffatt, author and actor Enrique Pinti echoed the call in 1984 for a more embracing, multicultural, and discursively pluralistic democracy. Yet rather than focus on the authoritarian and dogmatic shortcomings of the recent junta and other past (military) governments, Pinti tugged more directly at the conscience of individual Argentines. While he praised the national outpouring of “nunca mas” sentiment that blossomed in the months following the Dirty War, Pinti simultaneously harped on the recurring failure of Argentines to confront and commemorate tragedy. He lamented, for instance, the widespread popular use during the recent dictatorship of alarming aphorisms like “no me acuerdo” or “I don’t remember,” suggesting that such collective apathy and inaction were emblematic of the same impulse that had led Argentines during events such as the 1978 World Cup of soccer (which Argentina had hosted and won) to “say ‘yes’ to everything, pour out onto the streets [to celebrate our championship], all the while knowing the substantial number of [human] losses which that new plaything had brought upon us.”⁸ So long as “we have these transgressions of memory,” he concluded, not only would Argentina never fully achieve the kind of vibrant, tolerant, and just *verdadera democracia* that so many Argentines spoke of after 1983, but the country would be susceptible to a Dirty War all over again.⁹

Pinti and Moffatt’s collective emphasis on the political and cultural importance of memory and the need to cultivate and embrace things such as free speech and a rainbow of opinions and ideas embodied much about Argentina’s new democratic movement. Their claims were both a product and indication of the profoundly new ways in which Argentines, in the aftermath of the Dirty War, strove to refashion the future of their country’s often tumultuous

history by actively reshaping the meaning and direction of civil society and national identity. Unlike at any other time in the nation's past, this included a palpable push among many Argentines to interrogate their country's longstanding unitary cultural presumption and, by extension, reassess the political and cultural treatment and standing of ethnic and religious minorities— Jewish Argentines most certainly included— in this land of immigrants.

If therefore, as Oscar Murmis and José Jaritonsky argued above, the recurring question of whether or not Jews were “fully Argentine” was as relevant in 1984 as it had been in 1964, the historical context in which that and other debates unfolded had been irrevocably altered by the recent military dictatorship. Although I may enjoy the benefit of hindsight in making such a statement, many Argentines as early as the first-half of 1984 had already come to view the Dirty War as having radically changed the nation's past, present, and future trajectory in ways that no other episode in their country's fragile history had. The profound post-1983 push towards an open and lasting democracy, the accompanying calls for and recognition of pluralism and multiculturalism, the drive for national anti-discrimination legislation, the unprecedented level of Jewish political participation, and the constant pleas of “never again” together pointed to the Dirty War's unparalleled significance and, by extension, its aftermath. As we shall see, the restoration of democracy in December 1983 represented a watershed moment in Argentine history that forever transformed the ongoing national conversation about the meaning of *argentinidad* and, in the process, the attention paid to and agency appropriated by minority groups like Jews in Argentine society.

Historical Background

On June 28, 1966, ten years prior to the onset of the Dirty War, the military, led by General Juan Carlos Onganía, overthrew civilian President Arturo Illia (1963-1966), ending

Argentina's second Frondizian democratic experiment.¹⁰ With the country yet again mired in economic and political turmoil, many Argentine groups— including big and small business, major political parties¹¹, the Church, union leaders, and even the perpetually exiled Perón— welcomed the coup as the possible beginning of a new popular and corporate regime “pledged to political balance and compromise.”¹² Yet such hopes were quickly dashed when Onganía and his circle of collaborators swiftly established a hardline autocratic state aimed explicitly at changing society from above while squelching all political expression and shutting out many of the very interest groups who had in fact supported the 1966 coup. Within months of seizing power, Onganía dissolved Congress, banned all political parties, stripped universities of the autonomy they had regained under Frondizi and Illia, suppressed worker strikes, silenced the media, and even outlawed— to the particular satisfaction of the Catholic Church and some right-wing nationalist groups— miniskirts, long hair, pornography, and (civil) divorce.¹³ Furthermore, Onganía eliminated all but five government ministries, effectively establishing what Guillermo O'Donnell has come to call a “bureaucratic-authoritarian state.”¹⁴

Onganía's coup— or *revolución argentina* as he termed it— was bent, above all, on trying to resolve Argentina's chronic economic woes. To succeed economically where countless other civilian and military governments had previously failed, Onganía and his colleagues believed that the new regime required the political luxury of time. As a result, they took additional measures to try to suppress the two groups that they felt represented their greatest source of potential opposition: the still powerful (and largely peronist) unions that stood in the way of their impending round of wage cuts and other “free market” reforms, and intellectual dissidents whose “communist” activities threatened the nation's political, social, and cultural fabric.¹⁵ To these ends, Onganía ordered key union leaders fired and imprisoned, stripped many unions of their legal standing, raided the nation's universities, and physically beat and

intimidated professors and students, most notoriously on June 29, 1966 in what infamously became known as *La Noche de Bastones Largos* or The Night of the Billy Clubs.¹⁶

Having (temporarily) suppressed by the end of 1966 the labor movement and the universities, Onganía along with his cadre of financial technocrats, many of whom had been educated abroad, sought to implement their free market economic stabilization plan.¹⁷ Between 1966 and 1968, their recipe of heightened foreign investment, a sharp devaluation of the peso, an increase in exports, domestic technological growth, a two-year wage freeze, a suspension of collective bargaining, and other practices generally favorable to the nation's large firms and businesses produced what David Rock has called "an apparent magical transformation."¹⁸ So much so that by late-1968 Onganía felt confident initiating the "social phase" of the regime's revolutionary program, notably providing workers with a modest wage increase and reconvening collective bargaining agreements. Yet for the Confederación General de Trabajo (CGT), Argentina's largest and historically peronist union, Onganía's 1968 overture proved too little too late. Led by a new group of younger, more militant leaders who had grown frustrated with a political system that, since 1966, had entirely shut labor out, the CGT rejected as insufficient Onganía's 1968 concessions and cautiously began to take to the streets.¹⁹

At the same time, university students, equally exasperated with Onganía's suffocating regime, also began to mobilize. Though cautious too at first, student adopted in early-1969 a more belligerent anti-Onganía stance after government forces killed nineteen-year-old protester Santiago Pampillón during a student demonstration in Córdoba, Argentina's second largest city. Armed with Pampillón's memory, students in Córdoba and throughout Argentina spearheaded in the spring of 1969 a more radical and determined wave of protests culminating with the remarkable, though still unexpected events of May 29, 1969.

After the local CGT chapter in Córdoba called on May 29 for a general work-stoppage, students in Córdoba, in an unusual display of solidarity, joined striking workers in what became, together with the *Semana Trágica* of January 1919 and the Peronist awakening of October 17, 1945, the most significant protest in twentieth-century Argentine history. Workers and students marched on downtown Córdoba where they managed, in conjunction with other Argentines sympathetic to their cause, to take control of the city center. The police responded quickly and aggressively, yet for two days proved unable to quell the resilient and surprisingly well-organized student-worker “coalition.” On May 31, Onganía felt compelled to call in the army, which successfully managed to restore order yet not before some twenty-five people had been killed, five-hundred wounded, and three-hundred arrested.²⁰

The 1969 *Cordobazo*, as it became known, exposed the fragility and limits of Onganía’s bureaucratic-authoritarian regime and, more significantly, unleashed a radical and frequently violent wave of social protest that persisted off and on until the onset of the Dirty War in March 1976. It inspired a generation of Argentine students and workers— much like their counterparts in Paris, Prague, Rio de Janeiro, Mexico City, Tokyo, Berlin, and Berkeley— to call for an end, now through armed struggle, of both the Onganía dictatorship and what they saw as foreign (notably U.S.) imperialism in Argentina and indeed throughout Latin America.²¹ Between 1969-1976, leftist revolutionary groups like the *Montoneros* and the *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP), taking on the self-professed role of Robin Hood, gained national prominence through a series of well-publicized and high-profile bank robberies, kidnappings, and assassinations, all in the name of national liberation— episodes that many exasperated Argentines initially cheered.²²

Like elsewhere in Latin America, this spectacular rise in violence sent foreign investors fleeing and, by extension, the Argentine economy reeling— a devastating blow to Onganía and the military’s own revolutionary aspirations. As the economy faltered, the military— long

Onganía's political pillar of support— and the nation's increasingly disgruntled industrial elite together grew skeptical about Onganía's ability to overcome this mushrooming social and economic crisis. That prompted a government shake-up in the second-half of 1969, including the dismissal of Adalbert Krieger Vasena, Onganía's influential Finance Minister and architect of the regime's "free market" stabilization plan. Yet the crisis in Argentina only worsened in 1970, further eroding the junta's confidence in Onganía. Indeed, Onganía's days as president now appeared numbered. Fittingly, his political fate was sealed on the first anniversary of the Cordobazo when the *Montoneros*, Argentina's most prominent urban (and peronist) guerrilla group, kidnapped and, shortly thereafter, executed former Argentine President General Pedro Aramburu; days later, the military replaced the once omnipotent Onganía.

Having ended one tumultuous period, the military embarked another. Onganía's successors, Generals Roberto Marcelo Levingston (1970-1971) and particularly Alejandro Lanusse (1971-1973), dramatically stepped up the military's efforts to eradicate the growing revolutionary left.²³ In March 1971, President Lanusse established the new Federal Criminal Court of the Nation, a special pro-government body of twelve judges and three prosecutors, empowered with complete jurisdiction over all "subversive" crimes.²⁴ With violent leftist attacks still on the rise, Lanusse then declared a state of siege, which facilitated not only the police's counter-terror efforts against suspected militants, but also, for the first time, legally empowered the armed forces to "combat internal subversion, terrorism, and related acts."²⁵ As a result, the police and the military (not to mention a growing number of sympathetic right-wing vigilante groups) routinely began to arrest, abduct, torture, and even murder suspected leftist guerrillas— the most infamous case being the August 1972 Trelew Massacre in southern Argentina.²⁶ In short, between May 1970 (Aramburu's assassination) and March 1973 (when the military government finally abdicated power), Argentina witnessed an unprecedented rise of

domestic violence, with government forces matching the guerrillas' hardnosed offensive blow for blow in a virtual civil war.

No one benefited more from this spiraling wave of unrest than the storied and remarkably still formidable Juan Perón. Despite continuing to live in exile in Madrid, Perón came to command— to the anguish of the military who, since ousting him in 1955, had sought above all else to squelch all things peronist— equal, if not greater political and popular stature than he had as President of Argentina between 1946-1955.²⁷ With vocal pockets of the population clamoring for an end to years of military dictatorship and a solution to the country's deepening social and economic crisis, Perón emerged as the leader— for many the *only* leader— most capable of liberating Argentina from its ominous political, social, and economic state.

In the months and years following the Cordobazo, Perón's political base of support actually appeared broader than at any point during his ten-year (1946-1955) presidency. As expected, the nation's working and disenfranchised classes, as they had since October 17, 1945, continued to champion the peronist cause and regard Perón as their savior.²⁸ Yet in sharp contrast to the 1946-1955 period, many left-leaning university students and other middle-class intellectuals now also actively embraced peronism and proclaimed Perón as their leader. Having come of age politically after the Cuban Revolution and galvanized by the recent Cordobazo, many students and intellectuals came to regard Perón and peronism as Argentina's unique expression of popular struggle and national liberation, and not, as many of their parents had a generation ago, a suffocating, authoritarian, and manipulative political force that stifled civil and intellectual freedom.²⁹ All the more remarkable, this growing leftist middle-class support of Perón coincided with that of a growing number of rightist groups and thinkers, including outspoken Catholics and staunch nativists, who saw in Perón and peronism, following a half-

decade of US-supported military dictatorship, the possibility for Argentina to reclaim her economic, political, and cultural sovereignty.³⁰

As only he could, Perón skillfully cradled, while still in exile, this powerful, yet precarious and contradictory “alliance” of peronists. As leftist and rightist peronist “factions” appropriated and refashioned the meaning of peronism to fit their respective visions of what a revitalized post-dictatorial Argentina might look like, Perón channeled their peronist drive and aspirations to advance his own political cause and elevate the movement’s national standing. For instance, as early as November 1970, three years before the military abdicated power, Perón secretly negotiated a pact with Argentina’s principal civilian political parties— aimed squarely at undermining the waning legitimacy of the military government— that called for an immediate return to democracy, a fairer distribution of wealth, and greater protection of the national economy.³¹ In subsequently leaking word of this historic agreement, Perón managed to bolster not only his own popularity among the diverse cross-section of peronists hollering for his return, but also astutely positioned himself as the logical leader of an even broader peronist-non-peronist, post-military civilian democratic alliance.

President Lanusse and the military desperately wanted to prevent Perón from returning to power. Left with fewer and fewer options in the face of Perón’s burgeoning (and the dictatorship’s diminishing) popularity, Lanusse attempted in 1972 to create his own partnership with the nation’s principal civilian political parties, inviting them to join with the military government in forming the *Gran Acuerdo Nacional* or the Great National Alliance (GAN). In exchange for their support in combating the revolutionary left, Lanusse agreed to end the ongoing 1966 ban on political and intellectual activity and, perhaps more significantly, to allow for democratic elections in March 1973. He even agreed, vocal opposition within the military notwithstanding, to lift the 1955 ban on peronism and invite moderate Peronists to join GAN, so

long as they too were prepared to repudiate left-wing guerrilla violence and embrace democracy.

However, any such agreement by members of the Peronist Party invariably required Perón's tacit approval and Perón had no intention of according Lanusse that political (or personal) satisfaction. Instead, he instructed the *Montoneros* to step up their barrage of violence, which only further undermined Lanusse's delicate GAN efforts and, in the process, raised Perón's power and prestige.³² When a desperate Lanusse countered by mandating that all candidates in the upcoming March 1973 national elections be residing in Argentina prior to August 24, 1972— a stipulation aimed squarely at blocking Perón's presidential bid— Perón simply ignored the deadline. And as if to remind Lanusse and the military that they stood in political check, Perón returned to Argentina unannounced on November 17, 1972 and then, just as abruptly and surreptitiously, left again for Madrid three weeks later.³³ Caught completely off guard by Perón's surprise visit, Lanusse and the military were tacitly forced to admit that which they likely already knew: *Gran Acuerdo Nacional* or not, they could not thwart Perón's eventual return to power.³⁴ With the official collapse of GAN in late-1972, it was clear that not only had the 1966 *revolución argentina* failed, but so too had the military's post-1955 campaign to silence Perón and peronism.

After eighteen years in exile, Perón returned for good to Argentina on June 20, 1973 and was greeted at Buenos Aires' Ezeiza international airport by over one million jubilant supporters— the largest political gathering in Argentine history. Not surprisingly, President Héctor J. Cámpora— Perón's hand-picked Peronist pawn elected by the people in March of 1973— declared June 20 a national holiday and provided all Argentines with free transportation to the capital to welcome home their hero.³⁵ For many, a palpable sense of optimism permeated the air— as if the country's long-awaited moment of great national restoration had

finally arrived— overshadowing, for the time being, grave public concerns over the nation's persistent social and economic woes. Throughout the country, elated peronists dotted benches, balconies, and buildings with banners reading "Perón to Power," neatly encapsulating the inevitable; Victorio Calabró, then lieutenant governor of the province of Buenos Aires, perhaps put it best: "now that Perón is back no one else can be president of Argentina."³⁶

Predictably Cámpora resigned, and on September 23, 1973, at age seventy-seven, Perón was elected President of Argentina for the third and final time with a convincing 62% majority. In many ways, however, getting elected proved the easy part: no longer four thousand miles away in Madrid, President Perón now faced the daunting task of cradling that precarious and contradictory "coalition" of peronist rightists and leftists who shared virtually nothing in common ideologically other than their unwavering faith in him and his government. Indeed as his plane was preparing to land at Argentina's Ezeiza international airport, Perón was reminded of the inherently explosive nature of that heterogeneous peronist mix of workers, middle-class intellectuals, right-wing and left-wing nationalists, military officials, business leaders, and outspoken Catholics: as hundreds of thousands of peronists gathered near Ezeiza awaiting their political savior's long-anticipated arrival, a sudden and stunning shootout broke out between heavily armed peronist factions after someone in the colossal crowd inexplicably fired a bullet. The ensuing gun battle between leftists and rightists, both claiming to be the true ideological bearers of peronism, raged on for over three hours, leaving 100-200 people dead and forcing Perón to land at a secondary airport in Buenos Aires.³⁷

Following the June 20 Ezeiza Massacre, Perón cautiously began to distance himself from the revolutionary left. In fact, not unlike Onganía and Lanusse, Perón too had long ago grown weary of the militant left, yet while in exile in Madrid had willingly and astutely harnessed their support to continue to help undermine the 1966-1973 military government.³⁸ As President,

however, Perón increasingly came to support the peronist right; in fact, even before being sworn into office in 1973, Perón purged Marxist and other radical leftist unions from the state-controlled labor movement. He also quickly maneuvered to exclude influential leaders of the left-wing Peronist Youth from occupying key posts in his new government and, simultaneously, blocked Héctor Cámpora, the *Montoneros'* choice for Vice-President, from serving as his running mate, opting instead for his third wife Isabel.³⁹

Despite those initial setbacks, leftist revolutionary peronist groups such as the *Montoneros* and *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* (FAR) continued for the time being to support Perón— the power of *personalismo* persisted. They were quick, however, to let be known their disappointment and frustration with Perón's efforts to curtail their influence within the Peronist movement and government. Responding as they knew best, they assassinated in 1973 CGT union boss José Rucci, the very person whom Perón had quietly charged with purging the radical left-wing labor groups. Perón did not back down. Forty-eight hours after the Rucci incident, José López Rega, Perón's Minister of Social Welfare and head of the new "Argentine Anticommunist Alliance" (AAA)— the government's clandestine "anti-terror" force— countered by ordering killed Enrique Grynberg, leader of the Buenos Aires chapter of the left-wing Peronist Youth.⁴⁰ Such was the pattern throughout the remainder of 1973 and into 1974: the well-trained and well-financed AAA regularly traded death blows with the various leftist guerrilla groups, peronist and not.⁴¹

In the early-spring of 1974, the AAA and the revolutionary left reached an unspoken truce, owing in large part to Perón's legendary stature and a number of well-calculated political decisions he made such as allowing the Peronist Left to retain a strong measure of control of the nation's public universities. However, that tenuous truce did not last long. When in April 1974 Perón dismissed Rodolfo Puiggrós, the popular Marxist rector of the University of Buenos Aires,

embittered leftists again went on the offensive, dramatically stepping up their high-profile kidnappings and assassinations. López Rega and the AAA responded quickly and brutally, bringing Argentina to the brink of civil war. By late April, one thing was clear: however much the new peronist government had otherwise intended, it ultimately did not signal much of departure from the turbulent, bloody, and unforgiving policies of the recent Onganía-Lanusse dictatorship.

The decisive break between Perón and the revolutionary left came on May 1, 1974. As Peron addressed the Labor Day faithful gathered in the Plaza de Mayo from the balcony of the Casa Rosada— as he first had nearly thirty years earlier on October 17, 1945— a large crowd of *Montoneros* and Peronist Youth suddenly interrupted their once venerated leader with chants of “What’s going on, General? The People’s Government is full of gorillas!”⁴² Irrate, Perón shot back by calling them “you morons,” and then immediately attempted to ostracize them further from, as he put it, the “wise and prudent” peronists present in the plaza.⁴³ The verbal jousting persisted until approximately half of those gathered in the plaza abruptly departed, leaving an inauspicious void in the plaza crowd and, by extension, the peronist movement.

Ever the pragmatist, Perón attempted in the ensuing weeks to mend the divide, but, on July 1, 1974, he died of heart failure. With the only leader purportedly capable of maintaining a semblance of order and stability now gone, Argentina plunged under Perón’s politically inexperienced wife and successor Isabel into outright economic, political, and social chaos. Led by the *Montoneros* and López Rega’s AAA, virtual civil war erupted between leftists and rightists in the streets of Argentina. Between July and September 1974 alone, the AAA carried out approximately 220 individual attacks— an average of three to four a day— including over sixty assassinations and twenty kidnappings.⁴⁴ For their part, groups such as the *Montoneros*, FAR, and the non-peronist *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP) responded in equally cruel

fashion, killing dozens of people including Argentina's Chief of Police as well as Professor Jordán Genta, a flamboyant right-wing, Catholic nationalist with ties to the air force who previously had proposed the total annihilation of the revolutionary left.⁴⁵

Those two murders, coupled with the revolutionary left's subsequent gruesome killing of Captain Humberto Viola and his three-year old daughter in the streets of the western province of Tucumán, galvanized military hardliners to take more direct aggressive action. With homicide and carnage an everyday affair, the country on the verge of financial collapse, and President Isabel Perón appearing politically incompetent, the Army's Joint Chiefs of Staff convinced Isabel's feeble government in 1975 to grant them the authority to wipe out the left, peronist or otherwise. Code named "Operación Independencia," army leaders sent upwards of 5,000 soldiers into the ERP-dominated province of Tucumán, where they arrested hundreds of labor organizers, university students, teachers, journalists, and other suspected left-wing subversives.⁴⁶ Those arrested were carted off to one of a dozen makeshift military "interrogation centers" scattered throughout the province where they were questioned, frequently tortured, and more often than not killed— a chilling sign of things to come. Following their "success" in Tucumán, the army extended its crackdown on subversives to other parts of the country. By December 1975, their aim was clear: "We're at war," declared prominent General Luciano Benjamín Menéndez, "and war obeys another law: he who wipes out the other side wins."⁴⁷ Unofficially, the Dirty War had already begun.

The Dirty War, 1976-1983

Following a birthday celebration at the Casa Rosada on the night of March 23, 1976 for one of her close advisors, Isabel Perón boarded the presidential helicopter and headed for her Olivos estate on the outskirts of the capital. Rather than take her home, however, the pilot

landed at a nearby airport where Isabel was met by a group of military officers who informed her that she was no longer president and placed her under arrest.⁴⁸ A few hours later, in the early morning of March 24, the new self-proclaimed junta headed by General Jorge Rafael Videla, Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera, and Brigadier Orlando Ramón Agosti announced to the nation that “in view of the country’s current state, [we shall] proceed to take charge of the Government of the Republic.”⁴⁹ As Onganía had done in 1966, the junta immediately dissolved Congress, suspended all political party, trade-union, and university activities, censored all major media outlets, and made it illegal, among other things, to possess “subversive” literature. It also claimed direct control over the nation’s courts, including the power to remove and appoint Supreme Court justices, and abolished due process of law.

However this “Process of National Reorganization,” as the junta’s March 24 manifesto to the nation was called, entailed far more than just reasserting political and economic authority.⁵⁰ It signaled an all-out covert war on subversion, aimed, once and for all, at *physically* eliminating all leftist militant opposition groups (peronist or not) as well as dismantling the state structures and institutions that allowed them to exist. To these ends, the military ordered thousands of troops— each unit assigned to a designated “security zone” within the country— to hunt down all leftist guerrillas and their suspected sympathizers. Modeled after the 1975 Tucumán experiment, those apprehended were taken to one of approximately 340 recently-created clandestine “interrogation centers” scattered throughout the country, where many were questioned, tortured, and executed.⁵¹ Every effort was made, from junta leaders coordinating the grisly operations to local officers acting on each assignment, to maintain total secrecy.

Between 1976-1983, notably during the first few years of this Dirty War, some 9,000-30,000 people— over 80% of whom were between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five— “disappeared” at the hands of the military.⁵² Yet what made this “the most terrible repression

ever known in Argentina” was not only the number of *desaparecidos*, but the horrific manner in which many were abducted, tortured, and killed.⁵³ First, gangs of masked officers— recruited largely from the Naval Mechanics School (ESMA), the army’s special Battalion 601 force, SIDE (the Argentine central intelligence agency), and the Federal Police— forcibly entered the homes, day and night, of suspected militants or sympathizers and, after ransacking and looting their property, hauled them away, usually in an ominous green Ford Falcon awaiting outside.⁵⁴ Handcuffed and hooded, victims were then transported to a secret detention center— often a police station, a local army base, a naval mechanic shop, an abandoned office building or school, or even a farmhouse— where they were questioned about their activities and associations.⁵⁵ If interrogating officers *felt* a prisoner was innocent, he or she might be released; those released were explicitly warned not to speak to anyone about their experience at the detention center.⁵⁶

If a prisoner was not released— owing to the fact that the interrogating officer continued to suspect the person of having subversive ties— he or she was usually then transferred to a small holding cell to await further “questioning.” Sanitary conditions in those cells generally were poor and inmates received minimum food and water. As they awaited their next round of “interrogation,” prisoners could often hear the unnerving cries of fellow detainees being tortured in the nearby “operating rooms,” as they colloquially became known. Common methods of torture ranged from beatings and cigarette burnings to the removal of fingernails and toenails and electric shock treatments to the head, chest, and genitals. Officers also frequently employed a practice known as the “submarine,” during which the victim’s head was repeatedly submerged in a tub of water for extended periods of time; equally common was the “dry” version, in which a plastic bag was placed over the prisoner’s head until he or she suffocated or nearly suffocated. Sexual abuse, including rape, was widespread and pregnant women who gave birth while in detention were often stripped of their babies. One particularly

wrenching form of psychological torture included prisoners being forced to watch mock— and, in some cases, real— executions of family members or friends.⁵⁷

Many prisoners died from the torture they suffered or were later shot to death, usually by firing squad. Every effort was made to keep all executions secret, though occasionally the military planted stories in the national press about, for instance, intense skirmishes that had erupted between soldiers and guerrilla groups that had left a specified number of militants dead; in its 1984 report *Nunca Más*, the National Commission of Disappeared Persons (CONADEP) asserted that most of those said skirmishes never actually took place.⁵⁸ Bodies of most *desaparecidos* were usually either burned or buried in unmarked graves— some of which continue to be unearthed to this day. In some cases, tortured prisoners were sedated, loaded onto military transport planes— usually about thirty prisoners per plane— stripped of their clothing, and then dumped alive into the Atlantic Ocean.⁵⁹ Adolfo Francisco Scilingo, a naval commander who took part in two such flights, estimated in 1995 that the military had killed between 1,500-2,000 people in that manner.⁶⁰

By 1978, the military had all but “eliminated” the revolutionary left. Yet physically eradicating suspected militants through an organized and systematic campaign of state terror was but one part of the junta’s broader March 1976 agenda. Its self-proclaimed “Proceso de Reorganización Nacional” also entailed three other central, interrelated objectives: a moralizing national campaign aimed at defending and advancing traditional “Western Christian” values, the dismantling of organized labor, and “the promotion of national economic development.”⁶¹

From the moment the military seized power on March 24, 1976, it sought to refashion, to paraphrase historian Alison Brysk, the ideological soul of the nation.⁶² Responding to a foreign journalist’s question about the disappearance of handicapped woman who posed no threat of violence to the regime, President Videla insisted that “a terrorist isn’t just someone

with a gun or a bomb, but also someone who spreads ideas that are contrary to Western and Christian civilization.”⁶³ Videla’s remarks made clear, much like his 1976 inaugural address to the nation, that, first, the junta’s war on subversion was as much an ideological and cultural undertaking as it was a military and political affair and, second, the military government’s collective vision of *argentinidad* included a strong dose of what it often termed “la moral cristiana.”⁶⁴ Reminiscent of the 1930s and 1940s, the junta steadfastly promoted both a quasi-fascist expression of Catholic nationalism and a rigid set of patriarchal values, which included clearly defined traditional roles for women. Furthermore, it strictly censored the media, regularly infiltrated schools, universities, and trade unions, and banned the publication of “subversive” literary materials— including Pablo Neruda’s poems, María Elena Walsh’s children’s songs and stories, and Saint Exupéry’s *The Little Prince*— all in defense of “Western Christian civilization.”⁶⁵

As too had been the case in the 1930s and 1940s, these state-sponsored efforts “to civilize” the nation were most apparent in the field of public education. For instance as part of its National Security Doctrine, the junta’s Ministry of Culture and Education prepared and distributed to all Argentine schools an instructional booklet entitled “Subversion in the Field of Education: Knowing our Enemy.” Charged with protecting “the essence of our nationality,” teachers and administrators were required to help “eradicate subversion in all its forms” by imparting to students the lessons contained in the booklet’s four principal chapters on “Communism,” “War,” “International Marxist Aggression,” and “Subversion.”⁶⁶ That entailed parlaying to students not only ‘obvious’ societal evils associated with the likes of Marx or Lenin, but equally significant ‘social ills’ such as class struggle, the breach of private property rights, attacks on traditional family structures and values (i.e. the promotion of civil unions and divorce), the spread of feminist ideas and organizations, and student efforts at university

reform.⁶⁷ In a further effort to expand the reach of this national campaign of ideas, junta officials disseminated to Argentine parents a similar, more condensed publication entitled “Instructions to Detect Subversive Signs in Your Children’s Education,” in which parents were encouraged, among other things, to keep tabs on their children’s daily diction for signs of what authorities dubbed “ideological crossover.”⁶⁸

Central to this civilizing pedagogical mission was a desire— as the second of the junta’s nine core objectives initially made clear on March 24, 1976— to inculcate among Argentines a profound sense of “Christian morality.”⁶⁹ In the classroom, that meant— as was the case following the 1943 Nacionalista Revolution— the suppression of Argentina’s longstanding secular education mandate (Law 1420) and the reintroduction of mandatory Catholic education.⁷⁰ With the explicit backing of the Catholic Church, Minister of Culture and Education Juan José Catalán revived in all public schools the religious education course entitled *Formación Moral y Cívica*, during which students received regular doses of conservative Christian moral and biblical instruction. Hoping to prepare students, in the words of education historian Adriana Puiggrós, “to distinguish between Good and Evil,” Catalán publicly argued that “without God or moral [precepts], there is no country possible.”⁷¹

The junta’s ideological efforts to refashion the nation were also widely apparent on the economic front. Determined to put to rest years of persistent financial upheaval and social conflict, junta officials sponsored a series of orthodox, Washington-friendly ‘free-market’ economic reforms reminiscent of those Onganía had first introduced in 1966. Yet the failed Onganía-Lanusse experiment of 1966-1973 and the three subsequent crisis-ridden years under Juan and Isabel Perón had taught the current cadre of junta officials an invaluable political lesson: its proposed neo-liberal economic program could not succeed so long as Argentina’s

powerful working class movement, and the peronist-inspired corporatist structure from which it drew much of its strength, continued to exist.

To these ends, the ruling junta sought, both economically and militarily, to disempower the working class movement. As they had students, professors, politicians, journalists, and other “subversives,” junta officials first aimed to eliminate individual union leaders and labor activists through their systematic and organized campaign of state terror. Once successful, they began (in 1977) to shift their attention to the economic front where they sought, as David Pion-Berlin has argued, to further reduce the institutional clout of the working class movement by dismantling Argentina’s corporatist-peronist legacy and reviving Argentina’s traditional export-oriented agricultural economy.⁷²

Under the direction of Finance Minister José Alfredo de Martínez de Hoz, junta technocrats, many of whom were economically privileged and had been educated abroad, introduced a series of free market policies intended to reign in state-sponsored market subsidies, artificial price controls, import tariffs, hyperinflation, and, above all, what they regarded as rampant labor costs. For working class and poor Argentines, that entailed a two-year union wage freeze, a ban on collective bargaining, a serious reduction of state credits and subsidies, and the elimination of important sources of federal and provincial employment opportunities, only a fraction of which the nation’s growing private sector managed to replace.

While Argentina’s poor and working class majority benefited relatively little from Martínez de Hoz’s neo-liberal reforms, the nation’s middle and, particularly, elite sectors certainly did. Between 1976-1980, elite landowners and industrialists welcomed, among other things, the flood of foreign investment in Argentina, the dramatic drop in labor costs, the significant rise in export revenues, the growth of certain high-technology industries, the sharp rise in federal funding for domestic infrastructure projects, and the increasing number of

international and national financial institutions in the country.⁷³ At the same time, the nation's sizeable middle class (temporarily) saw its purchasing power and overall economic prospects improve, particularly during the three-year period (1976-1979) of giddy financial speculation known as *plata dulce* or "sweet money" when a huge influx of U.S. dollars produced an artificial "burst of affluence."⁷⁴

The 1978 World Cup

Though the *plata dulce* period ultimately proved unsustainable and the economy as a whole collapsed in 1980, Brysk argues that this short-lived "burst of affluence helped garner support for the military and decreased concern about repression."⁷⁵ That was true not only of traditional elite agricultural exporters and wealthy business groups who from the outset openly supported the Proceso, but also of many middle class Argentines who, particularly on the heels of the grave economic, political, and social turmoil that had prevailed under President Isabel Perón from 1974-1976, were understandably eager for a sustained period of growth and stability.⁷⁶ Perhaps Jacobo Timerman, renowned editor of the popular left-leaning newspaper *La Opinión* (Argentina's version of *Le Monde*)— and ironically, himself a soon-to-be prominent victim of the military's Dirty War atrocities— best embodied such middle class sentiment when he openly applauded in a March 27, 1976 editorial the military's decision to oust Isabel, claiming that the new government "would bring Argentina the civilized reparation that it deserved."⁷⁷

Of course, that is not meant to suggest that the middle class, or a majority of Argentines for that matter, welcomed or approved of the junta's brutal terror tactics— indeed, the extent to which they fully knew of what was transpiring during the peak *desaparecidos* years (1976-1979) continues to be debated and discussed to this day. That said, many Argentines— owing paradoxically to the climate of both uncertainty, fear, and censorship on the one hand and

newfound political order and economic prosperity on the other— expressly avoided exploring or even acknowledging signs of the atrocities unfolding around them. For instance, when confronted with information of kidnappings or disappearances, Argentines frequently invoked what became popular Dirty War refrains: “Por algo habran hecho” (“They must have done something”), “En algo anduvo” (“He/She must have been involved in something”), or “Por algo será” (“There must be a reason”). While such collective inaction, if not social paralysis was understandable given the climate of fear and repression at that time, it nonetheless also quietly spoke to the tacit acceptance among many Argentines of “the military’s justification for its activities.”⁷⁸

Public attitudes such as those were greatly amplified in 1978 by the much-anticipated World Cup of soccer, which Argentina hosted and ultimately won. Gripped by a stirring sense of patriotic fervor, particularly as their national team triumphantly advanced to the tournament’s final game in late June, Argentines proudly embraced many of the exultant virtues and images of their country being trumpeted by the military junta locally and to the world while simultaneously ignoring and even reproaching the alarms being sounded by the international community (notably the European press) about widespread kidnappings, abuses, and disappearances unfolding in Argentina at that moment. Perhaps nothing better encapsulated such sentiment than the image on the June 30, 1978 cover of the Argentine weekly *Somos* of an ecstatic Videla jumping for joy at the Estadio Monumental as the championship match concluded accompanied by the headline “Un País que Cambió” (“A Country that Changed”).⁷⁹

Between April and June 1978, thousands of people across Europe, including many liberal-leaning Argentines who had fled to the Continent in the months and years following the 1976 coup, took to the streets to protest the upcoming Argentine World Cup, going so far as to call for a European boycott of the soccer championship. In cities such as Amsterdam, London,

Paris, and Madrid, posters reading “Argentina: terror and repression! Boycott the World Cup of Football in Argentina!” dotted public buildings. The European press loudly echoed those sentiments. In a photo-essay on Argentina, the French weekly *Paris-Match* published— under headings such as “This is what awaits the French in Argentina” or “Unfortunately, a daily scene at the government palace in Buenos Aires”— a series of pictures that included a row of Argentine police officers armed with tear gas; police officers beating back a group of young Argentine twenty-somethings; and a group of people standing at police gunpoint with their hands above their heads facing a wall of the Casa Rosada. The Spanish weekly *Cambio 16* remarked that “it is not just that the World Cup is played in a country that does not respect human rights” while *Le Monde Diplomatique* published an article comparing the 1978 World Cup in Argentina to the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. The British BBC perhaps touched the most sensitive nerve when it stated that “the Argentines are making like an ostrich by burying their head in the sand so as not to see the reality.”⁸⁰

It came as no surprise that President Videla and other members of the governing junta publicly denounced all such European accusations or that officials such as Argentine Ambassador to France Tomás de Anchorena labeled any mention of the so-called *desaparecidos* as a bunch of “nonexistent cases.”⁸¹ More surprising, however, was, first, that all (and more) of the above European denunciations were published for all to view in the censored Argentine press and, second, the vigor with which the Argentine press and public responded to those accusations. Not unlike Argentine government officials, many Argentines strongly objected to foreign reports that characterized Argentina as anything but a cohesive, peaceful, enlightened, and humanitarian nation. For instance, in a detailed April 1978 exposé of European gripes, *Somos* went so far as to label them all a European “Plot against Argentina,” in turn arguing that “the upcoming World Cup will show how Argentina [truly] lives, works, and is.”⁸²

The *Somos* piece personified how scores of other Argentine journalists and private citizens reacted before, during, and after the 1978 World Cup. A June 1978 *Clarín* editorial openly chided “the many foreigners who arrived forewarned, expecting to find a country sick with violence and fear, disunited and rancorous, altogether reduced to an opaque silence” and, like *Somos*, looked to the World Cup “to erase at once the deceitful images that are being spread about our country abroad.”⁸³ Other popular Argentine dailies such as *La Nación* and *La Prensa* published equally provocative patriotic accounts that too sought to recast foreign perceptions of Argentina and, in the process, reinvent for Argentines themselves, particularly after their triumphant victory over the Dutch in the championship game, what seemed like a new national commemorative tradition. A popular clothing advertisement neatly captured this at once visceral and manufactured emerging national spirit: a jubilant and cohesive middle class Argentine family— father, mother, son, and daughter— appears draped in national flags accompanied by the caption “A new style has been born: Argentina ’78, Apt for the entire family, With the joy and optimism that is authentically our own, Forever welcome.”⁸⁴

Individual Argentines publicly echoed their support for this “new Argentina,” which, intentionally or not, bolstered support for the ruling junta and decreased concern about military repression. For instance, in a July 1, 1978 letter to the editor in *La Nación* that was emblematic of many others, one reader passionately wrote that there exists “a collective feeling of brotherhood that manifests itself in each moment among our people” and concluded by stating that we “have demonstrated to the world, by way of our representatives and the marvelous mass media, that our country is disciplined, vigorous, orderly, and peaceful.”⁸⁵ Similarly, a delegation of fourteen female Argentines that had recently attended the 4th Annual Conference of Inter-American Writers (held between May 20-24, 1978 in Ottawa, Canada) submitted to *Clarín* a moving essay (published in the newspaper’s “Culture and Nation” section) which

categorically rejected “the aggression carried out [by foreign groups] against our country.”⁸⁶

Asserting that “our country is not the den of bloodthirsty animals as they try to depict her,” this delegation of women was determined above all “to show that we [Argentines] export art, science, and love and not hatred and destruction. That— and not the other— is the true image of Argentina.”⁸⁷

In short, Argentina’s first-ever world soccer championship provided the military junta with an unprecedented degree of political capital— or in the words of the French daily *Le Point*, “the true winner of the World Cup was President Videla.”⁸⁸ Internationally, the contagious display of Argentine joy and hospitality, coupled significantly with the relative absence during the month-long tournament of any visible public disturbances or incidents of violence, helped improve the junta and the nation’s image abroad. While many European media outlets, notably the BBC, continued immediately following the World Cup to publish reports of torture and disappearances in Argentina, others, such as Jacques Ferran of *L’Équipe*, praised Argentina and stated almost apologetically: “Not a single broken window. Nor a single face deformed. Nothing.”⁸⁹ Similarly, American journalists such as Charles Krause of *The Washington Post* also lauded Argentina’s performance on and off the field, noting optimistically that “Argentina will never again be the same.”⁹⁰

Domestically, Videla and other members of the governing junta enjoyed, unlike at any other moment during its seven-year rule from 1976-1983, what one local journalist called “a united internal front.”⁹¹ The euphoria associated with the World Cup and particularly Argentina’s unprecedented triumph produced, in the words of Argentine sociologist and lawyer Julio Carlos Abiello, a “great phenomenon of national integration,” something he noted “that we had been missing for quite some time.”⁹² Warranted or not, the military junta harnessed this tremendous outpouring of national faith and confidence to usher in, beginning officially on

August 1, 1978, its so-called “Second Stage” of military rule, made possible by the near elimination over the previous two years of Argentina’s “subversive” elements.

The Vocal Minority

While positive in some respects, this display of unity and optimism also served to extend, to borrow from Dirty War scholars Inés Dussel, Silvia Finocchio, and Silvia Gojman, “the stupor, fear, paralysis, and inaction” that had prevailed in Argentine society since the coup of March 24, 1976.⁹³ Already unwilling to explore or acknowledge signs of the atrocities unfolding around them, an increasing number of Argentines, in the immediate aftermath of the World Cup, were now even less likely to confront the ongoing wave of military kidnappings and disappearances— all of which had become harder to ignore following the numerous European press accounts that had appeared in major Argentine newspapers and magazines in the previous weeks and months. Of course, the constant climate of fear in Argentina continued to shape the decisions of many not to speak or act out against such abuses, yet so too did the contagious World Cup euphoria and the accompanying national desire to forget past political and economic disappointments. In short, unlike any other moment between 1976-1983, public concern over military repression appeared to wane.

There were, however, significant exceptions. Since the 1976 coup, a vocal minority of Argentine individuals and groups bravely confronted the horrors of the military’s Dirty War atrocities and, in the process, helped pave the way for a new, dynamic civilian democratic tradition that would take shape under President Raul Alfonsín beginning in December 1983. Human rights organizations such as the *Liga por los Derechos Humanos* (founded in 1937) and, particularly, the *Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos* (founded in 1975) worked during the Dirty War to gather information on nearly six-thousand political prisoners and

desaparecidos, information that proved especially valuable following the return to democracy under Alfonsín. Also, the liberation theology-inspired movement *Servicio Paz y Justicia*, founded in 1974 and headed in Argentina by 1980 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Adolfo Pérez-Esquivel, provided key educational and logistical assistance to local grassroots groups most affected by the repression.⁹⁴

Similarly, two religious-based organizations, the Christian *Movimiento Ecuémico por los Derechos Humanos* (formed in 1976) and the Jewish *Movimiento Judío por los Derechos Humanos* (formed in 1977), played an important role in providing spiritual, psychological, and legal support to victims and families affected by the repression. The presence of each of those two groups was also significant for other reasons. The *Movimiento Ecuémico*, composed of both Catholics and Protestants frustrated by the Argentine Catholic Church's unmistakable support of the military and the Dirty War, delivered a message of pan-Christian solidarity and simultaneously provided, in the words of Alison Brysk, "an important symbolic counterweight to the Argentine Church."⁹⁵ For its part, the *Movimiento Judío*, again to borrow from Brysk, "lent a distinctively Jewish presence and interpretation to multisectoral events"—for example, linking "the experience of state terror to the Holocaust."⁹⁶ The *Movimiento Judío* also raised awareness, both locally and internationally, of the disproportionate number of Jewish victims of the military's atrocities— in total, Jews accounted for approximately 1,500, or 5-10%, of the 15,000-30,000 desaparecidos during the Dirty War.⁹⁷

Yet no group had a greater impact or became more well-known in the struggle against military repression than *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*. Not long after the March 1976 coup, a number of middle-aged mothers, whose teenage or adult children had recently disappeared, individually began to come into contact with one another at police and military stations, local jails, and select government offices where they regularly showed up to inquire about the

whereabouts of their missing children. After repeatedly being rebuffed, a group of fourteen of these mothers banded together and decided to present their case jointly to the Minister of Interior in Buenos Aires. Initially unsuccessful, they returned to the minister's office each week hoping to receive some news, until one day the police told them that they were no longer welcome. Forced to depart the ministry building, the fourteen politically-inexperienced mothers began to walk— in pairs and arms held— until they arrived in historic Plaza de Mayo, Argentina's political, social, and geographic center.⁹⁸

Then on April 30, 1977, those fourteen Madres, white handkerchiefs (derived from diapers) covering their heads, began what became a weekly ritual gathering in the Plaza during which they silently circulated with poster-sized photographs of their missing children in hand.⁹⁹ As their numbers steadily grew from fourteen to several dozen in 1978 to several hundred in 1980, they also gradually began to sponsor other forms of public protest that included local pilgrimages, flyers, and newspaper advertisements to petitions, newsletters, and, by 1981, even mass demonstrations. Yet regardless of the form their protests took, it was always their enduring image— a group of grieving mothers (in a historically *machista* society) advocating on behalf of their and, indeed as they came to see it, all Argentine children— that eventually helped galvanize Argentines while also providing Las Madres with a degree of protection (though by no means immunity) against police crackdowns and military abductions.¹⁰⁰

Early on, however, many Argentines either did not know about Las Madres and their weekly Plaza vigils or did not fully embrace them. Historians Maria Alonso, Roberto Elisalde, and Enrique Vázquez have argued that censorship under the military prevented widespread publicity of Las Madres in Argentina, but also more significantly perhaps that “vast sectors of the population preferred not to become aware of the massacre that was developing around them.”¹⁰¹ Moreover, Jean-Pierre Bousquet points out that at times even some informed

Argentines were quick to belittle Las Madres and their protest efforts, unsympathetically referring to them as “Las Locas de Plaza de Mayo” or “The Crazy Ones of the Plaza de Mayo.”¹⁰²

Instead, the foreign press and international organizations deserve much of the initial credit for helping the Mothers raise awareness about the desaparecidos and the nature and extent of military repression in Argentina. As early as 1977, European and North American reporters began to record the Mothers’ testimonials in the Plaza and publicize them abroad, greatly assisting the Mothers and, by extension, the entire Argentine human rights movement to survive and grow.¹⁰³ Moved by their stories and unique form of political theater, the international community quickly embraced the grieving Mothers’ cause— a significant blow to the Videla regime so concerned about world opinion and, particularly, the disposition of foreign investors. At the height of the dictatorship in 1978, some of Las Madres began visiting Europe, the United States, and Canada and, in 1979 and 1980, were even invited to speak before the United Nations, the U.S. Congress, and the Organization of American States, all of which further served to legitimize their protests, help protect Argentine human rights activists, and put significant political and economic pressure on the Videla government.¹⁰⁴

In what proved to be one of several key (all-be-the-y gradual) turning points in the fight against military repression, the Human Rights Commission of the Organization of American States sent a group of inspectors to Argentina in 1979 to investigate claims made by Las Madres and other human rights activists.¹⁰⁵ After interviewing and gathering evidence from members of the above-mentioned human rights organizations and other members of Argentine society— in just two weeks, inspectors collected a total of 5,580 complaints about desaparecidos and other human rights violations— the commission published its landmark report in 1980, highlighting thousands of disappearances in Argentina and simultaneously calling for both an end to state terror and trials and punishments of all those government agents responsible.¹⁰⁶

The military junta was quick to respond. First, looking to fan the World Cup euphoria of 1978, the government organized a national soccer celebration that coincided with the Human Rights Commission's 1979 visit to Argentina.¹⁰⁷ Second, hoping to stem any bad publicity, the Videla government swiftly rejected the commission's findings, dubbing the report evidence of an international "anti-Argentina campaign." Finally, the military sponsored a broad publicity campaign, publishing its own account of human rights in Argentina under the pithy (if not also sardonic) slogan "Los argentinos somos derechos y humanos" ("We Argentines are humane and right"). Soon after, scores of bumper stickers bearing those words began to appear on cars, buses, and buildings throughout the country, highlighting a combination of the public's persistent fear of the military, its continued ambivalence towards Las Madres and Argentina's other human rights organizations, and, as Alonso, Elisalde, and Vázquez have suggested, that "many Argentines [still] consented to the polity being carried out by the dictatorship."¹⁰⁸

Yet despite these and other efforts by the military to continue to silence its critics, the Human Rights Commission's 1979 visit and 1980 report signaled a turning point during the Dirty War, one that helped further galvanize Argentina's vocal minority while also bringing it added international attention and support. Domestically, Las Madres and Argentina's other principal human rights groups stepped up and expanded their protest efforts after 1979, shifting from a more passive to a more active resistance strategy. For example, in the midst of severe repression, Las Madres managed to collect 24,000 signatures on a 1980 petition and, in 1981, led the first in a series of significant mass demonstrations in Buenos Aires, some of which numbered in the tens of thousands. Internationally, the United Nations set up in 1981 a Working Group on Forced Disappearance in response to events in Argentina; Amnesty International and other groups such as the (New York) Lawyers' Committee on Human Rights began to prepare lists of Argentine torture victims; and the Swedish Academy nominated Las

Madres for the 1980 Nobel Peace Prize, yet ultimately awarded it to Adolfo Perez-Esquivel, the relatively unknown leader of another Argentine human rights group *Servicio Paz y Justicia* (SERPAJ).¹⁰⁹

More significantly perhaps, previously silent Argentines— that is, those who did not constitute part of the existing human rights movement— increasingly began to voice their displeasure over military rule in the months and years following the Human Rights Commission’s 1979 visit. One of the most striking examples was songwriter and storyteller María Elena Walsh’s thoughtful August 16, 1979 article published in *Clarín*, one of the first to denounce the Proceso. Provocatively, yet somewhat innocuously entitled “Desventuras en el País-Jardín-de-Infantes” (“Misadventures in Kindergarden-Land”), Walsh, interweaving both the first and third-person, poignantly spoke out against the deleterious practice of extended military censorship, cautioning her readers about its long-term effects on the cultural vitality of Argentina’s children and the nation as a whole.¹¹⁰ While frequently employing a variety of nuanced metaphors, here she speaks most openly and directly:

For a while now we have been like children, unable to say what we think or imagine. When the censor disappears— because at some time he will succumb, demolished by a highway!— we will be decrepit, not knowing what to say. We will have forgotten the how, the where, and the why and we will sit in a plaza like the old couple in the Quino cartoon who ask themselves: ‘What were we...?’¹¹¹

Yes, the signatory [of this article] worried about the children, but she never thought that she would come to live in a Kindergarden-Land. She rarely imagined that that country could dangerously come to resemble Franco’s Spain, if we continue emulating its guards. That sad Spain where the lyrics of songs had to be subjected to censorship, like what is happening here today and nobody denounces it...

This is not a bravado...It is a request to those who have the honor of governing us: let us grow. It is the first condition [necessary] to preserve peace, so as not once again to establish a future of insane or futile adolescents.

Like that poor black seamstress named Rosa Parks, imprisoned for having refused to cede her seat on a bus to a white passenger as the law obligated, this author would declare to anyone

who accused her of being seditious: 'I am not a revolutionary, [but rather] it is just that I am really tired'.¹¹²

Although few among Argentina's silent majority were prepared in 1979 to act as boldly or courageously as María Elena Walsh, her written protest came to reflect the changing outlook of Argentina's mainstream during the final years of the Dirty War. Rather than offer the kind of scathing public indictment of the military that, say, Rodolfo Walsh (no relation) had on occasion of the first anniversary of the March 24, 1976 coup— he “disappeared” for good the following day— María Elena Walsh was more careful in her criticism, perhaps not wanting to overly-offend not only the military, but her Argentine readers as well.¹¹³ To be sure, María Elena Walsh unequivocally deplored both government censorship and the failure of everyday Argentines to behave like responsible adults by denouncing the abuses unfolding around them. Yet at the same time, she avoided reference to touchier subjects such as torture and the disappeared and concluded her article by underscoring the noble feats of a commoner such as Rosa Parks and by portraying herself not as some wild revolutionary, but rather an ordinary citizen simply saddened by the potential political and cultural demise of her beloved Argentina. Her candid, patriotic stroke, coupled with the changing tide in Argentina that followed the Human Rights Commission's 1979 visit, may have ultimately saved María Elena Walsh from ever being arrested or tortured by the military.

Jacobo Timerman, the well-known publisher of *La Opinión*, was not so fortunate. After initially supporting the 1976 coup that he, like many others, felt would bring an end to the social, political, and economic chaos that had prevailed under Isabel Perón, Timerman reversed course in 1976-1977 and, from the pages of his well-regarded newspaper, publicly began to denounce the military government while also occasionally publishing lists of the nation's desaparecidos. The military responded by closing down *La Opinión* and then, in the early-morning hours of April 15, 1977, kidnapped Timerman from his Buenos Aires home.¹¹⁴

Timerman spent the next two-and-half years— until his much-publicized release in September 1979— in an Argentine prison where he was physically and psychology tortured, often as he later claimed, because he was a Jew.

The Timerman affair was significant for a number of reasons. First, given his largely moderate political views and notoriety as Argentina's most recognized journalist, Timerman's arrest, as Rita Gardiol points out, helped accelerate the exodus of nearly one million liberal-leaning Argentines to Mexico, the United States, Spain, France, and other countries during the course of the Dirty War; many of those who left played an important role in publicizing the military's human rights violations abroad, as the controversy in Europe surrounding the 1978 World Cup suggested.¹¹⁵ Second, it sparked an international public outcry, particularly in the United States, where prominent media outlets such as *The New York Times* regularly reported on Timerman and leading Jewish organizations such as the American Jewish Committee, fearing anti-Semitism, persistently lobbied Congress to help procure Timerman's eventual release. The Timerman affair may have also indirectly shaped President Jimmy Carter's human rights foreign policy initiative as well as his decision not to invite any Argentine junta leader to the United States on an official state visit.

Third, Timerman's arrest proved to be one of the few human rights cases during the Dirty War that was ultimately overturned by the Argentine courts (in this case the Supreme Court), though that had far more to do with American political pressure and negative international publicity than it did with any notion of due process or habeas corpus in Argentina.¹¹⁶ Fourth, and perhaps most significantly, following his release in September 1979 Timerman chronicled the memoirs of his prison experience. Written in Spanish and published in 1980, *Preso sin nombre, celda sin número* was quickly translated into English in 1981 and almost instantly became a *New York Times* bestseller. In *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a*

Number, Timerman chillingly portrayed the abuse he suffered, but equally striking were his descriptions of the pervasive and deeply-rooted anti-Semitic attitudes of Argentina's ruling junta in general and his military "interrogators" in particular. The following lengthy passage encapsulates his view:

Is Argentina an anti-Semitic country? No; no country is. But there are anti-Semitic factions operating in Argentina, as indeed there are in all other countries. Are they violent? More violent than some, less violent than others. And the military? Each time a military government comes into power in Argentina, typical anti-Semitic acts disappear (the bombs placed in synagogues and Jewish institutions), for a military government at the outset imposes a certain order. But the Jew as citizen senses that his situation is altering: military governments do not name Jews to public posts; state radio and television prefer not to hire Jews; and so on, although there are always a certain number of Jews designated to serve as a defense against any possible accusation of anti-Semitism.

But this is past history. The military government that took power in Argentina in March 1976 arrived with an all-embracing arsenal of Nazi ideology as part of its structure. It would be impossible to determine whether this was backed by the majority or minority of the armed forces, though unquestionably anyone who was a Nazi, or merely anti-Semitic, didn't have to conceal or disguise his feelings; he could act accordingly. Security forces could repress Jews simply because they were Jews. They could mistreat political prisoners for their politics as well as for being Jews. The secret services could prosecute individuals, basing accusations simply on the fact that they were Jews; the leaders of the repression could detain Jewish prisoners merely for the pleasure of having Jewish prisoners, without any need to stipulate a valid accusation against them.¹¹⁷

Timerman's book caused an immediate stir abroad, particularly in the United States. In academic circles, supporters Robert Weisbrot and Edy Kaufman and critics Mark Falcoff, Seymour Liebman, and Benno Weiser Varon debated Timerman's anti-Semitic portrait of Argentina, especially his characterization of Argentina as a "fascist" and "Nazi" state as well as his assertion that Jews were kidnapped and repressed solely because they were Jewish.¹¹⁸

While certain of Falcoff, Liebman, and Varon's arguments were noteworthy— notably, their individual criticisms of Timerman for making no mention in his book of his business relationship with indicted (Jewish) Argentine banker and Montonero backer David Graiver— they mattered relatively little in the broader court of American public opinion. For the majority of interested

Americans who had little exposure to Argentina, Timerman's revelations about Argentina and the Dirty War were both accessible and alarming.¹¹⁹ That is, most interested Americans were far more likely to read Timerman's best-selling account or, say, Anthony Lewis' frontpage and favorable 1981 *New York Times* book review entitled "The Final Solution in Argentina" than they ever were to read Falcoff, Liebman, or Varon's criticisms in comparatively obscure academic journals such as *Commentary*, *Jewish Social Studies*, or *Midstream*.¹²⁰

The Changing Tide

Together Timerman's *Prisoner Without a Name*, María Elena Walsh's "País-Jardín-de-Infantes," the Human Rights Commission's visit and report, the persistent efforts of Argentine, American, and European human rights advocates, Adolfo Pérez-Esquivel's Nobel Peace Prize, and the petitions, demonstrations, and weekly Plaza vigils of Las Madres all played a critical role in the fight against military repression. And yet as vital as they were in helping to awaken local residents and the international community to the injustices being perpetrated in Argentina, the Argentine financial crisis of 1980-1983, the 1982 Malvinas (Falkland Islands) War, and the domestic political turmoil that ensued ultimately played the greatest role in mobilizing Argentina's silent majority and paving the way for an eventual return to democracy in December 1983.

In 1980, Argentina's artificial and unsustainable three-year "burst of affluence" finally collapsed. The crisis began when international investors, skeptical of the structural underpinnings of Argentina's economy and handsome profits already in hand, began to pull out of Argentina. Many local investors followed suit. Sensing that the era of "sweet money" was coming to an end, local manufacturers, small business owners, and individual Argentines—many of whom were now under considerable financial pressure—quickly began to withdraw

their bank savings. Unable to meet all of those financial obligations, a number of the country's banks suddenly found themselves teetering on insolvency, which forced the nation's Central Bank (CB) to help bail them out by guaranteeing their total deposits with CB reserves. Yet soon those reserves began to dwindle, prompting the CB to curtail individual withdrawals and print more money. Those emergency measures, however, also backfired when inflation, in relative check over the past three years, skyrocketed to nearly 100%. Making matters even worse, the government was forced to devalue the Argentine peso by nearly 400% and borrow heavily on the international market in an effort to recover its expenses.¹²¹

The financial and psychological consequences were devastating for all sectors of Argentine society, particularly the nation's middle and lower classes. Following the dramatic run on the nation's banks, forty in total— including Argentina's largest— went into bankruptcy by March 1981. The same was true of many local manufacturers and small business owners who, unable to count on a ready supply of U.S. dollars, access to their bank deposits, or secure loans, were no longer able to keep their operations afloat. Not surprisingly, national unemployment rose sharply while those who managed to keep their jobs saw their standard of living drop precipitously. Meanwhile, in a move that proved widely unpopular, the government decided in late-1980 to nationalize the private debt of fledging local industries— meaning the Argentine public was forced to assume this added financial burden— in an attempt to prevent a possible total economic collapse. Finally, between December 1979 and March 1981, government borrowing saw Argentina's external debt triple from \$8.5 billion to \$25.3 billion dollars, rising from 14% to an astonishing 42% of the country's GDP.¹²² This added debt burden also came at a high social cost: foreign creditors began to impose locally unpopular austerity measures on the Argentine government, often leading to drastic spending cuts in education, health care, and public sector employment.

By 1981, the military government was in political shambles. In the midst of a bitter power struggle among three competing factions within the armed forces, Videla's Finance Minister Martínez de Hoz was forced to resign. Shortly thereafter, in March 1981, Videla stepped aside and picked his ally General Roberto Marcelo Viola to succeed him as President, much to the chagrin of the other two military factions (one jointly led by Generals Lucaino Benjamín Menéndez and Carlos Suárez Mason and the other by Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera) both of which subsequently worked to ensure that Viola never came to exercise the kind of broad executive authority that Videla had enjoyed since 1976. Weak politically and unable to resolve the country's economic crisis, Viola lasted only nine months in office. On December 22, 1981, he was replaced by army commander Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri, who ultimately fared even worse than Viola, leading to his dismissal on June 17, 1982 in favor of General Reynaldo Benito Antonio Bignone.¹²³ In short, as Luis Alberto Romero points out, after March 1981 "the politics of order began to fail among the armed forces themselves, because the military behaved in an undisciplined and factional manner and did little to maintain the order that it sought to impose on society."¹²⁴

The ongoing economic crisis and the palpable internal dissention within the armed forces dramatically altered Argentina's political, social, and cultural landscape. As we have already seen, Las Madres and Argentina's other veteran human rights activists stepped up and expanded their protest activities in 1981, sponsoring, among other things, a number of mass demonstrations, the largest of which numbered in the tens of thousands. Yet equally, if not more significant, diverse sectors of the country's previously silent majority also publicly began to express their growing dissatisfaction over the state of the economy, the ineptitude of the government, and the nature of military repression.

Argentina's most prominent labor union, the *Confederación General de Trabajo* (CGT), was at the forefront of this domestic charge. Despite having been stripped of much of its political and economic leverage in the aftermath of the 1976 coup and having witnessed countless of its members disappear at the hands of the military, the CGT took the lead in 1981, launching a number of prominent strikes. The military responded to this growing labor unrest as it had when workers from *La Comisión de 25* and the *Confederación Nacional de Trabajo* (CNT) first sponsored a daring strike back in April 1979: violently, arresting and imprisoning many of the union's top leaders. Undeterred, labor leaders led a massive march in November 1981 to the cathedral of San Cayetano— the patron saint of the unemployed— where 50,000 workers could be heard chanting "Peace, Bread, and Work."¹²⁵

That same year, high school and university students joined the fray, sponsoring a number of strikes and protests of their own. Argentina's various political parties, all of which had been banned by the military in 1976, began to organize and speak out against military rule; in mid-1981, Peronists, Radicals, Christian Democrats, and other smaller parties, particularly disgruntled over Videla's recent broken promise to restore civilian rule, founded the *Multipartidario* whose chief demands were the release of information on the disappeared and the return of constitutional democracy free of military tutelage.¹²⁶ Despite death threats, complaints from high-ranking military authorities, and even the government's attempt to control the supply of newsprint, several newspapers, notably *La Prensa*, increasingly published both articles on the disappeared and advertisements from a number of Argentine human rights organizations including Las Madres.¹²⁷ The satirical monthly *Humor*, one of the few Argentine publications— despite, or because of, its comedic bent— to publish serious interviews with human rights activists during the early years of the Dirty War, further grew in popularity after 1980 as it continued to lampoon, now more boldly than ever before, the folly of the military.

The post-Videla era also saw an explosion of Argentine popular culture. First published in the magazine *SuperHumor* in 1980, the wildly popular comic strip *Bosquivia* satirically depicted various forest animals speaking and acting like humans; indeed, as the comic strip's artists themselves later remarked, "part of the Argentine tragedy of 1976-1983 is contained in these little tales of bad animals and good animals."¹²⁸ In July 1981, over one-hundred Argentine playwrights, actors, and directors organized the now famous open theater group *Teatro Abierto* to challenge political repression. Despite the climate of fear that still pervaded in Argentina, all shows at the Picadero theater in Buenos Aires were sold out— during its two-month run in 1981, a total of 25,000 people attended. Even (or especially) after the Picadero was burned to the ground in August 1981— not surprisingly, the military denied any involvement— the Argentine public continued to flock to see Teatro Abierto, for many a symbol of freedom and change. Indeed, "for the audience too," as Diana Taylor argues in her wonderful study *Disappearing Acts*, "Teatro Abierto implied an act of defiance: as audience members lined up for blocks to buy tickets, they formed part of the spectacle of resistance."¹²⁹

For many, the rapid growth of Argentine literature, film and, particularly, rock/folk music served much the same purpose. Five years into the Dirty War, a wave of novels such as Aira César's *Ema, la cautiva* (Ema, the Captive), Jorge Manzur's *Tinta roja* (It Colors Red), Carlos Dámaso Martínez's *Hay cenizas en el viento* (Ashes in the Wind), Enrique Medina's *Las muecas del miedo* (Grimaces of Fear), and Andrés Rivera's *Nada que perder* (Nothing to Lose) and films such as Adolfo Aristarain's *Tiempo de Revancha* (Time for Revenge) and Hector Olivera's *No habrá más penas ni olvido* (Funny, Dirty Little War) helped Argentines understand and confront the period of censorship and repression which they had and continued to live through, for many a liberating and cathartic experience.¹³⁰ Local musicians such as Charly García, León Gieco, Fito Páez, Susana Rinaldi, Mercedes Sosa, and Sui Generis— with such stirring classics as *Canción de*

Alicia en el País (Song of Alicia in the (Wonder) Land), *Sólo le Pido a Dios* (I only ask of God), *Cuervos en Casa* (Ravens in House), *Por Qué Cantamos* (Why We Sing), *Sueño con Serpientes* (Dream with Serpents), and *Juan Represión* (John Repression)— also educated and galvanized diverse sectors of society, especially the nation’s youth for whom these songs offered, in the words of Francine Masiello, “a pacifist message in time of war, binding the [country’s] adolescents with the struggles of previous generations.”¹³¹ In a country where the military had previously banned not only rock concerts, but also had censored over 240 songs and prohibited rock broadcasts on radio and television, the defiant sight of, say, Luis Alberto Spinetta playing in public with Nobel Peace Laureate Pérez Esquivel electrified thousands in the struggle against political repression.

In 1981, resistance to the military even came from two of the most conservative, influential, and unlikely of Argentine sources— Big Business and the Catholic Church— both of whom had steadfastly supported the Proceso since March 1976.¹³² Frustrated by the nation’s persistent economic crisis as well as disturbing signs of political weakness and discord within the government, powerful business groups such as the *Unión Industrial Argentina* and the *Sociedad Rural Argentina* joined the opposition front in 1981, notably after the fall of Viola in December of that year.¹³³ And despite the continued opposition of Cardinals Juan Carlos Aramburu (archbishop of Buenos Aires) and Raúl Francisco Primatesta (archbishop of Córdoba), both of whom supported the military regime until the end, the Church also began to show important signs of change.¹³⁴ As historians Alejandro Dabat and Luis Lorenzano point out, “in March 1981, after five years of silence, tolerance, and transparency, the Conference of Argentine Bishops issued a document (entitled “Church and National Community”) criticizing the excesses of repression and pointing out the dangers of usury.”¹³⁵ The decision of powerful business and

religious interests to distance themselves from the military provided the country's burgeoning opposition movement with a major boost.

Under this volatile backdrop, General Galtieri, a politically-inexperienced hardliner, inherited the presidency— following another bitter succession struggle within the armed forces— on December 22, 1981. Committed to “firmness and action,” Galtieri appointed well-respected economist Roberto Alemann as Finance Minister, yet Alemann’s privatization, deregulation, and anti-inflation plan proved no more successful than that of his recent predecessors. With the country still mired in recession and societal opposition growing by the day, Galtieri and his fellow hardliners conceived of a drastic plan to invade and occupy the British-controlled Falkland or Malvinas Islands located off the Argentine coast— long a deep and bitter source of national resentment.¹³⁶ Hoping to gain American political support, Galtieri, through a military attaché in Washington, worked to forge a “new ideological partnership” with President Reagan in the latter’s covert struggle in Central America. When, in early-1982, President Reagan lifted former President Carter’s human rights sanctions on Argentina, Galtieri mistakenly assumed, despite Reagan’s last-minute warnings to the contrary, that he had implicitly gained America’s stamp of approval— or at least one of U.S. neutrality.¹³⁷

Two days after the CGT led a massive March 30, 1982 national demonstration against the military regime, which was met by fierce and violent police resistance, Galtieri launched the most infamous war in Argentine history. At first, however, Galtieri’s Malvinas plan, in part because it caught everyone by complete surprise, appeared a great domestic success. Argentines, who only days earlier had been demonstrating against the government, spontaneously “poured out into the streets on 2 April to shout their approval,” unleashing a euphoric display even more powerful than the one following the 1978 World Cup. The next day and again on April 10, supporters packed the Plaza de Mayo where they twice more cheered the

“just” invasion. A great many of the nation’s cultural associations, sports clubs, ethnic societies, labor unions, and political parties— with the notable exception of Radical Raúl Alfonsín— expressed their unequivocal support. Individual citizens donated money and other valuables to the newly created “Patriotic Fund,” mothers baked *tartas malvinas* to send to the soldiers, and children collected food and clothing in their respective neighborhoods in support of the national cause.¹³⁸ Such visceral patriotic support stemmed from Argentina’s longstanding claim that the Malvinas— even before the British forcibly took control of them in 1833— were sovereign Argentine territory.

Far less emotionally invested, the world was quick to condemn the Argentine invasion: the United Nations Security Council, the U.N. General Assembly, the European Union, and even most Latin American nations emphatically voted against it. Yet for Galtieri and the military that initially seemed like an acceptable price to pay, first, because the war provided them with a much-needed domestic political boost and, second, because they never anticipated that the British would fight a war over the small and distant Falkland Islands. The latter, however, proved a gross miscalculation: Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, embroiled in her own domestic political troubles, dispatched eight destroyers, two aircraft carriers, and two nuclear-powered submarines to the region. Galtieri’s subsequent pleas to President Reagan for support fell on deaf ears and, after the British sunk the Argentine *Belgrano* battle carrier on May 2— killing over three-hundred soldiers and effectively cutting off Argentine air and sea support— the fate of the war already had been decided.¹³⁹

The sinking of the *Belgrano*, the rising number of casualties, and impending surrender of Argentine forces on June 14, 1982 proved all the more disastrous for Galtieri and the military because, through a deceitful campaign of misinformation, they had led the Argentine public to believe that Argentina had actually been winning the war. As Argentines gradually began to

learn otherwise— including news that many of the soldiers sent to the Malvinas islands were young boys, raw and poorly-trained, and lacking such basics supplies as weapons, ammunition, and radios— public jubilation quickly turned to outrage and utter disillusionment. When on June 15— in the midst of announcing Argentina’s surrender from the balcony of the Casa Rosada— Galtieri tried one last time to rally Argentines with a slew of anti-British proclamations, the crowd gathered below began hurling insults at him and then surged toward the building, breaking several windows before the police intervened. On nearby streets, livid protestors took out their frustrations by overturning and burning buses and cars. Two days later, to his surprise, the military replaced Galtieri with retired General Reynaldo Bignone.¹⁴⁰

The Malvinas war signaled, as Paul Lewis suggests in his superb monograph *Guerrillas and Generals*, “the final break between state and society, although the *proceso* would die a lingering death that would last another year and a half.”¹⁴¹ After six years of the Dirty War, Argentines across the ideological spectrum began to unleash their pent-up frustrations with the stifling and repressive military regime. Union activity resumed and labor strikes became an almost weekly affair. The ranks of Las Madres weekly “march for life” vigils swelled. Human rights groups intensified their protests. The media began to ignore censorship restrictions. Rock musicians played before massive audiences of 60,000 people. Political parties became more vocal and demanded a return to civilian rule. Lawyers called for judicial independence. Families pressed for information about loved ones who had disappeared. Housewives formed neighborhood associations. Young Christians sponsored pilgrimages to the cathedral in nearby Luján. University students protested enrollment limitations and tuition hikes. In short, this broad-based post-Malvinas awakening represented what Luis Alberto Romero terms society’s “second” — the first being the Cordobazo of May 1969— “people’s spring.”¹⁴²

Effectively unable to govern, the military began to plan its exit strategy in the second-half of 1982. At the core of that strategy, the military began to prepare what in 1983 would become known as the *Documento Final*, in which it sought assurances that in no way— for the sake of “national reconciliation”— would it be held legally accountable for any economic policy decisions, acts of corruption, or force it used in “the war against subversion and terror.”¹⁴³ When these demands were first made public in November 1982— around which time a mass grave was discovered in the city of La Plata and then another in the Grand Bourg neighborhood of Buenos Aires— the Argentine public and most political parties categorically rejected them. To underscore their opposition, they sponsored a massive “March for Democracy” on December 10, 1982. With over 100,000 Argentines in Buenos Aires chanting rhythmic slogans like “Se Van, Se Van y Nunca Volverán” (“They’re Going, They’re Going and They’ll Never Return”) or “Se Va a Acabar esa Costumbre de Matar” (“That Custom of Killing is Going to End”), this most important Dirty War protest to date signaled to millions that society “had overcome the fear imposed by the dictatorship.”¹⁴⁴

While the military was forced to acquiesce in part, agreeing to establish civilian elections for October 30, 1983, it steadfastly refused to abandon the provisions contained in the *Documento Final*, which it finally decreed on April 28, 1983. Days later, human rights activists organized another massive street demonstration against the measure while Radical presidential candidate Raúl Alfonsín separately declared that “unlawful acts committed during the repression ought to be judged in the courts, and not just by history.”¹⁴⁵ Increasingly alarmed, including by recent public statements made by Videla’s former Chief of Police General Ramon Camps in *La Semana* that “no disappeared persons were still alive,” the military was determined to ensure that it would be legally absolved of all Dirty War crimes.¹⁴⁶ Therefore on September 22, 1983, just five weeks ahead of the nation’s first democratic election in ten years, the military

promulgated the Act of National Pacification granting junior and senior officers a blanket amnesty for any crimes it may have committed between May 25, 1973 and June 17, 1982.¹⁴⁷ A few days later, in a final effort to prevent any future judicial examinations into the past, the departing junta ordered destroyed all documents relating to military repression.

Reinventing Democracy

On October 30, 1983, Raúl Alfonsín and his centrist Radical Party won a convincing victory in perhaps the most important election in Argentine history. With his “Democracy or Anti-Democracy” platform, Alfonsín captured 52% of the presidential vote, handily defeating his closest challenger, Peronist Italo Luder (40%). The Radicals meanwhile gained a clear majority in the Chamber of Deputies (Lower House), a plurality in the Senate (Upper House), and key victories in several pivotal gubernatorial races.¹⁴⁸ Although in recent months the Peronists had made remarkable strides in refashioning themselves as a more modern, inclusive, and democratic-minded party, too many Argentines in October 1983 still associated them with old provincial political bosses, shady union leaders, rigid hierarchical practices, and other elements from the country’s authoritarian and dogmatic past. On the other hand, many more equated the Radicals and particularly Alfonsín with renewal, optimism, human rights, constitutional rule and a new spirit of ethical and moral responsibility.

More than any other politician during the Dirty War, Alfonsín had established himself as a symbol of Argentine democracy.¹⁴⁹ Before and particularly after the fall of Videla in March 1981, Alfonsín frequently criticized the Proceso, spoke out against military repression, came to the defense of political prisoners, demanded information on the thousands of disappeared, and praised the efforts of Las Madres and the nation’s other human rights organizations. Following the 1982 Malvinas debacle, his popularity soared as Argentines recalled him being one of the

few politicians who had expressed immediate and vocal opposition to the war. When Alfonsín subsequently vowed during his 1983 presidential campaign to overturn the military's recent self-amnesty provision and prosecute all those responsible for the Dirty War atrocities, Argentines entrusted him to lead their nation's democratic revival.¹⁵⁰

Yet what shape did Argentines want their long-awaited democracy to take? For the tens of thousands of jubilant Argentines who converged on Buenos Aires' historic Cabildo on December 10, 1983 to take part in Alfonsín's inauguration and the millions more who listened to his memorable address on radio or television, it meant more than simply a move away from the Proceso or assurances of legislative and presidential elections every two to six years.¹⁵¹ Instead, it came to entail the dynamic reconstruction of a new national commemorative tradition that simultaneously confronted and interrogated the authoritarian tendencies and tragedies of the past while building and promoting a modern and inclusive political, social, and cultural environment where governance, civil society, and rule of law would consistently be grounded in open, ethical, peaceful, tolerant, and consensus-driven norms and practices. Under Alfonsín, this emotionally-charged collective experiment proved at once spectacular, taxing, and intense, in no small part because, as Romero points out, "several decades without real democratic practice necessitated a new apprenticeship in the rules of the game and in democracy's values and general principals, including those that had to do with a republic."¹⁵²

Backed by Congress, the human rights movement, and the public at large, Alfonsín immediately set the tone for this new democratic tradition when, in December 1983, he annulled the military's self-amnesty provision. Days later, he charged the Supreme Military Council (SMC) with investigating and prosecuting all those responsible for human rights violations during the Dirty War— from the actual torturers to the highest-ranking generals who issued the orders; before assigning the SMC judicial responsibility, Alfonsín sent two bills to

Congress (both were approved), the first of which reformed the military code of justice while the second granted the civilian courts future judicial control of the investigation should the SMC fail to punish the junta leaders. At the same time, Alfonsín directed the nation's civilian courts to begin similar proceedings against ERP and Montonero rebel leaders for violent crimes they had committed dating back to May 25, 1973.¹⁵³ Perhaps Alfonsín's decision to prosecute both junta and guerrilla leaders, which upset some human rights activists such as Nobel Laureate Perez Esquivel who did not agree with his "two demon" approach, could be viewed as a subtle way to assuage politically the new military leadership. Yet, more importantly, it signaled Alfonsín's desire to let the painful process of national healing and reconciliation begin and underscore, as psychologist and writer Alfredo Moffatt remarked, the nation's need to move beyond a rigidly bifurcated "black versus white" or "good versus evil" worldview that characterized not only the recent Dirty War but indeed much of political and cultural life since the first coup of 1930.¹⁵⁴

No two events proved more significant in the nation's collective effort to confront and interrogate the past than the creation of the National Commission of Disappeared Persons (CONADEP) and the 1985 trial of the junta chiefs (known as *El Juicio de las Juntas*). On December 15, 1983, Alfonsín launched CONADEP by tapping highly-respected Argentine writer Ernesto Sábato to direct an investigation into the fate of the nation's desaparecidos. After Sábato appointed an executive committee of nine other well-known public figures, including five veteran human rights activists (all of whom were male), their team of over one-hundred and twenty researchers spent the next nine months, despite repeated death threats, traveling to fifteen provinces and several foreign countries where they interviewed friends and family members of the disappeared, former prisoners, human rights activists, and any other witnesses willing to step forward.¹⁵⁵ Over the course of their investigation, they also visited numerous

clandestine detention centers, prisons, and morgues and examined available police, military, and prison records— though their frequent requests for additional information from the military were repeatedly ignored.¹⁵⁶

On September 20, 1984, accompanied by 70,000 human rights marchers, CONADEP submitted its massive 50,000-page report entitled *Nunca Más (Never Again)*, which the University of Buenos Aires Press immediately published as an abridged two-volume set. For the first time, the report detailed thousands of the Dirty War's gruesome individual horrors ranging from kidnappings, mass abductions, and interrogation and torture techniques to ethnically-motivated abuses, conditions in prisons and detention centers, and real and mock executions. It also listed the names of 8,961 people "known" to have disappeared and provided evidence of the military's coordination of it all. Summing up CONADEP's findings, Sábato wrote in the report's Prologue:

Our Commission was set up not to sit in judgment...[yet] we are convinced that the recent military dictatorship brought about the greatest and most savage tragedy in our history...[W]e cannot remain silent in the face of all that we have heard, read, and recorded. This went far beyond what might be considered criminal offences and takes us into the shadowy realm of crimes against humanity.¹⁵⁷

Despite isolated complaints on both sides of the ideological spectrum— human rights groups on the Left believed the number of disappeared was closer to 30,000 and were disappointed that CONADEP's list of 1,500 people implicated in the repression was not made public while groups on the Right such as the Forum for Studies on the Administration of Justice (FORES) questioned the objectivity and reliability of witness testimony that was not carried out under judicial oath— the *Nunca Más* report represented a defining moment in the country's interwoven struggle to confront the horrors of the recent past and rebuild a new imagined community.¹⁵⁸ Nearly two-thousand copies were distributed to government officials, domestic and international human rights organizations, and embassies. More importantly, the book

became an instant best-seller in Argentina. Thirteen editions were published between November 1984 and May 1986, each immediately selling out.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, in July 1984, more than a million Argentines watched a special CONADEP-produced television broadcast of the commission's work and findings.¹⁶⁰ For the great majority of Argentines, including those who had neither read the book nor watched the television special, *Nunca Más* became a sacred national text, forever shaping their past, present, and future.

After reading CONADEP's report, Alfonsín announced that the nine former military commanders of the Dirty War would be charged and tried for crimes against humanity. "Thinking it would make a powerful statement," remarks Marguerite Feitlowitz in *A Lexicon of Terror*, Alfonsín asked the Supreme Military Council (SMC) to try the nine junta officers.¹⁶¹ When the SMC ultimately refused in September 1984, the civilian Federal Appeals Court of Buenos Aires stepped in and took over judicial control of the proceedings, much to the satisfaction of the human rights movement and the post-*Nunca Más* public.¹⁶² Six months after the nine officers were arraigned, the *Juicio de las Juntas* officially began under heavy security on April 22, 1985 and concluded 230 days and 833 witnesses later. The entire trial was televised and the refurbished federal courthouse was outfitted with press boxes, a reserved seating area for seventy-five invited guests (among whom were several Madres and other Argentine human rights leaders), and a one-hundred seat gallery at the rear for members of the general public.¹⁶³

"The Trial of the Century," as it colloquially became known, gripped the entire country. On the opening day of the trial, a crowd of 50,000 gathered in a plaza adjacent to the barricaded courthouse and, as they would repeatedly over the ensuing nine months, publicly demanded that justice be served. Radio programs and the nation's principal newspapers, both of which reported daily on events unfolding in the courtroom, saw their number of listeners and readers swell. The newly-created weekly *Diario del Juicio*, dedicated exclusively to the trial, became

requisite reading for many. The book *El libro del juicio* was made available in 1985, the Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos prepared a video entitled *El juicio: Un documento inédito*, and Las Madres, who continued to march each week in the Plaza, began publishing a paper of their own entitled *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* that regularly profiled both the accused and other military figures not yet on trial. Yet nothing captivated Argentines more than the nightly television broadcasts of lead prosecutor Julio César Strassera and scores of witnesses providing graphic and incriminating testimony against Videla, Massera, Viola, Lambruschini, Agosti, Galtieri, Graffigna, Anaya, and Lami Dozo or the gratifying sight of the officers nervously grimacing, twitching, or even shouting.¹⁶⁴

Throughout the trial, Strassera and his team of associates consistently argued that the junta leaders and not their subordinates should be considered the principal authors of the Dirty War atrocities even if they themselves did not personally kidnap, torture, or execute their victims. Pointing to the Nuremberg war crimes trials, Strassera emphasized how the junta defendants systematically planned and orchestrated thousands of inexcusable crimes and urged the panel of six judges to demonstrate to the country and the world “that sadism is neither a political ideology or military strategy, but simply a moral perversion.”¹⁶⁵ “Your Honors,” Strassera exclaimed during his closing remarks before a packed courthouse and a rapt nation in October 1985, “*Nunca Más!*”¹⁶⁶ On December 9, the judges largely concurred, sentencing Videla and Massera to *prisión perpetua* or life in prison, Viola to seventeen years, Lambruschini to eight, and Agosti to four. Galtieri, Graffigna, Anaya, and Lami Dozo, who formed part of the last of the Proceso’s three juntas, were absolved.¹⁶⁷

Remarkable in their own right, the *Nunca Más* report and the *Juicio de las Juntas* underscored a much broader political, social, and cultural transformation taking shape in Argentine society in the aftermath of the Dirty War. As fear and mistrust gave way to hope and

optimism under Alfonsín, Argentines embarked on an intense period of critical self-reflection, questioning everything from their recent World Cup euphoria and collective silence in the face of tragedy to the historical roots of their nation's authoritarian, corporatist, and often violent past. While clearly excoriating the military and its traditional allies such as the Catholic Church, Argentines also began to assume a degree of individual and collective responsibility for any apathy, conformity, provincialism, or intolerance on their parts that may have contributed to their country's persistent democratic shortcomings. In short, as they strove to come to grips with the Dirty War and, indeed, several decades of dogmatic and authoritarian rule, many Argentines felt that to some extent virtually all private citizens were to share in the blame.

Such introspection profoundly shaped the new historical narrative which Argentines strove so hard to develop after December 1983. Determined to extirpate that "little fascist" who lurked in the national soul," they embraced their latest and most prized democratic opportunity with unparalleled vigor, confidence, and determination.¹⁶⁸ For instance, droves of younger Argentines, inspired by the promise of participatory democracy and constitutional rule, formed neighborhood associations and joined political parties en masse, helping to strengthen public institutions and breathe new life into the national discourse. Labor unions adopted a more open and grassroots approach and also established a number of internal human rights commissions. New citizen groups such as *Poder Ciudadano*, *Conciencia*, and *Ciudadanos en Acción* emerged to promote civic participation, civil rights, and greater political accountability. A new wave of Argentines, including many modern, secular, and progressive-minded former dissident intellectuals, were recruited to occupy key government posts or chose to run for public office, both of which led to the gradual replacement of the Old Guard at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels. Human rights advocates, who for much of the Dirty War had been relegated to the political and cultural margins of society, now became cherished symbols of

mainstream collective will. And a collection of upstart, reformist-minded lawyers helped transform Argentina's judicial system and secure for the nation's civilian courts an unprecedented degree of political and institutional independence.¹⁶⁹

These efforts to democratize the state and civil society and rid Argentina of her corporate and authoritarian legacy were equally prevalent in the media, film, literature, and education. With a few exceptions— notably, the English-language *Buenos Aires Herald*, Jacobo Timerman's *La Opinión*, and the popular monthly *Humor*— Argentina's principal newspapers, to quote respected political columnist Jesus Iglesias Rouco, "were at the service of the government" and "did not play any true journalistic role" during the Dirty War.¹⁷⁰ That started to change after Viola replaced Videla in March 1981 and, particularly, after the Malvinas debacle in June 1982 when dailies such as *Clarín*, *La Nación*, and *La Prensa* began to publish information on human rights abuses and challenge the military's "war on subversion." Yet not until democracy was restored in December 1983 did the mainstream Argentine media truly witness "a cathartic explosion of revelations of human rights violations, reinterpretations of the past, and the emergence of a diverse and critical spectrum of new sources of information."¹⁷¹ At the same time, a number of sophisticated, left-leaning newspapers such as *Página Doce*, *El Periodista*, and the Jewish Argentine weeklies *Nueva Sión* and *Nueva Presencia* emerged on the national scene, all of which now reported extensively on human rights issues, the legacy of the Dirty War, the *Nunca Más* report, the 1985 junta trial, and the need to promote and safeguard free speech, a diversity of opinions, authentic forms of representation, political transparency, national solidarity, and a modern multicultural society.

Throughout Alfonsín's presidency, the broadcast media regularly tackled many of those same issues. Ariel Delgado (Radio Argentina), Magdalena Ruiz Guiñazú (Radio Continental), José Eliashev (ATC television), and Jacobo Timerman (State television) hosted popular news and

interview-based programs that dealt with everything from the Dirty War to the state of Argentine democracy. Television networks aired special features such as CONADEP's *Nunca Más!* and the 1986 acclaimed film *La noche de los lápices*, the latter of which attracted an astounding four millions television viewers.¹⁷² Both radio and television also ran human rights-sponsored public service announcements and provided extended coverage of notable events such as the junta trial and the tenth anniversary of the March 1976 coup.

Like the print and broadcast media, a series of provocative new novels and films deeply informed the ways in which Argentines came to understand the recent authoritarian past and its enduring impact on the kind of democratic society they wished to construct in the present and future. Vicente Battista's *El libro de todos los engaños*, Aníbal Cedrón's *La memoria extraviada*, Humberto Constantini's *De Dioses, hombrecitos y policías*, Mempo Giardinelli's *Qué solos se quedan los muertos*, Jorge Landaburu's *Se lo tragó la tierra*, Tomás Eloy Martínez's *La novela de Perón*, Osvaldo Soriano's *No habrá más penas ni olvido*, and María Carmela Vázquez's *Luna sangrienta* permitted a highly engaged and literate public to revisit and reinterpret, in the relative security of civilian democracy, the painful period of censorship, violence, and repression from which they had just emerged.¹⁷³ In *Los chicos de la Guerra* (1984), *Hombre mirando al sudeste* (1985), *La noche de los lápices* (1986), *El exilio de Gardel* (1986), *Los dueños del silencio* (1987), and *La deuda interna* (1988), a talented new crop of Argentine filmmakers exposed thousands of viewers to a range of similar Dirty War-era topics, challenging them to reconsider the ways in which a lack of civic freedom, tolerance, and open constitutional rule stunted the development of Argentine political and social culture.¹⁷⁴

Luis Puenzo's Oscar-winning gem *La historia oficial* (The Official Story), which attracted over 800,000 Argentine viewers in 1985 alone, probably did so more effectively than any other film or novel. It told the compelling story of Alicia, a stern and traditional-minded high school

history teacher and wife of a military-affiliated businessman, who painfully came to learn in 1982-1983 that her beloved young daughter Gaby was the “adopted” missing child of a *desaparecida*. In the process, Alicia befriended a number of *Abuelas* (Grandmothers marching for information on the whereabouts of their grandchildren), discovered that her best friend had been kidnapped and tortured during the Dirty War, and learned of her husband’s cruel commercial and ideological association with high-ranking junta officers. Moreover, hearing her teenage students repeatedly question the canonized version of Argentine history which they were being taught, Alicia ultimately came to realize that “the official story” that she (and millions of other Argentines) had long accepted lacked any real credibility. Her world forever transformed, Alicia’s awakening emerged as yet another enduring national symbol alongside *Nunca Más* and the *Juicio de las Juntas* that reminded Argentines, to borrow from writer and philosopher Santiago Kovadloff, that the Dirty War was not merely “an experience of the past,” but rather a central element in the post-1983 process of “permanent re-elaboration.”¹⁷⁵

The wholesale transformation of public education under Alfonsín further underscored the performative character of this post-1983 collective project. Educators, politicians, and a diverse cross-section of other Argentines firmly believed that if Argentina were truly to develop an open, modern, and lasting democratic tradition it was imperative to transmit to the next generation of citizens not only a renewed appreciation of human rights, tolerance, and respect but also the searing memory of both the Dirty War and decades of authoritarian and corporatist rule. To these ends, Alfonsín called for the creation in 1984— with the explicit support and participation of the nation’s principal political parties, teacher and student unions, local democratic institutions, various ethnic and religious organizations, and the general public— of a National Pedagogical Congress (NPC). In truly democratic fashion, between 1984 and 1986 the NPC organized numerous public hearings, gatherings, and assemblies throughout the country in

an effort to provide, in the words of Adriana Puiggrós, “all of society an opportunity to discuss what kind of education it wanted for its children.”¹⁷⁶

Even before the NPC issued its final report on April 4, 1986—intended to coincide with the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the March 24, 1976 coup—important educational reforms had already taken hold in the nation’s classrooms.¹⁷⁷ For one, students began to learn about the tumultuous 1930-1976 period in Argentine history, something which had largely been ignored during the Dirty War. In Buenos Aires, elementary school students read and discussed a series of progressive educational booklets such as *Los derechos de todos* (The Rights of All), *Que es esto de la democracia?* (What is this of Democracy?), and *Por qué es una república Argentina?* (Why is Argentina a Republic?) that examined past military coups, the disappeared, human rights, and the efforts of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and in the process instructed students that “authoritarian governments make people forget how to participate” and how “in a democracy, discussion is very important.”¹⁷⁸ With the help of local journalist Roxana Morduchowitz, a group of primary school students crafted their own magazine called *Tenemos La Palabra* (We Have the Floor), a popular initiative that grew to include over 300 schools and, by 1988, was endorsed by the Ministry of Education.¹⁷⁹ At the high school level, teachers began to receive training on how to incorporate human rights instruction into their classrooms and students regularly participated in school-sponsored human rights activities.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, many secondary institutions adopted veteran human rights leader Emilio Mignone’s new progressive *Educación Cívica* textbook, which contained units on “The Democratic Way of Life,” “The Constitution,” “Breakdowns of Institutional Order,” and “Human Rights.”¹⁸¹

The National Pedagogical Congress’ 112-page final report affirmed and extended many of the democratizing principles already taking shape in the nation’s school and, indeed, society

at large. It called upon teachers and parents to educate students about the Dirty War and the country's authoritarian past and to help them "acquire and practice democratic habits" such as "liberty, equality, and solidarity," "the respect and defense of human rights," "creative and critical thinking," "freedom of expression," and the need to "resolve tensions through reason and not through violence." At the same time, the NPC went to great lengths to reach out to the nation's ethnic and religious minorities and underscore the secular and multicultural character of the nation's post-1983 initiative. Regularly invoking such language as "our pluralist and democratic society," "in a society like ours which is by nature pluralist," "our pluralist and participatory social co-existence," "to live together in religious pluralism," and "to foster pluralism and move from coexistence to cooperation," the NPC not only denounced all forms of ethnic, religious, racial, or national discrimination, but also made specific mention of the need to protect "distinct creeds" and "religious freedom" as enshrined in Article 14 of the 1853 Constitution. Moreover, it simultaneously breathed new life into Sarmiento's historic secular education statute of 1884 (Law 1420)— the 100th anniversary of which Alfonsín and the nation had joyfully commemorated only two years earlier— by once again prohibiting mandatory (Catholic) religious instruction in public schools during regular class hours, a sharp departure from the junta's 'Western Christian' moralizing educational directives.¹⁸²

Like *Nunca Más* and the *Juicio de las Juntas*, the significance of the National Pedagogical Congress cannot be overestimated. While not without its shortcomings, the NPC embodied, both in its means and ends, the driving spirit of cultural modernization that most Argentines sought to promote and institutionalize in the aftermath of the Proceso. It solicited the active participation of a diverse cross-sections of Argentines. It confronted and interrogated the memory of the Dirty War and in the process reminded Argentines that to forget was to fail democratically. It staunchly defended the principles of the 1853 Constitution and the 1948 UN

Declaration of Human Rights. It underscored the importance of dialogue and flexibility in place of violence and intransigence. It encouraged moral integrity and a diversity of opinion. It endorsed a multicultural and pluralist vision of *argentinidad* that was both sensitive to ethnic and religious minorities and yet also cognizant of the nation's "cosmovisión cristiana."¹⁸³ And it fostered a sense of national unity and solidarity, which was ceremoniously on display in April 1986 when President Alfonsín, in the company of a distinguished delegation of Radical and Peronist Party members, educators, writers, journalists, scientists, human rights activists, union leaders, and representatives of Argentina's various faith communities, inaugurated the highly-anticipated NPC report.¹⁸⁴

Democracy and the Jewish Argentine Community

For many of the same and a number of additional reasons, the restoration of democracy represented a watershed moment for Argentina's Jewish community. As was the case for the vast majority of Argentines, the period after December 10, 1983 signaled the birth of a new democratic tradition rooted in civic freedom, open constitutional rule, respect and tolerance, justice and accountability, and a fresh sense of political and cultural pluralism. And like many of their fellow citizens, Jewish Argentines largely supported Alfonsín, became increasingly active in politics, the arts, and the media, joined new citizen groups and neighborhood associations, marched in the streets, educated their children about the Dirty War, read *Nunca Más*, listened to Charly García, León Gieco, and Mercedes Sosa, went to see *La historia oficial*, watched the *Juicio*, and cheered the guilty verdicts.

Yet for members of the nation's Jewish community, the restoration of democracy also forced them to confront the particularly disturbing manifestation of anti-Semitism that had surfaced during the Dirty War. While most Jews likely did not share Timerman's blanket

characterization of Argentina as a “Nazi state,” many nonetheless recognized that a “new type of anti-Semitism” had emerged in Argentina between 1976-1983 where “for the first time a large number of Jews were tortured and assassinated, owing in part to their Judaism.”¹⁸⁵ Regardless of whether the Dirty War’s approximately 1,500 Jewish desaparecidos were targeted because Jewish Argentines were disproportionately active in leftist academic, professional, and labor circles or “because of the association in the public mind linking liberal dissent and socialism with the Jewish community,” there was much evidence to suggest that once captured Jewish prisoners were frequently singled out by anti-Semitic military *interrogators* and tortured *accordingly*.¹⁸⁶

Timerman’s numerous denunciations aside, scores of other Jewish Argentine survivors came forward during and particularly after the Dirty War to share “innumerable testimonials about anti-Semitism” at the hands of the police and military. For instance, Nora Stejilevich informed CONADEP investigators that after she was forcibly taken from her home on July 16, 1977, her military interrogators “threatened me for having uttered Jewish words in the street and for being a bloody Yid, whom [sic] they would make soap out of me. They took me straight away to the torture room where I was subjected to the electric prod...Days later, they told me my arrest had been a mistake, but not to forget that I had been there.”¹⁸⁷ Recalling her incarceration at an air force facility, Miriam Lewis reported in 1984 that that “the general attitude was of deep-rooted anti-Semitism. On one occasion they asked me if I understood Yiddish. I replied that I did not, that I only knew a few words. They nevertheless made me listen to a cassette they had obtained by tapping telephones...[of] Argentine businessmen of Jewish origin, talking in Yiddish;” her prison guards later told her, as they would other Jewish prisoners, that “the only good Jew is a dead Jew.”¹⁸⁸ Perla Wainstein, who was held at the “La Perla” clandestine detention center in Córdoba, testified at the 1985 *Juicio de las Juntas* that guards

attempted to brand a swastika on her husband's bald head. Another female Jewish detainee spoke of being forced, in the "El Olimpo" courtyard in Buenos Aires, to march to the beat of police officers smacking cans against the pavement while shouting "I will bill 50% in white and 50% in black."¹⁸⁹

The testimonials of non-Jewish Argentine survivors about the presence of anti-Semitism were equally, if not more alarming. In 1984, Pedro Miguel Vanrell told CONADEP that Jewish prisoners were forced to raise their hands and shout "I love Hitler!" while "the torturers would laugh, take the prisoners clothes off and paint swastikas on their backs with spray paint...[and] again beat them."¹⁹⁰ Elena Alfaro spoke of swastikas and the words "we are God" and "long live Hitler" emblazoned on the walls of "El Vesubio" detention center in Buenos Aires and further remarked that "if life in the camp for any prisoner was a nightmare, the situation was even worse for Jews. They were victims of constant beatings and other acts of aggression, to such an extent that many preferred to hide their origin, saying, for instance, that they were Polish Catholics."¹⁹¹ Daniel Eduardo Fernández, who at nineteen was imprisoned at "Club Atlético," told CONADEP that "Jews were punished simply because they were Jewish...All kinds of torture would be applied to Jews, especially one which was extremely sadistic and cruel: 'the rectoscope', which consisted of inserting a tube into a victim's anus, or into a woman's vagina, then letting a rat into the tube."¹⁹² At the 1985 junta trial, several non-Jews testified that the first thing they were asked by interrogators in the moments before they were about to be tortured was if they were Jewish. For example, María Angélica Garibotti de Obranich recalled how she had to convince her interrogators that her last name was Yugoslavian and not Jewish in origin while journalist Rodríguez Larreta described the following conversation he had at the "Automotores Orletti" detention center:

Interrogator: "What's your name?"

Larreta: "Rodríguez Larreta."

Interrogator: "Rodríguez with an S or a Z?"

Larreta: "With a Z."

Interrogator: "Okay you're saved then, because here we smash all Jews."¹⁹³

In both expected and unexpected ways, these expressions of anti-Semitism informed the manner in which Jewish Argentines reacted following the restoration of democracy in December 1983. For one, Jewish academics, journalists and writers (such as Silvia Bleichmar, Manuela Fingueret, Ricardo Feierstein, Abraham Huberman, José Itsigsohn, Santiago Kovadloff, Bernardo Kliksberg, Marshall Meyer, Leonardo Senkman, Javier Simonovich, Herman Schiller, Eliahu Toker, and Ismael Viñas) published a series of articles that more closely examined the military's bigoted actions and attitudes during the Dirty War. In the process, they also revisited earlier manifestations of anti-Semitism in Argentine history, calling specific attention to the rabid xenophobia of Julián Martel in the 1890s, the *Semana Trágica* of January 1919, the nativist chauvinism of the 1940s, and the Sirota Affair of June 1962. Together, they urged Jews and non-Jews "to remember and learn" from both the Dirty War and those episodes of the more distant past and to recognize that anti-Semitism in all its forms was inherently "anti-democratic" and, therefore, anathema to the nation's post-1983 project of political and cultural modernization.¹⁹⁴

Second, whether a direct response to this recent wave of anti-Semitism, part of the broader public reaction to seven years of repressive military rule, or both, Jewish participation in politics and public life reached unprecedented heights during Alfonsín's presidency. For one, members of the Jewish community became actively involved in CONADEP, including the appointment of veteran human rights activists Gregorio Klimovsky and Marshall Meyer to the commission's ten-person executive committee.¹⁹⁵ Jewish Argentines also played a leading role in the movement for educational reform and the National Pedagogical Congress, helping to draft portions of the NPC's final report and spearheading calls for the restoration of Law 1420, the creation of a pluralist and participatory learning environment, and the teaching of human rights

in the classroom.¹⁹⁶ Other Jews publicly advocated for the creation of a national anti-discrimination law, which Congress, led by Senator and future Argentine President Fernando de la Rúa, ultimately approved in August 1988.¹⁹⁷ Finally, Jewish journalists, novelists, and artists (such as Aida Bortnik, José Eliashev, Fingueret, Mario Goloboff, Ricardo Halac, Kovadloff, Eduardo Pavlovsky, Diana Raznovich, Sergio Renán, Mario Szichman, Timerman, Toker, and Horacio Verbitsky) helped capture the nation's collective imagination in the aftermath of the Dirty War through their remarkable contributions in print and broadcast media, film, theater, and literature.

Jewish involvement in local and national politics was equally noteworthy. Like their non-Jewish counterparts, large numbers of Jewish Argentine citizens began to enroll in the nation's major political parties, notably the Radical Party. A record number of Jewish Argentines also ran for Congress and several, most notably Adolfo Gass, César Jaroslavsky, Enrique Mathov, and Marcelo Stubrin, rose to political prominence in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. At the same time, professional economists Mario Brodersohn, Bernardo Grinspun, and Alejandro Rofman all occupied important government posts within the Ministry of Finance, Oscar Oszlak, with a doctorate in political science, became Secretary of Public Affairs, and Jacobo Fiterman headed up the Municipality of Buenos Aires' Public Works division. Most significantly perhaps, Alfonsín tapped noted Jewish Argentine author Marcos Aguinis to oversee the government's new Cultural Democratization Program (PRONDEC), which, following seven years of censorship and repression and decades of authoritarian and dogmatic rule, came to embody the president and the nation's post-1983 commitment to the growth of civic pluralism and multiculturalism.¹⁹⁸ Indeed, Jewish involvement in government and politics became sufficiently prevalent after December 1983 that Argentines colloquially— and at times disparagingly— dubbed Alfonsín's Radical administration the "Sinagoga Radical."¹⁹⁹

Heightened Jewish involvement in politics and civic society also pointed to a broader philosophical shift taking shape within the Jewish community. As Argentines sought to construct a vibrant democratic tradition rooted in open, ethical, tolerant, and inclusive norms and practices, a new generation of Jewish leaders, who openly subscribed to that budding vision of *argentinidad*, urged the DAIA (Delegation of Argentine Jewish Associations) and the country's other principal Jewish organizational bodies to seek to integrate more fully into Argentine society and, in the process, help shed public perceptions of the Jewish community, fair or not, "of a community of foreigners that lived behind closed doors"²⁰⁰ Making their views known in Jewish newspapers, at neighborhood gatherings, and in a series of community forums, they encouraged all Jews and, particularly, the older institutional guard that had dominated community politics during the Dirty War to abandon their "ghetto behavior," "lobby approach," and some even claimed "paranoia" and, instead, take advantage of the nation's democratic opening and spirit of multiculturalism to immerse themselves more fully— as a *community* and not merely as individual Jews— in debates, affairs, and issues of wider-ranging national concern.²⁰¹ To continue to act or appear "closed off" and "withdrawn" meant that the Jewish community, in the words of lawyer Paul Warszawski— one of the leading voices among this new generation of Jewish leaders— risked "losing any opportunity to align itself with those sectors of society that favor the legitimacy of the community's survival, which is to say, those sectors that aspire to political pluralism as well as an effective social and cultural pluralism."²⁰²

Yet for this new generation of Argentine pluralists— most of whom were born and raised in Argentina, felt more confidently "Argentine" than their Jewish predecessors, and came of age politically during the Dirty War— those calls for increased Jewish participation and integration in Argentine life did not imply hiding or abandoning their sense of Jewish identity. On the contrary, as avid proponents of the nation's emerging multicultural tradition, they

publicly embraced their Jewish roots and insisted that “there existed no contradiction between being a good Argentine and actively exercising one’s Jewish identity... [including demonstrating one’s] concern and support for the fate of Israel.”²⁰³ If the question of “doble lealtad” or “dual loyalty” had long been a source of concern for previous generations of Argentine Jews, for Aguinis, Rofman, Warszawski, and other members of this new generation it represented a harmonizing asset that could serve to enrich and strengthen Argentina’s post-1983 democratic experiment. Perhaps the best indication of this broader philosophical shift lay in something as simple as the new terminology that the latter increasingly employed after December 1983 to refer publicly to the Jewish community: rather than speak, as historically had been the case, of “la colectividad judía,” this younger and more pluralist-minded generation wrote and spoke of “la colectividad judeo-argentino.”

Their growing desire for a more open, involved, and integrated Jewish community stemmed in no small part to the anger and frustration that many Argentine Jews felt toward the DAIA leadership during and after the Dirty War. Jewish Argentines, particularly those who lost loved ones during the Dirty War, criticized what they saw as the silence and indifference of DAIA leaders in fighting for the release— or even seeking information on the whereabouts of— the hundreds of Jews who disappeared at the hands of the military between 1976-1983. They resented that the DAIA appeared more concerned with maintaining a working relationship with the junta and not challenging the status quo that it avoided speaking out— or, worse yet, remained completely detached and uninvolved— to the atrocities unfolding in Argentina. Friends and family members of the disappeared were especially bitter over the DAIA leadership’s frequent refusal even to meet with them during the Dirty War.²⁰⁴

As Jewish parents and grandparents clamored for the leadership to advocate on behalf of their kidnapped children, the boiling point for many came in mid-1977 when, first, the DAIA

shied away from community-led efforts to free Timerman and, second, when the military released DAIA President Nehemías Resnizky's kidnapped son Marcos, less than a week after he had been captured. Such signs of 'complacency' and 'duplicity' spurred the formation that year of the non-DAIA-sponsored *Movimiento Judío por los Derechos Humanos* (Jewish Movement for Human Rights) which, under the leadership of Rabbi Marshal Meyer and Herman Schiller, courageously intervened on behalf of Jewish detainees and simultaneously developed close working relationships with Las Madres, the Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos, and Argentina's other principal human rights groups. Negative perceptions of DAIA leaders also led, in the aftermath of the Dirty War, to an outpouring of Jewish indignation, neatly encapsulated in the Holocaust-tinged remarks of writer and economist Antonio Brailovsky: "In Argentina, there was a government that sent 1,500 Jews to the cremation ovens and there is a Jewish leadership that did not consider such acts to constitute part of Jewish interests."²⁰⁵

In a lengthy report entitled "Informe especial sobre detenidos y desaparecidos judíos, 1976-1983" that the DAIA released a month after Alfonsín assumed office, the organization's leaders rejected accusations that they acted cowardly, selfishly, or indifferently during the Dirty War. The report's opening page stated categorically: "the DAIA acted, throughout those convulsive years, decisively and energetically to safeguard the interests of the community...[and] assumed without hesitation or evasiveness the defense of those Jews whose disappearance was brought to the attention of the institution [the DAIA]."²⁰⁶ Specifically, DAIA leaders pointed to their many written correspondences with Minister of Interior General Albano Jorge Harguindeguy that helped to obtain valuable information on the status and whereabouts of Jewish detainees and simultaneously maintain "an indispensable dialogue with military authorities."²⁰⁷ Moreover, they pointed to both their efforts to reach out to Jewish detainees by persuading junta leaders to allow community rabbis the opportunity to visit with Jewish

prisoners and their determination and resourcefulness in procuring the release of at least ninety-two Jewish desaparecidos.²⁰⁸

As Jewish critics railed against such DAIA claims— calling them exaggerated, erroneous, and even a calculated attempt to absolve itself of any wrongdoing in the aftermath of the Dirty War— and continued to maintain that “the heads of the DAIA had kept silent in the face of the most brutal manifestations of anti-Semitism,” DAIA leaders reminded their critics of the element of fear that had underscored all of their decisions.²⁰⁹ Some, like DAIA Vice-President Juan Gurevich, did so by lashing out at Jewish detractors (in this case, at an open roundtable discussion that the latter had organized in 1985): “I ask myself, what were today’s critics doing while those 1,500 Jews were going to the cremation ovens. Did they take to the streets?, publish appeals?, carry out public demonstrations of protest?; or did they adopt the same behavior that the Argentine public in general took on...?”²¹⁰ Others, like former DAIA President Resnizky, assumed a less acerbic and more philosophical approach in responding to critics. For instance, in a 1985 article entitled “With Regard to the Country during the Years of the Proceso,” Resnizky shifted the ‘blame’ to six decades of largely undemocratic and oppressive rule— from the Uriburu coup of 1930 to the Nacionalista and Peronist regimes of the 1940s and 1950s through to the more recent Onganía and Videla-led military juntas of the 1960s, 1970s, and early-1980s— arguing that “we [Argentines] became accustomed to a fictitious consensus and artificial unity imposed through force” that caused “[us] to forget that society is structured around conflict and that the idea of a society without structural conflicts is a false one” — except for those who wished to maintain absolute power. The result, he concluded, was that “authoritarianism, corporatism, and the cult of violence impregnated themselves in our mind and our spirit,” which invariably conditioned the way he, the DAIA, the Jewish community and Argentine society at large behaved in a country seemingly in constant crisis.²¹¹

Whether analytically astute or a veiled apology, Resnizky's remarks pointed to something else entirely: a longstanding tendency or strategy on the part of the older institutional guard to insulate the Jewish community from external threats. That strategy evolved in the context of a tradition in which the Hispano-Argentine definition of nationalism, in spite of, or perhaps because of, the country's ethnically diverse immigrant population, was historically linked to Catholicism. That is, as Argentina's nineteenth-century liberal-secular architects openly embraced and espoused modern European and, particularly, American republican ideals such as freedom, acceptance, and religious tolerance in their efforts to attract European immigrants as a means to "civilize" Argentina, Alberdi and Sarmiento simultaneously avoided adopting certain elements of the American constitutional model— namely, the clear separation between Church and State. As we have seen, Alberdi was careful to underscore, first, that "our modern American politic should maintain and protect the religion of our [colonial] fathers" and, second, that "religious freedom is the means by which to populate the country. The Catholic religion is the means by which to educate that populace."²¹² Moreover, while the 1853 Constitution guaranteed the nation's inhabitants the right openly to profess, teach, and learn their chosen religion (Article 14), it also stated that "the federal Government upholds the Roman Catholic faith" (Article 2); Congress should help convert Argentina's indigenous populations to Catholicism (Article 67); and the President and Vice-President must be Catholic (Article 76).²¹³

While Jews in Argentina, with isolated exceptions, had always enjoyed the freedom to attend synagogue, operate Jewish schools, keep kosher, enter politics, and participate in all economic walks of life, the nation's Catholic political tradition— which throughout the twentieth century had manifested itself in ways both unambiguous (such as the Nacionalista rhetoric of the 1930s and 1940s or the Proceso's 1976 "Western Christian" civilizing mandate) and more

subtle (such as the eternal presence of a crucifix suspended on the wall over the Chief of Police's desk or even the 1976 founding of the progressive inter-Christian Ecumenical Movement for Human Rights)— had created both real and imagined challenges for Jewish Argentines and other non-Catholic minorities to gain full social and cultural acceptance. In its struggle to become “unmistakably Argentine,” in the words of Jorge Luis Borges, the institutional Jewish community had often sought to neutralize Judaism by downplaying identifiably “Jewish” tragedy in Jewish Argentine life. Be it the 1919 *Semana Trágica* when labor strikes and bloodshed in the streets of Buenos Aires metamorphosed into an anti-Semitic pogrom in the Jewish neighborhoods of *Once* and *Villa Crespo*, the mandatory Catholic education laws of the 1940s that eroded Argentina's secular spirit and marginalized members of the Jewish community, the Eichmann and Sirota Affairs of the 1960s that ushered in a violent wave of anti-Semitic activity, or the disproportionately high number of Jewish *desaparecidos* during the Dirty War, Jewish institutional leaders were often intentionally guarded in how they framed their responses and protests— a protective mechanism of sorts that aimed to negate social markers such as tragedy that separated Jewish Argentines from their non-Jewish counterparts. Ever sensitive to the cultural expectations of a government— perhaps with the exception of the Frondizi (1958-1962) and Illia (1963-1966) administrations— and, to a lesser extent, a society that had frowned upon the notion of hyphenated Argentines, Jewish institutions such as the DAIA tended to conform to that narrative of ‘fictitious consensus’ that made political and cultural acceptance a less risky affair.

While certainly relieved to see the Dirty War end, Resnizky and his cohorts were not convinced that the restoration of democracy was sufficient to warrant a different kind of community strategy or approach. Rather than perceive the post-1983 opening as a historic opportunity to rebuild Argentina's civic institutions and reconstruct a new pluralist tradition, the

DAIA leadership worried that the transition to democracy would be unpredictable and short lived. The country's last extended and peaceful democratic government assumed power back in 1963 and it lasted only three years before the military reclaimed political control for the better part of the next two decades; indeed, one of the embedded national allegories of democratic life in Argentina seemed to be that democracy was always provisional and that the military would eventually return to power. Moreover, the Jewish institutional leadership remained skeptical about two additional things: first, that the advent of democracy may not actually lead to a decrease in anti-Semitism and, second, that it would meet their Jewish critics and society's growing expectations of a more open, tolerant, and pluralist society.²¹⁴ Pointing to the "untouchable Church" and Catholicism's indelible mark on government, politics, and national identity in Argentina, they argued that the likelihood that a provisional democracy would provide Jewish Argentines with a meaningful opportunity to achieve greater normative recognition was limited.²¹⁵

What emerged then were two competing commemorative narratives within the Jewish community that reflected the broader Argentine struggle over how to confront the authoritarian past and structure the democratic present. The older institutional guard, many of whom had lived through events such as the Sirota Affair and even the years of mandatory Catholic education from 1943-1954, adopted a more insular approach that sought to downplay the significance of Jewish tragedy and other political and social markers of Jewish "difference"— it believed that such a strategy represented the safest and most effective avenue through which to become "Argentine." The younger generation of Jewish pluralists, born and raised in Argentina, more confidently both "Jewish" and "Argentine," and more direct products of the Dirty War, saw the post-1983 democratic opening as a momentous opportunity to transform Argentina's (and the Jewish community's) outdated political structures and civic norms—

including an active push for greater Jewish social, political, and cultural integration in a society increasingly dedicated to openness, tolerance, accountability, multiculturalism, and the protection of human rights. By speaking out and becoming more proactive, they hoped to construct a more pluralistic society in which cultural boundaries were easily traversed, yet precisely because they were also recognized and respected.

Conclusion

Between 1983-1989, Argentine society underwent a profound transformation. As large and diverse numbers of Argentines became actively involved in political parties, citizen groups, and neighborhood associations, they breathed new energy and gave dramatic new meaning to institutional and civic life. In confronting and interrogating the nation's authoritarian and corporatist past— through the *Nunca Más* report, the *Juicio de las Juntas*, the National Pedagogical Congress, films such as *La historia oficial*, print and broadcast media, human rights marches and commissions, and literature and music— and simultaneously calling and working towards a society centered upon rule of law, representative and ethical government, accountability and justice, modern and secular education, tolerance and consensus, and political and cultural pluralism, they developed what Yael Zerubavel has called “a new historical legend” that aimed to replace many of the traditions and practices that had prevailed not only during the Dirty War, but indeed throughout much of the 1930-1983 period.²¹⁶ In short, for the great majority of Argentines the restoration of democracy under Alfonsín signaled a true national awakening, one that continues to evolve to this day.

There were, however, three important limitations that tempered the success of that national awakening under Alfonsín. First, the armed forces continued to wield significant political influence in the period following the Dirty War and were able to thwart some of the

government and society's democratic initiatives. For instance, they consistently blocked efforts by CONADEP investigators and other civilian groups to access military and police records regarding their repressive Dirty War practices as well as the fate of the nation's disappeared; had investigators been able to retrieve all the documentation that they had repeatedly requested, the *Nunca Más* report likely would have been even more damning and the list of *desaparecidos* may have numbered closer to 30,000 (rather than 8,961).²¹⁷ Moreover, the armed forces successfully pressured Alfonsín and Congress to approve two controversial laws: the December 1986 Ley de Punto Final and the June 1987 Ley de Obediencia Debida. Intended to limit future trials of military officers, the first law set February 23, 1987 as the deadline for all human rights-related charges to be brought against a defendant. The second subsequently dismissed all charges filed against non-commanding officers, effectively exonerating masses of military subordinates who took part in the torture and executions.

The passage of the two laws, however, proved counterproductive. In a frantic rush to meet the February 1987 deadline, many Argentines (human rights groups in particular) filed a flood of lawsuits against military defendants. Moreover, they took to the streets on multiple occasions to protest what they saw as a violation of the nation's post-1983 democratic mandate. In response to the abundance of lawsuits filed and what members of the military regarded as the unfair criticism and treatment of the armed forces in the period since December 1983, a group of officers led by Colonel Aldo Rico sponsored an April 1987 uprising that caught Alfonsín and the nation by surprise. Rico and his rebels took control of the pivotal Campo de Mayo military base on the outskirts of Buenos Aires; several army regiments stationed throughout the country quickly voiced their support.²¹⁸ Although it was unclear whether or not the uprising signaled an attempted coup— Rico later stated that it was only intended as a strike or protest— Argentines from across the political and socioeconomic spectrum interpreted it as

such. In a tremendous show of support for the government and democracy in general, Radicals and Peronists, business leaders and union workers, and human rights activists and members of countless other civilian and cultural associations immediately filled the Plaza de Mayo (and other civic centers) and then together signed a Manifesto of Democratic Commitment.²¹⁹ In 1988, two additional military uprisings were met by similar public demonstrations of democratic conviction. And yet despite the failure of all three rebellions and the impressive show of civic solidarity on each occasion, the military as a whole was ultimately able to lay claim to a major and once unthinkable victory: on December 3, 1990, Alfonsín's successor (Peronist) Carlos Menem granted presidential pardons to six convicted senior military officers, including Videla and Massera, each of whom had received life sentences at the 1985 junta trial.

Like the military, the Catholic Church also posed a significant threat to the success of the nation's post-1983 democratic initiative. With the exception of a vocal minority of bishops and priests, the Church frequently criticized the efforts of Argentina's principal human rights groups, opposed the *Juicio de las Juntas*, and, under the rhetorical guise of "reconciliation" and "love and forgiveness," supported the amnesty of all junta officers.²²⁰ Moreover, the Church, which grew increasingly conservative in the aftermath of the Dirty War, openly rejected the secular and modern cultural discourse put forth by Alfonsín and the nation's democratic majority. Irritated, for instance, by the ratification of a 1985 divorce law, the restoration of Law 1420, the National Pedagogical Congress' recommendations for a more open, participatory, and multicultural learning environment, and the increasingly free-spirited and secular attitudes of the media and society as a whole, Church traditionalists became embroiled in a long political fight with Alfonsín and the government over what they saw as their rightful control of cultural and educational issues. As early as 1984, they took particular aim at efforts to construct a pluralist society, publicly arguing that pluralism "has its limits."²²¹ Perhaps the Catholic Church's

attitude with respect to pluralism best serves to explain, first, why the Church strongly opposed Alfonsín's nomination of Marcos Aguinis to head up the government's new Cultural Democratization Program, second, why it was among those groups on the far right that disparagingly labeled Alfonsín's administration the "Sinagoga Radical," and, finally, why Jewish pluralists and DAIA leaders both agreed that the Church represented the Jewish community's chief obstacle at achieving full acceptance within Argentine society.²²²

If over time the activities of the Church and military worked to undermine the strength of Alfonsín's government, so too did the dramatic economic recession of 1987-1989. From the moment he took office in December 1983, Alfonsín and his cabinet faced the unenviable task of trying to revive an economy that had nearly collapsed under Viola and Galtieri. As we have seen, from 1979 to the end of the Dirty War Argentina's foreign debt alone had risen an astonishing 450 percent to \$45 billion.²²³ Forced to accept many of the austerity measures imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund following the nation's debt crisis of 1982, Alfonsín continually had to balance the demands of international creditors with the need to boost domestic spending, control rampant inflation, and meet the increasingly vocal demands of Argentina's working class. In 1985, Alfonsín unveiled the government's much-hyped Austral Plan, which, through a series of wage price freezes, tax revenue increases, currency measures, and export and manufacturing incentives, temporarily helped to stabilize the economy. Unfortunately, the plan did little to address the nation's systemic economic woes. By 1987, the economy had entered a marked period of stagflation (sharp increases in both inflation and unemployment), which proved quite costly politically as the Peronists managed resounding victories in many of that year's congressional and gubernatorial races.²²⁴

Over the next two years, the situation went from bad to catastrophic. The gross domestic product contracted by 3 percent in 1988 and by a whopping 6 percent in 1989,

inflation spiraled to unfathomable heights (even by Latin American standards), unemployment soared, the national poverty rate climbed to 47 percent, and the government nearly defaulted on its foreign debt payments.²²⁵ As could be expected, industrialists, landowners, business leaders, store-owners, and middle class professionals complained bitterly while union protests became an almost weekly affair. Lacking popular support, Alfonsín ultimately resigned in June 1989, several months before newly-elected (Peronist) President Carlos Menem was to assume control of the Casa Rosada. There was, however, a silver lining: despite Alfonsín and the Radicals' enormous economic failings, they had succeeded since December 1983 in restoring popular trust in civilian government and democratic rule. In the past, such an economic crisis would surely have brought forth the military, likely at the public's urging. Instead, Argentines had resisted all attempts by the likes of Colonel Rico to uproot democratic rule and, for the first time since 1916, Argentina witnessed the peaceful transfer of political power between rival civilian parties.

¹ *La Luz*, August 10, 1984, 17. It is not entirely clear from the article whether Murmis himself employed those exact words or *La Luz* paraphrased him.

² *El Porteño*, July 1984, 12. Italics are Alfredo Moffatt's.

³ *El Porteño*, July 1984, 13.

⁴ Luis Alberto Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 257.

⁵ Edna Aizenberg employs the phrase "national imagined community" in "Jewish Gauchos and Jewish 'Others', or Culture and Bombs in Buenos Aires," *Discourse* 19:1 (1996): 15-27. In using that phrase, Aizenberg borrows from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

⁶ Argentina was the only South American nation to try its military leaders following the wave of military dictatorships ("Dirty Wars") that prevailed in the Southern Cone during the 1970s and early-1980s. For *Nunca Más* report, see Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (CONADEP), *Nunca Más: Informe de CONADEP* (Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 1984). For the Juicio de las Juntas, see Jorge Camarasa, Rubén Felice, and Daniel González, *El juicio: proceso al horror* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana/Planeta Editores, 1985); Mona Moncalvillo Alberto Fernandez, and Manuel Martin, *Juicio a la impunidad* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Tarso, 1985); and Sergio Ciancaglini and Martin Granovsky, *Nada más que la verdad: El juicio de las juntas* (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1995).

⁷ *El Porteño*, July 1984, 12.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ By Frondizian democratic experiment, I am referring to the civilian governments of both Arturo Frondizi (1958-1962) and Arturo Illia (1963-1966). As discussed in Chapter 3, the military ruled under President Guido (1962-1963) for less than two years between Frondizi and Illia.

¹¹ With the significant exception of the centrist-left Radicals and the unequivocally leftist Socialists and Communists.

¹² David Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987: from Spanish Colonization to the Falklands War and Alfonsín* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 347; Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 173.

¹³ María Alonso, Roberto Elisalde, and Enrique Vázquez, *Historia: La Argentina del Siglo XX* (Buenos Aires: AIQUE, 1996); Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 175.

¹⁴ Guillermo O'Donnell, *El estado burocrático autoritario, 1966-1973* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Belgrano, 1982).

¹⁵ Marcelo Cavarozzi, *Autoritarismo y democracia (1955-1996): la transición del Estado al Mercado en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 1997).

¹⁶ On June 29, 1966, a day after the Onganía coup, police raided a number of universities, beating up professors and students in the process. With the *Noche de Bastones Largos*, Onganía made clear that the period of academic autonomy had ended. Moreover, Adriana Puiggrós notes that the *Noche de Bastones Largos* and other 1966 episodes of intimidation and violence directed at the nation's universities spurred Argentina's largest exodus of academics and intellectuals to foreign universities. See Adriana Puiggrós, *Que Pasó en la Educación Argentina: Desde la Conquista hasta el Menemismo* (Buenos Aires: Kapelusz, 1996), 118.

¹⁷ As was often the case during the twentieth century, the military itself remained divided. Therefore, in addition to working to suppress the labor movement and the universities, Onganía and his supporters also had to contend with a vocal factional minority within the military that did not support his prescriptions of how to tame inflation and boost economic production. Whereas, as we shall see, Onganía favored a liberal economic plan centered upon a strong commitment to foreign investment and tight control of monetary policy (interest rates, price controls, credits, loans, incentives, wages, etc.), the military's "structuralist" minority believed that the state should concentrate, above all, on integrating Argentina's agro-export and industrial sectors in order to promote economic self-sufficiency and, thereby, overcome runaway inflation and the country's growing fiscal and foreign deficits. By the time Onganía appointed Adalberto Krieger Vasena as Minister of Finance— Vasena had unusually close personal and professional ties with foreign investors— it became clear that Onganía and his "liberal" economic camp had emerged victorious from within the military. See Robert Potash, *The Army in Politics in Argentina, 1962-1973: From Frondizi's Fall to the Peronist Restoration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 210-214. For a valuable discussion of Krieger Vasena's economic plan, see Oscar Braun, *El desarrollo de la capital monopolista en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Tiempo Contemporáneo, 1970).

¹⁸ Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, 348.

¹⁹ In addition to a more militant and vocal leadership, a major reason for the CGT's growing strength and effectiveness in 1968 and 1969 was the coming together of its two major factions, the more confrontational *vandoristas* and the more pragmatic *participacionistas*. See Robert Alexander (with the collaboration of Eldon Parker), *A History of Organized Labor in Argentina* (Wesport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003), 165-167.

²⁰ For a detailed account of the *Cordobazo*, see James Brennan, *The Labor Wars in Córdoba, 1955-1976: Ideology, Work, and Labor Politics in an Argentine Industrial City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); David Rock "The Survival and Restoration of Peronism," in David Rock, ed., *Argentina in the Twentieth Century* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975); and María José Moyano, *Argentina's Lost Patrol: Armed Struggle, 1969-1979* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

²¹ *Ibid.* The *Cordobazo* proved particularly significant in bringing together the various factions of the peronist labor movement, which, in recent years, had grown divided and, consequently, lacked the corporatist political leverage that it had exhibited during, say, the Frondizi and Illia years.

²² The leftist revolutionary groups included the Montoneros, the Frente Argentino de Liberación (FAL), the Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas (FAP), the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR), and the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP). With the exception of the ERP, all had peronist leanings, yet, as we shall soon see, peronism after the *Cordobazo* came to represent a far broader political and ideological movement than it did between 1946-1955 or after 1955. For one of the better recent discussions of these various left-wing guerrilla groups, see Paul H. Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals: The Dirty War in Argentina* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 51-68.

²³ Levingston, a former Argentine military attaché in Washington, was President for only nine months, from June 1970 to March 1971.

²⁴ The Federal Criminals Court of the Nation provided Lanusse with a legal mechanism to combat leftist militants by avoiding the "red tape" of Argentina's bureaucratically taxing judicial system. The Court's judges and prosecutors often traveled directly to where an apprehended militant was being held in order to initiate the paperwork and have the accused transferred to Buenos Aires. The Court's decisions could not be appealed. Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 71-72.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁶ On August 15, 1972, twenty-five leftist militants, including key leaders of the Montoneros, ERP, and FAR revolutionary groups, escaped from the heavily fortified Rawson Military Prison in southern Argentina. Their plan was to make their way to the nearby Trelew airport where a guerrilla-piloted plane awaited to transport them to Puerto Montt, Chile. After a series of complications getting from the prison to the airport, only six of the twenty-five managed to board the plane and escape to Chile; the other nineteen were captured by the military and returned to the Rawson prison where they were tortured over the next six days. Then on August 22, it is widely believed that the military shot those nineteen escapees. Remarkably, three survived to tell their story. The Trelew Massacre proved so significant because, not unlike the failed 1982 Falkland War, it greatly undermined the public's already waning trust in the military. Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 73; Moyano, *Argentina's Lost Patrol*, 28-30; Martin Andersen, *Dossier Secreto: Argentina's Desaparecidos and the Myth of the "Dirty War"*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 79-80; Antonius Robben, *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 124-125; Raymundo Gleyzer, *Ni olvido ni perdón: 1972, la masacre de Trelew* [videorecording, 1972]; and Antonio Muñoz, *Trelew, 22 de agosto: memorias de un sueño de fuego* [videorecording, 2004].

²⁷ Since being ousted by the military in September 1955, Perón lived in exile, for the most part in Madrid.

²⁸ The working class by no means represented a monolithic, unified voice. Indeed, part of the reason why Onganía proved so successful between 1966-1968 in temporarily silencing the labor movement was the result of significant internal union conflicts between the *vandoristas* and the

participacionistas (see endnote 19 above). The Cordobazo played a major role in helping to bring together those previously divided groups. For discussion of the nuances and divisions within the peronist working class, see Samuel Baily, *Labor, Nationalism, and Politics in Argentina* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1967); Brennan, *The Labor Wars in Córdoba, 1955-1976*; Alberto Ciria, *Política y cultura popular: la Argentina peronista, 1946-1955* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 1983); Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Walter Little, "The Popular Origins of Peronism," in David Rock, ed., *Argentina in the Twentieth Century* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975); and David Rock, "The Survival and Restoration of Peronism," in David Rock, ed., *Argentina in the Twentieth Century*.

²⁹ For discussion of the origins and formation of the peronist intellectual left, see Claudia Hilb and Daniel Lutzky, *La nueva izquierda Argentina: 1960-1980* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1984); Daniel James, "The Peronist Left, 1955-1975," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 8, 2 (1976): 273-296; Juan José Sebrelli, *Buenos Aires: vida cotidiana y alienación* (Buenos Aires: Editores Siglo Veinte, 1965); Silvia Sigal, *Intelectuales y poder en la década del sesenta* (Buenos Aires: Puntosur, 1991); Rock, "The Survival and Restoration of Peronism;" and Oscar Terán, *Nuestros años sesenta: la formación de la nueva izquierda intelectual en la Argentina, 1956-1966* (Buenos Aires: Puntosur, 1991).

³⁰ For an overview of the peronist right, see Sigal, *Intelectuales y poder en la década del sesenta*; Juan José Hernández Arregui, *La formación de la conciencia nacional, 1930-1960* (Buenos Aires: Centro de Editor Plus Ultra, 1973).

³¹ Alonso, Elisalde, and Vazquéz, *Historia: La Argentina del Siglo XX*, 183.

³² Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 78.

³³ Alonso, Elisalde, and Vazquéz, *Historia: La Argentina del Siglo XX*, 185.

³⁴ In 1972, Perón finally did accede to Lanusse's demand that he not run for president in the upcoming March 1973 election. Whether viewed as a setback for Perón or an astute political calculation on his part to hasten the end of the dictatorship and thus his return to Argentina, it ultimately had little effect on Perón's ability to maintain the upper-hand in their ongoing political chess match, nor did it impair him politically during the March 1973 elections.

³⁵ Héctor Cámpora, a Buenos Aires dentist and a long-standing leftist peronist supporter, was elected president in March 1973 after Perón acceded to Lanusse's 1972 (electoral) demand. Perón had selected Cámpora to run in his place and, from Madrid, instructed him on how to govern Argentina. For the most part, Cámpora heeded Perón's directives. He did, however, prove too accommodating to the revolutionary left for Perón's liking. For instance, on the day of his inauguration, Cámpora released all captured leftist militants from federal prisons—leading Perón to summon Cámpora to Madrid and rebuke him in person. Shortly thereafter, Perón prepared his final return to Argentina to claim direct control of the presidency. For a good summary of Cámpora's abbreviated presidency, a period that historians tend to gloss over, see Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 83-88.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁷ Leftist peronists fared far worse than their rightist counterparts, the latter of whom were largely responsible for organizing Perón's 1973 homecoming (and security detail). For a more detailed account of the Ezeiza Massacre, see Oscar Anzorena, *Tiempo de violencia y utopía, 1966-1976* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Contrapunto, 1988); Robert Crassweller, *Perón and the Enigmas of Argentina* (New York: Norton, 1987); Liliana De Riz, *La política en suspenso, 1966-1976* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2000); Ramón Díaz Bessone, *Guerra revolucionaria en la Argentina, 1959-1978* (Buenos Aires: Círculo Militar, 1988); Donald C. Hodges, *Argentina, 1943-1987: The*

National Revolution and Resistance (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988); Moyano, *Argentina's Lost Patrol: Armed Struggle, 1969-1979*; Deborah Lee Norden, *Military Rebellion in Argentina: Between Coups and Consolidation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996); and Horacio Verbitsky, *Ezeiza* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Contapunto, 1986).

³⁸ Rosendo Fraga, Paul Lewis, and Gregorio Selser each provide a similar, telling illustration of Perón's sustained skepticism of the peronist revolutionary left, namely Perón summoning Campora to Madrid and reprimanding him for having granted amnesty to imprisoned leftist militants. "What [are] you trying to do," Peron stated angrily, "destroy 18 years of struggle and sacrifice." See Rosendo Fraga, *Ejercito: del escarnio al poder (1973-1976)* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Planeta, 1988), 58-59; Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 87; Gregorio Selser, *Peron, el regreso y la muerte* (Montevideo: Biblioteca de Marcha, 1973), 18.

³⁹ Isabel's legal name was Marıa Estela Martınnez de Peron.

⁴⁰ It is widely believed that Lopez Rega's "Argentine Anticommunist Alliance," commonly known as the *Triple A*, was largely responsible for the June 20, 1973 massacre of peronist leftists at the Ezeiza airport on the day of Peron's homecoming. For more on the killing of Peronist youth leader Enrique Grynberg, see Richard Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron: Argentina's Montoneros* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1982), 165; Hilda Lopez Laval, *Autoritarismo y cultura: Argentina, 1976-1983* (Madrid: Editorial Fundamentos, 1995), 23; Moyano, *Argentina's Lost Patrol: Armed Struggle*, 38; and Antonius Robben, *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 135.

⁴¹ Lopez Rega's *Triple A* enjoyed one of the largest budget allowances during Peron's 1973-1974 administration.

⁴² The term "gorilla" was used in Argentina to refer to a staunch anti-peronist; it was first popularized in the months following the 1955 coup during which time the new military government set out to proscribe all things peronist. Here, I borrow Paul Lewis' translation of the Spanish "Que pasa, general, que esta lleno de gorillas el gobierno popular?" Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 95.

⁴³ Alonso, Elisalde, and Vazquez, *Historia: La Argentina del Siglo XX*, 189.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 197.

⁴⁵ Jordan Genta, *Acerca de la libertad de ensenar y de la enseanza de la libertad* (Buenos Aires: Dictio, 1976), 333.

⁴⁶ Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 108; David Rock, *Authoritarian Argentina: The Nationalist Movement, Its History, and Its Impact* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 224. See also Ricardo Burzaco, *Infierno en el monte tucumano: Argentina, 1973-1976* (Buenos Aires: R.E. Editores, 1994); Familiares y Amigos de los Muertos por la Subversion (FAMUS), *Operacion Independencia* (Buenos Aires: FAMUS, 1988).

⁴⁷ *Nuevo Confirmado*, December 18, 1975, 23; Hernan Lopez Echague, *El enigma de General Bussi* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1991), 172; Luis Mattini, *Hombres y mujeres del PRT-ERP* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Contrapunto, 1990), 420; Marıa Seoane, *Todo o nada* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Planeta, 1991), 261; and Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 108.

⁴⁸ Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 127.

⁴⁹ "Acta Para el Proceso de Reorganizacion Nacional," *Anales de la Legislacion Argentina*, March 24, 1976. Reprinted in *La Opinion*, March 25, 1976, 1 and 13.

⁵⁰ Towards the end of the Dirty War and, particularly, after civilian democracy was restored in December 1983, Argentines colloquially came to refer to the (1976-1983) period of military dictatorship as the *Proceso*.

⁵¹ Argentines later came to refer to the “interrogation centers” as *chupaderos*, from the Spanish word “chupar” meaning to “suck” or “milk.”

⁵² The number of *desaparecidos* varies depending on the source. The National Commission of Disappeared Persons (CONADEP), created by President Alfonsín after the restoration of democracy in December 1983, estimated in its 1984 *Nunca Más* report that there were 8,961 “known” to have disappeared during the Dirty War; CONADEP, however, suspected the actual number was much higher. The Organization of American States conservatively estimated 6,000 disappeared while Amnesty International listed 20,000. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo maintained that the number of *desaparecidos* was closer to 30,000. Although 30,000 may have been too high a number, it certainly was not unfathomable if one considers General Luciano Benjamín Menéndez’s warning in March 1976 shortly after the military took power: “We are going to have to kill 50,000 people: 25,000 subversives, 20,000 sympathizers, and we will make 5,000 mistakes.” In its 1984 report *Nunca Más*, CONADEP reported that 81.39% of the disappeared were between the ages of 16 and 35, notably between the ages of 21 and 30. CONADEP, *Nunca Más*, 294. The entire CONADEP publication is also available online in both Spanish and English.

⁵³ Daniel Lutzky, “La izquierda de los 60 en los años 80,” in Hilb and Lutzky, *La nueva izquierda Argentina*, 74.

⁵⁴ Occasionally, the military abducted suspected militants at their places of work and not their homes. Abductions generally occurred at night, although daytime kidnappings were not rare.

⁵⁵ CONADEP, *Nunca Más*.

⁵⁶ Organization of American States, Interamerican Commission on Human Rights, *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Argentina* (Washington, D.C.: General Secretariat of the OAS, 1980), 91-95.

⁵⁷ CONADEP, *Nunca Más*.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *New York Times*, April 26, 1995, A13; Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 157-158.

⁶⁰ *New York Times*, April 26, 1995, A13; Horacio Verbitsky, *The Flight: Confessions of an Argentine Dirty Warrior* (New York: New Press, 1996).

⁶¹ “Acta Para el Proceso de Reorganización Nacional,” March 24, 1976, 1.

⁶² Alison Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 35.

⁶³ *The Times* (London), January 4, 1978, 12; CONADEP, *Nunca Más*, 333; and Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 35.

⁶⁴ “Acta Para el Proceso de Reorganización Nacional,” March 24, 1976, 1.

⁶⁵ During the Dirty War, the overall number of books published in Argentina also dropped precipitously. For instance, in 1975, 5.5 million books of fiction were published; by 1980, that number had dropped to 1.3 million. Similarly, in 1975, 2.7 million social science books were published; by 1980, the number had fallen to 290,000. Alonso, Elisalde, and Vazquez, *Historia: La Argentina del Siglo XX*, 290; Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 35; and Adriana Puiggrós, *Que Pasó en la Educación Argentina*, 130.

⁶⁶ Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, *Subversión en el Ámbito Educativo (conozcamos a nuestro enemigo)* (Buenos Aires, 1977).

⁶⁷ Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, *Subversión en el Ámbito Educativo*; Puiggrós, *Que Pasó en la Educación Argentina*, 128-129.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ “Acta Para el Proceso de Reorganización Nacional,” March 24, 1976, 1.

- ⁷⁰ Minister of Culture and Education Juan José Catalán went so far as to label modern mathematics ideologically dangerous.
- ⁷¹ Puiggrós, *Que Pasó en la Educación Argentina*, 129.
- ⁷² David Pion-Berlin, "Political Repression and Economic Doctrines: The Case of Argentina," *Comparative Political Studies* 16, 1 (April 1983): 37-66.
- ⁷³ Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, 369; Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 223-224.
- ⁷⁴ Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 35.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁶ Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 236.
- ⁷⁷ *La Opinión*, March 27, 1976; Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 6-7.
- ⁷⁸ Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 42; Daniel Frontalini, Maria Cristina Caiati, *El mito de la guerra sucia* (Buenos Aires: CELS, 1984).
- ⁷⁹ *Somos*, June 30, 1978, coverpage.
- ⁸⁰ These and other European remarks were reprinted in the weekly Argentine magazines *Somos*, April 14, 1978 and *Para Ti*, August 14, 1978.
- ⁸¹ *Somos*, April 14, 1978, 9.
- ⁸² *Ibid.*, 12.
- ⁸³ *Clarín*, June 26, 1978, 8.
- ⁸⁴ *La Nación*, July 1, 1978, 7.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁶ *Clarín*, June 29, 1978, 4.
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁸ Reprinted in *Somos*, June 30, 1978, 15.
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.
- ⁹⁰ *The Washington Post*, June 27, 1978.
- ⁹¹ *Clarín*, June 27, 1978, 6.
- ⁹² *Somos*, June 30, 1978, 12.
- ⁹³ Inés Dussel, Silvia Finocchio, and Silvia Gojman, *Haciendo Memoria en el País de Nunca Más* (Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 1997), 42.
- ⁹⁴ Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 45-51.
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 207.
- ⁹⁷ Jews constituted approximately 1% (250,000) of the total Argentine population (25,000,000). For arguably the best study on Jewish demography in Argentina, see Sergio DellaPergola, "Demographic Trends of Latin American Jewry," in Judith Laiken Elkin and Gilbert Merx, eds., *The Jewish Presence in Latin America* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 85-133. One point DellaPergola makes is that estimates of the total Jewish Argentine population are often overstated. For the period of the Dirty War, one such example may have been the 1979 American Jewish Year Book which placed the total Jewish population in Argentina at 300,000. See American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Yearbook, 1979* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1979). For detailed accounts of the number of Jewish desaparecidos during the Dirty War, see Edy Kaufman, "Jewish Victims of Repression in Argentina Under Military Rule, 1976-1983," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 4, 4 (1989): 479-499; Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas, *Informe sobre la situación de los detenidos desaparecidos Judíos durante el genocidio perpetuado en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: DAIA, 1999), 8; Comisión de Solidaridad con

Familiares de Presos y Desaparecidos en la Argentina, *La violación de los derechos humanos de argentinos judíos bajo el régimen militar, 1976-1983* (Argentina: Colección Testimonios, 2006), 15; and Escuela Secundaria Integral Scholem Aleyem con la Asociación de Familiares de Desaparecidos Judíos en Argentina, *Los derechos humanos: exposición del respeto a la dignidad de persona* (Buenos Aires: La Escuela Secundaria, 2005), 5.

⁹⁸ For a more detailed account of the founding of *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, as told by Las Madres themselves, see the Argentine journal *Paz y Justicia* 10, 86 (January 1983).

⁹⁹ To this day, Las Madres continue to gather each week in the Plaza de Mayo. On a separate note, not long after the founding of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, a like-minded group of Argentine grandmothers established *Las Abuelas (Grandmothers) de la Plaza de Mayo*. The Abuelas focused their energies on the disappearance of younger children and the kidnapping of pregnant women. They made special appeals to the government and the general public on the whereabouts of their abducted grandchildren, all the while participating in the weekly marches sponsored by Las Madres. For more detailed information on Las Madres, see Jana Bennett and John Simpson, *The Disappeared and the Mothers of the Plaza* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985); Hebe de Bonafini, *Historias de Vida* (Buenos Aires: Fraterna/del Nuevo Extremo, 1985); Jean Pierre Bousquet, *Las locas de la Plaza de Mayo* (Buenos Aires: El Cid, 1983); Alison Brysk, "From Above and Below: Social Movements, Human Rights and the International System in Argentina," *Comparative Political Studies* 26, 3 (October 1993): 259-285; Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*; Jo Fisher, *Mothers of the Disappeared* (Boston: South End Press, 1989); Piera Paola Oria, *De la casa a la Plaza* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Nueva América, 1987); and Raúl Veiga, *Las organizaciones de derechos humanos* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1985). For more detailed information on Las Abuelas, see Rita Arditti, *Searching for Life: The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Disappeared Children of Argentina* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Raúl Veiga, *Las organizaciones de derechos humanos* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1985); Julio Nosiglia, *Botín de guerra* (Buenos Aires: Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, 1985); Brysk, "From Above and Below;" and Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*.

¹⁰⁰ Fearing that police or military violence against them would rise, Las Madres barred men and even younger women (who did not "look" like mothers) from joining their weekly Plaza vigils. Despite these and other "protective" measures, nine of the original Madres, as well as two French nuns who worked alongside them, eventually "disappeared" during the Dirty War. For more information, see CONADEP, *Nunca Más*, 128; Bousquet, *Las locas de la Plaza de Mayo*, 73-74.

¹⁰¹ Alonso, Elisalde, and Vázquez, *Historia: La Argentina del Siglo XX*, 265.

¹⁰² See Bousquet, *Las locas de la Plaza de Mayo*.

¹⁰³ Jerry Knudson, "Veil of Silence: The Argentine Press and the Dirty War, 1976-1983," *Latin American Perspectives* 97, 24:6 (November 1997): 102-103.

¹⁰⁴ Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 54.

¹⁰⁵ Prior to the arrival of the OAS inspectors, the military raided the offices of several of Argentina's principal human rights organizations and arrested a number of human rights activists.

¹⁰⁶ Organization of American States, *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Argentina*, 54.

¹⁰⁷ Bousquet, *Las locas de la Plaza de Mayo*, 155.

¹⁰⁸ Alonso, Elisalde, and Vázquez, *Historia: La Argentina del Siglo XX*, 266.

¹⁰⁹ Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 54-56.

¹¹⁰ The translated title "Misadventures in Kindergarden-Land" is borrowed from Jean Graham-Jones, "Broken Pencils and Crouching Dictators: Issues of Censorship in Contemporary Argentine Theatre," *Theatre Journal* 53, 4 (December 2001): 600.

¹¹¹ Author of *Mafalda*, Quino was Argentina's most popular and famous satirist/cartoonist. For an excellent discussion of the political and cultural significance of *Mafalda*, see David William Foster, "Mafalda: From Hearth to Plaza," in *Buenos Aires: Perspectives on the City and Cultural Production* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1998), 17-33.

¹¹² María Elena Walsh, "Desventuras en el País-Jardín-de-Infantes," *Clarín*, August 16, 1979. See also María Elena Walsh, *Desventuras en el País-Jardín-de-Infantes* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1993).

¹¹³ Rodolfo Walsh, "Carta Abierta a la Junta Militar," March 24, 1977. For a copy of the letter, see CONADEP, *Nunca Más*, File # 2587.

¹¹⁴ For a first-hand account of his abduction, see Jacobo Timerman, *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*, translated by Toby Talbot (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 9-10. See also, CONADEP, *Nunca Más*, File # 4635.

¹¹⁵ Rita Gardiol, "A Brief Overview of Argentine History Relative to its Jewish Population," in Rita Gardiol, ed., *The Silver Candelabra and Other Stories: A Century of Jewish Argentine Literature* (Pittsburgh: Latin American Literary Review Press, 1997), xxvi-xxvii.

¹¹⁶ Genaro Carrío, *El caso Timerman* (Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 1987).

¹¹⁷ Timerman, *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*, 68-69.

¹¹⁸ For discussion of their respective opinions, see Mark Falcoff, "The Timerman Case," *Commentary* 72:1 (July 1981): 15-23; Edy Kaufman, "Jewish Victims of Repression in Argentina under Military Rule, 1976-1983," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 4:4 (1989): 479-99; Seymour Liebman, "Argentine Jews and their Institutions," *Jewish Social Studies* 43:3 (1981): 311-28; Benno Weiser Varon, "The Canonization of Jacobo Timerman," *Midstream* 27:7 (August-September 1981): 36-44; and Robert Weisbrot, "Anti-Semitism in Argentina," *Midstream* 24:5 (May 1978): 13.

¹¹⁹ For details on the Gravier case, see Irene Capdevilla, *El Caso Graiver, o la historia de los testaferreros* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Agora, 1984); Juan Gasparini, *El crimen de Graiver* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editorial Zeta, 1990); Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 170-177; Revista Somos, *Historia y personajes de una época trágica* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Atlantida, 1977), 189-190; and Ramón Camps, *El poder en la sombra: el affaire Graiver* (Buenos Aires: Ro.Ca. Producciones, 1983).

¹²⁰ Anthony Lewis, "The Final Solution in Argentina," *New York Times*, Book Review, May 10, 1981, 1.

¹²¹ Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 225.

¹²² By the end of the Dirty War, Argentina's external debt would rise another 80% to a staggering \$45 billion. Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, 373.

¹²³ Alberto Jordán, *El Proceso, 1976-1983* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1993), 270-271.

¹²⁴ Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 236.

¹²⁵ Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 59; Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 237.

¹²⁶ Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 239.

¹²⁷ For instance, *La Prensa* published a 1978 advertisement that listed the names of 2,500 disappeared and in 1980 published a pamphlet that contained the names of 5,600 desaparecidos. See Knudson, "Veil of Silence," 99; Camarasa, Felice, and González, *El juicio*, 148-149; and Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 184.

¹²⁸ Dussel, Finocchio, and Gojman, *Haciendo Memoria en el País de Nunca Más*, 57. For a visual sampling of “Bosquivia,” see pages 157-162.

¹²⁹ Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina’s “Dirty War,”* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 234. For a thorough discussion of Teatro Abierto, see Taylor, 233-254. It is worth noting that in 1982, a collection of Argentine dancers followed *Teatro Abierto’s* lead by creating the performing group *Danza Abierta*.

¹³⁰ Aira César, *Ema, la cautiva* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de Belgrano, 1981); Jorge Manzur, *Tinta roja* (Buenos Aires: Legasa, 1981); Carlos Dámaso Martínez, *Hay cenizas en el viento* (Buenos Aires: CEAL, 1982); Enrique Medina, *Las muñecas del miedo* (Buenos Aires: Galerna, 1981); and Andrés Rivera, *Nada que perder*, (Buenos Aires: CEAL, 1982).

¹³¹ Francine Masiello, “La Argentina durante el Proceso: las múltiples resistencias de la cultura,” in Daniel Balderston, *Ficción y política: La narrativa argentina durante la dictadura militar* (Buenos Aires: Alianza, 1987; Dussel, Finocchio, and Gojman, *Haciendo Memoria en el País de Nunca Más*, 53.

¹³² For the most comprehensive account of the close political and ideological relationship between the military junta and the Catholic Church during the Dirty War, see Emilio Mignone, *Iglesia y Dictadura: el papel de la Iglesia a la luz de sus relaciones con el régimen militar* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Pensamiento Nacional, 1986).

¹³³ Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 236

¹³⁴ Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 185.

¹³⁵ Alejandro Dabat and Luis Lorenzano, *Argentina: The Malvinas and the End of Military Rule* (London: Verso, 1984), 74.

¹³⁶ Then as now, the Argentine Constitution included a clause affirming the nation’s “legitimate and non-prescribing sovereignty over the Malvinas” islands. See Constitution of the Argentine Nation, Temporary Provisions, First Article, 22.

¹³⁷ Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, 375-376; Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 241.

¹³⁸ Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 191; Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 243.

¹³⁹ *The New York Times*, June 28, 1982, A3.

¹⁴⁰ Andrés Fontana, “De la crisis de las Malvinas a la subordinación condicionada: conflictos intramilitares y transición política en Argentina,” in Claudio Varas, ed., *La autonomía militar en América Latina* (Caracas: Editorial Nueva Sociedad, 1988), 41-43; Jordán, *El Proceso, 1976-1983*, 362-367; and Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 192.

¹⁴¹ Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 192. See also Leon Rozitchner, *Malvinas: De la guerra sucia a la guerra limpia*. Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1984.

¹⁴² Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 250.

¹⁴³ Asociación Americana de Juristas (Rama Argentina), *Argentina, juicio a los militares: documentos secretos, decretos, jurisprudencia* (Buenos Aires: AAJ, 1988), 19.

¹⁴⁴ Alonso, Elisalde, and Vazquez, *Historia: La Argentina del Siglo XX*, 282.

¹⁴⁵ Dabat and Lorenzano, *Argentina*, 155; Fontana, “De la crisis de las Malvinas a la subordinación condicionada” 50-51; and Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 193.

¹⁴⁶ *La Semana*, February 11, 1983.

¹⁴⁷ Argentina, Law 22.924, “Acta de Pacificación Nacional,” *Anales de la Legislación Argentina*, September 23, 1983. The Act of National Pacification was published by the Argentine press on September 24.

- ¹⁴⁸ In addition to winning twelve provincial races for governor, Peronists also captured enough seats in the Senate to prevent a Radical majority.
- ¹⁴⁹ Edgardo Catterberg, *Los argentinos frente a la política: Cultura política y opinión pública en la transición a la democracia* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Planeta, 1989), 101-102.
- ¹⁵⁰ Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 62;
- ¹⁵¹ Around the time of Argentine Independence in the early-nineteenth century, the Cabildo served as the seat of the local municipal government and ever since has remained a symbol of democracy in Argentina.
- ¹⁵² Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 251.
- ¹⁵³ Camarasa, Felice, and González, *El juicio*, 24-25; Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 199.
- ¹⁵⁴ *El Porteño*, July 1984, 12.
- ¹⁵⁵ The ten members of CONADEP's executive committee were Ricardo Colombres, René Favarolo, Hilario Fernández Long, Carlos Gattinoni, Gregorio Klimovsky, Marshall Meyer, Jaime de Nevaes, Eduardo Rabossi, Magdalena Ruiz Guinazú, and Ernesto Sábato.
- ¹⁵⁶ Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 70-71; José Díaz Colodrero and Monica Abella, *Punto Final: Amnistía or voluntad popular* (Buenos Aires: Puntosur, 1987), 239.
- ¹⁵⁷ CONADEP, *Nunca Más*, Prologue.
- ¹⁵⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the complaints of the Left and the Right, see Alison Brysk, "The Politics of Measurement: Counting the Disappeared in Argentina," in David Louis Cingranelli, ed., *Human Rights in Developing Countries* (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1994), Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 72; Foro de Estudio sobre la Administración de Justicia (FORES), *Definitivamente Nunca Más (La otra cara del informe de la CONADEP)* (Buenos Aires: FORES, 1985); and Hugo Fruhling, "La Defensa de los derechos humanos en el Cono Sur: Dilemas y perspectivas hacia el futuro," in Hugo Fruhling, ed., *Represión política y defensa de los derechos humanos* (Santiago, Chile: Academia de Humanismo, 1986); and Lewis *Guerrillas and Generals*, 205.
- ¹⁵⁹ Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 12.
- ¹⁶⁰ Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 71.
- ¹⁶¹ Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror*, 13.
- ¹⁶² Horacio Verbitsky, *Civiles y militares: memoria secreta de la transición* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Contrapunto, 1987), 107.
- ¹⁶³ Camarasa, Felice, and González, *El juicio*, 96-100; Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 207; and *Somos*, April 26, 1985, 14-15.
- ¹⁶⁴ Sergio Ciancaglini and Martin Granovsky, *Crónicas del apocalipsis* (Buenos Aires: Contrapunto, 1986); Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 207; Moncalvillo Fernandez, and Martin, *Juicio a la impunidad*; and Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 12.
- ¹⁶⁵ Camarasa, Felice, and González, *El juicio*, 193-194; Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 218.
- ¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶⁷ For a detailed account of the events of 1985 junta trial, see Ciancaglini and Granovsky, *Nada más que la verdad: El juicio de las juntas*.
- ¹⁶⁸ For the phrase the "little fascist," see Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 257.
- ¹⁶⁹ Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 131-132, 146; Camarasa, Felice, and González, *El juicio*, 67-70; Lewis, *Guerrillas and Generals*, 202; Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 251-252; and Verbitsky, *Civiles y militares*, 51.
- ¹⁷⁰ In an article entitled "Press: Disappeared Information," *El Porteño* interviewed *La Prensa's* Jesus Iglesias Rouco and four other leading print and broadcast reporters, each of whom was

asked the same five questions. *El Porteño*, October 1983, 5. For more on the role of the Argentine press during the Dirty War, see Knudson, "Veil of Silence," 93-112.

¹⁷¹ Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 127.

¹⁷² *La noche de los lapices* (The Night of the Pencils) focused on the disappearance of six high school students who had called for a reduction in the price of student bus fares. *Página Doce*, October 7, 1988; Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 129.

¹⁷³ Vicente Battista, *El libro de todos los engaños* (Buenos Aires: Bruguera, 1984); Aníbal Cedrón, *La memoria extraviada* (Buenos Aires: Buenos Aires: Editorial Cartago, 1985); Humberto Constantini, *De Dioses, hombrecitos y policies* (Buenos Aires: Bruguera, 1984); Mempo Giardinelli, *Qué solos se quedan los muertos* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1985); Jorge Landaburu, *Se lo tragó la tierra* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana/Planeta, 1985); Tomás Eloy Martínez, *La novela de Perón* (Buenos Aires: Legasa, 1985); Osvaldo Soriano, *No habrá más penas ni olvido* (Buenos Aires: Bruguera, 1984); and María Carmela Vázquez, *Luna sangrienta* (Quilla Yaár: Editorial Diaguíta, 1984).

¹⁷⁴ Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 128-129; Daniel López, ed., *Catalogo del nuevo cine argentino* (Buenos Aires: INCINE, 1986).

¹⁷⁵ *Nueva Sión*, September 21, 1985, 4.

¹⁷⁶ Puiggrós, *Que Pasó en la Educación Argentina*, 136.

¹⁷⁷ *La Nación*, March 25, 1986, 38.

¹⁷⁸ *Página Doce*, November 29, 1988; Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 134 and 243-244.

¹⁷⁹ Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 134.

¹⁸⁰ Antonio Castagno, *Los derechos humanos en la Argentina: Problemática de su docencia* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de Belgrano, 1988), 34-35.

¹⁸¹ Emilio Mignone, *Educación Cívica* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Colihue, 1986); Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 134-135.

¹⁸² For all references in this paragraph, see Congreso Pedagógico Nacional, *Un cabildo abierto para educar nuestro futuro: Informe final* (Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 1986).

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *La Nación*, March 25, 1986, 38. Also see José Juan Del Col, *La dimensión religiosa en la educación pública estatal a la luz del congreso Pedagógico Nacional* (Bahía Blanca: CUSSA, 1990), 77-84.

¹⁸⁵ *Nueva Sión*, October 19, 1985, 17.

¹⁸⁶ Rita Gardiol, "A Brief Overview of Argentine History Relative to its Jewish Population," in Rita Gardiol, ed., *The Silver Candelabra and Other Stories: A Century of Jewish Argentine Literature* (Pittsburgh: Latin American Literary Review Press, 1997), xxvi.

¹⁸⁷ CONADEP, *Nunca Más*, File # 2535.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, File # 2365.

¹⁸⁹ *La Razón*, July 12, 1985, 7; *Nueva Sión*, November 16, 1985, 13

¹⁹⁰ CONADEP, *Nunca Más*, File # 1132

¹⁹¹ CONADEP, *Nunca Más*, File # 3048; *La Razón*, July 12, 1985, 7; *Nueva Sión*, November 16, 1985, 13.

¹⁹² CONADEP, *Nunca Más*, File # 1131.

¹⁹³ *La Razón*, July 12, 1985, 7; *Nueva Sión*, November 16, 1985, 13.

¹⁹⁴ Most of the articles appeared in *El Porteño*, *Nueva Presencia*, *Nueva Sión*, *Página Doce*, and *Controversia*. For instance, see *El Porteño*, March 1984, 22; *Nueva Presencia*, January 7, 1978, 7 and 12; *Nueva Presencia*, January 12, 1979, 4; *Nueva Presencia*, January 19, 1979, 2; *Nueva*

Presencia, January 16, 1981, 12-13; *Nueva Presencia*, January 23, 1981, 7 and 18; *Nueva Presencia*, January 30, 1981, 7, 13, and 17; *Nueva Presencia*, February 13, 1981, 15; *Nueva Sión*, October 5, 1985, 10-11; *Nueva Sión*, November 16, 1985, 7-8, 16, and 23-26; Leonardo Senkman, "El antisemitismo y las crisis argentinas, 1959-1965," *Controversia* (December 1983): 7-69; and Ismael Viñas, "Los judíos y la sociedad argentina: un análisis clasista retrospectivo," *Controversia* (December 1983): 70-112.

¹⁹⁵ For biographical details on Meyer and Klimovsky, see Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror*, 99 and 107.

¹⁹⁶ For example, see Hilel Rubinson and Paul Warszawski, "Los derechos humanos en la educación argentina," Comisión Asesora Honoraria de la Capital Federal, Congreso Pedagógico Nacional, (Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 1986); Julio Liksenberg, "Objetivos y funciones de la educación para la realización plena de la persona en una sociedad participativa y pluralista," Segundo Congreso Pedagógico Nacional, (Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 1986); and Asociación Mutualista Israelita Argentina, "Bases para la reflexión de la comunidad judía argentina frente al Congreso Pedagógico Nacional," (Buenos Aires: AMIA, 1986).

¹⁹⁷ For details, see Law 23.592, "Ley Antidiscriminación en Argentina," *Anales de la Legislación Argentina*, August 3, 1988.

¹⁹⁸ The election and appointment of these and other well-qualified Jewish Argentines to political office also highlighted a broader trend under Alfonsín towards the incorporation of progressive intellectuals into political life and, by extension, the intellectualization of Argentine politics. For more on PRONDEC, see Marcos Aguinis et al., *Memorias de una siembra: Utopía y práctica del PRONDEC. Programa Nacional de Democratización de la Cultura*. Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1990.

¹⁹⁹ Diego Melamed, *Los judíos y el menemismo: Un reflejo de la sociedad argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2000), 18-22.

²⁰⁰ Dr. Antonio Brailovsky quoted in Paul Warszawski, Oscar Oszlak, and Alejandro Rofman, "El proceso de democratización en Argentina y los judíos argentinos," *Controversia* (March 1985): 20.

²⁰¹ For reference to the terms "lobby strategy" and "ghetto behavior," see *Mundo Israelita*, July 17, 1987, 4; for discussion of this sense of community "paranoia," see Alejandro Rofman's remarks in Warszawski, Oszlak, and Rofman, "El proceso de democratización en Argentina y los judíos argentinos," 18.

²⁰² Paul Waszawski quoted in Warszawski, Oszlak, and Rofman, "El proceso de democratización en Argentina y los judíos argentinos," 10.

²⁰³ Those words appeared on the coverpage of *Nueva Presencia's* first issue on July 9 (Argentine Independence Day), 1977. Edited by human rights activist Herman Schiller, *Nueva Presencia* embodied the spirit of Jewish Argentine pluralism that would flourish after the restoration of democracy in December 1983. See *Nueva Presencia*, July 9, 1977, 1.

²⁰⁴ For a valuable, albeit ideologically-charged discussion of what Jewish friends and families members went through in their attempts to meet with DAIA leaders during the Dirty War, see Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror*, 97-109.

²⁰⁵ Brailovsky quoted in Warszawski, Oszlak, and Rofman, "El proceso de democratización en Argentina y los judíos argentinos," 20.

²⁰⁶ Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas, *Informe especial sobre detenidos y desaparecidos judíos, 1976-1983* (Buenos Aires: DAIA, January 1984), 11.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 12 and Annexes 2, 4, & 9. I thank Moisés Camhi, then Treasurer of the DAIA, for providing me with additional relevant correspondences and materials not found in the above report.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., Annex 11.

²⁰⁹ For an excellent synopsis of Jewish critiques of the 1984 DAIA report, see Ignacio Klich, "Política comunitaria judía bajo las juntas argentines" in *Nueva Sión*, October 5, 1985, 16-17; Ignacio Klich, "Política comunitaria durante las juntas militares argentinas: La DAIA durante el proceso de Reorganización Nacional," in Leonardo Senkman, *El Antisemitismo en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editor de América Latina, 1986.)

²¹⁰ Juan Gurevich quoted in Warszawski, Oszlak, and Rofman, "El proceso de democratización en Argentina y los judíos argentinos," 29-30.

²¹¹ For Resnizky's article, see *Nueva Sión*, August 10, 1985, 10-11 and 19.

²¹² Juan Alberdi, *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la república argentina* (Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 1966).

²¹³ *Constitución de la Nación Argentina* (1853), Articles 2, 67, and 76. Article 76 was amended in 1995 to no longer require the President and Vice-President to be Catholic.

²¹⁴ For two principal reasons, DAIA leaders such as Resnizky tended to believe that the frequency and intensity of anti-Semitism in Argentina actually increased under democratic governments. First, they felt that a) because democratic governments tended historically to be more unstable than military ones and b) because democracy brought with it an increase in civic freedom and expression, anti-Semitic rhetoric and activity tended to rise and was more likely to go unchecked. Second, military regimes, in their overall quest to silence all forms of social conflict and unrest, were quicker to "crush" public manifestations of anti-Semitism. Of course, such a viewpoint fails to take into account the military's own anti-Semitic attitudes, as the Dirty War illustrated. For an excellent discussion of these debatable historical patterns, see Leonardo Senkman, *El antisemitismo en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1986); Leonardo Senkman and Mario Sznajder, *El legado del autoritarismo: derechos humanos y antisemitismo en la Argentina contemporánea* (Buenos Aires: Nuevohacer, 1995).

²¹⁵ For a particularly valuable discussion of such sentiments, see Warszawski, Oszlak, and Rofman, "El proceso de democratización en Argentina y los judíos argentinos," 10-11 and 21.

²¹⁶ Yael Zerubavel, "The Historic, the Legendary, and the Incredible: Invented Tradition and Collective Memory in Israel, in John Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 105-126.

²¹⁷ As previously noted, Las Madres and other human rights groups calculated approximately 30,000 people "disappeared," far higher than CONADEP's published figure of 8,961.

²¹⁸ Ernesto López, *El último levantamiento* (Buenos Aires: Legasa, 1988), 71-78; Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 98-101.

²¹⁹ Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 263-264.

²²⁰ Conferencia Episcopal Argentina, *Democracia, responsabilidad y esperanza* (Buenos Aires: Conferencia Episcopal Argentina, 1984), 7; Juan Rosales, "La reconciliación (o cómo convertir la 'guerra sucia' en 'guerra santa')," in Jorge Luis Ubertalli et al., *El complot militar: Un país en obediencia debida* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Dialéctica, 1987).

²²¹ Conferencia Episcopal Argentina, *Democracia, responsabilidad y esperanza*, 3-4; Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 148-152; and Mignone, *Iglesia y Dictadura*.

²²² David William Foster, "Jewish Buenos Aires," in *Buenos Aires: Perspectives on the City and Cultural Production* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1998), 132-149; Melamed, *Los judíos y el menemismo*, 18-22; *Nueva Sión*, May 4, 1985, 9; *Nueva Sión*, October 5, 1985, 10; *Nueva Sión*, November 16, 1985, 16; Warszawski, "Los dilemmas de la redemocratización," 121-122; and Warszawski, Oszlak, and Rofman, "El proceso de democratización en Argentina y los judíos argentinos," 20-22.

²²³ Rock, *Argentina 1516-1987*, 373.

²²⁴ Peronists won control of the Chamber of Deputies (Lower House) and 16 of 22 provincial races for governor. Daniel Lewis, *The History of Argentina* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001), 162.

²²⁵ Lewis, *The History of Argentina*, 163-165; Puiggrós, *Que Pasó en la Educación Argentina*, 139; Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, 271-273; and Thomas Skidmore and Peter Smith, *Modern Latin America*, 5th Edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 102.

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored Jewish and non-Jewish Argentine reactions and responses to four pivotal events over the course of the twentieth century: the 1919 *Semana Trágica*, the Catholic education decrees of the 1940s, the 1962 Sirota Affair, and the 1976-1983 Dirty War. The methodological decision to focus on four physically and/or culturally violent acts was intentional: while the passionate and emotive reactions and responses to those events may not reflect everyday political, cultural, and social norms in twentieth-century Argentine society, they provide a compelling opportunity to test the ever-changing meaning, boundaries, and limitations of *argentinidad* over the past century. Those four episodes help to reveal the challenges Argentines have faced in assimilating a religious minority and what those efforts suggest about how various groups have sought to define and control what it has meant to be “Argentine” over time.

Scholars such as Samuel Baily, Fernando DeVoto, José Moya and others have done an excellent job highlighting how Italian and Spanish immigrants have negotiated and navigated the competing demands of ‘ethnic’ preservation and ‘national’ integration in Argentina. However, Italians and Spaniards— who comprised 85% of the total immigrant population between 1870-1930— benefited from a religious, linguistic, and cultural familiarity with their host country that Jewish immigrants did not. The presence of Jewish immigrants and later Jewish Argentines challenged the efforts of Argentines to assimilate newcomers in ways Catholic immigrants and Catholic Argentines could not. Since the days of Alberdi and Sarmiento, Argentina has often championed itself as a nation of liberal secularism and religious tolerance, yet the overwhelming majority of Catholic immigrants were not in a position to test the civic and cultural boundaries of that rhetoric and reality the way Jews did. Jewish Argentines, more so than their Spanish and

Italian counterparts, forced a diverse cross-section of Argentines to ‘clarify’ their definitions of civic assimilation, national integration, and the place reserved for minorities within their visions of Argentina and *argentinidad*.

For many Argentine Jews, the 1919 *Semana Trágica*— notably the nativist-inspired Jewish pogrom in the neighborhoods of *Once* and *Villa Crespo*— shattered part of their “Argentine dream.” At the same time, the tremendous outpouring of non-Jewish support for the Jewish community in the months following the pogrom reaffirmed the community’s commitment to its adopted homeland and its young, but fragile liberal-secular democratic tradition. The immediate aftermath of the *Semana Trágica* also signaled the growing integration of the Jewish community into Argentine society; Jewish-led protest strategies were aimed at both reaching the broadest audience possible and underscoring common “Argentine” principles rather than particular “Jewish” traits or values. In the process, paradoxically perhaps, Argentine society “discovered”— to borrow the term employed by contemporary Argentine writer Joaquín Morales Solá— its Jewish community like never before. However amidst the positive elements to emerge from the *Semana Trágica*, there remained three principal causes for concern: 1) Jewish protest strategies brought to light ideological and class divisions between the mainstream Jewish community and more working-class Jewish leftists; 2) close associations among members of the police and military with nativist vigilante groups such as the *Liga Patriótica Argentina* and the troubling specter of *impunidad*; and 3) resistance by sympathetic political officials, including President Yrigoyen, to Jewish-led efforts to call attention to their ethnic or religious heritage— despite reminders from Jewish leaders that the January pogrom had specifically targeted Jews— that they felt threatened the nation’s non-pluralist civic ideal.

The Uriburu coup of 1930 was a watershed moment in twentieth-century Argentine history. In the short-term (1930-1945), it ushered in a period of authoritarian non-civilian rule

that culminated with the 1943-1945 Nacionalista military government. Quasi-fascist in nature, the 1943 nativist-minded military junta sought to fashion, more so than any other period in Argentine history, a *Nación Católica* or Catholic Nation. At the heart of their ideological project was the promulgation on December 31, 1943 of Decree 18.411, which mandated compulsory Catholic education in all public schools. The new decree, which became Law 12.978 under Perón in 1947, repealed Argentina's historic 1884 secular education law (Law 1420).¹ For many Argentines— Catholics and non-Catholics alike— Law 1420 was a collective pillar of their nation's longstanding mantra of civic tolerance and cultural acceptance; in the burgeoning ideological battle over the meaning and control of *argentinidad*, they rightfully viewed the 1943 Catholic education decree as an attack on Argentina's half-century-old liberal-secular democratic tradition. For Argentina's Jewish population, the memory of the *Semana Trágica*, the events of World War II, and the fact that the military sponsors of the 1943 decree were also great admirers of Franco, Mussolini, and even Hitler represented an added psychological blow.

Following nearly three decades of contentious political rule— from the *Decada Infame* (1930-1943) and the Nacionalista Revolution of 1943 to Perón's groundbreaking, yet polarizing populist experiment (1946-1955) and the military's subsequent anti-peronist backlash (1955-1958)— the Frondizi years (1958-1962) gave many Argentines hope that the thorny and (with the exception of Perón) undemocratic period of non-civilian rule had come to a close. Frondizi's conciliatory political approach and modernizing program known as *desarrollismo* captured the imagination of large segments of Argentina's middle and progressive-minded classes as well as that of key manufacturers and industrialists dissatisfied with the nation's outdated commercial infrastructure and persistent economic woes. Equally important, Frondizi placed a premium on the rule of law, national reconciliation, intellectual and cultural exchange, and the revival of secular education Law 1420. Together, Frondizi's economic and cultural platform injected into

Argentine society a renewed sense of hope and optimism that was heartening to many— even non-Frondizi supporters— after years of authoritarian, conflict-ridden, and circumscribed political rule that characterized much of the period since 1930.

Under Frondizi, Jewish Argentines enjoyed unprecedented internal cohesion, greater economic prosperity, heightened political participation, and a cultural climate in which they felt more comfortable than ever before openly identifying as both Jews and Argentines. Paradoxically, the Frondizi years were also characterized by a surge in anti-Semitic acts perpetrated largely by extremist groups such as *Tacuara* and *Guardia Restauradora Nacionalista*; between 1958-1964, there were over two hundred anti-Semitic incidents in Argentina. None galvanized Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines more than the Sirota Affair of June 1962. The Jewish community spearheaded efforts to denounce the tragedy, including its highly successful “Closed in Protest of Nazi Aggression” nationwide work-stoppage. A diverse cross-section of non-Jewish Argentines— from politicians, journalists, union workers, industrialists, and shopkeepers to physicians, lawyers, students, intellectuals, and religious and community groups— joined their Jewish compatriots in repeatedly and vociferously denouncing the attack on Graciela Sirota as a “barbarous act” that “defies all classification” and one that is altogether “un-Argentine.” Such expressions of support were emblematic of the growing acceptance and integration of the Jewish community into Argentine society that coincided with Argentina’s cultural and (short-lived) democratic awakening under Frondizi.

At the same time, the Sirota Affair raised some familiar concerns that underscored the boundaries and limitations that Jews faced in Argentine society. For one, in planning the June 1962 work-stoppage, Jewish leaders expressly avoided the slogan “Closed in Protest of *Anti-Semitism* in Argentina” to avoid offending non-Jewish sensibilities.² Judging by a number of supportive non-Jewish public remarks following the Sirota episode, including those of

Argentina's Subsecretary of the Interior Marcelo Acosta, that altogether sought to disassociate Argentina from intolerance, persecution, and anti-Semitism, DAIA leaders had correctly gauged the pulse of the nation. Second, as was true in 1919, the police not only failed to apprehend the Sirota culprits but also issued, including the chief of police himself, a series of culturally-insensitive remarks that together led many incredulous Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines to question the judicial process and rue what they regarded as the nation's ongoing specter of *impunidad*. Third, the Jewish community expressed disappointment at the slow and muted response of the Catholic Church to Sirota Affair and, in its estimation, the Church's reluctance at this important historical moment publicly to embrace greater religious tolerance.³ Finally, the Sirota Affair roughly coincided with the end of democratic rule and the military's return to power. Despite Frondizi's many shortcomings— notably his inability to stave off another recession— the 1962 coup signaled the fourth time since 1930 that the military had prevented a democratically-elected Argentine president from completing his constitutional term. Although the military would permit civilians Guido and Illia to govern briefly, by 1966 it once again assumed control of the Casa Rosada— this time for the better part of the next two decades. Indeed, Argentina's short-lived democratic awakening was over.

The "Dirty War" (1976-1983) forever changed Argentina. Led by President Videla, the military junta initiated on March 24, 1976 the infamous *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* that featured a state-sponsored campaign of kidnapping, torture, and execution of upwards of 30,000 Argentines, most of whom were aged sixteen to thirty-five. Although debate remains on the anti-Semitic character of the junta and its accomplices, a disproportionately high number of the desaparecidos— approximately 1,500— were Jewish. Economically, the junta, under the direction of Finance Minister Martínez de Hoz, sought to dismantle organized labor by reigning in Argentina's state-sponsored market subsidies and price controls and adopting a series of

neoliberal economic reforms that privileged both the nation's elites and foreign multinationals. While Argentina experienced a short-term "burst of affluence" during the *plata dulce* period (1976-1979), the economy once again crumbled and between 1976-1983 Argentina's external debt rose a staggering 400% from approximately \$6 billion to \$45 billion. Culturally, junta leaders and its Church allies sought to refashion, to paraphrase historian Alison Brysk, the ideological soul of the nation by defending and advancing "Western Christian" values. Reminiscent of the early 1940s, the junta strictly censored the media, arts and literature, and university life, promoted a rigid set of patriarchal values, abandoned secular education Law 1420, and re-introduced mandatory Catholic education in the classroom. In short, it endorsed a restrictive vision of argentinidad best encapsulated by Videla's notorious 1978 remark to a British journalist: "a terrorist isn't just someone with a gun or a bomb, but also someone who spreads ideas that are contrary to Western and Christian civilization."⁴

The significance of the Dirty War in Argentine history cannot be fully understood without taking into account the dramatic changes in Argentine society in the post-Dirty War era. For the great majority of Argentines, the election of President Alfonsín in December 1983 represented far more than a return to civilian rule. It also signaled for Argentines across the ideological spectrum a defining moment of individual and collective self-reflection centered around two enduring questions: how was such a national tragedy possible and what was needed to ensure it never happen again. The emerging consensus was, first, to examine profoundly the recent and distant past and, second, to forge a new kind of civic and cultural democracy in Argentina that would extend to many facets of daily life— from political participation and the future role of the military to national education and public debate. In the short-term, the 1984 publication of *Nunca Más* and the 1985 trial of the junta leaders were key and cathartic components of that national introspection. Equally significant, Argentina's leaders and

inhabitants sought to move away from the narrow and often bifurcated “black versus white,” good versus evil” worldview that many felt characterized not only the junta’s outlook during the recent Dirty War but also that of other military and even civilian governments dating back to the Uriburu coup of 1930.

The resulting political and cultural transformation— central to building what Argentines were now calling a *verdadera democracia* and epitomized by the 1985 National Pedagogical Congress— sought to embrace and promote like never before multiple and divergent views and opinions in society. Argentines were challenged to confront and interrogate the memory of the Dirty War; to forget was to fail democratically. The principles of liberty put forth in the 1853 Constitution and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights were staunchly defended. Violence and intransigence conceptually gave way to dialogue, flexibility, and a diversity of opinion. And for the first time in Argentine history, official and non-official expressions of *argentinidad*— so central to this post-war democratic initiative— championed a multicultural and pluralist spirit that was openly sensitive to Argentina’s ethnic and religious minorities and simultaneously appreciative of the nation’s Catholic tradition. Without romanticizing the treatment of all minorities, Argentina’s new democracy proved far more inclusive and respectful of Argentine Jews— as both Jews and Argentines— than ever before.

In the period since Alfonsín, few events tested Argentina’s newfound democratic and pluralist resolve more so than the 1994 AMIA bombing that shook the heart of Buenos Aires. If the March 17, 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires (killing 29 people) was regarded by many as an attack of a foreign entity on Argentine soil, the 600-pound car bomb that leveled the AMIA headquarters on Pasteur Street at 9:53AM on July 18 (killing 85 people) was internalized as a strike on both the Argentine Jewish community and the nation as a whole. The tremendous and immediate showing of national solidarity manifest itself in numerous ways,

most notably the July 21 march in the driving rain in Buenos Aires that brought together a diverse cross-section of 150,000 people— including representatives of all political parties, key labor leaders, and major industrialists— at the steps of Congress.⁵ More striking than the June 1962 Jewish-led work-stoppage to protest the Sirota Affair, the *La Tarde de las Paraguas* or *The Afternoon of the Umbrellas* quickly emerged as “a moment of honor in the history of Argentine human rights activism.”⁶ The next day’s newspaper headlines— “The AMIA Massacre: More than 150,000 Against Terrorism,” “Death of Fear,” and “A Pluralist and Silence Act Massively Repudiated Terrorism”— encapsulated the collective sentiments of a nation and its evolving post-Dirty War spirit.⁷

That evolving post-1983 spirit continued to take shape in the weeks, months, and years following the AMIA bombing. Under the heading “Thank You Christian Brothers and Sisters,” the Jewish monthly *Noti Fesela* published in August 1994 a selection of heartfelt letters of support from members of the Parish of *María Madre del Redentor*. In *Página 12*, novelist Tomás Eloy Martínez reminded Argentines that the AMIA atrocity could not be disassociated from the horrors of the Dirty War and urged his fellow citizens “not to fear” and “not to forget,” remarks iterated a month earlier in *Clarín* by former CONADEP president and *Nunca Más* author Ernesto Sábato.⁸ In November 1994, prominent Argentine musicians Luis Spinetta, Fito Páez, Patricia Sosa, Sandra Mihanovich, Juan Carlos Baglietto and Ignacio Copani sponsored a public concert (entitled *Recital para la Reconstrucción*) dedicated both to the victims of the AMIA bombing and to collecting funds for the construction of the new AMIA building.⁹ Such expressions of support and solidarity were widespread, all of which were encapsulated by a singular non-Jewish refrain echoed throughout Argentina: “Todos somos judíos” (“We Are all Jews”).

Jewish Argentine reactions also reflected the nation’s post-1983 political and cultural climate. Speaking to the 150,000 Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines gathered in the rain at the

Plaza del Congreso on July 21, 1994, DAIA President Rubén Beraja demanded that the government, in the presence of Argentine President Carlos Menem (1989-1999), put forth “clear and convincing proposals [of those responsible for the AMIA bombing], regardless of the political cost”— an unmistakable reference to the still unresolved 1992 Embassy bombing.¹⁰ In *Testimonios de una semana de horror* (Testimonials of a Week of Terror), Miguel Steuermann, director of the Jewish radio channel FM JAI, compiled a 300-page written record of the oral reactions of prominent Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines in the days immediately following the AMIA bombing; he did not mask his motivations for the publication: “Sale porque el silencio es complicidad” (“It is put forth because silence is complicity”).¹¹ The living legacy of the Dirty War was equally apparent in Dan Adaszko’s May 1995 ‘reflection’ in the Jewish weekly *Nueva Sión* entitled “El Argentino Post-Dictadura,” one of many articles on the dictatorship and its enduring aftermath published by Jews (and non-Jews alike) between the AMIA bombing and the 20th and 25th anniversaries (March 24, 1996 and March 24, 2001, respectively) of the onset of the Proceso.¹² Indeed, just as the Dirty War and its aftermath continually shaped Jewish and non-Jewish Argentine reactions to the AMIA bombing, so too did the AMIA bombing influence future ‘March 24’ national commemorative acts and ceremonies.

Jewish responses such as these— both Jewish and undoubtedly Argentine— reflected and extended the popular democratic and pluralist initiative that had taken shape under Alfonsín. Because the AMIA bombing occurred during an era in Argentina when cultural boundaries were more widely recognized and respected than ever before, Jewish Argentines continued, in the words of journalist Diego Melamed, “to embrace their Jewish identity without fear” while simultaneously “becoming increasingly Argentine, ...exhibiting clear national traits.”¹³ This certainly could be said of contemporary Jewish Argentine novelists such as Cecilia Absatz, Marcelo Birmajer, Isidoro Blaisten, Eugenia Calny, Santiago Kovadloff, Silvia Plager, and

Alicia Steimberg who, in the words of Rita Gardiol, “seem comfortable and at ease with their Jewish identity as Jews and reveal a greater freedom than ever before to reflect their Jewish heritage in their works or even simply to ignore the issues of cultural differences in favor of expressing their own individual personalities and perspectives.”¹⁴ The same could be said of a pair of published Jewish responses to the popular non-Jewish Argentine refrain “todos somos judíos.” In an August 1994 article in *Clarín*, Judge Roberto Wassner asserted instead, as the title made clear, that “We Jews are Argentines.”¹⁵ In an even more evocative editorial in *Página 12*, Rabbi Alejandro Bloch suggested that if Argentina, a nation born of immigrants, were truly to combat discrimination, embrace its minorities, and enhance its multicultural character it would be best to declare not that “we are all Jews,” but rather “Todos Somos Argentino!” or “We Are All Argentine.”¹⁶ On the surface, Bloch’s remark could be said to resemble the civic assimilationist ideal put forth by President Yrigoyen during his January 1919 audience with Jewish leaders in the aftermath of the Semana Trágica; the major difference in 1994 was that Bloch’s remark was predicated upon the changing public expressions of argentinidad that had emerged over the previous decade, if not the entire century as the Jewish community gradually moved from the margins to the mainstream of Argentine society.

Two final illustrations neatly reflect these pluralist tendencies among Argentine Jews to embrace openly and concomitantly their Jewish and Argentine heritage, which in turn further shaped the evolving national discourse of argentinidad. In the months following the AMIA bombing, the AMIA, in cooperation with *Clarín*, sponsored a series of art, photo, music, and writing contests aimed at high school and university students. The goal was to reach out to young Argentines, particularly non-Jewish Argentines, and have them reflect artistically on “the AMIA bombing and its [relationship to] the urban environment.” The contest was widely publicized by *Clarín*, including a September 19, 1994 multipage montage entitled “The

Construction of Memory” that featured, among other things, a history of the predominantly Jewish neighborhood of *Once* (where the AMIA was and is located) as well as a chronicle of the July 18 attack.¹⁷ The AMIA honored the winners by publicly displaying their works of art.

The second, meticulously conceived by Jewish Argentine writer and storyteller Eliahu Toker and Ana Weinstein, AMIA survivor and director of the institution’s Jewish Argentine research center (Centro de Documentación e Información Marc Turkow), was a stunning textbook entitled *Seis millones de veces Uno. El Holocausto (Six Million Times One— The Holocaust)*.¹⁸ With the hard-earned political and financial backing of the Menem government, in 1999 Toker and Weinstein succeeding in distributing 50,000 copies of this glossy pedagogical masterpiece (replete with maps, photos, tables, testimonials, and points for classroom discussion) to high schools throughout the country.¹⁹ Along with the 1993 Oscar-winning film *Schindler’s List*, this book, which included select discussion of the Nazi presence in Argentina, was instrumental in raising awareness of the Holocaust among the nation’s youth. And though no mention was made of the AMIA bombing in the book, the July 18, 1994 attack— publicly regarded in Argentina as ‘the worst anti-Semitic incident since the Holocaust’— nonetheless shaped public discussions of the Holocaust not unlike the commemorative connection between the AMIA bombing and the Dirty War.

Renowned Argentine novelist and commentator Santiago Kovadloff neatly asserted in 2002 that over the past century in Argentina “there has been an ongoing battle between those forces who wish to retain the discourse of exclusion and those who wish to embrace the discourse of inclusion that mirrors what the nation really is.”²⁰ Employing the experience of Argentine Jews as a case study, this dissertation has provided a historical portrait of both the discourse of exclusion and the discourse of inclusion, the latter of which has come to predominate in the period since 1983 in the nation’s century-long struggle over the meaning

and control of *argentinidad*. Yet as we have seen in Chapter 4 and will again witness in these final pages on the AMIA bombing, the discourse of exclusion— predicated upon, in the words of Edna Aizenberg, “a cluster of Hispano-Catholic ideals ultimately derived from medieval Iberia” that ultimately determined whether or not one was “truly Argentine”— continued to challenge the nation’s democratic, judicial, and pluralist aspirations.

Two unintentional, yet nonetheless telling illustrations of this exclusionary legacy were a pair of similar phrases uttered by some in the aftermath of the AMIA bombing. In sharp contrast to the popular refrain “*todos somos judíos*,” some Argentines inadvertently uttered, including a newscaster on Argentine television, “*muyeron judíos, pero tambien cayeron inocentes*” (“Jews died, but so too did innocent ones”) or “*entre las víctimas había judios, pero también argentinos*” (“among the victims were Jews, but also Argentines”).²¹ Responding to those remarks in 1994, Mario Fraust, a Jewish radio host and one of the co-authors of *Testimonios de una semana de horror*, perhaps put it best: without taking away from the tremendous show of solidarity directed towards the Jewish community in the aftermath of the bombing, declarations such as these “allowed it to be understood that the [presumably non-Jewish] passerby [who was killed on the street from the AMIA blast] was innocent, and he who was inside the AMIA building [presumably a Jew] was guilty. [Stated so] one could comprehend or even justify the killing of the Jews that day.”²² During my research visit to Argentina between 2000-2002, a number of Jewish Argentines conveyed a similar sense of frustration stemming from those two remarks.

However frustrating, it pales in comparison to the one issue that has long stirred the indignation of Jewish and non-Jewish supporters of the discourse of inclusion: to this day, the investigation into the AMIA bombing remains unresolved, no one has been convicted, and the families of the victims and the nation as a whole continue to await justice. Worse yet, from the

botched investigation and abhorrent collection of evidence in the days immediately following the July 18 attack, to the purported involvement of the provincial police in the bombing, to the presiding judge (Juan Jose Galeano) paying a suspect (Carlos Telleldin) \$400,000 to falsely accuse police officers of being involved in the bombing, to the outright dismissal of the AMIA trial in 2004 (that had begun in 2001) because the evidence was now deemed tainted, to the three-judge tribunal's public rebuke in 2004 of the former Menem government and former head of intelligence Hugo Anzorreguy for possibly being involved in a cover-up in the case, the AMIA case serves as a glaring "symbol of the failings of Argentina's judicial system."²³ When understood in historical context— police and military ties to the very vigilantes who carried out the January 1919 pogrom; the Catholic Nationalist government's admiration in the 1940s of Franco, Mussolini, and even Hitler; the police's failure in 1962 to apprehend the neo-Nazi youths responsible for tattooing a swastika on young Graciela Sirota's breast; the Dirty War's thousands of desaparecidos; Menem's presidential pardon of the junta leaders in 1990 (all had received life sentences in 1985); and the still unresolved 1992 Israeli Embassy bombing— for many the AMIA case symbolizes even more: a longstanding and disturbing pattern of impunidad that at once threatens the nation's democratic and pluralist initiative and, by extension, endorses the discourse of exclusion.

Internally, the Jewish community was not immune from some of the same philosophical divisions. From the July 21, 1994 Afternoon of the Umbrellas march onward, the rallying cry of victims, mourners, and protestors remained "Justicia!" or "Justice!" Appropriating and sustaining the inspiring commemorative practice of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, a new group called Memoria Activa (formed by three Jewish mothers who had lost children and husbands in the AMIA tragedy) began to rally each Monday at exactly 9:53AM in front of the Supreme Court. As the botched investigation into the AMIA bombing dragged on, Memoria

Activa increasingly began to direct its anger and frustration not only at the Menem government but also DAIA President Ruben Beraja and what it termed the Jewish establishment. In her now famous 1997 speech at the ceremony marking the third anniversary of the AMIA bombing, Memoria Activa's Laura Ginsberg, before 30,000 attendees, harshly criticized Menem, central figures in his administration, and Beraja for the government's failings in the AMIA investigation and the persistent absence of justice.²⁴

Reminiscent of the ideological conflict that emerged during and after the Dirty War between a younger generation of Jewish pluralist and the older institutional guard embodied by then DAIA President Nehemías Resnizky, that 1997 moment forever changed the tenor of the AMIA protests and public perceptions of both Menem, Beraja, and even the Jewish community. Growing criticism of Beraja for failing to speak out and prod Menem sufficiently reached dramatic new heights in 1998 when the Beraja-controlled *Banco de Mayo*, which housed the lifesavings of thousands of Jewish and non-Jewish Argentines, suddenly collapsed. For the Jewish and non-Jewish Argentine public, pre-1998 suspicions that Beraja had become too tangled-up economically and politically with the Menem government to advocate effectively on behalf of the Jewish community now seemed far more credible; for many, they were confirmed in 2004 when the three-judge tribunal that dismissed the AMIA case ordered an investigation into the actions of Beraja and Menem's Minister of Interior Carlos Vladimiro Corach (who is also Jewish), among others. Together, the countless positive Jewish and non-Jewish reactions and responses to the AMIA tragedy, the persistent absence of justice, and the negative publicity stemming from the Beraja affair contributed to Argentina's profound rediscovery of her Jewish community and, by extension, the nation as a whole.²⁵

Note from the author: on July 18, 2009, *The New York Times* reported that “Argentina’s Supreme Court validated much of the evidence of the initial investigation, which had previously [in 2004] been ruled inadmissible after an investigative magistrate [Galeano] tried to bribe a witness [Telleldin]. In its recent ruling, the court ordered an “end to impunity” and emphasized the need for Argentina to finally solve the case.”²⁶

¹ As discussed in Chapter 2, Perón’s 1947 support of Law 12.978 was more politically and less religiously motivated.

² Italics mine.

³ For instance, see Chapter 3, pages 49-50 of the dissertation.

⁴ *The Times* (London), January 4, 1978, 12; CONADEP, *Nunca Más*, 333; and Brysk, *The Politics of Human Rights in Argentina*, 35.

⁵ Similar though smaller marches took place throughout Argentina. For details, see *Clarín*, July 22, 1994, 8.

⁶ Edna Aizenberg, *Books and Bombs in Buenos Aires: Borges, Gerchunoff, and Argentine-Jewish Writing* (Brandeis University Press: Hanover, NH, 2002), 10; Ana Weinstein, Eliahu Toker, Lucas Lanza, and Analía Sivak Oyhanarte, eds., *AMIA: 18 de Julio y después / July 18th, the Aftermath* (CD-ROM) (Buenos Aires: Kehilnet, 1999).

⁷ Respectively, *Clarín*, July 22, 1994, 1; *Página 12*, July 22, 1994, 1; and *La Prensa*, July 22, 1994, 2.

⁸ *Página 12*, August 21, 1994, 32; *Clarín*, July 19, 1994. Cited in Aizenberg, *Books and Bombs in Buenos Aires*, 10.

⁹ *Página 12*, November 30, 1994, 25. The new AMIA building, constructed at the same location at 633 Pasteur Street, was completed in 1999.

¹⁰ *Clarín*, July 22, 1994, 2. While in the coming years Beraja became for many a *persona non grata* (discussed below), it is important to note that that was not the case immediately following the 1994 AMIA bombing. Many Argentines Jews initially regarded Beraja, a Sephardi who had been reelected as DAIA president in January 1994, as a new kind of DAIA leader who “professionalized” the organization in part by establishing more direct channels of communication with the (Menem) government than most of his predecessors.

¹¹ Miguel Steuermann, Lea Faust, and Mario Faust, *Testimonios de una semana de horror* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Jai, 1995), 9.

¹² *Nueva Sión*, May 5, 1995, 6.

¹³ Diego Melamed, *Los Judíos y el Menemismo: Un reflejo de la sociedad argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2000), 14-18.

¹⁴ Rita Gardiol, “A Brief Overview of Argentine History Relative to its Jewish Population,” in Rita Gardiol, ed., *The Silver Candelabra and Other Stories: A Century of Jewish Argentine Literature* (Pittsburgh: Latin American Literary Review Press, 1997), xxix-xxx.

¹⁵ *Clarín*, August 2, 1994.

¹⁶ *Mitzva* 2:7 (August 1994): 3.

¹⁷ *Clarín*, September 19, 1994.

¹⁸ Eliahu Toker and Ana Weinstein, *Seis millones de veces Uno. El Holocausto* (Buenos Aires: Ministerio del Interior, 1999).

¹⁹ Melamed, *Los Judíos y el Menemismo*, 55-56.

²⁰ While the idea is that of Santiago Kovadloff, the English-language quotation employed here belongs to Edna Aizenberg, preeminent literary critic and author of the excellent study *Books and Bombs in Buenos Aires*. See Santiago Kovadloff, "Por un future imperfecto," in Horacio Ernesto Eviner and Edgardo Fossati, eds., *Club del Progreso, 1852-2002: sesquicentenario* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Lumiere, 2002), 141-144; Aizenberg, *Books and Bombs in Buenos Aires*, 8.

²¹ Daniel Lvovich, *Nacionalismo y antisemitismo en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Javier Vergara, 2003).

²² Mario Faust, "No Solo Judíos, También Inocentes," in Steuermann, Lea Faust, and Mario Faust, *Testimonios de una semana de horror*, 307.

²³ The quotation is from Alexei Barrionuevo, "Inquiry on 1994 Blast at Argentina Jewish Center Gets New Life," *The New York Times*, July 18, 2009, 1. The remainder of the information here stems from Argentine journalist Sergio Kiernan's excellent reports on the AMIA case published by the American Jewish Committee. In particular, see Sergio Kiernan, *Still no Justice: Four Years After the AMIA Bombing* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1998); Kiernan, *Seeking the Truth: The AMIA Bombing Goes to Trial* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2001); Kiernan, *A Tangled Road to Justice: The AMIA Trial Nine Years Later* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2003); and Kiernan, *A Cover-Up Exposed: The 1994 AMIA Bombing Case Hits the Wall* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 2004).

²⁴ Aizenberg, *Books and Bombs in Buenos Aires*, 11-12; Memoria Activa, *Cuatro años de impunidad* (Buenos Aires: La Página, 1998), 16; and Laura Ginsberg in Gisela Heffes, ed., *Judíos, argentinos, escritores* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Atril, 1999), 307-318.

²⁵ Melamed, *Los judíos y el menemismo*, 11.

²⁶ Alexei Barrionuevo, "Inquiry on 1994 Blast at Argentina Jewish Center Gets New Life," *The New York Times*, July 17, 2009, 1.

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