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Women's organizations and Jewish orphanages in Buenos Aires, 1918–1955

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Community organizations among Jewish populations in the Diaspora have always served to bind immigrants and long standing populations together. This has been particularly true in countries like Argentina, a nation with an official relationship with the Catholic Church, and a reputation for tolerating anti-Semitism. What is often missing from the studies of community solidarity is the role of female Jewish philanthropists. Their story is more than an effort to remember important women. It is part of the process of incorporating gender relations into Jewish Diaspora history. The following is the story of women who operated Jewish orphanages in Argentina in the first half of the twentieth century. It provides not only important community building, but also challenges some assumptions about the nature of anti-Semitism in Argentina, and the role of the Peronist government in those activities.

Before World War I, despite the presence of a lively and vigorous Jewish community in the Argentine capital, Buenos Aires, there were no institutions to care for orphaned, abandoned or needy Jewish children. A 1918 study published by renowned Argentine public health physician Emilio R. Coni on the state of welfare services in Buenos Aires listed more than one hundred institutions, public and private, to help single mothers and poor or orphaned children. Most were founded by private individuals, often women with the help of the Catholic Church, but increasingly the municipal government of Buenos Aires, along with secular elite groups, also offered their services to needy families. Furthermore different religious and national groups such as the British, Irish, Spanish and French, as well as Freemasons founded

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their own orphanages. When it came to the Jewish community (which Coni identified as the *colectivdad rusa* – the Russian community) he noted that it consisted of 28,436 persons, and that within the city of Buenos Aires they were the third largest immigrant group, although they were not listed has operating any major charitable institution.[1]

Among the Jewish organizations sponsored by the immigrant community, he noted that Bikur Joilim, a Jewish workers' mutual association, was the oldest, having been founded in the late nineteenth century, and had over two thousand members. Other groups were more religious and educational in nature, such as Talmud Torah which subsidized the religious instruction of poor students and the Congregación Israelita Argentina. The later had been founded in 1868 to build a synagogue in the city. In 1900 the Ezrah society was founded to provide aid to the poorer members of the community, as well as to collect funds to build a Jewish hospital.[2]

This paper deals with two major groups of Jewish philanthropic women who labored to provide housing, religious instruction, and secular education for the orphans and poor children in their community, as well as for refugee Jewish orphans during the two World Wars. The first was the group eventually known as the Sociedad de Damas Israelitas de Beneficencia They operated the Asilo Argentino de Huérfanas Israelitas. The second group, the Idischer Frauenhilfsverein, founded the Hogar Infantil Israelita which operated a day care center and kindergarten for poor Jewish families. The first group began operations in 1908 and continued until 1980. The second opened its home in 1931 in midst of the depression, and also operated facilities well into the 1980s. These were not the only Jewish child welfare organizations, but they were the ones operated principally by women. They are also interesting because they chose different paths during the Peronist years, yet both reached their moments of glory during that time period, a fact that sheds new light on Peronism and the Jewish community.

Among other Jewish organizations mentioned by Coni, several women's groups showed indications that they were following the path already established by Catholic women's groups that provided services to needy parturient women and their children. The Aid Society of Israelite Women (La Sociedad de Socorros de Damas Israelitas), an association within the Congregación Israelita Argentina, in 1908 formed to help Jewish childbearing women and new born children. Initially they limited their program to providing medical help, clothing and food. In 1912 their goals were also adopted by another group called the Israelite Female Beneficence Society (Sociedad Israelita Femenina

de Beneficencia) who lent small amounts of money to the poor as well as helped parturient women. It is possible that the two groups were in fact the same group, as Coni noted that the Society of Israelite Women were contemplating the establishment of an "*asilo infantil*" or children's home.

According to a fragment of a magazine article published in a Yiddish version of *Caras y Caretas*, the idea of a Jewish orphanage resulted from the 1915 appearance in Buenos Aires of a Jewish widow from the Carlos Casares colony who had various orphans with her. She called upon a Sra. Clara de Banadir, to find space in an orphanage for the children. Clara de Banadir became the first president of the *Sociedad Israelita Protectora de la Infancia*, a short-lived organization. That year they held a fund raising event at the theater of Max Glücksmann, the future patron of the Asilo Argentino de Huérfanas Israelitas.[3]

The first Jewish orphanage for boys and girls opened in 1918 as an adjunct to a nursing home. The following year the Jewish girls' orphanage opened and became the special responsibility of the Sociedad de Socorros de Damas Israelitas, which in 1927 was renamed the Sociedad de Beneficencia de Damas Israelitas. Aiding the women in the search for a suitable property were four distinguished male members of the Congregación Israelita, specifically Hermann Goldenberg, president of Congregación Israel, Gustavo Weil, Max Glücksmann and S. Krämer. Hermann Goldenberg, purchased the building at auction for the women, and Gustavo Weil contributed 1,000 pesos in his wife's name. President Hipólito Yrigoyen of Argentina sent his personal representative to the opening ceremony on December 23, 1919. The intendente (mayor) of Buenos Aires then attended the celebration honoring the home's first anniversary, and Argentine president, Marcelo T. de Alvear attended the inauguration of the new building constructed specifically for the asylum on Arévalo Street, in March, 1927. It marked the first time an Argentine president attended personally an official function of the Jewish community.[4]

The asylum filled an important need within the community, and shortly after opening, it became clear that the dormitory space was too small. In response to this problem the Chevra Keducha Aschkenazi Society donated 5,000 pesos to help the group, and the Buenos Aires Municipal Council offered a 5,000 peso subsidy to deal with the large numbers of children seeking entry. By 1923 when it became evident that the impact of post World War I immigration to Argentina meant that even the expanded facilities were too small, the male leaders at the Congregación Israelita once again offered to help by lending them

21,973.06 pesos without interest to construct a new building on land purchased in the Palermo neighborhood. That same year the Argentine government began to subsidize the orphanage with an annual stipend of 1,800 pesos.[5]

The women raised money for the orphanage by organizing raffles, having dances and *kermesses* (fairs where money was raised through raffles, races, etc.), asking for donations from the Jewish communities of the interior and receiving special donations from the wealthier members of the congregation. A frequent contributor in the early years was the pioneer cinematographer, Max Glücksmann, who also often held special benefit performances in his movie theater the Grand Splendid. His wife Rebecca became fourth president of the Sociedad in 1914, replacing Sra. Francisca R. de Krämer, whose husband helped select the site for the first orphanage. Rebecca R. de Glücksmann remained president until 1954, providing unwavering assistance to the home.[6] Her lengthy administration, however, led to criticisms within the Jewish community that a select group of rich members were controlling the orphanage for their own status satisfaction. This meant that Buenos Aires collections and donations beyond the circle of founders and those who attended the parties at the fancy hotels rarely met either needs or expectations, and the Damas had to hire a man to travel to the interior to collect money from the Jewish communities scattered throughout Argentina.[7] However, well into the 1950s no one stepped up to oppose Sra. de Glücksmann, and she continued to run the organization with the unpaid help of hundreds of women and men.

Despite the elitist accusations lodged against the board of the orphanage, the women's group contributed to the welfare of the Jewish community in many ways. They adopted as their motto and repeated in each report: "We engage in welfare work not for charity, but for human solidarity. Poor people who are helped by us in their moment of need tomorrow will be able to give aid to others. And, as a consequence of these principles no one should ask for help they don't need so that they end up making charity a vice." [No hacemos beneficencia por caridad, sino por solidaridad humana. De manera que el menesteroso de hoy, mediante nuestra ayuda en un momento crítico de su existencia, sea mañana, en circunstancias propicias, protector de otros necesitados. Como consecuencia de estos principios, nadie debe implorar ayuda si realmente no la precisa, para no dengenerar y hacer la caridad un vicio.] The Damas followed this principle when they shared the expenses of sewing machines and small business loans to women with the Sociedad Ezrah. Besides sewing layette clothing for poor pregnant women, they

also attended Jewish immigrants of both sexes who arrived from Europe during and after the war. Among these were 30 female Ukranian orphans whose presence at the orphanage led the women to request double the annual contribution of each patron as well as to plan the construction of a new wing at the property on Curupaligüe Street.[8]

In 1923 the Sociedad de Protección a los Inmigrantes Israelitas invited the women running the asylum to collaborate and help immigrant women obtain jobs. To that end, they donated sewing machines for a workshop in downtown Buenos Aires. The Damas of the girls' orphanage were also invited to join an alliance of several Jewish philanthropies, a plan intended to rationalize Jewish philanthropy, promote greater efficiency, and end the need for each group to support a variety of social events and campaigns. Instead the umbrella organization would charge a single membership quota.

The Damas opposed closer association with the various groups for several reasons. First, they doubted with a system of dues collection would yield adequate income. Second, they argued that the only paid position in the group was the woman who directed the orphanage–the other employees served without recompense. Finally, they resisted joining a group that would identify itself as principally associated with the Ashkenazi community. Even though most of the members of the Congregación Israelita were of Russian origin, the orphanage not only accepted children regardless of their links to Ashkenazi or Sephardic groups, they also relied on Sephardic groups to promote special activities to support the institution. And finally, they believed that their social agenda offered a form of sociability that would be destroyed by such an alliance, and no other community in Argentina relied upon an umbrella group for philanthropy.[9] The Damas perceived of themselves not only as members of the Ashkenazi Jewish community, but also as part of a national and religious movement of Argentine women.

In this way the Jewish community, led by prominent women, joined other Argentine groups in the battle against infant mortality and child abandonment by poor women. Since 1823 the Sociedad de Beneficencia de la Capital (The Beneficent Society of the Capital) created by the Argentine liberal Bernadino Rivadavia operated the orphanages and child welfare institutions originally expropriated from the church. Supposedly disconnected from the Catholic Church, the elite women's group in fact turned to nuns in the 1880s to operate their various orphanages and hospitals.[10]

For the Jewish community of Buenos Aires, the risks of relying on Sociedad de Beneficencia controlled orphanages were high, because

all infants without proof of baptism were baptized and thus lost to the Jewish community. A 1914 article in the publication of the Ezrah society clearly noted this problem:

> Our collectivity, whose advancement can be tracked year by year and which already has resulted in mutual associations . . . still completely lacks an asylum that collects and cares for our orphaned or abandoned children.
>
> Perhaps we justify this omission because there already are many asylums in the country. But we must keep in mind that these charitable institutions pose a grave risk for the continued independence of certain religious traditions because far from being lay associations, on the contrary, they are eminently Catholic, run by nuns who are strongly influenced by a proselytizing mission. And already there have been cases of baptized Israelite children.

Equally disturbing to the Jewish community was the reality that if a mother had to choose between baptism and misery that could lead to death, maternal instinct to keep their babies alive led to baptism.[11]

In 1926 the plight of Jewish children in Catholic orphanages still preoccupied the Jewish Community. Members of the board of the boys' orphanage met with Rabbi Men on July 18 to discuss the situation. They estimated that there were approximately 300 Jewish children in Catholic orphanages, but it would be very difficult both politically and financially to retrieve them. The financial considerations related to the fact that the Jewish orphanages would be asked to pay for each child's room and board at 15 to 20 pesos per month for their entire stay in other institutions. The Jewish orphanages had barely enough money to pay for children in their care, let alone rescue others.[12]

The Jewish Damas were also cognizant of the problem facing Jewish children who entered state orphanages. In 1931 they published an advertisement to encourage members of the community to become patrons of the girls' orphanage by arguing that "The Girls' Orphanage saves hundreds of souls for Judaism, because without its help they would be condemned to conversion or at least a loss of familiarity with Judaism (*la desjudaización*)."[13]

For the Jewish women charity work offered several attractions. First of all their good deeds acknowledged and reaffirmed their understanding of Jewish solidarity in Buenos Aires. Secondly, they often organized programs along with their husbands, and their presence as married couples further reinforced their status within the community. Finally, they created a social space within the Jewish community that paralleled

that of the Catholic Sociedad de Beneficencia de la Capital, whose name they adopted in 1927, and the Patronato de la Infancia, another charity organized by the city of Buenos Aires in 1890 and operated by men with a group of equally elite women supporting them. It was these groups that initiated yearly collections in neighborhoods, and special occasions that served as fund-raisers. Jewish women who copied these groups legitimated their presence in some of the most elite social spaces in the city, particularly the Plaza Hotel and the Alvear Palace Hotel. The fact that these women had no problems sponsoring activities at elegant hotels indicated that Buenos Aires high society accepted this Jewish women's group at a time when anti-Semitism was increasingly visible.[14]

While the Jewish Damas patterned their name and social activities on the Catholic model, their attitude toward their charges, as well as their willingness to acknowledge their husbands' roles in their activities, set them apart. Historically the Catholic Damas of the Sociedad de Beneficencia de la Capital were very wary of sharing power and/or authority with anyone. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries they vigorously opposed efforts to remove female education and the medical care of poor women from their responsibility. Their disputes with male public health physicians became notorious, and in the 1930s and 1940s they struggled with national officials who wanted to incorporate the Sociedad's institutions into the nascent national welfare system.[15] They rarely acknowledged any role played by their husbands, and only relied on the recommendations of male legal counsel and powerful politicians when necessary. If friends or relatives left property or money to the Society, the donations were never discussed in terms of family.

These women could afford to publicly ignore their husbands because their married last names, their *apellidos*, automatically identified them with their male relatives, and linked them to the most socially, politically identifiable individuals in the country. The Jewish Damas, on the other hand, were part of a group that was officially separated from Argentine aristocracy by religion. Therefore the women needed more than *apellidos* – they needed the physical, and often the financial support of their spouses to retain their support within the Jewish community.

Equally important, the Damas of the Sociedad de Beneficencia de la Capital and those in the Patronato de la Infancia never felt a close personal bond with their charges. A wide class gulf always separated the abandoned and orphaned children from their guardians. Indeed, these

Damas refused to give unnamed infants last names, thereby relying on foster parents to permit their wards to adopt their last names. The rest had to make do with their matriculation numbers or, upon leaving the orphanages, adopting the last name of *expósito* or foundling, to define their social standing. When they spent time with the children, it was usually to mark official holidays or to make a public spectacle of charity.[16]

In contrast, the Jewish Damas often celebrated the religious holidays at the orphanages with their family and charges. They organized parties attended by some of the most respected members of the Jewish community and their families. They encouraged members of the community to celebrate events such as a bar mitzvah by offering hot chocolate to the orphans and participating in the act with their family and friends. The women insisted that the children address them informally, using "tu" rather than using the impersonal third person form "Usted."[17] They also refused to place children in foster care. This meant that all children who entered as foundlings or orphans, stayed until the age of majority–22–or married. In 1927 the first female orphan, Dora Verona, was married. In celebration the Temple waived all fees, and the chief Rabbi, Samuel Halphon, married the couple in a ceremony attended by many people from the Jewish community. After the wedding, there was a luncheon and reception, and the bride received a complete trousseau, a gift from each woman on the commission of the Damas. Gustavo Glaser gave furniture as a gift, along with donations from all over Argentina. As they put it, "In a word, the Israelite collectivity married off an orphan in the same way they would have married off a daughter."[18]

Education consisted of religious and practical courses, as well as the basic curriculum up to the sixth grade, as Argentine laws required. The girls learned Hebrew and Yiddish, and each year they had to pass public examinations. Local newspapers rarely mentioned the quality of education boys received. Yet they did recommend that Jewish girls study language, biblical episodes, and Jewish spirituality. Unlike the boys, girls did not publicly celebrate becoming "benei mitzvah" (often at a collective ceremony for twenty or so orphans, followed by a big public party), which was preceded by a course of study and other ritual preparations. This gave reason specially to emphasize that girls, too, be educated in Jewish ways and knowledge. It would not be surprising to discover that the girls in the orphanage eventually knew more of Jewish ritual and religious matters than did Jewish girls reared in private homes where religious education was strictly a family matter.[19]

This does not mean that the girls were reared to be purely, and properly, middle class. They were taught sewing, just like the girls in the Sociedad de Beneficencia's charge or the waifs rounded up by the police and sent to the Women's Correctional Facility. Older girls were sent to secretarial and nursing schools. Within the asylum, by 1943 the girls were taught classes from kindergarten to sixth grade, as well as nursing, decorative arts, secretarial and bookkeeping skills.[20]

The outbreak of World War II presented new challenges for the Jewish Damas. As refugees began to arrive in Argentina, more help was needed to clothe and house orphans. In 1944, for example, efforts were made to bring in 1,000 refugee children. That year, however, only 65 were admitted. Then in 1947, members of the Jewish community approached the Peronist Minister of Foreign Relations to urge the government to admit 1,000 children. The Peronist government supported the request, but the children were never allowed in. The thought of serving the Jewish community by providing a refuge for war victims encouraged the Damas to believe that there would always be a need for the orphanage.[21] In addition to the orphanage, the Damas bought small businesses for adults, obtained sewing machines and other work implements, as well as jobs, and paid the rent for those who lacked funds. They had a social worker, Aída Cherniak, and two women, Sofía S. de Reinoff and Rosa R. de Goldfarb, who served as inspectors and distributed layettes (ajuares) and clothing for the women. By that time they received orphans from Buenos Aires, the interior, and neighboring countries. Still thinking orphans would arrive in droves from Europe, they decided to construct a fifth dormitory, and continued their fund raising activities with annual collections, teas, and dances at the best hotels.[22]

The 1943 revolution, alongside the growing demands on the women's group, should, according to the traditional historiography of Peronism, have induced the Damas to reduce their activities. But the Jewish community's hopes of admitting 1,000 Jewish children to Argentina, along with Argentina's subsequent recognition of Israel meant that relations between Jewish charities and the government were not as strained as they were for the Sociedad de Beneficencia, which was intervened in 1946.

In 1943, the Asilo Israelita de Huérfanas celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary, to which *El Mundo Israelita* devoted an entire page. For their part, the Damas continued to expand their activities. In 1945, the women purchased a rural property in General Belgrano, province of Córdoba, so that the orphaned girls could have summer vacations.

The local committee in Córdoba took charge of the property. The Damas also began to receive inheritances from the community that had supported them for so long, and they continued to receive a national subsidy as well as occasional donations such as 2,500 pesos from the YPF, the state petroleum monopoly.[23]

This trajectory continued under Peronism. The 1950–1951 report of the society mentions that the women had distributed 27,835 pesos subsidies to poor Jewish people in Argentina, with only 4,560 pesos going to support babies. They also donated money to pay rent and cover medical bills as well as donate clothing and shoes. Furthermore, in a direct imitation of Eva Perón, who had her own charitable foundation, and had established *hogares de tránsito*, or special hostels for women who migrated from the Argentine interior, the Jewish Damas opened up their own hostel for homeless adult Jewish women living in Buenos Aires. These women were also offered adult education religious classes. Clearly the Damas did not want Jewish women to enter the Peronist homes for transient adult women. Perhaps this also explained why the annual financial report did not include a national subsidy as in past years.[24] In any case, the Asilo Argentina de Huérfanas Israelitas survived the war years and was neither intervened nor taken over by the government like the Catholic Damas.

The experience of the Sociedad de Damas Israelitas de Beneficencia was not, however, unique. Another group of Argentine Jewish women, this time Ashkenazi and Yiddish speaking, banded together to found a home called the Hogar Infantil Israelita (Jewish Infants' Home). The purpose of these women, who formed the *Idischer Frauenhilfsverein*, was to establish a temporary home for young children whose parents were ill, worked specially long hours, were being hospitalized, or had died. This new foundation grew out of earlier efforts by these same women during the depression to aid poor Jewish women and needy mothers of the newborn. The competition with the Sociedad de Damas and its orphanage was superficial, at the most. The *Idischer Frauenhilfsverein*'s work evolved into a multi purpose organization that operated a daycare center and kindergarten for poor Jewish immigrants and which lasted through the 1980s.

The founders, notably Rosa G. de Gierson, who eventually was named president and Rebecca de Glücksmann, who served for many years, also included Ana S. de Garensky, Tary B. de Svartz, Esther de Fischer, Sofía de Milleritsky and Paulina Goldfarb and Eva Priluk. Esther de Fischer was the first president. They originally intended to admit children on a case by case basis. The kindergarten received

children between the ages of 4 to 6, who were brought to school each day by bus. Within one year the home provided day care facilities for seventy children under the age of six in the Flores neighborhood of Buenos Aires.[25]

The records of the Hogar Infantil initially recorded all the cases they encountered. Often the petitioners responded to a letter of solicitation from some member of the community. This was the case with "N.G.," a five year old whose father was having an operation in the Jewish Hospital. Another infant had been abandoned at someone's door, while a one-year old girl was admitted because her mother had to work; the recommender was the *Chevra Kadisha*. The women paid for circumcisions for boys, and generally took in children of hospitalized parents. They drew the line for acceptance at unweaned babies, although only until they opened an infants section in 1934. They did provide health information to immigrant women, calling upon them and speaking Yiddish. They also published pamphlets in Yiddish. The women accepted Jewish children from the interior to justify the donations they solicited there, and they even gave monthly contributions to the local police home for children.[26]

Since the children in their care had parents, most stayed at the institution or attended the daycare facilities as needed. Thus when they were approached by individuals seeking a child to adopt, they were quick to note that they did not deal with such issues. Indeed, there was no Jewish institution caring for children who sent them into foster care or adoption. They were quite willing, however, to care for children in abusive families. In a case that occurred on February 2, 1934, Sra. Fischer reported to the committee that she went to visit with a woman living at Avellaneda 925. After talking with the mother of several children, Sra. Fisher decided that the woman was in bad health and mistreated by her husband. Therefore it was prudent to take in the children.[27] Many cases such as this one was recorded each week by the group.

Like the Sociedad de Damas Israelitas de Beneficencia, the Idischer Frauenhilfsverein raised money through dances at fancy hotels, but more often they held events on the grounds of the Hogar, a tactic that saved them much of the criticism of upper-class behavior leveled at the former group.[28] In fact, there never seemed to be any accusations of elitism lodged against these women. Perhaps this was because, from their inception, they associated themselves with a noted physician, Dr. Jaime Favelukes, who often spoke for the women at important occasions. Favelukes represented the Jewish community and championed the

use of social workers to help immigrant families at the First Congress of Social Work and Infancy held in 1932. The following year he gave a similar talk to the First National Conference on Social Work. In that talk he argued that the effectiveness of social workers was limited because they were considered paid charity workers, rather than professionals.

To reinforce his ideas concerning immigrant families, ones that included an ability to speak the language of the family, as well as the need to understand the living conditions and situations confronting the immigrant poor, Favelukes told the audience how he had discovered social work after 1925 when he was providing medical services for several Jewish organizations. At that time Dr. Favelukes headed the *Liga Israelita Argentina contra la Tuberculosis* (The Argentine Jewish Association Anti-Tuberculosis League) where a social workers' office took shape. He soon understood the merits of trained specialists and in 1932, when he became President of the Jewish hospital, *Hospital Israelita Ezrah,* he opened a similar office. With these credentials, his association with the Hogar identified the institution as progressive and professional.[29]

In 1933 that the organization acknowledged the need for a dormitory for infants (*sala cuna*), and even before they could add one to the property, they began to hire wet nurses to help mothers "whose husbands have taken up drinking and cannot support the family."[30] Unlike the orphanage, the Asilo, however, these children did not remain until they were grown, but returned to their families as soon as possible.

By 1938 the missions of the women who operated the Hogar Infantil Israelita seemed to be very similar to those who ran the Asilo de Huérfanas. Yet, when they were approached about possibly unifying efforts, the Frauenhilfsverein declined. Instead, in 1940, they proposed statutes for the Institution, and defined themselves as an organization of Israelite women who operated a children's home designed to help indigent parents of preschool children. They also planned to create similar institutions throughout the capital city, as well as to operate a ward for children under age two.[31] By that time the home had moved to a new, larger location at José Bonifacio 2016, and its character as a kindergarten became more clearly defined, with more than ninety children, most of them from working class families, attending. The doors of the Hogar were opened to Sephardi children, not Ashkenazim alone, although the majority of children were of Ashkenazi origin.[32]

In 1936 Ana de Gavensky became president of the Hogar. The institution cared for 100 to 130 children each day, and they had two buses that transported the children from the center to their homes. At

that point they owned no buildings of their own, but instead relied on renting from others. They began a building campaign that continued into the 1940s. Eventually they purchased a building at Monte 2150. By 1946 the organization was swamped with requests to help children, and they began to contemplate opening another institution.[33]

To support their activities, the Damas of the Hogar Infantil organized collections similar to many Buenos Aires child welfare charities. Each year there was a campaign just before the Jewish New Year to pay for gifts of food, and they relied on bridge tournaments, dances and an annual dinner. Equally important were individual contributions by donors which were always mentioned in extensive lists published in the Hogar's annual reports along with many pages of paid advertisements by members of the Jewish community, a tactic also pursued by the Sociedad de Damas Israelitas de Beneficencia. From time to time they also solicited contributions at synagogues during important Holy Days such as Yom Kippur. To pay off the debt on the new Monte Street property (subsequently renamed Baldomero F. Moreno 2150), they created local committees in the interior so that women there organization fund raisers there. Evidently the Jewish community in the interior faithfully supported the charities in Buenos Aires.[34]

Between December 1, 1930 and 1967, more than 4,048 children attended the day schools or lived in the dormitories of the Hogar Infantil. Children often attended the day school with their siblings. Although the great majority were identified as Argentines, because they were born in Buenos Aires, of the immigrant children, the most frequent nationality was Polish. Other children were Cuban, North American, Uruguayan, Brazilian, Greek, Galitziano (sic), Lithuanian, Chilean, German, Austrian, and Palestinian. Children from Germany and Austria stood out in the late 1930s. A number of Argentine children had Syrian parents, indicating the Hogar's commitment to the Sephardic community. By the 1950s many of the parents were second-generation Argentines, indicating that many in the Jewish community had not been able to prosper after their arrival in Buenos Aires.[35] Perhaps poverty, rather than anti-Semitism, offers a better explanation of the attraction of Zionism to Jews in Argentina.

During those years, the women who ran the Hogar seemed to be on better terms with the Perón government than the Damas. Perhaps this was because of Perón's supposed willingness to allow European refugee children into Argentina. As testimony to their support, for several years, the women of the Hogar ran a page dedicated to Perón's Second Five Year Plan (Segundo Plan Quinquenal) in the Jewish press. In 1955,

they supported the creation of a forest in Israel named after Perón by "planting trees as a just homage and expression of the friendship between two nations that are fighting to achieve greatness: Argentina and Israel."[36]

After Perón's overthrow in 1955, the Hogar's earlier explicit support for Peronism did not prevent it from operating day care services for young children. By contrast, the organizations and businesses of many other Peronist sympathizers were closed down.

The comparison of these two institutions reveals important aspects of the history of the Jewish community rarely seen in official histories. Just as Emilio Coni noted that Jewish women desired to participate in child-focused charities in Buenos Aires, upper-class Jewish women wanted these activities to validate both their own position in the Jewish community, as well as the Jewish upper-class presence in the fashionable spaces of Buenos Aires and the interior. Although these women had their critics, they were usually found within the Jewish community itself, one divided by Zionist and anti-Zionist and pro and anti-communist sympathies, as well as by class differences. Despite the criticisms of elitism, the women were lauded by the Jewish community for their well-run institutions, and Argentine political officials attended the institutions' important ceremonies. Indeed, one could argue that these women forged linkages of acceptability for the Jewish community with the larger Argentine society that heretofore has been ignored.

The fate of the women's work was eventually shaped by the decrease in immigration. This was not, however, a situation unique to the Jewish community. By the 1960s second and third generation communities were losing interest in community financed welfare, whether of the young or the old. Increasingly, child orphanages all over the country began to close down or were converted into day schools. From this perspective, it would be hard to blame Peronism directly for the demise of Argentina's Jewish orphanages. In addition, the community had invested time and money to ensure that there would be sufficient space to house all needy Jewish orphans, precisely as the demand for services began to decline. The only situation that would have mandated the continued growth of Jewish orphanages in Argentina would have been the arrival of massive numbers of war orphans. But the task of caring for children of the Holocaust was preempted by the creation of the State of Israel. Not only did few European orphans reach Argentina in the 1940s and 1950s, but by that time, native-born Jewish orphans from Argentina, as well as foreign born children, were being sent to Israel. This exodus complemented the departure of thousands of other

Argentine Jews who went to Israel seeking a new life. By the 1950s, there were simply too few female Jewish orphans to justify maintaining the orphanage, especially for girls, parts of which were rented out to Hebrew language schools. The remaining girls followed predecessors who had been sent to Israel, or they simply went to live with relatives.[37]

The elegant edifice used to house the Jewish orphanage was used by several organizations until it was sold to a bus company, to become its headquarters, as, in fact, it remains to this day. The Asilo Argentino de HThe (Asilo Argentino de Huérfanas Israelitas) became a smaller institution. Operated by a Jewish Dutch refugee and known as the *Hogar de Niñas*, it took over the Asilo's functions as a home and school. The new Hogar's name contained no public Jewish identification and, in fact, no classes in religious studies were held there as in the past. Instead, the new Hogar was linked to the *Sojnut*, The Jewish Agency, and Hebrew lessons prepared children for emigration. By the 1980s, the community deemed even these limited functions unnecessary. Most of the girls emigrated, and after those with relatives were sent to live with them, the home closed.[38]

For similar reasons the older Hogar Infantil was transformed into a regular day school with no facilities to house children after school. The days of large institutions with resident facilities were over, not only in Argentina, but throughout the world. New approaches to orphans included a greater emphasis on foster care and adoption, a legal procedure finally available in the 1940s, although not frequently used thanks to its cumbersome procedures and requirements. In addition, changing economic conditions that pushed women into the paid work force meant that there would be too few volunteers to staff the homes.

* * *

Collective memories of the immigrant experience often focus on the personal, rather than the institutional. This is particularly true for the history of child welfare institutions. Neither the women who labored without pay to administer, care for, and educate orphan and poor Jewish children, nor the institutions themselves, have been well recorded in the history of the Argentine Jewish community.

The relationship of Peronism to the closure of the Sociedad de Benefcencia, as well as acts of anti-Semitism during the 1940s, have led to strong accusations of anti-Semitism under the Peronist regime. Yet the history of the Jewish orphanages shows that women's organizations both opposed to Perón and in favor of Peronism flourished during the 1940s, and their transformation and decline in the 1950s was not

unique to Jewish organizations. It was part of the changing reality of orphanages all over Argentina, and in other parts of the world like the United States, that had experienced massive immigration in the early twentieth century.

Recent scholars like Raanan Rein have begun to nuance this perspective by carefully analyzing the complex relationship between Perón and Israel and Peronism and the Jewish community, while others have explored anti-Semitism as an Argentine theme.[39] Nevertheless, none of them have looked at how Jewish women were capable of entering social spaces reserved for Catholic elites, nor how they helped shape community identity through child welfare. These very public groups, even at the height of Argentine anti-Semitism, were never criticized by members of the dominant community. As these women danced at cocktail parties and Kermesses at the Alvear Palace Hotel and invited the public to attend Jewish holidays with them, the community at large found reasons to protect and sustain these female operated institutions until there was no more need for their services. It was this, not Peronism or its attributes that decided their fate. Their history is embedded in the Argentine Jewish immigrant experience.

Notes

1. Emilio R. Coni, *Higiene social; Asistencia y previsión social. Buenos Aires caritativo y previsor* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta de Emilio Spinelli, 1918), 656–657. By defining the community simply as being Russian, Coni ignored the other members of the Jewish Community such as the Sephardic and German Jews. His definition makes it clear how difficult it was to "count" the Jewish community when most information was provided by nationality.
2. Coni dates the founding of the Sociedad de Damas to 1903, but according to the Jewish Newspaper *Mundo Israelita*, it began on Sept. 17, 1908, as the result of efforts by Rabbi Samuel Halphon. ibid., 657, Archivo IWO, *Mundo Israelita*, June 26, 1943.
3. Gloria Rut Lerner, "El Asilo de Huérfanas Israelitas," unpublished paper, Universidad Nacional de Luján, 35–36. The fragment can be found at the Instituto Científico Judío (IWO), Buenos Aires. I would like to thank Gloria for this information.
4. Ibid., 658. *Reseña sobre la marcha de la Sociedad de Socorros de Damas Israelitas*, 1918–1919, 11; 1920–1921, 12–13. The Society changed its name to the Sociedad de Beneficencia de Damas Israelitas in 1927. In addition to helping parturient women, the Jewish community had already established an association to prevent young Jewish girls, particularly immigrants, from becoming entrapped in "white slavery" or the international traffic in women and children. See Donna J. Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family and Nation in Argentina* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991). The advertisement

was published in *Mundo Israelita*, May 7, 1927, 4. It noted that the president of Argentina would be accompanied by his wife, members of the Argentine congress, and ambassadors of foreign countries.

5. Gloria Rut Lerner, "El Asilo de Huérfanas Israelitas," unpublished paper, Universidad Nacional de Luján, 23.
6. There were earlier presidents of this women's group, but after 1919 they identified these two women as the first and second presidents. See Lerner, "El Asilo de Huérfanas Israelitas," 20.
7. A long controversy preoccupied the Buenos Aires Jewish community. It began in 1931 when *Mundo Israelita* urged the group to provide an alternate slate of candidates. Subsequently the newspaper realized that those opposing Rebecca R. de Glücksmann never bothered to organize their own slate, and that unfounded rumours existed in the capital accusing the women of forming a closed circle of aristocratic women. Although *Mundo Israelita* publicly refuted this accusation, the orphanage suffered by having many fewer patrons. "La renovación en la Sociedad de Damas," *Mundo Israelita*, August 22, 1931.
8. *Reseña sobre la marcha de la Sociedad de Socorros de Damas Israelitas*, 1921–1922, 11; 1922–1923, 16.
9. *Reseña sobre la marcha de la Sociedad de Socorros de Damas Israelitas*, 1922–1923, 25–30.
10. Cynthia Jeffress Little, "The Society of Beneficence in Buenos Aires, 1823–1840," Ph.D. Thesis, Temple University, 1980; Karen Mead, "Oligarchs, Doctors and Nuns: Public Health and Beneficence in Buenos Aires, 1880–1914," unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1994.
11. Archivo Centro de Documentación e Información sobre Judaísmo Argentino "Mark Turkow" [Archivo Turkow], "*Ezrah*" *Hospital Israelita* (Enero 1 1914), 97–98, "La infancia abandonada; Necesidad de un asilo infantil en nuestro medio."
12. "Asilo Israelita Argentino," *Mundo Israelita*, July 24, 1926, 4.
13. Advertisement, *Mundo Israelita*, undated, ca. 1931.
14. For example, the Sociedad de Damas Israelitas de Beneficencia sponsored a tea dance at the Imperial Salon of the Alvear Palace Hotel on July 22, 1941. The proceeds were intended to subsidize the Girls' Orphanage. Archivo IWO, *Mundo Israelita*, July 14, 1941. Prior to the construction of the Alvear Palace, the Damas held events in the Plaza Hotel, and the Savoy Hotel, both considered fine upper-class city hotels. Sociedad de Socorros de Damas Israelitas, *Reseña sobre la marcha de la Sociedad ...*, 1920-1′, 12–13.
15. José Luis Moreno (compl), *La política social antes de la político social; (Caridad, beneficencia y política social en Buenos Aires, siglos XVII a XX)* (Buenos Aires: Trama editorial, 2000).
16. Sociedad de Socorros de Damas Israelitas de Beneficencia, *Asilo Argentino de Huérfanas Israelitas Memoria y Balance*, 1945–1946, 31–32 contains a list of holidays both secular and religious celebrated at the orphanage, along with a long list of prominent Jewish families who attended Passover services there.
17. This information came from a conversation with Sra. Berta Bairach, who went to live in the Asilo after having spent time at the Casa de Expósitos and the Sociedad de Beneficencia's Asilo de Huérfanas in the 30s and 40s, because her

mother died at birth. Conversation, September 23, 2002, Buenos Aires. I thank her for her comments.

18. Sociedad de Socorros de Damas Israelita, *Reseña sobre la marcha de la Sociedad...*, 1927, 24.
19. "See the long article about spiritual welfare for the girls in Ampiación espiritual del Asilo de Huérfanas," *Mundo Israelita*, December 10, 1932. In contrast, there was only a short notice that examinations were taking place in the boys' orphanage, with no discussion of religious training. "Examinose a los alumnos de la escuela israelita del Asilo de Huérfanos," *Mundo Israelita*, November 25, 1936.
20. Donna J. Guy, "Girls in Prison: The Role of the Buenos Aires Casa Correccional de Mujeres as an Institution of Child Rescue, 1890–1940," in Ricardo D. Salvatore, Carlos Aguirre and Gilbert M. Joseph, eds., *Crime and Punishment in Latin American Law and Society Since Late Colonial Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 369–390. Sociedad de Socorros de Damas Israelitas, *Reseña sobre la marcha de la Sociedad, 1923–1924*, 17. Immigrant women also worked there, but it was closed the following year. Archivo IWO, *Mundo Israelita*, June 26, 1943, 12, "Através del Asilo de Huérfanas se cumple una tarea de gran importancia."
21. Archivo IWO, "Informe de la "Soroptomis" por el año 1944, manuscript, 14; *Mundo Israelita*, January 18, 1947, "Han tenido éxito las gestiones de la DAIA para lograr que mil niños judíos ingresen al país," 7.
22. Sociedad de Damas Israelitas de Beneficencia, *Memoria*, 1941, 14–15, 30, 37.
23. Sociedad de Damas Israelitas de Beneficencia, *Memoria*, 1946, 35, 41, 50. The Society had been receiving 10,000 pesos per year from the national government. Private inheritances that year, however, reached 47,000 pesos out of 276,807.84 taken in – a truly unusual event, *Mundo Israelita*, June 26, 1943, 12.
24. Sociedad de Damas Israelitas de Beneficencia, *Memoria*, 1950–1951, 15–16, 42, and unpaginated financial report to June 30, 1951.
25. Archivo IWO, Hogar Infantil Israelita Argentina, *Libro de Actas*, 1931, f. 141. *El Mundo Israelita*, August 1, 1931; Advertisement from the Hogar Infantil Israelita Argentino invited members of the Jewish community to an open house. "El Hogar Infantil en su primer aniversario," *Mundo Israelita*, November 21, 1931.
26. Archivo IWO, Hogar Infantil Israelita Argentina, *Libro de Actas*, May 31, 1933, f. 14–24, September 19, ff. 44–50; January 2, 1934, ff. 167–171.
27. Archivo IWO, Hogar Infantil Israelita Argentina, *Libro de Actas*, May 31, 1933, f. 14; Sept. 19, 1933, f. 44; January 2, 1934, f. 167.; Feb. 2, 1934, f. 81. Archivo IWO, Hogar Infantil Israelita Argentina, *Libro de Actas*, August 12, 1941, f. 30.
28. See, for example, *Mundo Israelita*, November 23, 1931; February 20, 1932.
29. "Primer congreso nacional de servicio social a la infancia," *Mundo Israelita*, October 1, 1932, 2; Dr. Jaime Favelukes, "El servicio social del Inmigrante," Primera Conferencia Sobre Asistencia Social, 3 vols. (Buenos Aires: Kraft, 1934), 26–33.
30. Ibid., August 22, 1933, f. 36.
31. Ibid., August 23, 1938, f. 21; December 18, 1940, ff. 27.
32. Hogar Infantil Israelita Argentina, *Memoria y Balance General*, 11 ejercicio, 1938–1939, 15–16.

33. *Mundo Israelita,* October 4, 1941, 8. Hogar Infantil Israelita, Argentina, *Memoria y Balance General*, 1946–1947, 48–49.
34. Archivo IWO, Ibid., 1946–1967, 39. *Memoria, 1985–1986*, unpublished document.
35. Archivo IWO, Hogar Infantil Israelita Argentina, *Registro de Niños*. This is a two volume ledger where all children are identified by name and nationality, but not all parents' nationalities are identified. Other information includes reasons for admission such as "father abandoned the home . . . ," the child's domicile, and who went to interview the family. Although the information is rather sparse, it gives a vivid picture of the poverty and social problems encountered by working-class immigrant Jewish families in Buenos Aires and in the interior.
36. Hogar Infantil Israelita Argentina, *Memoria y Balance General*, 27 ejercicio, 1954–1955, 33.
37. Bertha Bairach, for example, still had a father, uncle, and disabled brother living in Buenos Aires. As an adolescent she finally went to live with her father and worked in his garment factory, eventually taking it over until it closed. Interview, September 23, 2001.
38. Lerner, "El Asilo de Huérfanas Israelitas," 64, 68.
39. Raanan Rein, *Peronismo, populismo y política: Argentina 1943–1955* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de Belgrano, 1998), *Argentina, Israel y los judíos; Encuentros y desencuentros, mitos y realidades* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Lumière, 2001).