THE COMPLETE ARGENTINIAN—JEW / ZIONIST / ARGENTINE: THE FIRST TWO GENERATIONS OF JEWISH IMMIGRANTS TO CÓRDOBA

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Abstract

Basado en una amplia gama de fuentes primarias el artículo hace un seguimiento de las dos primeras generaciones de inmigración judía a la provincia de Córdoba, con el propósito de analizar quiénes inmigraron y por cuáles motivos, de dónde provenían, dónde se asentaron, cuáles fueron sus ocupaciones o profesiones, cómo se organizaron institucionalmente, y de qué modo fueron recibidos por la sociedad mayoritaria cordobesa. El artículo arroja luz sobre el proceso de radicación e integración de los judíos en Córdoba identificando los componentes fundamentales de la identidad colectiva de los judíos cordobeses.

Palabras clave: Argentina, Córdoba, inmigración judía, comunidad judía, cadena migratoria, sionismo

Introduction

The present article deals with the migration and integration of Jews who settled in the Córdoba Province in Argentina from the late nineteenth century until the period between the two world wars. In order to trace the history of the first two generations of this immigration, the parents who

left Europe and their children who were born in Argentina, I will examine the push/pull factors that brought them to Córdoba, their general profile in diverse areas and during different periods, and the relationships among themselves and between the immigrants and the host society.

I will look closely at several immigrants and their individual stories in an attempt to paint an overall picture of the Jewish immigration to Córdoba: who chose to settle there and why, where they came from, how they selected their destination, where they settled, what they did to support themselves, how they organized as a collective, and how they were accepted by the majority, both as individuals and as an organized community. This synthesis of the factors that prodded the immigrants to pull up stakes, with their characteristics, settlement patterns, and economic activity, during the period in question, will reflect the process of their integration into Córdoba and reveal the main elements of their collective identity.

This article is guided by more general questions. First of all, I want to evaluate the extent to which the Jews' patterns of integration into Córdoba were unique or similar to those of other immigrant groups in the province and to Jews elsewhere in Argentina. Another question relates to the Jewish immigrants' cultural, social, and religious behavior within the civil society in the Córdoba Province. The group's relations to the majority society and the local elites' attitude to it will allow me to assess the importance of the Jewish presence in Córdoba.

The article is based on a wide diversity of sources amassed over many years in the forgotten cellars of the Jewish community in Córdoba and in various archives in both Argentina and Israel. In addition, I was able to draw on the national and provincial census records, headcounts of the Jewish population of Argentina and of Córdoba, contemporary newspapers, memoirs written by immigrants, letters that turned up in the archives, and various other sources left behind by the immigrant organizations.

Methodologically, the close scrutiny of these documents will make it possible for me to extract the quantitative information provided by census records, the research literature, and statistics, as well as the qualitative information provided by the immigrants themselves. The analysis, crosschecking, and integration of the quantitative information with the

qualitative data will help me identify the main changes in various domains that took place among the Jewish collective in Córdoba during the first two generations of settlement there.

Córdoba Formulates an Immigration Policy

After the fall of the dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas in 1852, Argentina began a process of national consolidation. Its first stage lasted until 1880, when the province of Buenos Aires joined the Argentine Confederation. Now a united republic, the country found its great moment to promote the settlement policy devised by its thinkers, founders, and legislators. Córdoba Province, too, was shaped by the conflicts that were part of the unification process. Its governments followed a policy intended to organize Córdoba in the spirit of the liberal constitution of 1853. The leaders of this process were members of the liberal and positivist political elite; the main challenge facing them was to include Córdoba in the economic plan based on the development and exploitation of the Wet Pampas as the main supplier of raw materials to European markets, in return for capital, industrial products, and manpower. Córdoba's inclusion in this model was made possible by the exploitation of its eastern territories, especially the southeastern districts, and led to a radical change in its economic and demographic structure.[1]

A series of new laws, and notably the provincial constitution of 1855, were the first steps in this direction. This document was intended primarily to regulate the status of land in the province, especially public lands, in order to encourage new settlement. Throughout the 1860s, however, there was no great demand for land there; migration to and settlement in Córdoba got under way later than in the coastal plain, the location of Buenos Aires, Santa Fe, Entre Ríos, and Corrientes. It was only in the next decade, when the province began organizing to welcome immigrants, that

1 Gino Germani, *Política y sociedad en una época de transición: De la sociedad tradicional a la sociedad de masas*, Buenos Aires 1971, pp. 179-232.

settlement and regional development picked up speed. Article Two of the provincial constitution, as amended in 1870, made Catholicism the official religion but also ensured freedom of religion for non-Catholics. The first immigration and settlement law, enacted in 1871, encouraged spontaneous settlement on public land.[2]

Despite the attempts to encourage immigration and settlement, the data on migration to the province in the 1870s indicate that the conditions were not yet ripe for absorbing immigrants and settlers in Córdoba. Although the population did increase, from 210,508 in 1869 to 254,164 in 1880 (an increase of 20.73%), immigration made a negligible contribution to this growth. In 1869 there were only 1,737 immigrants in the entire province. There was a modest influx of immigrants in the 1870s—slightly more than 7,000. Given the overall immigration figures for Argentina, newcomers clearly did not see Córdoba as a popular destination in those years. Most of those who did settle in the province were from Italy, Spain, and France, along with smaller numbers from Germany and Great Britain. About half of them settled in the provincial capital and the others in the districts of the interior.[3]

Even though conditions in Córdoba were not yet optimal as to encourage immigration on a large scale, the development described here did mark the start of an immigration and settlement process. A few initial attempts at settlement in the pampas of Córdoba were made in the 1870s, most of them the result of private initiatives, especially by English groups, through the Central Argentinian Railway Company (Ferrocarril Central Argentino). The provincial authorities' increasing involvement in settlement projects also contributed to the process. New laws to encourage immigration and settlement in Córdoba empowered the provincial authorities to establish colonies on public land and regulated the terms for private settlement and farming, as well as the process of urbanization, education, the judicial system, and communications. This development took place in parallel with

2 *Leyes de la Provincia de Córdoba, Años 1871-1876, Tomo IV*, Córdoba 1916, p. 9.

3 María Cristina Vera de Flachs, *Las colectividades extranjeras. Córdoba 1852-1930*, Junta Provincial de Historia de Córdoba, Córdoba 1999, pp.19-55, 63-78.

the rapid expansion of the railroad in central and southern Argentina. At the same time, there was also a significant increase in land prices in the coastal regions, which accounted for much of the increased interest in immigration and settlement among bureaucrats in Córdoba and private individuals who wanted to expand their investment in the region.[4]

These processes finally laid the ground for the start of an extensive immigration and settlement movement, especially to the provincial capital and the southeastern districts of the province. In 1895, the population of Córdoba Province slightly exceeded 350,000, of whom 10% were immigrants. Two decades later, on the eve of the First World War, this figure had doubled to nearly 750,000, of whom more than 20% were immigrants. During these years there were many changes in the city of Córdoba. By 1914 its population had reached 135,000 and the city was making major strides towards modernization. Immigration from across the sea, mainly from Spain and Italy, played a decisive role in this process.[5]

The stream of immigrants, which peaked then, was abruptly suspended in 1914. When it resumed after the war there were many fewer arrivals from Italy and Spain. Most of the postwar newcomers, to the country and to Córdoba Province, came from Central and Eastern Europe (mainly from Russia, Poland, and the Balkans, and notably Romania and Bulgaria, as well as from Syria. At this stage there was also incipient industrialization that triggered internal migration to the city from other provinces and from elsewhere in Córdoba, especially from the southeastern districts. By 1930 the city of Córdoba had more than a quarter of a million residents.[6]

In the 1920s one of the main attractive factors for migration to the city, both from inside the country and from abroad, was the university reform of 1918. The influence of this reform, which first took shape in Córdoba, transcended local events and served as the model for other reforms throughout Latin America. In their early formulation, the reformist

4 Ibid., pp. 39-51.

5 Hilda Iparraguirre, "Notas para el estudio de la demografía de la ciudad de Córdoba en el período 1869-1914", *Instituto de Estudios Americanistas*, Córdoba 1973, pp. 267-288.

6 Flachs (see note 3), p. 73.

demands expressed the aspirations of the middle class to overthrow what still remained of the colonial, corporate, and oligarchic university and to create the possibility of modern education in a progressive spirit. The reformists chose the university as the focal point of the social revolution they sought. Until then the Church had exercised full control over the academic institution, and the university benefited only a restricted elite that used it to perpetuate its social, economic, and political status. It served to consolidate an educated aristocracy with great economic and political power, consisting chiefly of physicians, attorneys, bankers, and other liberal professionals. But an aristocracy of only a hundred families could not prevent the admission to the university of young people from other social strata, especially in a city like Córdoba that was at the height of economic, social, and demographic changes.[7]

The immigrants who arrived in Córdoba before the First World War managed to establish themselves economically. This success allowed them to send their sons to attend its university. For them the university was a key junction on their way to economic, social, and political integration in Córdoba. The second generation, the children of immigrants, flooded the university in the second decade of the twentieth century, bringing with them a new spirit and ideas that challenged the entrenched and stagnant traditions whose roots lay in the colonial period.[8] The students who promoted the reform included the sons of newcomers who had settled throughout the province during the period of mass immigration. The young people in Córdoba set themselves an immediate goal and revolted "against an administrative system, against a method of instruction, and against a concept of authority".[9] We should understand that this younger generation that organized and revolted had grown up in the stormy atmosphere created by the First World War, a generation that sought to understand the meaning of the Bolshevik Revolution and wished to be involved in political life, especially after the expansion of the franchise in 1912. As a result, their

7 Juan Carlos Agulla, *Eclipse de una aristocracia*, Buenos Aires 1968.

8 *Manifiesto Liminar de la Reforma Universitaria*, Córdoba, 21 de junio de 1918.

9 Ibid.

activities were permeated by idealism.

Thanks to these processes, an extremely significant social watershed was reached during the 1920s. The immigrants' absorption into the middle class and successful penetration of the civic and political strata of society were the core of the change.[10] Even though Argentina limited immigration in 1930, the main urban centers, and especially the city of Córdoba, attracted internal migration in the 1930s, and especially in the second half of that decade, when Córdoba Province experienced a subsidized process of accelerated industrialization protected by the government. The process was felt chiefly in the city of Córdoba. From a quarter of a million residents in 1930, within less than two decades the population had increased to 400,000, or about 30% of the residents of the province.[11]

Jewish Immigration to Córdoba: The First Generation

The legal, economic, and demographic developments described above served as the basis for the first wave of Jewish immigration to Córdoba Province, starting at the end of the nineteenth century. It had three distinct sources: the first consisted of Jews who had arrived in Argentina to live on the agricultural colonies and had decided to abandon the farmer's life; the second consisted of immigrants who came directly from Central and Eastern Europe; and the third group were immigrants from the territories of the Ottoman Empire.

The first group, as stated, consisted of immigrants from Europe who had attempted to make a new life as farmers in the Jewish agricultural colonies but had been unsuccessful. As a result, they decided to again took up the wanderer's staff to relocate to the developing urban centers. From the outset, the Jewish settlements in Argentina were marked by rapid population turnover. The agricultural colonies served as a way station for

10 María Silvia Ospital, *Estado e inmigración en la década del 20. La política inmigratoria de los gobiernos radicales*, Buenos Aires 1988, p. 7.

11 Marta Philp. *En nombre de Córdoba, Sabattinistas y peronistas: estrategias políticas en la construcción del Estado*, Córdoba 1998, pp. 57-76.

many Jewish immigrants who never planned to settle there in the first place, as well as for those who did not prosper as farmers.[12] As a result, many families on the colonies had an urban branch that could facilitate their own subsequent relocation. By the late 1890s, there were active "out-migration chains" from the settlements to the major towns, involving both singles and families. These chains led directly to the migration by both individuals and families to the city of Córdoba.

The difficult conditions for integration on the Argentinian frontier and the social and community life on the colonies had a strong influence on those pioneers from Eastern Europe who chose to resume their wandering after that constitutive experience. The eight members of the Lublinsky family of Grodno (then in Lithuania)—the father, Boris, his wife, and their six children—signed up for the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA) colony project, and reached Argentina in 1900.[13] The family's journey to Argentina was especially drawn out and seems to have taken three years from when they decided to emigrate until they reached the New World. Fanny Lublinsky (later Blank) was born in 1889 or 1890, the second child in the family, and was nine years old when they set out on their adventure. Fanny described their journey to a port city on the western edge of the Pale of Settlement, through its Polish regions, as a dangerous adventure, "with no property, starving, and under the hostile eyes and ears of the Cossacks we encountered everywhere."[14] She added that they were buoyed mainly

12 According to one estimate, some 50,000 Jews passed through the agricultural colonies of Argentina. Jacob Tsur, "Memorandum on the ICA Settlement Project in Argentina and Brazil," January 18, 1951, ISA, hettzade 55/1, 6 [Heb.].

13 Carlos Meirovich, *¿Por qué no te fuiste, papá?: Saga de una familia de argentinos judíos,* Buenos Aires 2008, pp. 65-68. The Jewish Colonization Association (ICA) had been founded by the Baron Maurice de Hirsch, a German Jewish philanthropist who worked intensively to find a way to facilitate Jewish emigration from Eastern Europe. Baron Hirsch saw settlement in Argentina as a prime solution to the Jewish problem in Russia. With their fare paid by Hirsch, tens of thousands of Jews sailed for Argentina, which gradually became an alternative destination for eastern European Jews who wanted to turn to farming.

14 Ibid., p. 67.

by "the hope of reaching the closest and longed for port city on the way to respectable and free life in Argentina."[15]

There is no doubt that the Lublinsky family's adventure and the difficulties they encountered on the way made the migration process rather traumatic. Their ocean passage remained deeply engraved in Fanny's memory. She could never forget the cold, the crowding, the disease, and the hunger: "We survived on stale bread dipped in water, cheese, and dried fruit."[16] At long last the family made it to the colony of Santa Clara, near Moisés Ville, in the Santa Fe province. The harsh conditions there, the exhausting agricultural labor, and the repeated natural disasters, including a plague of locust and floods, were clearly remembered by the adolescent girl. Her father's death broke the family, which decided to leave the farming life behind. Fanny was 18 in 1908 when she decided to settle in the city of Córdoba; her siblings decided to try their luck in Buenos Aires. Fannie's choice of Córdoba had something to do with the presence there of a young man named Jaime Goldenblank, whose story was similar to hers.[17]

Jaime Goldenblank and his family came from Teleneşti, a small town in Bessarabia, not far from the capital Kishinev. In 1904 the family settled in the colony Palacios, in the Santa Fe province.[18] The difficulties of absorption, adjusting to the life of farmers, the backbreaking work, and natural disasters left a strong impression on the family. Jaime did not feel he could make it on the colony and decided to move on. On February 5, 1905, he arrived in the city of Córdoba—an especially stormy day in a period of political turmoil, when activists of the young Radical Party took up arms and caused riots that lasted the entire day. During his initial period there, Jaime boarded with Moisés Rascovsky in the center of town, and through him found work in the Rascovsky family's carpentry shop. [19]

The Rascovskys were another family for whom the Jewish colonial

15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., p.95-98.
18 "Breve biografía de Jaime G. Blank, Pionero Hebreo 1885-1949", pp. 1-9. Boris Blank, Private Archive, Córdoba, Argentina.
19 Ibid

project in the Santa Fe province was merely a way station to the big city. The brothers Moisés and Samuel Rascovsky arrived in Córdoba at the end of the nineteenth century. Jaime Goldenblank was particularly impressed by the two brothers' knowledge of Jewish tradition, both ancient and modern. Jaime described them as men of progressive views who were able to establish a flourishing business and soon found a place in Córdoban society.[20] In 1908, after he managed to get his feet on the ground, Jaime Goldenblank married Fanny Lublinsky, whom he had met in the colony several years earlier.

The Zatzkin family, too, arrived in Argentina during the great wave of migration. According to the documents available to me, Margarita Zatzkin was a girl of around five when her parents, José Zatzkin and Anna Saiman, began thinking about leaving Odessa. She was eight when, along with 300 other passengers, they boarded the SS *Petropolis*, which arrived in Buenos Aires in 1891.[21] In a letter she wrote Margarita recounted the story of their immigration, beginning with the vacillation about the decision to leave Russia, the ocean passage to Argentina, the stay in the immigrants' hostel in Buenos Aires, their journey to the colony of Moisés Ville and settlement there, and finally their arrival in Córdoba:

> My ancestors' life in the land of the Czars had always moved back and forth between abuse and persecution, between vandalism and murder. My grandparents were living in Odessa when my parents were born. Even though they lived in a large city, the restrictions that made life difficult for the Jews denied them access to the gymnasias and universities. My father used to say the times were very bad and would lead to pogroms against the Jews, so we had to run away, perhaps to America. In the end, 300 coreligionists, adults, old people and youngsters, set out on their journey on the *Petropolis*—a voyage I will never be able to forget. The children suffered from the cold in the depths of third class; the adults were seasick and mainly hungry because the food on board was not kosher. When we

20 Boris Blank, *La mujer judía en la ciudad de Córdoba a comienzos del siglo XX*, Córdoba 1994, pp. 20.

21 Boris Blank, *Monseñor Pablo Cabrera y Margarita Zatzkin, la hebrea (El encuentro de dos vidas diferentes)*, Córdoba 2000, pp. 22-24.

> reached Buenos Aires we slept in warehouses for a number of days and then took the train to the colony, a very painful and sad experience. We stayed on the colony for six years, suffering from the cold, hunger, floods, droughts, bandits, and many other troubles; many children and teenagers died. Some of the settlers had more luck than others, but my parents, who worked without a letup, could not change their situation and fell ill. When we finally moved to the city of Córdoba, where my father found work in Moisés Rascovsky's furniture factory, I was 14.[22]

The Zatzkins, too, found their living in the Rascovskys' carpentry shop; it was probably the main reason that brought them to the city of Córdoba in 1897, when Margarita was 14. Her family joined the handful of Jewish families who lived in the town then. Her mother passed away soon after they arrived and her father, who suffered a chronic illness, grew weaker and died shortly after her. The orphan Margarita was adopted and supported by the tiny Jewish community of Córdoba.[23]

The history of that community was described by a young man of 20, Joseph Reich, who reached Córdoba in 1900 straight from Kamenetz Podolsk in Podolia, the district which the pioneers on the *Weser* ship had left eleven years earlier en route to Argentina. Reich told the story of the first Jewish families in the city of Córdoba in a letter he sent to the Fifth Zionist Congress, which met in Basel in 1901. In this letter, now in the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem, Reich reported that there were currently eight Jewish families in Córdoba: four from Russia, one from Austria, two from Spain, and one from Italy—a total of 35 people.[24]

They established the first Jewish organization in Córdoba, a branch of the Hovevei Zion society in Buenos Aires; its chairman was a German Jew named Símon Ostwald, from the small town of Herford in western Germany. To some extent his biography reflects the fate of the handful of immigrants who came to Argentina from Western Europe before 1880. Ostwald and his three siblings arrived in Argentina in the late 1860s, hoping

22 Boris Blank, Private Archive, Córdoba.

23 Ibid., pp. 15-16.

24 Fifth Zionist Congress, General Letters, Central Zionist Archives, Z1/84.

to expand their family business. His biography is a faithful reflection of the fate of the earliest Jews in Argentina, immigrants from Western Europe who intermarried with their gentile neighbors and left no direct descendents among the Jews of Argentina.[25]

In addition to the Ashkenazi immigration to Córdoba, at the start of the twentieth century there was another trickle of Jews from the territories of the Ottoman Empire. According to the sources I examined, they formed two separate communities, based on their origin and language. The first consisted of immigrants from Turkey and Greece, who had their Ladino mother-tongue in common; the second, of newcomers from the Arabic-speaking regions of the Empire, especially from Damascus, Aleppo, and Beirut.[26]

The first Sephardi Jew in Córdoba was León Rubin. Rubin, born in Izmir in 1879, arrived in Córdoba by himself in 1904. A few years later he was joined by other immigrants. This small group was in the habit of gathering on holidays in León Rubin's home in the center of town. His house served the community and temporarily hosted recent arrivals to Córdoba, who received support and assistance in their first steps in the city. According to the evidence I have collected, the house also served as the first shelter for more than 20 families; "meals were [held] in common so there would not be any inequality among them and no one would feel any shortage[s]." [27]

There were two major streams of Arabic-speaking immigrants to Córdoba, divided by where they came from. The first influx of Arabic-speaking Jews began in 1914 by a number of immigrants from Syria. The second group consisted of Jews from Damascus. The trailblazers were the Halacs, Salomón and his son León, who arrived in Córdoba in 1912. A year later they were joined by Jaime and José Halac. The other immigrants arrived in 1914. The two groups of Sephardim organized separately,

25 Boris Blank, "Simón Ostwald, Pionero Hebreo", *Revista Historia XXII\86,* Córdoba 2002; Haim Avni, *Argentina and the Jews: A History of Jewish Immigration,* Tuscaloosa 1991, pp. 12-20.

26 *Estatutos de la Sociedad Israelita Siria,* 1923, *Actas de la Sociedad Israelita de Beneficencia Sefaradí*, 1926-1941.

27 Jacobo Rubin, Historia de la Comunidad Israelita Sefaradí de la Provincia de Córdoba, Córdoba 1960 (inédito).

evidently the result of cultural differences and their different places of origin.[28]

The First World War interrupted the flow of immigrants to Argentina. In Córdoba, though, a process of industrialization and urbanization that began during the war increased internal migration to the city. This process accelerated in the 1920s and reached its peak in the 1930s. The story of the Talpalar and Meirovich families can exemplify this historic development. Their adventures, which began around the turn of the twentieth century, were reconstructed and set down on paper in the autobiography of the physician, professor, and author Carlos Meirovich.[29]

At the end of the 1890s the Talpalar family, which had 13 members, was one of the many Jewish families that were thinking about leaving Kishinev. The decision to move to Argentina was reached early in the new century and the family immediately began its preparations for the journey. They set out from Kishinev and crossed the border into Austria-Hungary at Brody, which was packed with Jews who wanted to sell off what remained of their possessions and embark for the New World. After a few days in Brody, the family boarded the train to Paris, from which they proceeded to Le Havre. Many Romanian Jews chose this route, which, though longer, was felt to be safer than traveling by way of Odessa, which was of course under Russian control. In Le Havre the Talpalar family boarded a ship that docked in Buenos Aires on February 11, 1902. The family's migration was funded by the ICA, so they soon moved to the colony of Palacios.[30]

The Meirovich family's journey was similar. They too left Bessarabia around the end of the nineteenth century and decided to join the Baron Hirsch's Argentine colonization project in the late 1890s. Their destination, too, was Palacios. Living conditions on the colony were extremely difficult. Ultimately the plagues of locusts, the floods, and epidemics were too much for the family, and in 1911 they decamped for Chile, where another branch of the family had already settled. In 1915 the family returned to Argentina.

28 Ibid.
29 Meirovich (see note 13), pp. 55-64.
30 Ibid., p.63.

According to the family's accounts and memoirs, the decision was prompted by a desire to provide their sons with a university education; they chose Córdoba as their destination because of its excellent university.[31]

It is also possible that various messages that reached them from Córdoba influenced their choice of destination. They might have heard that Margarita Zatzkin had recently completed her medical studies at the National University of Córdoba. Or perhaps they had learned about Jaime Goldenblank's flourishing business. The family attraction to the furniture business, which was popular among the Jewish immigrants in Córdoba, may also have been at work. Although it is hard to provide a single clear-cut reason for decisions of this type made so many years ago, it seems plausible that it was this assortment of factors, rumors, and other interests that produced the final decision to settle in Córdoba.

Jewish Immigration to Córdoba between the Two World Wars

Immigration resumed after the First World War, but with a major demographic change: there was a drastic reduction in the flow of newcomers to Argentina from Western Europe, balanced by an increase in those from Eastern Europe, mainly Russia, Poland, and the Balkans, as well as from Syria. Their destinations and demographic effects also included Córdoba as well. These processes influenced Jewish immigration which also increased after the war, chiefly from Poland,[32] but also from the territories of the former Ottoman Empire. The bulk of this influx, to the country and to Córdoba, was during the 1920s. Finally, it should be noted that internal migration by Jews, from the agricultural colonies to the urban centers of the Córdoba province and especially to the city, increased, and the new inhabitants helped the Jewish community of Córdoba grow rapidly during the 1920s.

31 Ibid., pp. 55-64.

32 Celia S. Heller, *On the Edge of Destruction, Jews of Poland Between the Two World Wars*, New York 1977, pp. 11, 133-139.

Samuel A. Levy was born in Buenos Aires in 1886. His Moroccan-born father, Abraham Levy, had arrived in Buenos Aires in the early 1880s after stopovers in Gibraltar and then Brazil. Chain immigration from Morocco to Argentina began with the arrival of the Benjetrit family from Tetuán, after a brief sojourn in Montevideo, Uruguay. Samuel Levy was active in the Sephardi Jewish organizations; through the Spanish-language newspaper he founded in 1917, *Israel*, he maintained close contact with the Sephardi Jewish communities in the provinces. He was the moving spirit behind the paper, whose readership extended far beyond the Moroccan Jewish immigrants (it claimed to have 10,000 subscribers).[33]

Levy's articles, which I found in the archives of the Sephardi Jewish community in Córdoba, contain extremely interesting quantitative and qualitative information. In an issue of July 1926, there is his own account of his visit to the city of Córdoba in 1926, which attests to the growth of the local Jewish population in the first half of the 1920s. He wrote that some 3,000 Jews were living in Córdoba in 1925, a significant increase from only 600 a decade earlier. The Jews accounted for slightly more than 1.5% of the total population of almost 190,000. Around 84% of the Jews in the city came from Eastern Europe, mainly Russia and Poland. The rest were Sephardim, most of them from Damascus, Aleppo, and Beirut, along with another group from Izmir and Constantinople. There was only one family that had come from Morocco.[34]

In the 1930s, immigration from abroad came to an almost complete halt. Nevertheless, internal migration to the city of Córdoba intensified, adding to the quarter of a million residents it had in 1930. The Jewish community, too, grew swiftly. In 1935, Simón Weill, the director of the ICA office in Buenos Aires, reported the figures he had collected on Jewish immigration to Argentina. He wrote that in 1934 the Jewish population of the country was 253,000, in 100 different localities. There were 131,000 Jews in Buenos Aires, 12,500 in the city of Rosario, and 5,300 in the city of Córdoba. There

33 Victor Mirelman, *En búsqueda de una identidad. Los inmigrantes judíos en Buenos Aires 1880-1930*, Buenos Aires 1988, pp. 26-32.

34 *Israel*, Buenos Aires, julio 1926, pp. 15-17.

were another 30,609 Jews in the ICA colonies (this number includes those living in the villages and small towns of the settlement region).[35]

Seven years later, in 1941, the ICA conducted a comprehensive census of the Jewish population of Argentina, under the direction of Jedidia Efrón.[36] Efrón was born in Amadur, a small town in Grodno province, Lithuania, on July 11, 1878. He was the fifth of seven children and grew up in a typical middle-class religious Jewish family. At age 17, in 1895, he emigrated to Argentina with his parents and siblings as part of the ICA project and settled with them as a farmer in the colony of Clara in Entre Rios Province. Efrón decided, however, that he wanted to pursue a career in education. He studied the local language and the country's history and customs, and quickly became familiar with the traditions of his new country. In 1903 he married, started a family, and joined the faculty of the Jewish school affiliated with the ICA-funded elementary school network.[37]

This network advocated assimilation into the local culture and society while holding onto Jewish tradition and religious observances. At its peak, in 1915, it ran more than 60 schools with a total enrollment of around 5,000 pupils, most of them from the colonies.[38] Efrón showed great promise in his pedagogical labors and was appointed principal of one of the schools. In addition to this network in the agricultural colonies, there were also small Talmud Torahs attached to synagogues in Buenos Aires and the cities of the Argentine interior Although these institutions were founded at the initiative of local groups, starting in 1911 they were supported by the ICA and brought under the same roof as part of the Cursos_Religiosos Israelitas (Jewish Religious Schools), which came under the authority of the Educational Committee of the Congregación Israelita de la República

35 Simón Weill, *Población Israelita en la República Argentina*, Buenos Aires 1936, p. 12.

36 Julio Mazo, *El judaísmo argentino 70 años atrás: análisis demográfico y socio-económico del censo Efron, 1941-1943 y su contexto histórico*, Jerusalén 2013.

37 Iedidio Efrón, *Amdur, mi pueblo natal*, Comité de homenaje a la memoria de Iedidio Efron, Buenos Aires, 1973, pp. 8-9.

38 Haim Avni, *Emancipación y educación judía. Un siglo de experiencia judía argentina, 1884-1984*, Jerusalén 1985, pp. 31-34 [heb.]. See also: Efraim Zadoff, *Historia de la educación judía en Buenos Aires, 1935-1957*, Buenos Aires 1994.

Argentina (CIRA, the first Jewish community organization in the country, founded in 1867).[39]

In 1914, Efrón was appointed superintendent of all the schools in the settlement districts. That year he and his family moved to Buenos Aires so he could oversee the growing Jewish educational system, a post he held for 25 years.[40]

In addition to his educational work, Efrón was involved in Jewish public activity in organizations such as SOPROTIMIS (Sociedad Protectora de Inmigrantes Israelitas, the Association to Protect Jewish Immigrants) and Ezras Noshim, which protected Jewish women and families. There is no doubt, however, that the comprehensive census that Efrón conducted for the ICA in 1941 made a huge and special contribution to Argentinian Jewry. At the ICA's request, Efrón was assigned to draw up an all-inclusive report on the Jewish residents of the agricultural colonies, the small towns, and the urban centers in 1941 and 1942. The document he submitted is an instructive primary source on Jewish life in places that have not yet been studied, and provides qualitative and quantitative raw material along with a wealth of fascinating anecdotes about Jewish life in Argentina in general and in Córdoba in particular.[41]

According to Efrón's report, there were 7,675 Jews in the province (1,661 families)—6,523 of Ashkenazi origin (1,418 families) and 1,152 of Sephardi origin (242 families). He estimated that at the end of 1941 the population of Córdoba province was 1,230,000, so that Jews accounted for 0.64%.[42] Most of the Jews in the province lived in its capital: 5,800 persons, or 1.75% of the city's total population of 330,000. Among them, there were roughly 5,000 Ashkenazim (1,000 families) and 800 Sephardim (150 families). As for the other important urban centers in the province,

39 Ibid., pp. 31-49.

40 Efron (see note 37), pp. 14–18.

41 Jedidia Efrón, "Informe sobre la colectividad judía de la provincia de Córdoba, presentado a la Dirección General de la JCA de Buenos Aires, 11 de junio 1943"; *Archivo Central para la Historia del Pueblo Judío*, Jerusalén 514\a, Fondo JCA, Londres.

42 Ibid.

in Río Cuarto there were 230 Jews among the 45,000 inhabitants; in Villa Maria there were 206 people in a total population of 35,000. He found 247 Jews in San Francisco, whose total population was 35,000.[43]

The Economic Integration of the Jewish Immigrants

The large-scale immigration and its geographic concentration worked far-reaching economic changes in Córdoba. In this section I will assess the Jewish immigrants' involvement in commerce and industry in the province (the two most important employment sectors for the Jews, as we will see below, both in the outlying towns and in the capital). The immigrants' presence in the different economic sectors can be estimated on the basis of the figures in the various census reports and other sources, such as business directories, documents from community archives, and of course memoirs. A reconstruction of the occupational stratification of the Jews and a study of the changes as the immigrants integrated into the host society is one of the most important research topics here.

A curious detail of Córdoba is that each ethnic group concentrated in a particular economic branch, often one that was uncommon in their country of origin. The immigrants' greatest concentration was in commerce. As we have seen above, a commercial and industrial boom struck the province, and especially the capital, in the last years of the nineteenth century. This growth was associated with tax benefits that an 1893 provincial law offered entrepreneurs in various branches of both heavy and light industry. These benefits included a tax exemption based on the size of the investment. Capitalists who invested more than 50,000 pesos were granted an exemption for ten years. Immigrants throughout the province were keen to exploit opportunities of this sort. [44]

The Jews' settlement patterns in the province exerted a significant influence on their occupational stratification. Because the newcomers settled

43 Ibid.

44 Flachs (see note 3), pp. 83-104.

in the towns and chiefly in the capital, their main occupations were in light industry and commerce. From the very beginning, the Jews who came to Córdoba found their niche in the urban proletariat and lower middle class. In the city, immigrants were small tradesmen, laborers, and especially installment peddlers, who played an important role in the local economy. By selling goods on a credit plan they made it possible for the poorer classes to purchase various articles. The peddler bought his merchandise from a Jewish merchant and sold it at a large profit, but took the risk of losing on a deal if a customer defaulted on payments. Jaime Goldenblank is remembered as having said that the word of a Criollo (a person of Spanish descent) was worth more than a thousand signed contracts.[45]

A peddler who managed to amass some capital generally opened his own business and often became a supplier for other peddlers. Small tradesmen also aspired to achieve financial independence and stability. The workshops that employed artisans and apprentices grew into small factories that employed new immigrants. Most of the Jewish immigrants were either peddlers or small merchants. Furniture and other goods that were rather expensive on the local market became the main branches of manufacturing for Jews, who produced goods of a quality and price level suitable for customers in the lower classes.

From individual stories we can also derive evidence of these historical processes. Jaime Rascovsky and his brothers were the pioneers in the manufacture and sale of furniture in the city of Córdoba. The family enterprise hired the first Jews who reached the city, including José Zatzkin, Margarita's father, Jaime Goldenblank, and many others. Soon after his arrival in Córdoba, Jaime Goldenblank was able to set up his own factory, which produced and sold furniture. It did very well and provided employment to many Jewish immigrants. Another example is Isaac Scholnik, who was in the furniture business in Buenos Aires and decided to expand to Córdoba in 1910. Five local Jews worked for Scholnik and received a commission of 8% on whatever they sold.[46]

45 Meirovich (see note 13), p. 97.
46 Flachs (see note 3), p. 96.

A similar pattern could be found among the Jews who arrived from the Ottoman Empire. According to the documents I examined, this group was employed in a very small number of commercial branches. As a result of this occupational pattern, all of them settled in the center of town, especially in the main business district in the northeast. This is where they had their shops and homes, as well as the institutions they established (see below). In this case, too, there was a clear trend to climb the socioeconomic ladder from peddlers to small landlords and store owners, and even to running retail firms with several branches. They were involved chiefly in textiles, notions (such as buttons, threads and needles), and silk. But there were very few Jews (Ashkenazi and Sepharadi) in the liberal professions.[47]

As can be understood from the foregoing, at the turn of the century the Jews of Córdoba were embarking on a process of socioeconomic mobility and entering the middle and upper middle classes. This process began with the Jewish immigrants' arrival in the city, continued until the First World War, and expanded rapidly during the interwar period. Jewish financial activity, which gained momentum in the 1920s, accelerated in the 1930s, and culminated in the opening of a Jewish bank in Córdoba, offers a good indication of this process.

This process began with the formation of credit associations that helped ease their members' material difficulties, especially among the Jewish peddlers. The credit unions and loan funds established by the immigrants were also intended to assist men who came directly from Europe to Córdoba to bring over their families who had remained behind.[48] The records of the first credit union, which was founded on March 19, 1922, include a list of the loans to immigrants to cover the cost of the ocean passage from Europe to Argentina. It includes the names of the borrowers, of their relatives in Europe, and of the ships on which the latter were to sail.[49]

47 Efron (see note 37); Rubin (see note 27); Israel (see note 34)

48 Efraim Zadoff, "Credito económico y liderazgo comunitario. Las cooperativas de crédito judías y la vida comunitaria judía argentina en el siglo XX", AMILAT (ed.), *Judaica Latinoamericana* V, Jerusalem 2005, pp. 129-134.

49 Paola Feldman, *Las Memorias del Banco Israelita de Córdoba*, Córdoba 2007, p. 4.

This first credit association, the Caja Israelita de Créditos Mutuos (Jewish Mutual Loan Fund), began with an initial capital of 180 pesos (at the time a kilo of bread cost 10 centavos and a kilo of meat 20 centavos).[50] Jaime Goldenblank was the main instigator of this enterprise. Later it came to be known as "La Caja Grande" (the Large Fund). By 1926 it had 450 members and 1,600 shareholders, with an estimated capital of 150,000 pesos. Its turnover in 1925 came to a million pesos. The credit union provided loans up to a ceiling of 5,000 pesos, at an interest of 6% to 7% per annum.[51]

In 1924 another group of shareholders decided to start a second credit association, La Caja de Créditos Mutuos de Obreros y Minoristas (The Workers' and Retail Merchants' Mutual Credit Fund), which came to be known as the "Small Fund" (La Caja Chica). Its bylaws, drafted in 1927, were written in both Yiddish and Spanish. This enterprise had shareholders and 300 depositors made loans, and contributed to organizations in financial straits.[52] In 1926 its capital was listed as 100,000 pesos, divided among its 110 members.[53] The credit associations were very important both for immigrants fresh off the boat and to the longer-settled who needed economic support or additional credit to set their business on a firm footing. The Small Fund focused on the first category, while the Large Fund assisted mainly those who had already been in Córdoba for several years.

In addition to their vital assistance to individuals, the two funds were also an important factor in the Jewish immigrants' integration into Córdoba between the two world wars and quickly became a dominant player in the local Jewish community. They merged in 1942 and created the Jewish Bank of Córdoba (Banco Israelita de Córdoba).[54] The Banco Israelita opened its doors to the public on June 2, 1942, in the former premises of the Large Fund in a building in downtown Córdoba that belonged to the Centro Unión

50 Ibid., p. 5.

51 Israel (see note 34).

52 Libro de Actas de la Cooperativa Israelita de Créditos Mutuos 1927. Acta N-1, 2, 11.5.1927.

53 Israel (see note 34).

54 Feldman (see note 49), p. 9-11.

Israelita de Córdoba (see below more about this organization). In 1943 the bank purchased its own building, also in the center of town; the festive ribbon-cutting ceremony took place in November 1945. In 1944 the bank's management decided to work with non-Jewish customers, both individuals and organizations.[55] Later this was evident in the bank's contributions and assistance to local institutions and especially, as we will see, to the Jewish schools in the city.

When Efrón conducted his census in 1942 he found that of the 1,476 adult Jewish males he counted in 98 districts of the Córdoba province, 63% were in trade, 4.2% were tailors, 3.38% worked in industry, and 0.95% were employed in carpentry—a total of 932 persons. Another 25.4% (325 persons) were in the liberal professions, including physicians, dentists, nurse-midwives, attorneys and brokers, teachers, engineers, and accountants. Most of the Jews in the city of Córdoba worked in various branches of light industry. These 272 persons were mainly employed in factories that produced furniture, mattresses, and notions. Efrón also counted 125 Jewish peddlers, out of 130 peddlers in the city (96.1%). Of the 2,191 liberal professionals in Córdoba City, 7% (153) were Jews: 40 Jewish physicians, of the 439 in town (9.1%); 20 Jewish dentists, out of 129 (15.5%); 12 Jewish nurse-midwives, out of 74 (16.2%); six Jewish pharmacists, out of the 13 in the city (46.1%). Finally, 20 Jews were employed by the Central Norte railroad.[56]

When Efrón conducted his survey, Córdoba was at the height of the industrial boom that accelerated the Jews' rise out of the proletariat. A hint of this can be found in the following figures: In 1942, 2,800 students were enrolled in all of the departments and faculties of the National University of Córdoba. The 458 students in the four departments of the Faculty of Medicine—medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, and midwifery—included 245 Jews: 131 were studying medicine (53.5% of all students in the faculty) and 9.6% of the university's total enrollment). Another 22% of the Jews were studying dentistry (11.3% of all the students in the university); 53

55 Ibid., p.12.

56 Efron (see note 37).

students, 21.6% of the Jews, were studying pharmacy (12.35%); and 2.8% of the Jews (seven students) were pursuing a degree as nurse-midwives (7% of all the students in the university).[57] Only 70 of these 245 Jewish students had grown up in Córdoba itself; the rest came from the Jewish agricultural colonies and Buenos Aires.[58]

The deproletarianization reflected in these figures was not unique to the Jews of Córdoba. The harbingers of the process were already visible seen in a study conducted by Simon Weill seven years before Efrón's survey.[59] A quip by Marcos Alperson, in his history of the agricultural colonies, "we planted wheat and harvested doctors," epitomizes the process perfectly.[60] For the Jews of Argentina, including those in Córdoba, this process was in full swing in the mid-1930s and reached its height in the 1940s. Many more Jews achieved economic stability, as many moved upwards and entered better-paid and more respected sectors and professions, including quite a few who became university lecturers.

Education, Religion, Culture, and Political Involvement

As may be inferred from this survey of the Jewish organizations in Córdoba, Jewish education was the core of their activity, determined their priorities, and spawned ideological, cultural, and political debates. The focus on educational institutions is reflected in the decision-making process. Both the bylaws of the Centro Unión Israelita de Córdoba and the records of community meetings represent Jewish education as one of the immediate goals set by the leadership. Nevertheless, in 1941, Jedidia Efrón saw the general indifference in Córdoba about the community's educational, cultural, and religious needs as extremely worrisome. He summed up his concern in his concluding sentence: "There are Jews in

57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Weill (see note 35).
60 Mordecai Alperson, *Thirty Years of Jewish Settlement in Argentina,* Tel Aviv 1930 [Heb.]

Córdoba, but no Judaism."[61] In his survey, Efrón placed special emphasis on the social life of the younger generation and sought to learn about their programs and reasons for their get-togethers and the questions they were asking in those dark days for the Jewish people. To this end he attended several meetings that took place in the building of the Centro Unión Israelita de Córdoba. He reported that the discussions and conversations focused on entertainment, dancing, and songs, with no educational, religious, or social content and absolutely nothing Jewish about them.

The educational model adopted by the Jews in Argentina during the period covered in this study was that of supplementary (afternoon and Sunday) schools; the children attended regular public schools in the morning. In those years there were five Jewish schools in Córdoba—four Ashkenazi and one Sephardi. Two of them had a Yiddishist, anti-religious, and leftist orientation. Two others were religious and supported by the Cursos Religiosos affiliated with the Congregación; the Sephardi school was strictly Orthodox. One of the schools with a religious bent was affiliated with the Sociedad Talmud Torá Max Nordau and supported by the Centro Unión Israelita de Córdoba. The second school was housed in the building adjacent to the main synagogue. All of these were afternoon schools, which the children attended after their day in the public school in Córdoba, and totally independent of one another. This arrangement was in keeping with a decision by the community's board.[62]

In 1942, the five schools had a total enrollment of 200 pupils, 131 boys and 69 girls. There were only six teachers. In Efrón's estimate, the caliber of education was catastrophic and totally devoid of any solid religious content. Working from the data available to him, he calculated that in a community of 5,800 persons, and on the assumption that 15% of them were school-age children, the schools should have enrolled 870 pupils. In other words, only 23% of the Jewish children in Córdoba were attending the Jewish schools. Efrón also discovered that only 100 children (12%) came to school on a regular basis. He wrote that the community

61 Ibid.

62 *Actas del Centro Unión Israelita de Córdoba*, acta 40, 28.8.1917.

leadership evinced deep concern and frustration about the issue, but added that opinions were sharply divided about the appropriate curriculum and teaching methods. [63]

The Zionists wanted the classes to be taught in Hebrew; because this was not done, they refrained from sending their children to the Centro Unión schools. The Orthodox, by contrast, asserted that the curriculum was devoid of religious content and accordingly saw no reason for their children to waste time there. The antireligious progressives eliminated all religious content from the curriculum of their institutions. The Sephardi schools focused on religious instruction, but did so in an old-fashioned way that did not attract or interest their pupils.[64]

The ideological debates among the Zionists, the Orthodox, the anti-religious progressives, and the Sephardim made it impossible to bridge the gulf between the groups so they could unite forces in education. This changed only at the end of the 1940s, when Jewish education was integrated into the public system with the founding of the San Martín Jewish day school,[65] which was "unique: combined general and Jewish education**,** pioneering, and Zionist," as Jaime Firstater, its first principal, put it.[66] In Córdoba, the second generation found the solution in the model described by Firstater: "The child learns to love the land of San Martín and Belgrano [heroes of the Argentine war of independence] alongside their love for the Land of Israel. A Zionist school that produces the complete Argentinian [*Argentino integral*], a model for the Jews of Argentina and of all the America."[67]

Despite the efforts by the first immigrant generation, the place, status, and nature of the religious services provided were marginal in Jewish society in Córdoba. The later waves of Jewish immigrants brought with

63 Efron (see note 37).

64 Ibid.

65 *Actas del Centro Union Israelita de Cordoba*, acta 7, 1949, pp. 366-371.

66 Jaime Firstater, "Colegio Israelita Integral Gral. San Martín: Nuestro Colegio – Ejemplo para América", *La Voz del Centro Unión Israelita de Córdoba* (agosto-septiembre 1956): 11.

67 Ibid.

them the spirit of secularization, a rebellion against the tradition, and an anti-religious ideology. The urban setting and difficulty of earning a living in the early years, too, were significant factors in the indifference to religion that prevailed among the Jews. As a result, the overwhelming majority were estranged from religion. Despite the efforts invested in them, the afternoon schools and courses in religion failed to produce a younger generation with a religious identity. There was only one ritual slaughterer in Córdoba, also employed as a teacher in one of the schools, whose salary barely managed to keep him afloat. Very few Jews kept kosher, so the owner of the only kosher shop in town was at constant risk of bankruptcy.[68]

During his visit to Córdoba in 1942, Efrón was invited by the religious Zionist Mizrachi organization to take part in its Purim party and deliver a lecture. Only kosher food was served. Because the organization did not own enough kosher pots, plates, or utensils for all the diners, there was no meat dish on the menu and the main course was fish. For the very same reason there were no forks on the table and people had to eat with toothpicks. After witnessing this comedy, Efrón used his lecture to protest against the dismal religious and spiritual situation of the Jews in the city.[69]

Two synagogues operated in the building owned by the Centro Unión Israelita de Córdoba. Although neither of them could attract a minyan for regular prayers, they could not be merged because they followed different rites and customs. Efrón attended one of them for the reading of the Megillah on Purim, and found very sparse attendance, which included two teachers and several former members of the colonies. Efrón noted that except for the synagogue and cemetery, the Sephardi community did not conduct any cultural or social activities worthy of mention, while its social club did not have a program of Jewish culture and education. When he toured the Jewish cemetery he found that it was run efficiently and that its building met all the requirements set by the municipality.[70]

Zionism was very important among the Jew of Córdoba, and the

68 Efron (see note 37).
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.

organization of community life on the basis of support for it was conspicuous. Zionism provided many with a focus of identification, an axis of organization, and a source of legitimacy. The very first attempt to organize the handful of Jewish families who were living in Córdoba at the end of the nineteenth century had been as a branch of the Dr. Herzl Hovevei Zion Society. Only eight families signed up and the chapter soon folded. The Zionist idea did not resurface as an organizing principle for Córdoba Jewry until after the Balfour Declaration.[71]

Efrón's report reflects the prominent role of Zionism in Jewish public life in Córdoba. The Dr. Herzl Society that was founded immediately after the Balfour Declaration had more than 200 members, who engaged mainly in disseminating political Zionism and Hebrew culture. The organization's office was in the Centro Unión's building. Efrón emphasized that Córdoba was heavily solicited by the Zionist fundraising organizations and provided impressive figures on the results of those campaigns, especially those by the Keren Hayesod and by the Jewish National Fund [KKL] which picked up steam from 1920 on. The third Zionist organization raising money in Córdoba, beginning in 1929, was WIZO, the Women's International Zionist Organization. That organization's first act was the publication of a manifesto in Yiddish and Spanish calling on the Jewish women of Córdoba to enlist in the Zionist project. It soon elicited more than 100 responses from local women. In 1941, the local chapter of WIZO had 400 members, both Ashkenazi and Sephardi. Fundraisers for the Friends of the Hebrew University also made it to Córdoba. This organization had great success in Latin America, and in Córdoba made contact with non-Jewish intellectuals as well.[72]

From Efrón's report we can learn about the schism that existed then between the several ideological currents within the Zionist movement and their battles among themselves and against the anti-Zionist left to "conquer the community." Efrón noted that the Zionist groups tended to control the

71 Actas de la Asociación Sionista Doctor Hertzl, actas 1-76, 1918-1921, Central Zionist Archives, F26.

72 Efron (see note 37).

community institutions, while the anti-Zionist leftists held sway mainly in the cultural and economic institutions. Here Efrón inserted many anecdotes to exemplify the clashes within the Zionist movement, in whose wake the non-Zionists were able to gain temporary control of various community institutions. Much the same took place in Buenos Aires, La Plata, Tucumán, Corrientes, Rosario, Santa Fe, and other places in Argentina.[73]

Zionism was the main axis around which the battles and schisms in the Jewish community of Córdoba revolved. These conflicts, which pervaded every arena of Jewish public life, ultimately ended with the victory of Zionism. "It is impossible to be a Zionist and turn one's back on Judaism," remarked Jaime Firstater, a successful attorney and one of the intellectual leading lights of Córdoba Jewry. He went on: "It is impossible to be a Jew and be indifferent to the Zionist ideology." Accordingly, Firstater proposed that his listeners wage a constant and honorable battle, in their professional life, business, industry, the economy, education, and the arts, to ensure that both Jewish and Zionist ideals are respected. Or, as he put it: "Only in this way can we be Jews, only in this way can we be free, only in this way can we be Argentines."[74]

The Jews' involvement in civic and political affairs, for example, is an indication of how the majority society saw them and of the Jews' weight in it, as individuals and as a community. Going by the documents I examined in my research, quite a few Jewish individuals left their mark on many areas of Córdoban society. Their stories show which strata of society were open to Jews, and which remained closed. Starting in 1940 there was a major change among the Jews in Córdoba. As described previously, it was around then that the process of their deproletarianization was at its height. The immigrant generation had made it economically; now many of the second generation, their children, attended university and acquired liberal professions. One result was that many Jews found a place in various spheres of public life.

When Jedidia Efrón conducted his survey in the Córdoba province

73 Ibid.

74 Jaime Firstater, *Lucha, moral y futuro*, Córdoba, 1967, pp. 328-329.

he encountered a fair number of Jews who held prominent positions in the public service sector, at both the national and the provincial levels. He emphasized the achievements of the Jewish lecturers, all of them the children of colonists from Moisés Ville. Jews also entered politics in the 1940s. Efrón noted the case of Andrés Bercovich, the son of a former colonist, a member of the Radical Party who served three terms as president of the provincial House of Deputies.[75] There were also prominent Jewish journalists, sculptors, painters, and attorneys.[76]

Conclusion

Throughout this article, I have insisted on the decisive importance of chain immigration for the migration process. The first immigrants who came to the city of Córdoba created the initial basis of information that generated and promoted additional options for immigration. The personal contacts, ties, and the relationships among families, friends, and those from the same town in the old country, both back in Europe or Syria and in their new homes, were decisive factors in the migration process.

My study, mapping, and examination of these stories shed light on who chose to emigrate and why, how they chose their destinations, where they settled, and what occupations they took up. Despite the immensity of the migration process, it was rational and carefully thought out. The decision to emigrate was taken with great caution, after much indecision, second thoughts, and the weighing of the various arguments pro and con that were intended to minimize the risk involved. For many, Córdoba was the final destination but not necessarily their first choice for settlement. Internal migration to Córdoba began at the end of the nineteenth century, swelled in the early twentieth century, and peaked in the 1920s and 1930s. The internal Jewish migration played a major role in the growth, consolidation, and stabilization of the Jewish community in the city.

75 Efron (see note 37).

76 "Centenario", *La Voz del Interior*, 31.10.1989.

The fascinating picture that emerges from my examination and analysis of the sources shows that the case of Córdoba is relevant and important, with many unique patterns, and makes a major contribution to the study of migration in general. The immigrants to Córdoba were not pioneers who came to make the Argentinian wasteland bloom, but city folk who preferred the major urban centers of the province, and especially its capital, Córdoba City. The earliest immigrants who arrived there laid the foundations for those who came after them. The Rascovsky brothers, among the very first Jews to settle in Córdoba, brought many others after them, as can be seen in the stories of the Zatzkin, Goldenblank, and Lublinsky families, who moved to Córdoba from the Jewish agricultural colonies in Argentina. In the other migration streams to Córdoba, too, we can identify the decisive influence and importance of the pioneers for those who followed them. The stories of the Halac and Rubin families are good examples of this.

Special importance attaches to those immigrants who abandoned the agricultural settlements for life in the city. I have referred to them as the "refugees from the colonies" or the "Moisés Ville generation" (as they were called then). Their experiences on the Argentine frontier, though often quite brief, were a formative experience for them. This is strongly reflected in the memoirs, where it is clear that, for those Jews, Argentina was much more than just one more place they could move to. The unique conditions of absorption and the social and community life of the colonies left its mark on the refugees from the colonies. Despite the traumatic experience some had on the Argentinian frontier, they carried away from it a spiritual energy and pattern of public service that had a positive effect on the cooperative character of the urban Jewish community in Córdoba.

That the Jewish immigrants saw Argentina as not just one more country they could have selected was a very important component of their collective identity. This idea went beyond the borders of the agricultural colonies because of the influence their residents had on all of Argentine Jewry. This influence was magnified by the heavy turnover characteristic of the Jewish settlements, which turned the colonies into a way station for many Jewish immigrants. Those immigrants, their families, and their dependents made a

direct contribution to the growth of the Jewish population of various cities throughout Argentina, including Córdoba.

The tales of the Jewish colonists were the formative text and educational basis for the members of the second and third generations of Argentinian Jewry in general and for the colonists' descendents in particular. Their stories and memoirs bring to life the experiences of those whose identity was imbued with the Argentinian landscape, nature, and agricultural labor. This utopian element of their collective identity influenced the economic activity and organizational patterns of the Jews of Córdoba.

In my research I also traced the Jews' growing economic security and the socioeconomic mobility as they advanced from the proletariat and lower middle-class to the middle class and upper-middle class. The process began almost as soon as the first Jewish immigrants arrived in the city, continued until the First World War, and accelerated greatly between the two wars. Jewish financial activity gained momentum in the 1920s and even more so in the 1930s, culminating in the founding of the Jewish bank of Córdoba. At this point, Córdoba was at the height of its process of industrialization, which generated far-reaching socioeconomic changes that further intensified the deproletarianization of the local Jews in the second half of the 1940s.

The younger generation in the city did not have much of a religious consciousness. The Purim party sponsored by the Mizrachi in 1942, where the shortage of kosher dishes and utensils forced the diners to rely on toothpicks, is a concise illustration of the minor role of religion in the lives of most of the local Jews. Jedidia Efrón summarized his impression as "There are Jews in Córdoba, but no Judaism." Those Jews participated, as individuals and as a group, in diverse spheres of the majority society. The organized Jewish community was run through its institutions, which, although their political status was rather weak, were resolute about acting and representing their members to the majority society of Córdoba, with no fear or sense of inferiority.

"La Docta" (the scholar), as the city of Córdoba was known, created Jaime Firstater's "complete Argentinian." Based on an analysis of the sources and my summary of the main components of the collective identity

of the Jews of Córdoba, I would add a number of additional traits to his "complete Argentinian": the utopian element of the Jewish farmer and the secular and Zionist Jewish identity based on the principle of mutual aid. I would add that another characteristic of the "complete Argentinian" is his skill with a pen and urge to document and preserve information for future generations. Witness this the memoirs of Jaime Firstater, Boris Blank, and Carlos Meirovich, all three the sons of immigrants whose experience left a mark on their individual and Jewish identity, and who hunted down, collected, preserved, wrote, investigated, and documented the history of their families and their communities, while evincing an exceptional flair for historical research. The result, to my great good fortune and benefit, is embodied in an extensive memoir literature, comprehensive and high quality, which has great historiographic and above all great educational value.