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**Aleksandra Jakubczak**, *University of Warsaw*,  
*alex.jakubczak@gmail.com*

## **JEWS AS THE AVANT-GARDE OF ANTI-PROSTITUTION DISTURBANCES AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

*Abstract:* The present article presents the wave of anti-prostitution disturbances which unfolded in several cities of the Russian Empire and Argentina. Due to the raise of anti-Semitism, repeating accusations against Jews of being white-slave dealers, and personal contacts with the duped women, Jews became the main agents in the anti-prostitution movement. The aim of the present work is to establish why the violent actions against procurers and traffickers of women took place solely in the Russian Empire and Argentina between the years 1905 and 1908. The author assumes that there were couple factors that contributed to the outburst of violence against the Jewish underworld in Warsaw, Łódź, and Buenos Aires. Among the factors were: the concentration of Jewish working class in those urban centers, significant influence of socialist ideology on the participants of the clashes, and the latency of the authorities which supported the traffickers instead of limiting their criminal activities.

*Keywords:* prostitution; white slavery; Pogrom of the Pimps; revolution 1905; Jews of Buenos Aires; Warsaw's Jewry.

**Александра Якубчак**, *Варшавский университет*

## **ЕВРЕИ В АВАНГАРДЕ ПРОТЕСТОВ ПРОТИВ ПРОСТИТУЦИИ В НАЧАЛЕ XX В.**

*Резюме:* Настоящая статья посвящена волне протестов против проституции, которые развернулись в нескольких городах Российской империи и Аргентины. Из-за роста антисемитизма, повторяющихся обвинений евреев в торговле «белыми рабами» и благодаря личным контактам с обманутыми женщинами, евреи стали главными агентами движения по борьбе с проституцией. Цель настоящей работы — установить, почему насильственные действия против сутенеров и торговцев женщинами имели место исключительно в Российской империи и Аргентине в 1905–1908 гг. Автор предполагает, что существует

несколько факторов, которые способствовали всплеску насилия против еврейского преступного мира в Варшаве, Лодзи, и Буэнос-Айресе, а именно: концентрация еврейского рабочего населения в этих городских центрах, значительное влияние социалистической идеологии на участников столкновений, тайное покровительство администрации, не ограничивавшей преступную деятельность, а поддерживавшей ее.

*Ключевые слова:* проституция; белое рабство; погром сутенеров; революция 1905; Евреи Буэнос-Айреса; варшавское еврейство.

## I. THE RISE OF PROSTITUTION AT THE TURN OF THE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES

As a consequence of urbanization and modernization in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, soldiers, students, and workers, began to populate massively the growing urban centers. Flocks of single men created a high demand for sexual services in the major cities. As a result, urban centers attracted many prostitutes. The number of harlots increased concurrently with the demographic and industrial development of the cities.<sup>1</sup>

The sudden raise of fallen women's number in the cities appeared to be enough visible and alarming to provoke reaction from the state authorities. At the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the majority of European countries adopted a new policy toward prostitution — a regulatory system. Shortly, this method of controlling prostitution was introduced in the Polish lands by the partitioned powers. Prussia and Austria applied in the Polish lands regulatory system at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Russian authorities adapted the policy of regulating prostitution as well, though with a slight delay. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in Russia were in force several laws concerning prostitutes referring mainly to police and medical control over fallen women. The police was responsible for giving licenses for bordellos, controlling them, and detecting unregistered harlots. From 1843, all the prostitutes in Russia were obliged to carry a yellow ticket and to attend a doctor on a regular basis.<sup>2</sup> In general, the regulatory system lied in obligatory license for brothels, control over bordellos, registration of prostitutes, and obligatory medical examinations of prostitutes. The supporters of this method believed that legal brothels and scrupulous control over fallen women would limit secret prostitution and venereal diseases.

Although one may expect that the regulatory system of controlling prostitution can provide accurate evidence about the scope of the phenomenon, the numbers

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<sup>1</sup> *Jolanta Sikorska-Kulesza*, "Prostitution in the Congress Poland", *Acta Poloniae Historica* 2001, vol. 83, p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> *Laurie Bernstein*, *Sonia's Daughters: Prostitutes and Their Regulation in Imperial Russia*, University of California Press, 1995, p. 19.

are far different from reality. Since the registration limited the freedom and caused hardship in finding a full time job as a servant or as a factory's worker, many women who considered prostitution as a temporary solution for their problems did not want to be registered as prostitutes and preferred to solicit clandestinely. According to the census of 1889, in Russian Empire there were registered 7,840 women soliciting in bordellos and another 9,760 worked as streetwalkers.<sup>3</sup> In the same year, 1889, there were 2,018 registered harlots in the Congress Poland, from which almost half of this number dwelled in the capital.<sup>4</sup> For the similar period of time scholars estimate the number of illegal prostitutes in the Kingdom of Poland of 10,000.<sup>5</sup> In fact, if we can trust these calculations, it appears that almost one third (sic!) of all single women in the Russian Poland were involved in prostitution.<sup>6</sup> These numbers raised significantly, accounting for even 50,000 non-registered harlots in the Congress Poland at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it is absolutely reasonable that the state and social concern about prostitution increased at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially, since it was additionally incited by reports about traffic in women.

## II. THE EXPANSION OF THE WHITE SLAVE TRADE IN THE MODERN ERA

The term “white slavery” referring to women coerced to prostitution was coined for the first time by London physician in 1839.<sup>8</sup> Needless to say, traffic in women existed in pre-modern era, but only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it became a prospering business on a big scale. Not only the spread of prostitution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century provoked the emergence of white slavery in a new expanded form. Scholars who conduct research about white slavery propose several additional factors that appeared in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and triggered international traffic in women.

First of all, massive migrations from villages to major industrial centers caused significant changes in women's life. The women found themselves in new environment and experienced difficulty to adapt to a new situation. Moreover, they were usually left alone, without any support from family or traditional community. The disappearance of community's protection resulted in high vulnerability of these women. In addition, the distressing work mar-

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<sup>3</sup> *Laurie Bernstein*, “Russian Empire”, [in:] *Encyclopedia of Prostitution and Sex Work*, vol. 1, Greenwood Press 2006, p. 223.

<sup>4</sup> *J. Sikorska-Kulesza*, “Prostitution in Congress Poland...”, p. 126

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *L. Bernstein*, *Sonia's Daughters...*, p. 161.

ket's conditions in East Europe led many women to look for other possibilities, for instance, emigration or prostitution.

Secondly, migrations to the New World engendered also changes in men's life and consequently produced a place with a high demand for paid sex. To demonstrate, whereas entire families immigrated to the United States, to South America migrated usually single men. For a long period of time Argentina and Brazil did not appear to be ideal places to start a new life with a family. Therefore, these locations attracted mainly single men who were looking for an adventure or they saw the immigration to South America as a temporary solution and a chance to earn some money. This trend of migration to Argentina and Brazil resulted in a huge disproportion of genders, with an obvious dominance of men, and hence the demand for women. To illustrate, from 1895 to 1914, the ratio of man in Argentine among the foreign population was 172 to 100 women.<sup>9</sup>

There are also certain factors ascribed to the "success" of white slavery among the Jewish population in Eastern Europe. The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a turbulent time for Jews in Russia. Due to two waves of pogroms, in 1880–1881 and 1903–1907, many Jewish families were left without male members. Women became orphans with no dowry or *agunot* with no future within traditional community. Physical violence against Jews resulted also in growth of poverty. All of these pushed the vulnerable women into hands of procurers and traffickers who were eager to take advantage of the miserable situation of Jewesses. Obviously, there were also women who consciously gave themselves to the procurers and white slavedealers, but due to numerous accounts published in the press it was commonly believed that the majority of the prostitutes were craftily allured innocent girls.

In several bigger cities Jewish pimp circles created complex criminal groups. For instance: 'Ludwig' in Warsaw, 'Maccabees' in Moscow, and 'Varshe' (Yid. Warsaw), later on known as 'Zvi Migdal', in Buenos Aires.<sup>10</sup> These organizations had expanded networks, including smugglers, thieves, border officials, police officers, and judges, at the same time. To illustrate, in Warsaw and in Buenos Aires, local procurers controlled many coffee shops and restaurants in the center of the city, where they used to do their criminal businesses. Moreover, at the back of these places they usually run clandestine brothels or they organized auctions of girls — future sex slaves. Their visible presence on the streets together with their unbridled criminal activity provoked

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<sup>9</sup> Victor Mirelman, "The Jewish Community Versus Crime: The Case of White Slavery in Buenos Aires", *Jewish Social Studies* (1984), p. 147.

<sup>10</sup> L. Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters...*, p. 161–162.

To read more about Zvi Migdal, see: G. Bra, *La Organización Negra, La Increíble historia de la Zvi Migdal*, Buenos Aires 1982; G. Bra, "La Mutual de los Rufianes," *Todo es Historia*, no. 121, Junio 1977; N. J. Jozami, *Vendida! Memorias íntimas de Cosia Zeilon, La Zvi Migdal vista por dentro*, Buenos Aires 1930; L. Levy, *La Mancha de la Migdal, Historia de la Prostitución Judía en la Argentina*, Buenos Aires 2007.



anti-Semitic reactions. To demonstrate, in Buenos Aires all the Jews started to be associated with prostitutes and white-slave dealers because the latter were the most blatant to the eyes of Gentiles.<sup>11</sup>

In European countries as well, people started to consider white slavery and bordellos as exclusively Jewish business.<sup>12</sup> The trials of Jewish travel agents and traffickers of women at the time nourished people's imagination about villain Jews who traded on human flesh.<sup>13</sup> As Keely Stauter-Halsted points out, in the Polish narratives about commercial sex Jews played the role of devious immoral men exploiting their own women and selling them to disgrace.<sup>14</sup> Main Polish abolitionists, including of Jewish origin, blamed Jews for trade in women and the corruption of Polish society.<sup>15</sup>

### III. ANTI-PROSTITUTION ACTIONS INSPIRED BY JEWS

The visibility of Jewish white-slave dealers, procurers, and madams, provoked negative reactions not only from Gentile societies. Procurers and traffickers of women usually desired to remain members of Jewish communities and even to fulfill important functions. The short story of Shmuel Yosef Agnon "The Pimp" about a trafficker of women who used to be the leader of a prayer in the synagogue at the same time, had its reflection in reality.<sup>16</sup> The striking presence of immoral individuals on the streets and Jewish communal places, such as synagogues or societies of mutual help, gave rise to decisive responses of the Jewish communities. *Ostjuden* (the East-European Jews) suffered not only from the accusations against Jews, but also, if not mostly, from the miserable situation of the Jewish families that lost their daughters in brothels. Obviously, this emotional factor, which resulted from close relationships with the fallen women, was crucial. As a consequence, East-European Jews took more resolute steps in order to eradicate the immoral elements from the Jewish community and to save their women from disgrace and the tragic plight of a harlot.

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<sup>11</sup> J. Sikorska-Kulesza, *Handel kobietami z ziem polskich na przełomie wieku XIX i XX — historyk między głosem prasy a milczeniem sądu, [in:] O kobietach. Studia i szkice. Wiek XIX i XX*, ed. Jadwiga Hoff, Rzeszów 2011, p. 123; *Mir Yarfitz*, Polacos, White Slaves, and Stille Chuppahs: Organized Prostitution and the Jews of Buenos Aires, 1890–1939, PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles 2012, p. 59.

<sup>12</sup> *Keely Stauter-Halsted*, *The Devil's Chain. Prostitution and Social Control in Partitioned Poland*, Cornell University Press 2015, p. 175.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>15</sup> See: *Augustyn Wróblewski*, *Handel kobietami*, "Czystość", the 14th of May 1909, p. 354–355; *Stanisław Posner*, *Nad Otchłanią*, Warsaw 1901, p. 12–17 according to *K. Stauter-Halsted*, *The Devil's Chain...*, p. 169.

<sup>16</sup> Sh. Y. Tshatshkes, *Ha-Sarsur le-ariyot*, "Ha-Mitspe", the 29th of September 1905, p. 3.

The most infamous action against the members of the underworld involved in prostitution had place in Warsaw on the eve of revolution 1905. The events were immediately labeled by the observers as the Pogrom of the Pimps, since the main targets of the attacks were procurers and traffickers of women, not the bordellos themselves. The so called “Alfonsnpogrom” (Yid. The Pogrom of the Pimps) was the first public act of violence aimed against procurers, madams, and traffickers of women. It became a fabled occurrence, remembered even in the interwar period as an act of Jewish workers’ bravery in the name of public morality. Moreover, the workers’ actions were repeated by other social circles in Jewish Diaspora in Imperial Russia and Argentina.<sup>17</sup>

For almost six days in May 1905, Jewish workers, commonly associated by observers and scholars with Bund supporters, chased and attacked the members of Warsaw’s Jewish underworld.<sup>18</sup> While destroying the brothels, the workers shouted: “*We washed off the shame from us!*”<sup>19</sup> Evidently, the accusations against Jews of being over-proportionally present in traffic of women and pimping troubled Jewish workers. They knew well that the presence of traffickers and procurers is striking to the eyes of Gentile observers and, thus, feeding the anti-Semites. The Jewish workers strived to show that they did not tolerate the moral corruption of their coreligionists and that immorality was not an innate feature of all Jews. “*Since the Jewish workers had taken very personally the accusation of Christian workers that their [of Jewish workers] coreligionists were supporting the moral corruption among women by recruiting the harlots from the working class, they [the Jewish workers] had been agitating already long time ago for limiting this breach*” — reported a socialist Polish newspaper after the events.<sup>20</sup>

The crowd managed to destroy about 150 bordellos and private properties of pimps. As a result, hundreds of procurers and white-slave dealers left the city for good.<sup>21</sup> This resolute campaign of the Jewish workers against the immoral elements of Jewish society caused the deterioration of prostitution in Warsaw.

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<sup>17</sup> See: *Haim Avni*, T’meim: sahar be-nashim be-Argentina u-be-Israel, Tel Aviv 2009, especially chapter “Public Struggle” about common social opposition to pimp circles in Buenos Aires; *Victor A. Mirelman*, “The Jewish Community Versus Crime: The Case of White Slavery in Buenos Aires”, *Jewish Social Studies* (1984), p. 145–168; *L. Bernstein*, *Sonia’s Daughters: Prostitutes and Their Regulation in Imperial Russia*, University of California Press, 1995.

<sup>18</sup> The association between Bund and the “Pogrom of the Pimps” was suggested by: *Edward J. Bristow*, *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight Against White Slavery, 1870–1939*, Oxford 1982, p. 59; *Stanisław Kalabiński, Feliks Tych*, *Czwarte powstanie czy pierwsza rewolucja: lata 1905–1907 na ziemiach polskich*, Warszawa 1976, p. 218,219; *Scott Ury*, *Barricades and Banners: The Revolution of 1905 and the Transformation of Warsaw* Jewry, Redwood 2012, p. 129; *J. Sikorska-Kulesza*, “Sądy dorażne...”, p. 118.

<sup>19</sup> Tigrot damim bi-rhovot Varsha, “Ha-Tsefira”, the 26th of May 1905, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Dorażne sądy ludowe, “Do boju” 1905, no 7, p. 15 according to *J. Sikorska-Kulesza*, “Sądy dorażne...”, p. 118.

<sup>21</sup> *Natan*, Varsha 15 Mai, “Ha-Zman”, the 31th of May 1905, p. 3.

Shortly after the events, the chief of the Warsaw's police restrained the presence of prostitutes in the city. From then on their private chambers and bordellos could not be located in the vicinity of places of worships and schools.<sup>22</sup> For next couple years none of the destroyed bordellos reopened.<sup>23</sup> The social tensions between the underworld and the "moral" members of Jewish society relented, for a short period of time though:

"The 'moral outrage' expressed by immoral acts, which unfolded during destroying the bordellos and private chambers of harlots and killing procurers, had not even the result expected by the most skeptical people to the pogrom — eliminating the public corruption from the streets. Not many days passed from the 'pogroms' and already Nowy Świat Street teemed with prostitutes and their companions [...]"<sup>24</sup>

Seemingly, the problem of prostitution still bothered the inhabitants of Warsaw. Only in year 1910, the Russian government decided to send the majority of the pimps and harlots away from Warsaw to Moscow and the prostitution itself was officially prohibited in the capital of the Russian Poland.<sup>25</sup>

The anti-prostitution Jewish movement in Warsaw motivated Jews from other places to take decisive steps against the community members, which were considered immoral and bringing shame on all Jews, thus encouraging anti-Semites. Similar violent actions against the procurers, madams, and traffickers of women, unfolded, though on a smaller scale, in Łódź and Białystok in 1905 and 1906.<sup>26</sup> Reportedly, when the unrests in Warsaw were fading attacks in Łódź unfolded:

"Yesterday [some people] intended to destroy a bordello in Robert Opleter's building at Długa 61 Street [...] The second case of an attack happened at home of Daniel and Gitla Putzmans at Konstantinowska 7 Street. [...] Defenseless women decided to escape. In the meantime, the attackers destroyed the furniture, torn the bedclothes, and left to the streets at the end"<sup>27</sup>.

The "moral crusade", as the movement of cleansing the society from immoral elements is called, on the streets of Russian Empire lasted at least until late 1906. Attacks against bordellos were sometimes repeated in one city:

"Reportedly, in Łódź there was again the pogrom of bordellos. The crowd burst into the yard of one of the houses at Wschodnia Street and broke the door, destroyed all the furniture, and, moreover, beaten dispersed all the forty

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<sup>22</sup> Varsha, "Ha-Tsefira", the 5th of June 1905, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Wacław Zaleski, Z dziejów prostytucji*, Warszawa 1923, p. 77.

<sup>24</sup> *D.*, Co inni piszą: Uzasadnione skargi, "Słowo", the 23th of June/the 6th of July 1905, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Witold Chodźko, Handel kobietami*, Warszawa 1938, p. 27.

<sup>26</sup> *J. Sikorska-Kulesza*, "Sądy doraźne...", p. 116.

<sup>27</sup> Kronika: Napady na domy rozpusty, "Rozwój", the 3rd of June 1905, p. 3.

female residents. At the same day, there was bordellos' pogrom also on the Średnia Street. On the 8th of May still there were people destroying brothels at Widzewska Street. The reason of the pogrom was the following: in the evening on the 5th of May two young ladies, returning from the theatre, were accosted by procurers, who tried to drag them into the bordellos at Średnia Street".<sup>28</sup>

The chases after the traffickers of women and the pimps continued also in Warsaw, as reported in the local Warsaw press: "*Last night a crowd, consisted of 40 persons, Jews in majority, showed up at the Warszawa-Brzeska train station. Their aim was to pursue vendetta against thieves and procurers who were operating in trains [...]*".<sup>29</sup> The lynchings over the Warsaw's underworld lasted at least until the year 1906.

Jews from Buenos Aires took the example of Eastern-European coreligionists and also brought the war against procurers and traffickers of women. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Argentinean authorities decided to limit the presence of Jewish procurers and traffickers of women in Argentina. A deputy Palacios proposed a new bill granting the expulsions of white-slave dealers from Argentina. As reported in "Ha-Tsefira" — "the Jews of Argentina, who knew well that the majority of the white-slave dealers here [in Argentina] are from theirs [of the Jewish origin] and who suffered a lot of disgrace and disdain, were of course the first to support the proposal [of Palacios]."<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the new law proposal "gave them [the Argentinean Jews] a hope to get rid of this embarrassing problem in a fast way."<sup>31</sup> Actually, traffickers in women and pimps for previous thirty years constituted a serious problem for the Argentinean community. Similarly as in Warsaw, procurers and white-slave dealers had their own clubs and coffee places, where they were making businesses.<sup>32</sup> They also felt comfortable enough on the Jewish streets and in the Yiddish theater.<sup>33</sup> Despite their economic influence on the community's life and their ambition to become an integral part and respected members of the *kehilah*, they did not succeeded to gain the acceptance of the "honest" Jews of Buenos Aires.<sup>34</sup> They were not only unaccepted, but even more — they were excluded from the Jewish community. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century they were banned from all Jewish institutions, as *Hevra Kadisha*, Jewish cemetery, and societies for mutual help. From then on, the pimps and traffickers could not participate

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<sup>28</sup> Wiadomości Bieżące, "Czystość", the 15th of May 1906, p. 320.

<sup>29</sup> Wypadki: Lynch, "Słowo", the 28th of June/12th of July 1905, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Belof, "Ha-Tsefira", the 3rd of December 1913, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> *H. Avni*, op. cit., p. 120.

<sup>33</sup> Pimps and white-slave dealers controlled as well Yiddish theatres in Warsaw.

See: Przebieg Dyskusji 20.X.1993, [in:] Teatr żydowski w Polsce, ed. A. Kuligowska-Korzeniewska; M. Leyko, p. 438.

<sup>34</sup> *Victor A. Mirelman*, The Jewish Community Versus Crime: The Case of White Slavery in Buenos Aires, "Jewish Social Studies" (1984), p. 151.

in Jewish social and religious life, as they wished to do. The formal exclusion of the *t'meim* (Yid. impure ones) from the Jewish community was unusual and did not happen in other Jewish communities, for example in the Kingdom of Poland. On the contrary, traffickers of women and procurers were tolerated by communal representatives and could freely participate in Jewish religious life of the community.

The opposition against white-slave dealers and procurers in Argentina was not limited to the official ban imposed on the *t'meim*. However, the members of the underworld were excluded from the religious communal life of the Jewish community, there were still ways to participate in the social life of Jews in Buenos Aires, for example by sponsoring theaters and going for theater plays. Therefore, it does not surprise that the most violent act against the *t'meim* in Buenos Aires had place at the premises of the Yiddish theater in 1908. Members of Poaley Zion<sup>35</sup> ostensibly discarded the pimps from the performance of the Yiddish play “Miriam” of Perets Hirshbein. The play, chosen by the sponsors of Yiddish theater, was about the tragic plight of a Jewish girl abducted by white-slave dealers and placed in a bordello.<sup>36</sup> Seemingly, despite the formal ban of Jewish community, the procurers and traffickers of women still felt confident in Jewish public places and did not even try to appease their coreligionists. On the contrary, the *t'meim* were inciting the conflict between them and the rest of the Buenos Aires' Jews.

During the same year, two youth groups opposing the *t'meim* were formed — Juventud (Spanish: Youth) and Broyt un Ehre (Yid. Bread and Pride).<sup>37</sup> They organized boycotts against Jews dealing with the impure ones, as well as public mass demonstrations petitioning government to limit the scope of prostitution and white slavery.<sup>38</sup> Noteworthy, those young Jewish activists opposing to white-slave dealers and procurers were usually the supporters of socialist ideology. As Haim Avni points out, the year 1905 brought to Argentina a number of Jewish workers and future leaders of Jewish socialists in Argentina. These wave of immigration strengthen the Jewish proletariat in Buenos Aires.<sup>39</sup> It is thus probable, that the Jewish workers from Warsaw, Łódź or Białystok who arrived in Argentina on the eve of Revolution 1905 witnessed the violent actions against procurers and traffickers of women in Eastern Europe. If not, surely they had heard of the infamous events in Warsaw and could have brought these news to South America.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, I would dare to say that there is a possible link between the Argentinean members

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<sup>35</sup> Poaley Zion — socialist Zionist movement.

<sup>36</sup> *H. Avni*, op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *V. Mirelman*, op. cit., p. 156.

<sup>39</sup> *H. Avni*, op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>40</sup> The news about Alfonsnpogrom in Warsaw in May 1905 were widespread all over Eastern Europe and were remembered at least until the outbreak of the Second World War.

of Poaley Zion, who violently opposed to white-slave dealers, and the Jewish working class in Eastern Europe fighting against the underworld in 1905 and 1906.

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The present research sets itself a goal of answering the questions: what affected different Jewish communities to conduct the “moral crusades” against its members? Why similar outburst of violence against white-slave dealers and bordellos did not happen in Galicia or England, where the procurers and traffickers were considerably visible as well?

It was, surely, not random that these violent actions against the Jewish underworld unfolded solely in the Russian Empire and Argentina. Several local factors concurred exactly in these places and exactly then, about 1905–1908, and stimulated Jews to take decisive steps. First of all, a strong and numerous Jewish working class existed in Białystok, Warsaw, and Łódź. And yet, the vast majority of prostitutes originated from the working class, as the initiators of the anti-prostitution actions were. In addition, the affiliations with socialism among these working circles were crucial. After all, it was socialist ideology that condemned prostitution as one of the negative symptoms of capitalism and promoted the liberalization and equality of women. The short story of Ezriel Natan Frenk “*Der Alfonsnpogrom in Varshe*”, published in 1908 in Warsaw, underlines the influence of socialist ideology on the participants of the Alfonsnpogrom. For the Jewish workers, taking part in the clashes, procurers and traffickers of women collaborated with the bourgeoisie, called the *hoypst-retsoychim* (Yid. the upper-murderers).<sup>41</sup> Bourgeoisie, thieves, pimps, and white-slave dealers, had the same goal — to take advantage of poor workers and their hard work. All of them lived in symbiosis and, therefore, by murdering the pimps and destroying the source of their income, the Jewish workers were fighting against bourgeoisie.<sup>42</sup> Also in Buenos Aires members of socialist movement — Poaley Zion — took on themselves the responsibility for cleansing Jewish community from unwanted elements, who were ruining the reputation of entire Jewish diaspora in Argentina. As aforementioned, the ranks of socialist movement built up thanks to the the immigration wave of Jewish proletariat in 1905. The Poaley Zion party was very young in Argentina and only after the influx of Jewish workers in 1905 the movement gathered strength and consequently was able to oppose publicly to the underworld.

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See: *Aleksandra Jakubczak*, Jews’ Participation in White Slavery and Prostitution as depicted in Hebrew Press between 1880s and 1914, unpublished M. A. thesis, Hebrew Institute, Oriental Studies Department, University of Warsaw 2016.

<sup>41</sup> *Ezriel Natan Frenk*, *Der Alfonsn Pogrom in Varshe*, Varshe 1908, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.



One cannot forget either the revolutionary upheaval in the Russian Empire. Revolutionary slogans calling for cleansing immoral individuals, such as tsarist collaborators, coincided with the purifying ideas of “moral crusade”. Moreover, the ferocious way of meting out the justice was indicated by the omnipresent ferocities on the streets of the Russian Empire, during strikes and other public manifestations. These slogans were probably brought to Argentina by Jewish workers who constituted the majority of the Jewish immigrants in 1905.<sup>43</sup>

Another important factor, which unquestionably resulted in commotion of Jewish working masses, was the fact that in the cities where the disturbances unfolded, Jews were over-proportionally represented in running bordellos and were organized in influential pimp-organizations. To illustrate, according to data from 1889, Jewish madams supervised even 75% of the brothels in the Kingdom of Poland.<sup>44</sup> Press information and other sources, for instance, diplomatic correspondence of a British consul in Warsaw from 1905, confirm that the dominance of Jewish brothels’ owners and madams was clearly conspicuous.<sup>45</sup> Statistics from Argentina support the data from Russia, by showing that in 1909 in Buenos Aires out of 199 bordellos 101 (51%) were run by Jewish women who were usually wives or partners of the dealers.<sup>46</sup>

As aforementioned, Jewish pimps and traffickers of women were well organized and they functioned openly. To demonstrate, *“like a wild storm the wave of bloody vengeance passed through Warsaw, and afterwards other cities [...] Entire organized societies of degenerates exported numerous victims of debauchery to fill with them bordellos all over the world [...]”*<sup>47</sup> What is more, as reported in the Hebrew newspapers, in the period just before the Pogrom of the Pimps the panache of pimps, procurers, madams, and traffickers of women in Warsaw transgressed the limits of social tolerance. As stated in Hebrew periodicals, in Warsaw existed restaurants and coffee shops, which were dominated by pimps, thieves, and traffickers of women.<sup>48</sup> Apparently, the underworld openly controlled all these places, which were in the heart of Warsaw and the Jewish neighborhood. Moreover, it was known to everybody that exactly there the criminals did their businesses and that at the back of these places they were running clandestine bordellos. In addition to that, in the months preceding the “Alfonsnagogrom” the cases of kidnapping Jewish female workers from factories and placing them in bordellos became epidemic. Especially during the strikes, which became more common from the beginning of the year 1905,

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<sup>43</sup> H. Avni, p. 125.

<sup>44</sup> Jolanta Sikorska-Kulesza, *Zło tolerowane — Prostytycja w Królestwie Polskim w XIX wieku*, Warszawa 2004, p. 243.

<sup>45</sup> Lloyd Gartner, “Anglo-Jewry and the Jewish International Traffic in Prostitution 1885–1914”, *AJS Review* Vol. 7/8, (1982/1983), p. 133.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>47</sup> Ks. Józafat Zyskar, *Kilka myśli o prostytucji, “Czystość”*, the 1st of August 1905, p. 25.

<sup>48</sup> *Natan*, Varsha 13 Mai, “Ha-Zman”, the 30th of May 1905, p. 3.

the women were the most exposed to being abducted and forced to prostitution, as reported in the Hebrew press.<sup>49</sup> Probably, it resulted from a general disorder in factories and even on the streets, as well as inimical attitude of the police toward workers. According to “Ha-Mitspe”, the traffickers of women, by kidnapping female workers at the time of strikes, cooperated with the Russian regime.<sup>50</sup> The abductions of striking women constituted a punishment for the rebellious workers and their strikes. In addition, the underworld exploited not only the women of the working class, but also took advantage of working class men. Reportedly, thieves and procurers used to steal from porters and carters. What is more, they even dared to commit murders avowedly.<sup>51</sup>

Also in Buenos Aires in the period preceding the infamous action in the Yiddish theater the conflict between the *t'meim* and their coreligionists escalated. Likewise in Warsaw, the procurers openly did their businesses and controlled many public places, such as coffees and theatres. The hotspot that stimulated the Poaley Zionists to oppose publicly the panache of the pimps was the theme of the play “Miriam”, which was nothing else than the provocation of the traffickers of women. Staging the play about white slavery was, in the eyes of Jewish workers, a transgression of social tolerance.

What is more, pimps and traffickers of women had connections at the police and in courts. Allegedly, Russian and Argentinean governments were not only aware of the white-slave dealers' actions, but even facilitated them their criminal activities.<sup>52</sup> The popular conviction about cooperation between tsarist regime and traffickers of women contributed to the outburst of violence precisely on the eve of Revolution 1905. It was common to castigate the collaborators of Russian regime, such as informers. The underworld was back then associated with informers and the collaborators. Reportedly, during the strikes in the year 1905 thieves, pimps, and traffickers stood on the side of the Russian police and helped to quash the strikes. Obviously, from the beginning of the year one could discern a raising tension between the Jewish lower classes, oppressed by the tsarist regime, and the underworld, cooperating with the Russian authorities. Thus, only one incident was enough to add insult to injury. Reportedly, “two days before [the “Alfonsnpogrom”] they [the pimps] kidnapped a young servant” and since the police was latent, “the workers decided to make a lynch [on the pimps]” in order to mete out the justice.<sup>53</sup> In fact, there were circulating many different stories about the capture of a girl, which led to the outburst of violence. According to some accounts, which were not mentioned in the Hebrew press, the pimps burst into a wedding party of a worker and demanded tribute from

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<sup>49</sup> Ha-Mehuma be-Varsha, “Ha-Mitspe”, the 2nd of June 1905, p. 6.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Tigrot damim bi-rhovot Varsha, “Ha-Tsefira”, the 26th of May 1905, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> *Mir Yarfitz*, op. cit., p. 142–144.

<sup>53</sup> Ha-Mehuma..., p. 6.



him and his father-in-law. After their refusal to the demands, the pimps and thieves attacked the workers gathered at the party and kidnapped two women — the bride and the sister of the groom.<sup>54</sup> A motif of a kidnapped girl, who was some worker's relative, appeared as well in a Yiddish novel, written by Ezriel Natan Frenk in 1908 "Der Alfonsnpogrom in Varshe in Yor 1905."<sup>55</sup> Apparently, since all of the stories mentioned a kidnapped girl from the working class, there must be some truth in it. A capture of this unnamed girl provoked the outbreak of brutality and desire of revenge on the underworld that was oppressing the lower class. Therefore, the fight against pimps, white-slave dealers, and their associates, was at the same time, in the eyes of the "Pogrom of Pimps" participants a fight against the oppressive Russian rule and capitalism.

To conclude, the convergence of all the aforementioned circumstances at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century resulted in violent actions, as well as social and legal punishments against procurers, madams, and traffickers of women. The Jewish society was fatigued by anti-Semitic accusations and the panache of the pimps and the white-slave dealers. The socialist ideology together with the ideas of the "moral crusade" stimulated the Jewish working class to mete out the justice on its own and to uproot the immorality from the womb of Jewish society.

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<sup>54</sup> See: J. Sikorska-Kulesza, "Sądy doraźne"...

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