

**MODERNITY AND CRISIS: THE WRITING OF 'THE JEW' IN TWENTIETH  
CENTURY TRANS ATLANTIC LITERATURE**

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The western imaginary often associates modernity with the Enlightenment period of the eighteenth century because of its emphasis on the separation of church and state. The efforts to secularize nations in the name of social progress resulted in an institutionalization of exclusion of marginalized communities. As nations grappled with marginal communities, the “Jewish question” emerged in discourses, intertwining the figure of ‘the Jew’ with modernity in Europe. This study examines how the images and associations that were written to identify ‘the Jew’ and establish difference had *already* traveled to the Americas during colonization, establishing a relationship between modernity and ‘the Jew’ long before the Enlightenment period in Europe. Through textual analyses of texts from Brazil, Argentina, Mexico and Spain that were all published as of the second half of the twentieth century, this study examines the narrative function of ‘the Jew’ as a vehicle to address national issues of modernity, identity and national history. The chapters address “Jewishness” in order to examine the way in which recent texts write this figure in modern narratives. The study considers ‘the Jew’ as a “spectral operator” in these narratives, for they revisit historical contexts such as the Inquisition and the white slave trade of the nineteenth century in order to problematize long held notions of ‘the Jew’ and the representations of “Jewishness” in the Latin American scape.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</u> .....	vi
I. <u>INTRODUCTION</u> .....	1
A. <u>THE CRYPTO JEW</u> .....	15
B. <u>LA POLACA</u> .....	17
C. <u>THE “GHOST” OF ‘THE JEW’ IN SPAIN</u> .....	18
D. <u>CHAPTER SUMMARIES</u> .....	19
II. <u>DOES A JEWISH BODY EXIST?</u> .....	25
A. <u>LA POLACA: REWRITING THE EXOTIC SEDUCTRESS OF         THE SOUTHERN CONE</u> .....	29
B. <u>CIRCUMCISION: THE FINAL CUT IN THE CRYPTO JEW’S         IDENTITY CRISIS</u> .....	58
C. <u>CONCLUSION</u> .....	78
III. <u>MODERNITY AND CRISIS: PERPETUAL FAILURE AND TRAGEDY</u> .....	81
A. <u>MODERNITY AND CRISIS: PERPETUAL FAILURE AND         TRAGEDY</u> .....	82
B. <u>“EL ASTRÓLOGO” AND JOSEPH DE CASTRO: THE UTOPIC         VISION</u> .....	105
IV. <u>OFFICIAL AMNESIA CONTESTED: THE DEMYTHIFICATION OF       NATIONAL IDENTITY IN TWENTIETH CENTURY SPANISH TEXTS</u> .....	122
A. <u>“TRACES” OF “JEWISHNESS” IN NATIONAL MEMORY</u> .....	135
B. <u>THE “JEWISH BODY” AS THE SPECTER’S ARMOR</u> .....	148
V. <u>CONCLUSION</u> .....	168
VI. <u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u> .....	175

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## INTRODUCTION

Images and representations of “the Jew” can be traced in western discourse through aesthetics as well as philosophical, political and social debates that date as far back as the medieval period. As nations grappled with defining and establishing identity from the fifteenth to well into the twentieth century, they often referred to the marginalized Jewish population as “the Jewish question”, introducing this term to modern discourse throughout the global community. The “Jewish question” addresses the Jewish presence as a “problem” in national visions of uniform identity and progress. Its solution would result in dissolving the separatism of the Jewish community as well as its associations with the “pre-modern” ways. In this sense, the answer to the “Jewish question” in national terms throughout time has been an attempt to absorb the other into the same. As a result, “the Jew” undergoes a conversion from being a religious identity of living and breathing individuals to a “figure” acquiring different symbols, images and representations throughout history that are designed with the purpose of distinguishing this culture and identity from its surrounding community, establishing difference.

The figure of “the Jew” is a construction whose representations have become so widespread that we can consider them universalized. Meant to signify otherness, “the Jew” has taken on different characteristics depending upon the socio-cultural and political discourse of its particular time and place. Indeed, one of the conditions to its transcendence through the variety of discourses is contradiction, for over the course of several centuries, the images and representations address different dimensions of otherness: physical appearance, influence on the surrounding community as well as personality traits. Therefore “the Jew” has made appearances

in cultural productions and socio-political discourse as: the usurer, the capitalist, the communist, the seductress, the overbearing mother, the *shapeshifter* and the wanderer; not to mention the personality traits: complacent, stubborn, manipulative, selfish, greedy, ambitious, victim, martyr, etc. In this regard, the “figure” of “the Jew”, having acquired all these contradicting generalizations, is timeless and recognizable in any context. In “Re-figuring ‘the Jew’ in France”, Max Silverman points out that over the course of centuries, “the Jew” has evolved into one of the most malleable of representations of the western imaginary (197).

Despite the long standing presence of this representation throughout time and geographical region, it is not until the second half of the twentieth century that there emerges an interest to examine this figure under a critical lens. Throughout Europe and the United States social scientists, philosophers, literary critics and historians embark upon the task of examining these representations in a wide variety of cultural, political and social mediums. Sander Gilman, Tamar Garb, Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus are amongst the scholars whose areas of study have explored and deconstructed the figure of “the Jew”. From examining the construction of the Jewish body to the relationship between modernity and the figure of “the Jew”, to how these universalized representations manifest themselves in cultural productions, these scholars have contributed to the up and coming field of Jewish Cultural Studies.

Zygmunt Bauman’s term *allosemitism* is a significant contribution to Jewish Cultural Studies and the way scholars examine the figure of “the Jew” today. In “Allosemitism: Premodern, Modern, Postmodern”, Bauman traces the trajectory of the changes in perception of “the Jew” in these periods. He employs the term *allosemitism* as a way to describe all things dealing with the “Jewish” other, for according to Artur Sandauer, the Polish-Jewish literary critic that coined the term, “the concepts and treatments usefully deployed when facing or dealing with



the other people or peoples, simply would not do (143). The significance of the term is that it is, in essence, neutral. Derived from the greek word *allos* meaning other, it literally translates to “Jewish other”, creating a category for all references, whether they be anti- or philosemitic or generically Jewish (143). It is through this new and critical approach that the notion of “Jewishness” emerged. The term “Jewishness” permits a separation between the actual living and breathing individual that identifies himself as a Jew and the “figure” that is charged with these representations and constructions (in favor of or against) that have come to imply Jewish identity. In this sense, the “Jewish” nose, the “Jewish” sense of humor, neurosis, even the tone of voice are now being considered separate from religious and cultural identity. The separation of the figure of “the Jew” and the actual individual emphasize further the notion that “the Jew” we read in cultural productions and see in the visual arts are constructions and products of the process of representation.

One of the topics that sparked interest amongst many of these scholars and contributed significantly to approaching the figure of the “Jew” from a critical lens is the relationship between modernity and “the Jew” in Western Europe. The concept of modernity is a multidimensional project that in the case of these studies, developed from a vision of a globalized world driven by reason and scientific progress. Because of the fact that one of its objectives has been to achieve order within society, the Enlightenment period is often considered the beginning of modernity. The foundation of the Enlightenment implied a rupture with cultural determinism that was prevalent in the feudal systems with the aims of shifting the focus to reason and production as a means of value. The vision entailed a society where religion did not form part of the state and individuals would not be restricted by cultural identity or social position. In “Modernity, Identity, Textuality” Tamar Garb points out that as ideal as this notion may appear,

this vision did not result in an inclusion or acceptance of other communities, rather the contrary: an institutionalization of exclusion. Put to practice, the ideal concept of establishing a secular and egalitarian society did not result in a negotiation with other cultures and religions (23).

If the field of Jewish Cultural Studies has recently developed in Europe in the sixties, it has only been over the course of the past couple of decades that academics have directed their attention to the Jewish presence in Latin America. The contributions to Latin American history that include a focus on Jewish immigration by Judith Laikin Elkin and Jeffrey Lesser, the philosophical discussions that address the immigrant as well as the *converso* and Crypto-Jew subjectivities by Ricardo Forster as well as the examination of the Jewish presence in cultural productions such as theater, literature and most recently film, by critics such as Erin Graff Zivin, David William Foster, Nelson Vieira, Darryl Lockhart, Ilan Stavans, Edna Aizenberg, Naomi Lindstrom, just to name a few, are all participating in carving out a niche for Latin American Jewish Studies within the wider field of Latin American Cultural Studies.

While the most concentrated Jewish populations can be traced to Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, there are Jewish communities in every Latin American nation. Oddly enough, the majority of the texts that address the Jewish presence in Latin America (whether it be a study of cultural productions or historical accounts) begin with a claim that expresses the struggles to find studies that address this microcosm of Latin American culture and identity. Indeed, as Judith Laikin Elkin points out in *The Jews of Latin America*, “Jews do not figure in the postindependence history of Latin America...Overlooked by Latin Americanists as too few and too marginal to affect the area’s development” (xiii). In *Latin American Jewish Production* David William Foster introduces his text by considering Judaism to be one of the religions that

has “ routinely been excluded from the general historical consciousness” and taken for granted in the Latin American cultural map (xii).

“The Jew” has surged in central roles in Latin American cultural productions over the course of the past twenty to thirty years, but that does not mean that they have not always had a presence in Latin American literature. As Erin Graff Zivin points out in her text *The Wandering Signifier*, “the Jew” can be noted in canonical texts across time and space as a marginal presence, for writers such as Machado de Assis, Mario de Andrade, Luis Borges, Mario Vargas Llosa, Ricardo Piglia and Silviano Santiago, who are all significant contributors to Latin American Literature (2). If the examination of the Jewish presence and the hyphenated identity are products of recent interests, then the consideration of the figure of “the Jew” as a narrative tool is even less so. In reflecting upon the trajectory of Latin American Jewish Studies, Graff Zivin observes:

Yet the majority of research in the area of Latin American Jewish Studies has as its goal the delineation of a Latin American Jewish identity and tends to overlook the imagined or constructed nature of “Jewishness” even when allowing for the possibility of a hybrid or multivalent identity (13).

In this sense, examining “the Jew” as a presence with a narrative function is a recent approach to this figure. Therefore, attention to this presence, not as an identity, but as a narrative strategy, in literary and cultural criticism, is very recent.

Yet, the malleability of the representations of “the Jew” translates into narration, for the writing of this figure has fulfilled a wide variety of narrative functions throughout time. Prior to the twentieth century, the narrative function of “the Jew” has been to uphold anti-Semitic rhetoric in all mediums of cultural and national productions. The images of “the Jew” as usurer,

devil worshipper, corruptor of society, seductress or spreader of disease can be detected in productions such as “The Merchant of Venice”, *Oliver Twist*, *Salomé* and *Don Quixote* that represent a mere few of the most universalized western productions. Whether this figure serves as the representation of *otherness* or an allegory for a greater national threat, “the Jew” serves a function in the narrative that traditionally perpetuated long held generalizations of an anti-Semitic nature.

Just as the approach to the figure of “the Jew” has shifted to examining the processes and contexts that produced these generalizations, this figure has also undergone a shift in narrative function within cultural productions of the second half of the twentieth century. In this study I explore the relationship between modernity and “the Jew” in twentieth century trans Atlantic literature in order to examine how this figure fulfills a narrative function that breaks with or is in dialogue with the traditional representations. These texts still employ images that associate “the Jew” with difference and otherness, but in a complex manner that problematizes these long held notions. Indeed, this narrative strategy takes the very same representations that we recognize as “Jewish” but assigns them a new role that has resulted in widening the horizons of their traditional narrative functions. “The Jew” has appeared throughout Latin American Literature in references to the Inquisition or modernity in order to serve as a metaphor that addresses the oppression of dictatorships or crisis. Representations of the “wandering Jew” manifest as a symbol of the perils of exile, and the use of “the Jew” as a haunting presence serves as a reminder of a nation’s past; or, an effort to deconstruct national history by revisiting it and rewriting that narrative. The roles that emerge throughout the literature provide a different function for “the Jew” on two levels: they break or shift the focus away from traditionally held

notions of this figure's influence in society, while at the same time emphasizing the relationship between "the Jew" and modernity.

The studies that address the relationship between modernity and "the Jew" in European cultural productions generally approach it from the socio-political discourse and the European framework of modernity that primarily focuses on the Enlightenment period and mid-twentieth century. While the figure of "the Jew" manifests itself in Latin American Literature and cultural productions in the context of modernity, the relationship between the two has not been critically explored. This study examines literature and a screenplay from Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Spain with particular emphasis on the relationship between modernity and "the Jew". Many western scholars rooted in the European tradition consider the Enlightenment period to be the point of departure for modernity. The efforts towards the separation of church and state as well as the visions of national identity and the "enlightened" man all contribute to the notion of progression towards a more "civilized" society. However, the secularization of European nations implied an erasure of cultural and religious difference in the public sphere. Religion, once embedded not only in the cultural sphere, but in the national legislatures, was then expected to be kept within the private sphere. As a result, minority groups (such as Jews and Muslims) whose attire and dietary customs could not be confined to the private space, posed as a constant reminder of failure by part of the Enlightenment to create a homogenous society. Jews and Muslims alike represented the "unenlightened", "backward" past with which the nations aimed to break.

However, if modernity is viewed as the conscious effort to unify the nation by way of homogenization, then the Enlightenment period of the eighteenth century is not the first attempt at uniformity. As far back as the twelfth century the Inquisition traveled through Italy and

France before making its way to Spain and Portugal. The Inquisition first began in the Medieval period (around 1184) as a response to the threat of emerging sects whose ideals deviated from those of the Catholic Church. In this sense, the Catholic Church, which was intertwined with national governance in several European nations, faced a crisis of competition that could lead to the loss of influence and power over the people. In the case of Spain that housed an influential Jewish and Muslim community, the Inquisition served as a tool that would enable the Catholic Kings to enforce a national identity of a unified Catholic Nation. The attempts to absorb the other into the same involved coerced religious conversions and eventually, the expulsion of both the Muslims and Jews of the nation. In the context of that time period modern ideals were heavily associated with a uniform national identity which implied a homogeneous religious affiliation. The Inquisition was the means by which nations could obtain that vision.

It may appear as though the Inquisition and the Enlightenment had opposing visions of modernity, for one movement strived towards national identity and unity by way of religious affiliation, while the latter envisioned progress as a separation from the church. However different their approaches towards modernity, they have two traits in common: firstly, the movements emerged out of crisis, and secondly, but perhaps more importantly, they both resulted in the institutionalization of exclusion. Both of these movements yielded violent repercussions for otherness that did not fit the national mold. With uniformity and homogeneity at the core of many of modernity's proposed models, marginalized communities (such as the Jews and Muslims in these cases) often do not have a place within those visions. The result has been either to face persecution under these idealized visions of sameness, negotiate identity or migrate. Consequently, both the Inquisition and the Enlightenment created a relationship

between modernity and “the Jew” that transcended European borders across the Atlantic and continued in the Americas.

While the origins of modernity in space and time are still topics of discussion today, one thing is for certain: the notion of modernity bound Spain to Latin America in a dialectic of center and periphery. As far back as the polemical debates between Sepúlveda and Las Casas in regards to the “humanity” of the indigenous communities in the sixteenth century through the ubiquitous opposition between “civilization and barbarism” of the nineteenth century, to the economical theories of dependence of the sixties; projects such as colonization, Enlightenment, Capitalism and later on Communism, have all served as ideological, political and economical foundations serving in the name of modernity. The studies of modernity in Latin America traditionally part from those movements which maintain the marginalization of the modern projects and the Jews. Therefore, it is too often overlooked that the repercussions that modernity imposed on the Jews in Europe resulted in developing a trans Atlantic relationship in which these communities fled in large numbers from Spain, Portugal, Russia, Poland and Germany to Latin America in the fifteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this sense, as a result of the circumstances of the waves of migration, the Jews arrived to the Americas *already* intertwined with modernity.

Of course the way in which the Jews voyaged across the Atlantic to settle in the Americas is also symptomatic of modern projects, for in the case of the Inquisition and the Enlightenment periods, the efforts to modernize through homogenization produced new subjectivities. In *Crítica y sospecha* philosopher Ricardo Forster considers the modern individual to have emerged with the Inquisition of Western Europe. In his terms, as the Inquisition pressured people to either convert to Catholicism or leave the country, there emerged a new identity, that of an in-

between subjectivity. Whether the individuals that converted did so in good faith and abandoned Judaism, or chose to maintain traditions clandestinely in private spaces, the *converso* became a new category for itself, for not only did these individuals adopt double, conflicting lives, but they were not fully trusted as genuinely Catholic by the nation at large, nor able to maintain ties with its previous community. In a similar fashion, the Enlightenment period of the nineteenth century pressured Jews to consider separating religion from the public sphere by assimilating to the mainstream. In this sense, the assimilated Jew, that was no longer recognizable by attire, dietary laws or even geographical constraints of living in Jewish quarters, became a new subjectivity within his own Jewish community as well as in the mainstream national community at large.

In Europe both the Inquisition and Enlightenment period served as the catalyst for the movement of assimilation amongst their Jewish communities: absorbing the other into the same. Ironically, forced and pressured conversions as well as the assimilation of Jews in the mainstream meant that the individuals were no longer physically or geographically recognizable to the naked eye, which resulted in anxiety amongst their surrounding communities. The inability to identify “the Jew” led to more violence and aggression in modern nations. The Inquisition produced a relationship between modernity and “the Jew” by inadvertently creating a new modern identity, that of the *converso* and Crypto-Jew as well as encouraging migration of these subjects to Latin America. While these individuals were no longer considered Jewish in their religious affiliation, the notion of a fractured identity is indeed a modern product. Similar to the reaction that the assimilated Jew produced in Europe, it was the ambiguous nature of the *converso* identity that generated anxiety in the Iberian Peninsula and eventually the colonies. As the *conversos* and centuries later, the Jews embarked upon the trans Atlantic voyage to the



Americas, they traveled as a new subjectivity, for as marginalized identities from within Europe, these individuals represented the “other within” in the new world.

The Jews and *conversos* migrated to the Americas as products of modern projects, but that was not the extent of their engagement with modernity. In *The Communist Manifesto* Karl Marx considers modernity from the perspective of economic production and exchange. Within his own framework, he recognizes that modernity did not begin with the industrial revolution in western European nations, but rather with the encounter with the Americas. He observes, “Modern industry has established the world market, for which the discovery of America paved the way. This market has given an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication by land” (10). Marx’s notion of modernity in the context of massive modes of production recognizes a trans Atlantic relationship between western European nations and the Americas that began in the fifteenth century.

While Marx did not associate modernity with the Jews, this relationship implies the *conversos* and Jews, for as historian Judith Leikin Elkin observes, the *converso* Jews played a significant role in commerce and production of the Americas. In fact, in *The Jews of Latin America* she points out that while the Inquisition was a project of establishing religious homogeneity; its aims were political and social control. This becomes more evident when we examine how the Inquisition was enforced in the Americas. Though it was prohibited for *conversos* to travel to the colonies, there was an intricate system of taxes and permits that could be bought, and therefore, many managed to pay their way across the Atlantic in the hopes of leading anonymous lives in the colonies (9).

In Laikin Elkin’s archival research, she discovers that while the *conversos* traveled to the Americas as Catholics, the occupations of those accused for Judaizing were all trades, amongst

of which were servants and tailors, merchants, mine owners and African slave traders. While only the individuals charged for heresy made the records, her study finds that the larger groups of the accused were merchants and international traders. By the mid sixteenth century *converso* merchants controlled a great margin of South America's trade and in the case of Brazil, twenty percent of the *conversos* brought before the Inquisition were either owners of sugar mills or involved in the sugar trade (12-13). The social positioning and role of the *conversos* as officially Catholic Europeans in the Americas add another dimension to the relationship between modernity and "the Jew". While the Inquisition still actively pursued heretics across the Atlantic, the *conversos*, many of whom formed part of the bourgeoisie class in Europe, made a significant impact on the development of the new world markets and industry categorized as *conversos*, not Catholics. In this sense, the *converso*, already a new modern subjectivity, forms part of a different category within the modern social order that traveled across the Atlantic to the Americas. As a subject that is institutionally excluded and pursued, while at the same time participating in the development of the new world market, these *conversos*, representing the "other within" became the marginalized elite.

Marx briefly acknowledges the impact that the "discovery" of the Americas had on modernity in the western world as a way to address globalization and massive modes of production. His definition of modernity and the mention of the Americas serve as a means by which to address his central argument of social struggles and class distinctions. However, it does not address the subjects most affected by hegemonic models of power in a colonial system. In *The Idea of Latin America* literary theorist Walter Mignolo elaborates on Marx's notion when he defines modernity as dialectic of the modern/colonial world. In agreement with Marx, he expands by recognizing that modernity could not exist without coloniality in that "The

‘Americas’ are the consequences of early European commercial expansion and the motor of capitalism, as we know it today. The ‘discovery’ of America and the genocide of Indians and African slaves are the very foundation of ‘modernity,’ more so than the French or the Industrial Revolutions” (xiii). Mignolo’s text applies this definition of modernity to address the complexities of Latin American culture and identity.

As most post colonial scholars, Mignolo’s framework parts from the positioning of the other, usually the perspective of the repercussion to the European “triumph”, or as he puts it, darker side of the coin. If modernity is to be seen as a triumph by part of Western Europe, than coloniality and the repercussions on the different ethnic groups in Latin America is the flip side to that project. As a result, Mignolo addresses the racial and cultural strata by drawing attention to the African descendants and the indigenous communities (in his terms, the subaltern) and tracing the historical development of these “identities” from the European lens with the aim of deconstructing the colonial process of defining and naming people and territories. If traditionally modernity has been studied from the European perspective, and Mignolo along with other post colonial theorists have drawn attention to the trans Atlantic relationship modernity established with the Americas, what then of the “other within”?

With the exception of Ricardo Forster, linking the participation of the *conversos* and Jews to modernity in Latin America was not the intention of these scholars’ works. While Laikin Elkin’s historiography has made a significant contribution to Latin American Jewish Studies, I propose that the relationship between modernity and “the Jew” is long standing and did not result as a repercussion to the Enlightenment period, but rather began with the institutionalized exclusion acts of the fifteenth century. While the relationship between “the Jew” and modernity in Latin America has not been explored in these terms, I find that is within this definition of

modernity that Latin American literary works and cultural productions have written the figure of “the Jew”. Indeed, nineteenth century canonical texts (Jorge Isaac’s *María*, for example) include the figure of “the Jew” as a product of modernity, for it often emerges as a marginal figure that is associated with trade, money or prostitution, clearly representing the modern anti Semitic rhetoric that traveled with the Jews across the Atlantic.

The texts I analyze were all written as of the second half of the twentieth century and with the exception of those from Spain, the figure of “the Jew” shifts from the periphery to the center of the narratives. I propose that these texts coming from Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Spain write the figure of “the Jew” as what I consider to be a “spectral operator”, a figure from the past that is employed in these narratives with the aim of addressing social and political issues of the present, or revisiting the past in order to deconstruct national history. In this regard, the “spectral operators” appear in these texts as *conversos*, pursued by the Inquisition, *polacas*, (Eastern European prostitutes in Brazil and Argentina) and actual ghosts of the past as Spain grapples with Franco’s dictatorship. Put in another way, each of these figures are products of modernity on both sides of the Atlantic and in these narratives, they are intertwined with Latin America’s pressing questions and concerns of modernity as a failure and disappointment.

In the following chapters I examine the narrative shift through three figures: the Crypto Jew, the Jewish prostitute and finally, the “ghost” of “the Jew” in Spain. The three figures have a significant presence in the traditional approaches to “the Jew” in cultural productions, for as nations grappled with the crises of establishing homogeneous and modern states; they often resorted to these representations in national and socio-political rhetoric, thereby strengthening the relationship between modernity and “the Jew”. However, in the past twenty to thirty years the figures of the Crypto Jew, the *polaca* as well as the ghost of the nation’s past have

reappeared in cultural productions as “spectral operators” in trans Atlantic cultural productions that write these figures for the complexities of their circumstances and delve into their subjectivity in a way that contradicts the traditional approaches. In regards to the “ghost” of “the Jew” in Spain, I find that this specter literally appears in peninsular texts to (purposefully or inadvertently) reveal a contradiction with long held national myths of the absence of Jews on the Iberian Peninsula.

### **THE CRYPTO JEW**

What Spanish and Portuguese history considers the “Gran Unificación” resulted in the Expulsion and Inquisition for the Jews, and subsequently produced the *converso* and Crypto Jew identities. The term *converso* in Spanish or *Cristão novo* in Portuguese refers to Jews that converted to Catholicism willingly or forcibly, (as was the case in Portugal). The terminology in and of itself perpetuates a division between Catholics that had a bloodline of Catholicism in their ancestry and recently converted subjects who were therefore, not “authentic” Christians. Amongst the *conversos and Cristãos novos* emerged the Crypto Jews who, despite their official conversion to Christianity, practiced Judaism clandestinely in their homes. This distinction between the two subjects is imperative to understanding the conflicts that this population provoked in the Iberian Peninsula and its colonies because while it is true that all Crypto Jews are *conversos*, not all *conversos* were practicing the Jewish faith in hiding. As new subjectivities that formed as a means for survival, *conversos* and Crypto Jews alike were forced to negotiate their identities within the framework imposed by national ideals. As a result this new community generated a great deal of anxiety on the Iberian Peninsula, for it was impossible to distinguish those that truly adopted the Christian faith from those that were indeed heretics of the

Catholic Church. In Spain and Portugal's aims to homogenize their nations and establish Catholicism as part of national identity, these new subjectivities and their implied ambiguity represented a failure within the nations' visions of a modern state.

In contention with Laiken Elkin's historical findings, the Crypto Jews of Moacyr Scliar's *A estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* represent the marginalized elite as they embark upon modernizing projects in Latin America. In the protagonists attempts to participate in the slave and sugar trade, industrialization and the spreading of Marxist ideals, as fractured identities, they are not only embodying the failures of modern efforts, but they also fall to their own demise as they reach their limitations as "in between" subjects. In this sense, just as the Spanish and Portuguese nations failed to bring their visions of modernity to fruition, so too, do the efforts to modernize Latin America meet their untimely end. What does not fail however, is the repercussion of the Inquisition on the Crypto Jews, for they underwent the gradual loss of their religious identity over time. The lack of access to prayer books, the community of scholars and religious figures, as well as the need to sacrifice practices in order to uphold a Christian identity in public, all contributed to the loss of knowledge, history and ritual that once formed a significant part of their identity. Ironically, despite the loss of tradition and conscious sense of identity, the narrative implies that the attempts to absorb the other into the same also fail. While the protagonists lose awareness of the dual identity, there is an iteration of perplexity within their subjectivities that promotes a sense of disjoint. While the most current of protagonists is completely unaware of his ancestry, the haunting of his past is ever present, further emphasizing the failures of modernity.

## *LA POLACA*

The political project of opening its doors to European immigrants in order to jumpstart the development of urbanization in Argentina encouraged huge numbers of people from Southern and Eastern Europe to migrate. By the mid twentieth century almost half of the Argentine population was Italian and one fifth of the population of Polish, German, Russian and French descent, among which were the Jews (Laikin Elkin 33). However, with the Inquisition in place until 1810 and strict Catholic laws prohibiting marriages that were not Catholic or a burial ground for the Jewish community, Jewish immigration was scant. Sephardic Jews began trickling in at the turn of the century as merchants mostly resided in the interior (Laikin Elkin 34). The small Jewish population that gradually immigrated to Argentina quickly formed a significant part of the labor force and with their experience with labor unions in Europe, began to form unions primarily in Buenos Aires (Laikin Elkin 56). It was not until 1910, with World War I approaching that a significant number of European Jews migrated to Argentina and immediately participated in the proletariat movements for unions and labor codes. The high percentage of young male laborers and the legalization of prostitution was a breeding ground for the explosion of the sex trade. The Jewish prostitute in the Southern Cone is a byproduct of these nation's efforts to urbanize and enter the modern world.

However, as historians and social scientists like Jeffrey Lesser and Donna Guy have discovered, the participation of the Jewish prostitute in the actual sex trade pales in comparison to the impact this figure had in the media and international press. The generalizations between Jewish women and prostitution became so widespread that the term *polaca* referred to Jewish prostitutes of Eastern European descent. Recent studies indicate that in Brazil the Jewish

prostitutes comprised of 15 percent of the sex trade and in Argentina it was estimated to be 20 percent (Lesser 14, Guy 22). However, it is impossible to determine the accuracy of these statistics, for many of the records are based on the false assumption that all the Eastern European prostitutes were Jewish. The narratives I analyze in this segment revisit the figure of the *polaca* in order to emphasize that similar to the Crypto Jew identity, this figure also embarks upon a transformation that implies the appropriation of a modern subjectivity. On the voyage from the *shtetl* to the brothel these protagonists leave their homelands as innocent young (often religious) women to be converted into objects of desire for the Latin American market.

### THE “GHOST” OF “THE JEW” IN SPAIN

The Expulsion of the Jews and Moors of 1492 initiated a national myth of racial homogeneity that served as the core to national discourse well into General Francisco Franco’s dictatorship of the twentieth century. However, in moments of crisis such as the loss of the last of its colonies at the turn of the twentieth century, the issue of race emerges to the forefront of debates concerning Spain’s “problem”. The “Generación del 98” initiates the conversation of Spain’s condition by reverting to the determinist biological ideologies of the nineteenth century blaming the Semitic past for the deficiencies of the present. In *Myth and History in the Contemporary Spanish Novel* (1989) Jo Labanyi states that the 1898 writers reclaim the anti-Semitic rhetoric so prominent in medieval times. Indeed, historians, philosophers and academics alike echoed the national discourse of the past in their assessments of the present in stating that the “Arabs and Jews had corrupted Spain’s authentic inheritance, constituted by the ‘original’ race substratum of Celtiberian, Roman and Visigoth” (61). The effort to re-establish “true” origins that resulted in a re-formulation of history and identity had repercussions in cultural



productions that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. On the one hand, this discourse was adopted by Franco's regime and accommodated so that the nation's "origins" could be traced back to the "Catholic Kings" reinforcing the anti-Semitic rhetoric that always resonated as an echo to the medieval past. On the other hand, as a resistance to the regime as well as the claims of the "generación del 98", many writers and scholars alike resorted to otherness in order to address the myths about history and national identity.

Regardless of their political or ideological position, the references to the Semitic past appear in texts that both promote or reject these assessments of the Spanish "problem". Whether it be in the form of a reference to time (the Inquisition) or space (geographical regions of Spain) or in the demographic, (physical features that are understood to be "Jewish") these symbols and images appear as ghosts of the nation's past. In this sense, whether the theories aim to celebrate the mythical "homogeneous" condition or contest it, so long as the discourse is founded on race or cultural identity, this presence haunts modern Spanish thought and cultural productions. In this regard, the "ghosts" I examine in this study represent both sides of the Expulsion/Unification coin, revealing how it appears inadvertently, and consequently generates contradictions within one's own discourse, or, how it is employed as an instrument to deconstruct nationally held myths.

## **CHAPTER SUMMARIES**

### **Chapter One: Does a Jewish Body Exist?**

One of the most obvious representations of "Jewishness" is the body. The construction of the Jewish body forms an integral part that the western imaginary deems as "Jewish" and consequently these generalizations become inescapable markers of identity. The two subjects

that I address in this chapter are *la polaca* and circumcision. Traditional representations of “the Jewess” differ than those of “the Jew”. The male “Jew” of Western Europe can be identified by his traditional clothing or his physical body through circumcision. However the female “Jew” does not have any physical markers that identify her for her religious affiliation, deeming her an ambiguous figure, unidentifiable to the naked eye. In order to create distinction between the female “Jew” and her Christian counterpart, the construction of this figure resorted to the Orientalization by emphasizing physical and personality traits that differ from her Christian counterpart. In *The Jewess in Nineteenth Century British Culture* Nadia Valmans observes that the “Jewess” is exotic in her physical features by being described for her “large, dark eyes, abundant hair and languid expression” (3). While Valman does not mention complexion, olive skin is often a characteristic that further emphasizes distinction and is widespread amongst cultural productions. The figure of the “Jewess” poses a threat to Christian society, for she is not only exoticized to appear different from her Christian counterpart, but she is also erotically demonized. “The Jewess” is characterized as a temptress whose motives include corrupting the Christian man very much like Eve corrupted Adam, Delilah deceived Samson and Esther manipulated the King, these Biblical protagonists and their characteristics translate into the construction of the female “Jew”. Her ambiguity in not being an identifiable “Jew” poses an even larger threat to the Christian man she may corrupt and her surrounding Christian community.

In this chapter I propose that the construction of “the Jewess” only differentiates this figure from her Christian counterpart in the western imaginary. Within the Latin American space, these physical characteristics blend in with the general population and do not permit for the exoticization of this figure. Therefore, *la polaca*, the term for an Eastern European Jewish

prostitute is the trans Atlantic counterpart to the western figure of the western “Jewess”. This figure is slim, light and wavy haired, with clear colored eyes. In this sense, this woman is not voluptuous, dark skinned or dark haired; rather she resembles the typical Christian woman in the western imaginary. As I partake in a close reading of the *polacas* in Moacyr Scliar’s *O ciclo das águas* (1977), Myrtha Schalom’s *La polaca* (2003) and Elsa Drucaroff’s *El infierno prometido* (2006), I examine how these women are depicted in these texts in order to reveal that each in their own way problematizes the representations of this figure in a way that breaks with depictions that are committed to maintaining traditionally held notions of *la polaca* as seductress. As these narratives address different aspects of this historical account, they each contribute to a shift in this figure’s typical narrative function. Despite the fact that these protagonists are indeed prostitutes, there is less focus on their roles serving others and more emphasis on their interiority, delving into the physical and emotional repercussions of their circumstances.

### **Circumcision**

Circumcision is a ritual in the Jewish faith that marks the body with a permanent sign of religious identity. As such, it has been the locus of anti-Semitic rhetoric for centuries, for it is one of the most distinguishable signs of difference. The circumcised penis has been considered a castration and therefore, “Jewish” men as neutered or without gender. It has been associated with disease as well as weakness. However, in times of crisis such as the Inquisition or Holocaust, as a means of survival, many Jews abandon this practice so as to not bear the physical marker of identity.

In this segment, I examine texts that address circumcision in their depictions of the Inquisition. I argue that the ritual occurs at crucial moments within the text that reveal insight to the protagonist’s subjectivity as Crypto Jews. The scenes of circumcision in: Sabina Berman’s

play *En el nombre de Dios* (1991) and José Emilio Pacheco and Arturo Ripstein's screenplay *El santo oficio* (1980), Moacyr Scliar's *Á estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* (1987) all reveal different aspects of circumcision at a time of crisis. Whether it be a sense of lost identity because they cannot be circumcised or a sign of exclusion from within the Jewish community as they consider it a sign of "Jewishness", these texts place this ritual at the core of their identity. The fact that these scenes are physical acts of empowerment and pride reveal a different approach to this ritual that textually takes ownership of their clandestine identities.

## **Chapter Two: Modernity and Crisis: Perpetual Failure and Tragedy**

This chapter examines the failure of modernity in the context of Latin America through two narratives: Moacyr Scliar's *Á estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* (1987) and Roberto Arlt's *Los siete locos* (1929). Moacyr Scliar's *Á estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* addresses the wide variety of forms that modernity has arrived to Brazil. From fleeing the Inquisition to colonization, to the slave trade and sugar business, to the surge of socialist movements, the narrative addresses all these modernizing projects from the perspective and positioning of a Crypto Jew. By exploring the dynamic between the protagonists as well as the protagonist's ambitions to embark upon modernizing projects as a victim of a hegemonic model, I examine why in all of these attempts to participate in global modern projects, these protagonists fail tragically over and over again throughout the novel while his counterpart survives and develops continuation through his subsequent generations. I argue that it is his capacity to negotiate identity and positioning within hegemonic models that allows him to survive and coexist with his surrounding communities.

"El astrólogo" of *Los siete locos* is a protagonist that can foresee the implosion of modernity and the oncoming disaster as the narrative is published on the cusp of a totalitarian

regime. In his efforts to create a “new” society he draws upon different influences to the wider meta narratives at work within a modernizing model. “Jewishness” in this text, appears as tangential references that address the failures of the institutionalized religions in today’s world. Nevertheless, his proposal of a new world bears a strong dependence on a capitalist model (despite his contempt for capitalism) that mirrors his perception of Judaism. In this sense, I argue that his definition of “Judaism” as a faith based on a “Credit and Debit” system seems to bear an influence on his proposal for a new society.

### **Chapter Three: Official Amnesia Contested: the Demythification of National Identity in Twentieth Century Spanish Texts**

In *Narrating the Past* David Herzberger assesses the approach to national history in Post War Spain. As a historiographer himself, he considers:

The past springs forth as liquefied matter able to flow into one narrative structure or another, changing shape and meaning as it forms and reforms itself in unending patterns of deviance. Writing the past thus becomes a twofold endeavor: it is a way to write and to act against the grain, as well as a means to develop narrations that allow (and even compel) the opening of history to divergence (2).

Rather than historiography participating in a dynamic movement as Herzberger suggests, interpretations of history in Spain have been stagnant, with the constant gaze at one particular point on the timeline: the Expulsion of the Jews and Moors. The retelling of history during Franco’s regime was even more restrictive, freezing that moment in time and cutting out anything that did not belong to that image of a unified and homogenous nation. The censorship of texts was self implied under his rule, but more problematic was his monopoly over the historical production during his dictatorship. As a result a great deal of literary writers devoted

themselves to the Social Realism movement of the 1950's in which they intertwined history in their narratives and embarked upon the task of telling and recounting history through literature.<sup>1</sup> These writers that were clearly committed to their social responsibility set an example for future scholars under the regime, for as literary texts, so long as they passed the censorship, they would get published. That was not the case for historiographers, for to publish a study you had to be an appointed historian of the regime.

As a result, a great deal of literature of the Post War period reflects a close relationship to national history. One of the widespread topics that manifested itself in this genre of literature is the mythification of national identity and history. Through the examination of four peninsular texts: Pío Baroja's *El árbol de la ciencia* (1911), José Ortega y Gasset's *España invertebrada* (1921), Ana María Matute's *Primera memoria* (1959) and Luis Martín Santos' *Tiempo de silencio* (1961) I examine how these texts employ history in their narratives to speak to a greater national discourse in order to delineate how the presence of "Jewishness" appears as a "ghost", floating in and out, serving as either a tool that reminds the reader of its existence and the violent past, or as an inescapable haunting presence that appears unexpectedly, either in the architecture or the physical features of the demographic, this presence is a constant reminder that the "grand unification" and the homogeneous state were never a part of the Spanish reality.

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<sup>1</sup> Juan Goytisolo, Luis Goytisolo, Jesús Fernández Santos and Carmen Martín Gaité are a select few of the writers that deemed themselves a part of this movement.

## CHAPTER ONE: DOES A JEWISH BODY EXIST?

The rhetoric that generates hate —that being of a racist, sexist, homophobic or anti-Semitic nature— requires a vehicle for the representations of its targeted populations. These ideologies are formed through a complex process in which the generalizations eventually result in identifiable and universal images of their subjects in cultural productions. In the context of this study, that vehicle is construed in the physical body of the Jew. In the process of constructing images, parting from the human body allows for an imposition of markers and physical attributes on the subject. This act of assigning physical traits and therefore, *visible* characteristics creates a relationship in which the subject that is involuntarily marked sustains the false image constructed of him.

In this sense, whether or not these characteristics are “real” or not is irrelevant, the physical traits already form a part of the imaginary that society holds of the subject. Consequently, the constructed body, as the product of this process, inadvertently supports and perpetuates the constructed stereotypes and in so doing, the “marked” body justifies, involuntarily of course, the cultural generalizations that aid in signaling out the identity in question. In this sense, the body serves as “proof” that the ideology is founded on “undeniable” traits and becomes an accomplice of the stereotype. Thus, if religious affiliation already establishes distinction between the Jews and their surrounding communities, the physical characteristics associated with “Jewishness” takes that one step further by extending the religious difference to an inherently biological one. In this sense, the artificial construction of the “Jewish” body bears real consequences, for it further alienates this subjectivity from its Christian counterpart.

The representation of the Jewish body dates back to the times of antiquity and while the imaginary of Jewishness is a living concept that acquires “new” characteristics as different social and political contexts unfold, the earliest symbols continue into the present. Representations of “Jewishness” in antiquity address difference in the religious context by portraying the Jew as an incarnation of sin. The most traditional generalizations speak to two dimensions of “Jewishness”: the body and profession. Depictions of the Jew with physical characteristics such as a cloven hoof, horns and tail, directly associate this figure with the devil. Images and expressions that criticize “Jewish” trades such as money lending and commerce link the Jew to avarice as part of his “nature”. In “Modernity, Identity, Textuality”, Tamar Garb addresses representations of Jewishness in the cultural productions of Europe from the pre-modern to the nineteenth century. Images of the Jew manifest themselves in folk tales and pamphlets as that of “the usurer, the horned devil, the seducer, the drinker of Christian blood and the parasite” (21). Hence, these depictions traditionally employed in pre-modern times reveal that the rhetoric and visual representations emphasize religious difference by associating the Jew with possessing an immoral, demonic nature.

While the most aggressive anti-Semitic images are of a sinister nature, there are those that manifest themselves in a satirical manner. Francisco de Quevedo’s “Poema a una nariz”, written in the fifteenth century during Spain’s Golden Age, is an example of a cultural production that addresses the Jew through physical representations of the nose. The first two stanzas describe the oversized nose with indirect references to Jews by using images such as a badly bearded swordfish or the nose as a scribe, (a common profession for Jews in that period). The association between this “superlative” nose and the Jew are clear in the third stanza, when the poem states: “érase una pirámide de Egipto, los doce tribus de narices era...” (Rivers,289).



The poem associates absurd images with “Jewish” symbols such as a beard and large nose in order to emphasize the most visible characteristic of “Jewishness”.

These depictions that are traditionally associated with religious and moral differences persist into the present. However as modern thought evolved into different visions of human nature, so too did the representations of “Jewishness” acquire characteristics that reflected these worldviews. Therefore, in the nineteenth century when critical thinkers were preoccupied with categorizing races to determine “superior” traits, “Jewishness”, traditionally a religious difference, acquired a racial dimension.

In *The Jew’s Body*, Sander Gilman explores the stereotyped representations of Jewish corporality, tracing the transformations of these images associated with identity. Gilman demonstrates how it is that between the nineteenth and twentieth century, the anti-Semitic rhetoric shifts from having a religious foundation to a pseudo-scientific one. That is to say, through the movement of determinism, the Jewish body is converted into a race, whose “characteristics” are considered genetically founded by the fields of medicine and science. As of the nineteenth century, when science invested in categorizing different races in order to establish which ones were inherently weaker and degenerate, the Jew —that had long before been considered a locus of difference— was converted into a body with pathological qualities (39).

In “Neither Black Nor White: The Figure of ‘the Jew’ in Imperial British Literature”, Bryan Cheyette explores the way in which “Jewishness” is portrayed as a race by examining the Jewish protagonists. He concludes that in order to distinguish them from their racially pure British counterparts, the descriptions of the characters emphasize their skin tones as very dark (31). Thus the characteristics that emphasized religious differences continue, but nineteenth century thought supplements the existing images that imply a Jewish *race*.

The physical representations such as the nose, skin and circumcised penis that in the fifteenth century represented a religious difference, in the nineteenth century become referents of the Jewish subject's own pathology. The Jew, as of the nineteenth century, was considered and perceived not only as an inherently sick body, but as the agent of epidemics in Europe. By the mid-twentieth century, one illness of great concern was syphilis. The German imaginary strongly associated the Jew with this disease. Gilman attributes this association to the fact that the German culture related the shape and nature of the nose to the penis. In these terms, the Jew's circumcised penis was associated with sexually transmitted diseases, particularly syphilis (*Jew's Body* 219).

The history of the construction of the Jewish body traces anti-Semitic rhetoric and its evolution within the European imaginary of the Jewish community and indicates why this representation, as a product of modernity, is employed in discourses that portray this project. Nazi rhetoric is of particular interest because the images reinforced in this regime stem from those pseudo-scientific "theories" of the nineteenth century. The cultural productions and propaganda of that era depict 'the Jew' as a threat to society for "Jewishness" is *inherently* untrustworthy, ill, pathological and calculating. The notion that 'the Jew' having a circumcised penis is inherently more susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases is but one example of how the German imaginary of "Jewishness" capitalizes on the representations and incorporates them in cultural and scholarly productions. In *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler describes the Jews as a plague that contaminates Europe, spreading its disease and vermin throughout society. By comparing the plague of the Jews to the black plague of a few centuries before, Hitler implies not only that they are uncontrollable, but that the objective of the Jewish community is the destruction of Europe (221).

In order to analyze the narrative function of ‘the Jew’ in these Latin American and Peninsular texts, it is first necessary to examine the construction of the ‘Jewish body’, both female and male. It is in many cases the vehicle through which imagery and associations of “Jewishness” manifest themselves in cultural productions. It is not my interest to signal out anti-Semitic rhetoric nor is it the purpose of this study to imply that these texts perpetuate that ideology, but rather to examine how this rhetoric and imagery are employed in the different literary projects in order to analyze the narrative function the Jewish body may have in the texts.

The ‘Jew’ is a figure whose traits appear in distinct cultural productions. Focusing critical attention to the narrative function of rhetoric associated with “Jewishness” in these texts requires a revision of certain constructions. The two that I will discuss here are representations of *la polaca* and circumcision. The images that are directly associated with the Jewish body are traditionally portrayed in cultural productions with the purpose of perpetuating anti-Semitic rhetoric and ideologies. Through an analysis of novels, plays and an adapted screenplay, I argue that these texts employ traditional symbolism and imagery in a parodied and ironic manner with the purpose of dismantling national and historical models.

### ***LA POLACA: REWRITING THE EXOTIC SEDUCTRESS OF THE SOUTHERN CONE***

Representations of women as we know them today stem in part from biblical stories. The story of Eve can be read as the origin of how the female gender acquired the dual characteristics of temptress and mother in Judeo-Christian traditional thought; however these dimensions attributed to the female character are seen repeatedly in the protagonists throughout the Old Testament. Naomi, Delilah and Esther are mere examples of Biblical women that employ manipulation or seduction (or both) in order to control the men in their situations. However, as

Nadia Valman notes in *The Jewess in Nineteenth Century British Culture*, the distinction between Jewish and Christian women in cultural productions was realized through the orientalizing of the 'Jewess' who acquired recognizable traits of an erotic nature in being described for her "large, dark eyes, abundant hair and languid expression" (3).

The 'Jewess' then, is an embodiment of a paradox. On the one hand, she incarnates exotic and sensual desire; and on the other, symbolizes maternal goodness. These two characteristics in and of themselves do not differ from the traditional images and roles that represent women in general. However, the Orientalization of the 'Jewess' that emphasizes both a religious and cultural difference is what distinguishes her from her Christian counterpart. The desire she provokes is associated with a forbidden element. The 'Jewess' then incarnates differences on two dimensions: gender and religious identity.

As stated in the introduction, it was the ambiguous status the 'Jew' held in Christian societies that (particularly in moments of crisis) required a means of identifying this assimilated or newly converted subject. In the case of the Jewish male, circumcision is both a marker of religious affiliation and difference. As representations of "Jewishness" evolved from being a religious difference to a racial one, physical markers such as the nose and penis became signifiers of Jewish identity. However, in the case of the 'Jewess', Valman notes that there are no physical attributes or markers that affiliate her religiously or racially, making her body unreadable (3).

Therefore, the 'Jewess', as a woman with an *unreadable* body is by her very nature ambiguous as a literary figure; and for that reason she, just as the male Jew, serves as a vehicle that has the capacity of fulfilling a wide variety of narrative functions. The exoticism and religious difference she symbolizes that distinguish her from her Christian counterpart are

traditionally depicted with the purpose of emphasizing immorality or the “demonic nature” of “Jewishness”. In *Madonna or Courtesan? The Jewish Woman in Christian Literature* Livia Bitton Jackson states that the wandering ‘Jewess’ is a unique atypical image because she inherits the universal images of the Jewish male and female. She is the figure of both the sinister, evil Jew and the sweet, kind “Jewess” (3).

In these terms, just as the figure of the male Jew can be read as an empty signifier that is presented in cultural productions with different narrative purposes, the “Jewess” too, in her own sense of ambiguity as an “unreadable body” and woman, is a figure that can be molded to represent topics such as desire, guilt and resentment. Consequently, the orientalized “Jewess” results in exotic images and representations that symbolize immorality. For that reason, this subject has the potential for a greater impact than that of her Christian counterpart in cultural and social constructions. The figure of the Jewish prostitute in nineteenth century Argentina and Brazil is an example of how the participation of “Jewesses” in the sex industry developed a notorious generalization of the Jewish immigrant population as a whole. An examination of this historical account reveals that despite the low numbers of Jewish prostitutes in Argentina and Brazil, their presence in historical documents, media as well as cultural representations portray the Jewish community as protagonists of Argentina and Brazil’s famed sex trade.

Numerous studies and analyses of classic Victorian and early modern British literature find that the narratives that resort to the universal representations of the “Jewess” do so within a greater social and political statement that perpetuates or maintains anti-Semitic ideologies (Valman,16). Donna Guy’s text, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires*, examines the social and political climate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Buenos Aires through an analysis of prostitution. Her text argues that women outside of the traditional construction of

family threaten the notion of national identity and therefore, legalized prostitution in nineteenth century Argentina provides a model in which destitute women shaped the political and social realms in which they operated (2).

As the text examines Argentine society through women's participation in the underworld, it also addresses the representations of the Jewish prostitute as a result of a greater social and political statement. In the attempts to clean up the city's image as "sin city" by banning prostitution and legalized brothels, both Protestant and Jewish foundations engaged in campaigns that resorted to the Jewish prostitutes and procurers as the locus of immorality. By associating the Jewish prostitutes with syphilis, the activists set on banning prostitution adopted images and representations of the 'Jewess' as the symbol of corruption and disease.

Nineteenth century Argentinean and Brazilian societies associated Eastern European Jewish immigrants with prostitution so adamantly that it manifested itself in the language. The terms *la polaca* and *caftén* which literally translate to Polish woman and robe, (after the traditional Orthodox attire that Jewish men wear) are used to reference Jewish prostitutes and procurers. The term *polaca*, originally used to refer to Eastern European prostitutes, evolved to encompass *all* Jewish women of Eastern European descent, to the point where *la polaca* became synonymous with a female Jew. According to Donna Guy's study, the Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women (JAPGW) attempted to battle the white slave trade that sexually exploited young Jewish women. In their aims to end Jewish participation in the sex industry, the reports they published for international awareness contributed to the very generalizations they aspired to diminish, for in analyzing their findings they erroneously assumed that all Russian and Romanian prostitutes were indeed Jewish (19).

The JAPGW's objective of raising consciousness and confronting the Jewish run prostitution rings resulted in an exaggeration of the actual participation of Jews in the sex industry. The association's influence in the media attracted global attention to the Jewish procurers and prostitutes, presenting the *polacas* and *cafténs* as protagonists of the white slave trade. However, in the case of the procurers, the linguistic representation of the term *caftén* was not synonymous with the male Jew, despite the fact that the Orthodox attire identifies these subjects as unmistakably Jewish. Rather, linguistically, the effect was the opposite, for the term *cafishio*, derived of *caftén*, evolved in cultural productions to refer to procurers in general, regardless of their cultural identities. The universalization of the term *cafishio* to refer to procurers in general is present in these cultural productions. Both *El infierno prometido* and *O ciclo das águas* make references to Italian and French procurers by that term.

The question why Jewish women who have *unreadable* bodies acquired a generalization as *polacas* can be addressed from various sources that contributed to the construction of this figure. The JAPGW's campaign against Jewish prostitution rings is not the only factor that attracted attention to *la polaca* in nineteenth century Brazilian and Argentinean societies. As mentioned above, Nadia Valman states that it is the orientalizing of the "Jewess" that distinguishes her from her Christian counterpart and she is therefore projected as an erotic being whose physical attributes such as olive skin, dark, almond shaped eyes and abundant hair are considered exotic in the Western European imaginary (3).

However, I find that generalizing all female European Jews as *polacas* in the Latin American context is also a result of a *new* construction of the exotic "Jewess" that stems from the imaginary of Argentinean and Brazilian societies. If we take into account that their local populations consist of Indigenous, African and Mediterranean influences (for historically both of

these countries received large waves of immigrants from Italy, Spain and Portugal), then the characteristics that the West deems as exotic no longer apply in these circumstances. Therefore, just as the “Jewess” as a product of the Western European imaginary —as seen in British and German cultural productions— is orientalized and described for her dark hair and eyes as exotic features, *la polaca* too is an exoticized construction that parts from the Latin American racial and cultural norms.<sup>2</sup>

Cultural productions and the media often portray the *polaca* as tall, pale with light and curly hair as well as clear colored eyes. Evidently, these characteristics are exotic in a context where straight dark hair, tan skin and dark eyes are the physical attributes of the population at large. In this sense, on both sides of the Atlantic, the figure of the “Jewess” as a product of the imaginary of her surrounding community is reified in such a way that she can be distinguished from her Christian “mainstream” counterpart. Therefore, if the European imaginary of the female Jew is that of an orientalized figure, I consider the *polaca* to be the trans-Atlantic equivalent in the South American imaginary.

Indeed, historically the figures of *las polacas* and *los cafténs* had a greater impact in the media and the global awareness of prostitution in Argentina despite the fact that their participation was less than that of the French and Italian procurers and prostitutes. However, with different objectives in mind, the Protestant and Jewish groups drew attention to the “Jewish” component of this international issue (Guy 12). Through worldwide conferences and the press, accounts of foreign born prostitutes that involved either the “Jewess” or a male Jew as a procurer were published with a much higher frequency than those of French and Italian descent

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<sup>2</sup> For a more extensive look at representations of ‘Jewesses’ in cultural productions, see *The Jew in the Text* eds. Linda Nochlin and Tamar Garb and Lisa Lampert’s *Gender and Jewish Difference from Paul to Shakespeare*.



who were also highly involved in the global sex trade (Guy 9). In fact, information about French organized groups was rarely publicized, despite the fact that the *Alliance Fraternelle* (Brotherhood Alliance) declared 250 members in Buenos Aires alone (Guy 11). According to Guy's findings, on the few occasions that the French and Italian procurers did make headlines, they were not vilified in the same way as their Jewish counterparts (Guy 23).

The history of Jewish participation in the sex trade in Brazil is similar to that of Argentina. In *Welcoming the Undesirables*, Jeffrey Lesser re-examines Brazil's national history with the purpose of deconstructing the official myths that influenced institutionalizing laws that limited or prohibited the arrival of more Jewish immigrants. While Jewish males and females were strongly associated with being pimps and prostitutes, at its height in 1922, less than 750 of the nation's prostitutes were from Eastern Europe. In fact, less than fifteen percent of the prostitutes arrested that year were Jewish (34).

If the Jewish participation in the sex trade of Brazil and Argentina was statistically low, why then were the Jewish immigrants so strongly associated with prostitution? Jeffrey Lesser and Donna Guy's studies reveal that the media shaped public perceptions of the Jewish immigrant community in Argentina and Brazil from an anti-Semitic lens. As a part of nineteenth century enlightenment thought that made its way across the Atlantic, the elite classes expressed concerns about hygiene—in both the moral and the biological sense. Lesser's study reveals the movement to “clean up” their societies targeted prostitution in the lower middle class communities, which happened to be the clientele of the Jewish prostitutes (34). In this sense, whether the Jews were protagonists of the sex industry in Argentina or Brazil is irrelevant. The perception of Jews as inherently immoral and a source of biological and social disease is what

shaped the cultural productions and media coverage that contributed to the construction of the *polacas* and *caftans* as the threat to modern Argentinean and Brazilian societies.

With the exception of the physical traits, the characteristics of a “typical” *polaca* parallel those of the “Jewess” in Western European cultural productions of the nineteenth century. In “Salome, Syphilis, Sarah Bernhardt, and the Modern Jewess”, Sander Gilman examines the stereotypical characteristics of the female Jew in European cultural productions. Gilman defines the representations of the *belle juive* as the anti-Semitic version of the *femme fatale*, the figure directly associated with male destruction. Protagonists such as Eve, Delilah and Salome embody deception and manipulation through seduction as a means by which they can accomplish their personal goals.

Thus, a female Jew is often considered more of a threat than her male counterpart, for a male Jew is “visible” and constructed as repugnant and weak. The “Jewess”, on the other hand, has to be beautiful and exotic in order to destroy her surrounding community through seduction. If the representations of the female Jew inherently allude to the destruction of the men around her, then a Jewish prostitute poses an even bigger threat within nineteenth century thought. Indeed, not only does she embody the seductress whose role is to bring men to their demise, but the constant preoccupation of hygiene directly associates Jewish prostitutes as the source of corruption through syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Moacyr Scliar’s *O ciclo das águas* (1977), Myrtha Schalom’s *La polaca* (2003) and Elsa Drucaroff’s *El infierno prometido* (2006) are texts that revisit Brazil and Argentina at the turn of the century and approach the figure of the *polaca* from different angles, but they all share one characteristic in common: these novels present the *polaca* as the protagonist, delving into her interiority, developing it in such a way that complex dimensions of their character are exposed.

As commodities whose purpose it is to fulfill the desires of others, these *polacas* are clearly treated as products by their procurers, but these narratives place their individual desires and driving forces at the forefront of the text.

The three protagonists are very different in their ambitions. However, through a textual analysis of the three narratives, I argue that within their particular circumstances, these novels break with the traditional representations and images of the *polaca*. Indeed, these texts create their protagonists with a different objective in mind and therefore they provide a literary space in which the eroticized “Jewess” has a different narrative function that puts into question the traditional images and generalizations of this figure.

Each protagonist is unique in her ambitions and experiences. Esther of *O ciclo das águas* can be read as a “typical” *polaca* by embracing her fate and is driven by power and material possessions. Dina of *El infierno prometido* does not necessarily embrace her new role, but she does what is necessary to survive, eventually taking her destiny in her own hands by escaping from the grips of the *Zwi Migdal*'s organized crime ring. Rachel Lieberman of *La polaca* is sold into prostitution by her in-laws and resists her new fate from the onset. She is driven by her need to reunite with her children and free herself of that lifestyle.

On the surface each of these texts presents the *polacas* on the forefront of the narrative. By contextualizing the protagonists within the cultural and social climates of that time period, they provide a space in which the figure of the *polaca* can be portrayed with more depth and complexity. Through a textual analysis, I argue that from beneath the surface of these narratives' content, these novels contribute to a bigger project at hand. In their own manner, each one engages in deconstructing the universalized images of the female Jew and therefore provides this

figure with a different narrative function than that of the typical “Jewess” whose purpose is to seduce and corrupt man.

Of the three novels, *O ciclo das águas* has a more complex approach to the figure of the *polaca*. On the one hand, the protagonist presents being the *polaca* as a conscious construction which proposes a rupture with the commonly held notion that the female Jew is *inherently* a seductress whose intentions are to devastate men around her. Yet on the other hand, she embraces her role as a prostitute and relishes upon the material luxuries at her disposal. On the historical level, this novel subtly addresses the fact that Jewish prostitutes were not as prevalent in Brazil as once thought.

However, the other two narratives are in direct dialogue with the historicity of this figure in Argentina. *La polaca* is a historical novel that depicts the life of Rachel Lieberman, a significant protagonist in the dismantling of one of the most notorious organized crime rings of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> This novel not only deviates from the typical representations of the “Jewess” by revisiting the life of one of the actual characters that fought against the *Zwi Migdal*, but it contradicts the traditional notions encompassing this figure because she neither embraced nor willingly accepted her new fate as a prostitute.

*El infierno prometido* is written in the same redemptive fashion as *La polaca*, but from a different perspective. The two texts are products of historical accounts. On the one hand, *La polaca* is revisiting the life of an *actual* Polish Jewish prostitute in Argentina at the turn of the century. On the other hand, *El infierno prometido* parts directly from Donna Guy’s historical account *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires*. The historical foundations in these texts emphasize an

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that Rachel Lieberman as a heroic player in dismantling the *Zwi Migdal*’s crime ring is mythified to some degree. According to Donna Guy’s study, while she did testify and expose many of the participants, her contribution was not the determining factor in breaking up the crime ring.

objective of revisiting this moment and portraying it in their cultural productions with historical references. In so doing, they also provide ruptures with typical portrayals of the *polaca*.

As I engage in the following textual analysis, I will argue that while these narratives approach the figure of the *polaca* from very different perspectives, they all share one characteristic in common: they provide an alternative representation to the traditional figure of the *polaca*. While individually they deconstruct generalized images, when put into dialogue with each other, these texts participate in a new construction of the Latin American female Jew that deviates from the images and representations of the traditional “Jewess”. These three novels, published in 1977, 2003 and 2006, are re-appropriating the figure of the *polaca*. By placing them as protagonists at the forefront of these texts, they all contribute to a shift in this figure’s narrative function. Perhaps traditionally the *polaca* is a universalized figure of seduction and forbidden pleasure. However, these novels present that figure from a different perspective, offering new dimensions and a new construction altogether.

These texts reveal the protagonist’s transformation from being the innocent and naïve Polish girl in her native land to the exoticized prostitute that the *polaca* represents in the Brazilian and Argentinean imaginaries. For all three protagonists, the process begins on the voyage across the Atlantic. However, of the three narratives, it is *O ciclo das águas* that presents the most complete transformation. Esther accepts her new circumstances as a prostitute in Brazil and she embraces the situation not just by assuming the role of the *polaca*, but by consciously converting her body into that object of desire that the *polacas* represent.

When Esther first arrives to the brothel, she realizes that the reason she does not attract that much attention is because she is too skinny and the clients prefer voluptuous women. Esther immediately embarks upon the process of physically altering her appearance, for she:

...comia churrasco de rês gorda com muita farinha de mandioca, comia salada de batata com bastante pão, tomava cerveja. Arrematava com uma caixa de doces de Pelotas. E ficava a se palitar, satisfeita. O busto, o traseiro, arrendodavam-se, apetitosos. (p. 30)

Yet her physical transformation is not limited to her body shape. Although it that makes her a more desirable woman, it does not necessarily make her a *polaca*. The finishing touches to Esther's physical modifications that convert her into the Brazilian imaginary of the *polaca* are the bleaching and perming of her hair which, naturally, is a chestnut color. Esther's makeover marks the moment in which she appropriates her new life and identity. It is then that she resembles the stereotypical tall, blonde light-skinned Eastern European woman and it is then that her distinction as the *polaca* of the brothel is firmly established.

As a protagonist, her fascination with the silk dresses and robes, French perfume as well as the elegant gifts she receives, can all be read as characteristics of a "typical" *polaca* in that she is willing to continue in that profession so as to not sacrifice those material things. Her hunger for power and ambition to open up her own brothel in order to compete with her procurer and steal his clientele are characteristics that can be read as the traditional "Jewess" that brings a man to his ruin. However, it is that conscious act of transforming herself and her body as well as the ability to take her fate into her own hands despite the crime ring that lead me to argue that this text presents the *polaca* as a construction. The novel draws the reader into the transformation and becoming of this figure as a *process* and fails to present these characteristics as a part of her inherent identity.

From the Brazilian imaginary, Esther may be perceived as a *polaca* merely for being a Jewish prostitute. However, this narrative clearly marks the moment in which she truly assumes

the lifestyle and representations of that figure. In this text she is not a *polaca* merely for falling victim to the *Zwi Migdal*'s prostitution ring, nor is she a *polaca* for going through the motions of being a prostitute, but rather she *became* the figure of the *polaca* and assumed the identity in all its representations upon completing the physical transformation.

Textually this moment of rupture is directly linked with her success at the brothel, for she is praised precisely upon the completion of her own construction. Not only does she become “a mais querida do burdel”, but it is then that the novel makes it a point to address her as unique for being a *polaca*, in other words, Jewish (31). The narrative emphasizes Esther's transformation as that of a construction, but it also breaks with generalized conceptions of Jewish participation in Brazil's sex trade. The description of the “transformed” Esther and her newly found success in the brothel emphasizes a distinction between she and the other prostitutes that sets her apart: “Os fazendeiros confiavam nela: não é mentirosa, dizem, como estas *chinas* daqui” (31).<sup>4</sup> The tone of the narrative voice is subtle in differentiating Esther from the local prostitutes, not based on her physical characteristics, but for her composure amongst the clients.

The second instance of distinction is by no means a subtle tone, but rather a scene that clearly addresses Esther's identity as Jewish. The episode is indicative of the complexities involved in the figure of the *polaca*. The reactions of the characters are contrary to that of popular thought that Jewish prostitutes were abundant. When the Madame of the brothel approaches Esther about a solicitor, she states: “Ele diz que é com a moça judia. Só pode ser a senhora” (34). In this scene, not only does the Madame state that Esther is the only Jewish woman in the house, but as it progresses, the interactions of the characters also emphasize the uniqueness of the Jew as client and female Jew as prostitute. When she sees that the person

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<sup>4</sup> Chinas is a term used to describe the local prostitutes. The emphasis is mine.

soliciting her is himself Jewish, she reacts by stating: “Um judeu. Cosa *muy rara*”(34). The italicized “*muy rara*” is clearly a textual indication of the emphasis on her mental reaction, stressing a tonal fluctuation that occurs internally. This is not part of a dialogue, but rather her thoughts upon seeing the gentleman at the door.

The interaction between the two characters is charged with anxiety. Her stream of consciousness wanders to the unpleasant experiences she has with the Jewish community of São Paulo. As they converse, it is clear that he is nervous because he fidgets with his hat and begins to sweat. However, he is not there for his personal pleasure, but that of his son. As he stumbles through his words, he explains that he has a twenty year old son that is very shy and inexperienced with women. However, the interesting aspect of this exchange is that it is important for him that his son is with a *nice* Jewish girl when he states: “é uma moça judia, uma boa moça, e para o meu filho quero só o que é bom, o melhor...” (36).

The interchange between Esther and the gentleman stands out in this novel because all of Esther’s interactions with the local Jewish Community of São Paulo are aggressive and result in threats and tension. However, in this scene, the father is nervous and is clearly not comfortable in the brothel. He makes it very clear that he is searching for a *nice* Jewish girl, only the best for his son. The scene in its entirety (that begins with the Madame petitioning for Esther) implies that Jewish prostitutes are not so widespread. Not only is she the only Jewish girl in that brothel, but the father clearly had to search to find her. Indeed, the scarcity of Jewish prostitutes is reinforced later in the text when Esther establishes her own brothel and every other nationality is represented, (aside from nationals, the texts draws attention to the fact that there are also Asian, French and Dutch girls) but there is no mention of Jews.



*O ciclo das águas* is a novel that by no means attempts to vindicate *la polaca* by presenting her as a victim of her circumstances. On the contrary, Esther is unlike Rachel Lieberman or Dina in the sense that she never resists her role, but fully accepts it by establishing her own successful brothel. In this sense, of the three protagonists, Esther still resembles many of the qualities of the “traditional” *polaca*. However, this text reveals the process that she underwent in order to fulfill the expectations of what a *polaca* represents in the Brazilian imaginary. It was not a part of her *inherent* nature nor was it a part of her identity in her native space, Poland, but rather something she *became* on her trans-Atlantic voyage.

The following close readings of *La polaca* and *El infierno prometido* will explore how historicity affects the narratives. It is not my interest to examine historical accuracy. While Rachel Lieberman was real, whether or not a narrative is faithful to her true life story is irrelevant in my aim to examine how her mere presence participates in creating a different kind of *polaca*. Hence, this analysis reveals how interweaving history with the narrative produces a different image of *polaca*. Esther, who embraced her new fate, transformed her body in order to physically resemble the “typical” *polaca*. Dina and Rachel as protagonists that never wanted to accept their new fate did not make any particular efforts to alter their appearance.

Nevertheless, they do have certain characteristics that set them apart as exotic. For example, Dina is petite with light hair and big blue eyes and she discovers that “tener los ojos celestes combinados con pelo castaño era algo valioso, que a su piel blanca le sentaban bien los colores fuertes...” (p.68). In stating that her blue eyes and light skin are “valued” characteristics, this description emphasizes the features that set the Eastern European traits apart from those of the local population as well as the French and Italian immigrants. Raquel of *La polaca* is a redhead and her body is described by one of her clients who “...está intrigado por saber cómo

serán los pezones rosados de una polaca; se los imagina como la leche con la que amasa los panes...” (76). These descriptions, particularly the second one, stress the exoticization of the Eastern European Jewish immigrants and contribute to the universalized image of the *polaca*.

If traditionally the *polaca*'s narrative function was to fulfill forbidden fantasies and represent immorality, these narratives propose another objective: that of portraying the lives of the prostitutes through a more realistic lens by incorporating abject elements of their reality and exposing their vulnerability as “victims” of the white slave trade. In this sense, each of the three novels represents a contribution to the construction of a new type of *polaca*. I propose that the three texts provide a panoramic perspective of the *polaca*'s narrative shift from having elements of the “traditional” *polaca* in *O ciclo das águas*' Esther, to Raquel, a protagonist that represents the polar opposite in her approach and strategy to her new life. *El infierno prometido* could be read as the middle ground between the two polar extremes that *O ciclo das águas* and *La polaca* provide. It is a novel that speaks directly to Donna Guy's historical account *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires* while revealing the complexities of a *polaca*'s life. Dina's approach to her new life is from a stance that, unlike Esther and Raquel, does not represent either extreme. Her strategy seems to fall in between the two poles; she neither embraces, nor resists her new fate. Rather, she learns quickly how to survive in that environment and little by little plots her escape.

However, the changes in the protagonists from one text to another are not the only elements that raise interest in this study. These novels reflect a direct correlation between the presence of the organized crime ring that brought these protagonists to their fate and the lifestyles they lead. The stronger the presence of the *Varsovia* in the text, the more there is a presence of the abject, the sensation of entrapment and danger in the protagonists' lives.

*O ciclo das águas* depicts the life of the prostitute as glamorous. Esther receives extravagant gifts of jewelry and perfumes and she is even offered her own home in the country as the mistress of one of her most affluent clients. The novel emphasizes her fetish for silk dresses and robes as well as French makeup that she purchases with her earnings as a prostitute. When Marcos (her son) narrates their visits, he addresses his mother's appearance. She always wears fancy dresses with nice heels; she smells of sophisticated perfume and is always made-up (65). All three narratives emphasize the new luxurious things. The imported perfumes, jewelry and make-up as well as the silk robes and dresses are all new to these Eastern European immigrants.

When Donna Guy contextualizes the conditions that Eastern European immigrants left behind upon traveling to Buenos Aires, one of the contrasts she addresses is the difference in living conditions between the old world and the new. *El infierno prometido* integrates this contrast in presenting the amenities and comforts that Buenos Aires has to offer. However, in its efforts to portray a world that best reflects Guy's findings in her historical project, the text also reveals the exploitative conditions and repercussions to her new reality. Upon arriving at the brothel, Dina and Rosa are introduced to their new life and the expectations held of them. Terrified, Rosa instantly refuses to accept this as her life. As a consequence to her behavior, it is made clear that "si no trabajaba, no comería, y la llevarían a ese cuarto de arriba a que muriera de frío" (62). The luxuries of hot water, a modern stove, and eating meat on a daily basis are not just contingent upon fulfilling her duties as a prostitute, but complying with Brania (the Madame) or Herschfeld's (the procurer) every whim.

While this may be true for a prostitute's life in general, the cruelties of this reality are more clearly portrayed in *El infierno prometido* than the other two texts of this analysis. Esther

of *O ciclo das águas* and even Raquel of *La polaca* are given liberties to leave the brothel. However, from their very arrival to Buenos Aires, it is evident to both Dina and Rosa that they are never to leave the house. Their condition as prisoners is made even clearer with the “cuarto de castigo” and that all the windows are locked shut to them, elements that are not at all present in the other two narratives I examine here (58).

The three novels address the entrapment the protagonists feel in different degrees. I find that the more the text is tied to historical events, the more the narrative accentuates the feeling of entrapment, isolation and vulnerability. Esther, of *O ciclo das águas*, has the most freedom of the three. While there are “rules” about staying in the brothel every night and not spending too much time with any given client, upon her transformation and success at the brothel, Esther does as she pleases without any repercussions. Her vulnerability and imprisonment arises as an issue when Luis, her procurer, demands that she abort her baby. She successfully escapes and after giving birth in the countryside, she eventually establishes her own brothel. The element of danger or fear for revenge by part of Luis is virtually absent from this narrative.<sup>5</sup>

Raquel, of *La polaca*, on the other hand, feels the entrapment instantly and spends most of her time in Buenos Aires trying to escape the brothel and retrieve her children. However, even in this novel, that notion of imprisonment is still somewhat ambiguous, for the protagonists are allowed certain freedoms such as leaving the brothel to go shopping and even attend the theater and cinema unaccompanied by the Madame or the procurer (129). The protagonists of *El*

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<sup>5</sup> It needs to be stated that Luis does seek his revenge after all and does so by vandalizing Esther’s brothel to no repair. However, it is implied that the motive for his vengeance is that Esther’s brothel competes with his and she is taking his clients. The sense of danger for her own life is not as present in the other two narratives where the danger and threat is at the forefront of the protagonist’s consciousness.

*infierno prometido* are not even allowed to own street clothes, much less go to the cinema or theater.

The dialogue between *El infierno prometido* and *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires* is announced from the novel's introductory epigraph taken from Donna Guy's text. It reads: "Es necesario ver la miseria de las ciudades judeo-polacas...para entender que un viaje a Buenos Aires no es terrorífico" (10). This quote is from a Polish Rabbi of 1899, but it is present in Donna Guy's introduction when she contextualizes the conditions the Jews faced in nineteenth century Eastern Europe and Argentina. The majority of the novel's epigraphs consist of references to Donna Guy's text or Albert Londres' *El camino a Buenos Aires*, a historical account that addresses the trans-Atlantic journey that Eastern Europeans made in the nineteenth century, which is also cited throughout Guy's study.

I point out the inter-textuality between these historical accounts and narratives because I find that the differences between Esther of *O ciclo das águas* and the protagonists of *La polaca* and *El infierno prometido* lies in the relationship these texts share with history. In Jeffrey Lesser's study, he states that the majority of the clientele of the Jewish prostitutes in Brazil were of the working class. This is reflected in *La polaca* and *El infierno prometido*, for the "regulars" that attend the brothels are working and lower middle class men. Unlike Esther of *O ciclo das águas*, neither of the protagonists of these novels receives fancy or sophisticated gifts from their clients, nor do any of their experiences reflect a "glamorous" lifestyle.

*Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires* addresses the social and political climate of the brief moment in Argentine history when prostitution was legal. The point of interest in this study is her emphasis on the social strata from within the prostitute community. One of her many findings states that the French prostitutes earned more and pertained to the more upscale

brothels, while the *polacas* catered more to the working class demographic. This historical anecdote manifests itself in *El infierno prometido*. The *polacas* cost three times less than French prostitutes and the protagonists are aware of these differences. In an internal monologue Dina reflects: “Las francesas eran más caras. Dina y Rosa lo sabían. Era lógico, ¿cómo una judía iba a costar cinco pesos? Ya era milagro que costara dos” (118). The comparison of the *polacas* to their French counterparts in economic terms emphasizes a rupture with traditional images of the *polaca*. While the universal images of this figure include those of the “gold digger”, this novel presents the Jewish prostitute as part of the lower caste, whose brothels were located in working class and immigrant neighborhoods.

The sense of worth that is expressed in Dina’s reflection is accentuated by her own assessment. She considers it miraculous that a Jewish woman be worth two pesos at all, much less the five pesos that a French woman costs. Her perception is emblematic of her understanding of how the Jews are categorized by their surrounding communities. Clearly this applies to her experiences in her shtetl of Poland, but the difference in price and therefore “worth” between French prostitutes and Jewish *polacas* confirms that the classification traveled with her across the Atlantic.

Dina’s conditions as a *polaca* in Argentina are consistent with Donna Guy’s historical findings and her stark reality is accentuated when read together with *O ciclo das águas*. The “glamour” and luxuries as seen through the clients, the wardrobe, European perfumes and makeup are non-existent in this narrative. In fact, both *La polaca* and *El infierno prometido* break with the imaginary of the “glamorous” by emphasizing the abject elements of this lifestyle. These texts touch upon topics such as syphilis, violence and the typical repercussions of their professions. While the fear of contracting a sexually transmitted disease is present in the three

texts, Esther of *O ciclo das águas* is the only one that falls ill. The fevers, the night sweats and hallucinations consume her body for days, emphasizing that the threat of disease is real (120).

In *La polaca*, disease is present in the text as well and it addresses another dimension of the prostitutes' reality. It reveals the role of hygiene in Buenos Aires during a time when prostitution was legal. Nationally registered prostitutes are required to do routine checkups that confirm they are healthy and free of venereal disease. This narrative reveals the strategies the prostitutes used for the exams. For example, Olga eats chocolates in the waiting room of the doctor's office in order to cover up her oral sores. Any mysterious rashes or outbreaks are concealed with makeup (99).

This narrative's approach to disease emphasizes that the fear of falling ill is embedded in the protagonist's reality. The conversations amongst the women, the nervous silences in the exam room and fearful and whispered references to the *sifilicomio* throughout the text emphasize the threat of illness as an inherent occupational reality.<sup>6</sup> However, the fear is not for contracting an irreversible disease, but rather not being able to work any longer. "Estar sana equivale tener trabajo" and when they notice that one of their acquaintances from another brothel is not in the waiting room with them, they murmur amongst themselves: "...la habrán mandado a *vacacionar* a San Fernando o peor, a Rosario, que es como firmarle el acta de defunción" (99). The prostitutes use the term *vacacionar* sarcastically because they know that the procurers and Madams use it to send the sick to *sifilicomios* or asylums.

Despite being the most successful in the brothel and getting through the most clients, Raquel never falls ill. Neither Dina nor Rosa of *El infierno prometido* contract disease either. In

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<sup>6</sup> A *sifilicomio* was a prominent institution for those suffering from syphilis that was then an incurable disease. Its connotations parallel those to an insane asylum.

fact, other than the precautions that Dina takes in terms of cleansing herself and hoping that the client is willing to employ a contraceptive, there is no further mention of syphilis in this novel. The absence of disease in this text can be read as a break with the generalized notion of syphilis running rampant amongst the *polacas*. Esther on the other hand, written as a *polaca* in the more traditional sense, does contract the disease and in that sense represents the universalized image of the nineteenth century “diseased” Jew. The construction of “the Jew” as the spreader of disease is present in the European imaginary of the Jewish community throughout history and dates as far back as the medieval times and the Bubonic Plague. Therefore, within the historical context of the nineteenth century that strongly associates Jews with syphilis; it is worth noting that the absence of this disease amongst the Jewish protagonists in the more recent novels in and of itself draws attention to the relationship and therefore pronounces an attempt at disassociating the Jewish prostitutes from syphilis.

Instead, these texts address the abject by revealing dimensions of this lifestyle that deconstruct the generalized notion that the *polacas*, just as the typical *femme fatale*, revel in glamour and the destruction of the men around them. Each of the narratives presents the environment of the brothels from different perspectives, providing the reader with a panoramic view of this lifestyle. In *O ciclo das águas*, upon establishing her own brothel, Esther, unlike Luis, the procurer she escaped from, attempts to create an attractive, sophisticated and diverse space in which the women are comfortable and can socialize.

The way the narratives depict the ambiances in the brothels is coherent with the way the text writes the figure of the *polaca*. Esther’s brothel during the day is jovial and the women are lounging and relaxing with music playing in the background. There is laughter and banter amongst themselves as they gossip and socialize. The ambience of the brothel in *La polaca* is



rather family oriented. The rivalries that exist between some of the prostitutes resemble those that may develop amongst siblings. Perla enjoys cooking and the girls talk about the menu of the day as they look forward to her family-style meals. In moments of crisis they all pull together despite their differences in order to support each other.

The women of *La polaca* each have a passion that they enjoy or pursue on their free time. Perla looks forward to experimenting with her cooking; Malú and the other girls learn the latest tangos and the fox trot as they play the latest records. With the exception of Raquel, they all attend the theater and go shopping whenever they can. The narrative emphasizes the interpersonal relationships through emotion, laughter and communication amongst the characters. It is through the hobbies and personal interests that this novel not only presents the brothel with a family oriented environment, but provides insight to the interiority of the protagonists.

Aside from their individual desires and interests, the women provide for each other a source of nurture, friendship and support. Malú teaches Raquel Spanish and makes offerings to her saints when anyone in the house is in need. Raquel makes the others dresses and mends their clothing. Perla prepares hearty and nourishing meals on a daily basis, and when there are issues with their procurers or doctors, they all close ranks. It is that intimacy they all share that provides depth not just to each of these characters, but the complexities of their lives as they confront vulnerabilities when faced with their procurers and the outside world.

However, it is worth noting that the intimacy they develop with each other by creating a nurturing and supportive environment by no means glorifies the lifestyle; rather it accentuates the contrast to their abject experiences with their procurers and the “outside world”. Raquel’s first client was an important judge in Buenos Aires that aided the *Varsovia* in their organized

crime endeavors. In her refusal to accept her new life, she resisted him, resulting in a violent beating. The next morning Malú goes into her room and finds:

Olor a vómito y orina. Boca abajo, sobre la cama revuelta, la Polaca parece muerta...Se acerca y comprueba que respira. Empapa una toalla con agua y desinfectante para limpiarle las piernas y brazos. Le moja el pelo, la cara ‘Cómo te puso ese infeliz... ¡Qué pelea le diste al infeliz del juez! (67)

This scene produces two relevant effects for this reading: First of all, Malú is a source of nurture. She not only addresses Raquel’s wounds and cleanses her, but she expresses solidarity when she offers a prayer, support and comfort to her new housemate.

The second effect and perhaps the more relevant point for this analysis is that this scene offers a perspective of the *polaca*’s reality that is not traditionally addressed. The smell of Raquel’s vomit and urine that permeated the room emphasizes her violent reaction to her new reality. The fact that Malú feared she might be dead and therefore had to confirm that she was indeed breathing, along with the wounds on her arms and legs are all characteristics that accentuate abject elements of this lifestyle. Malú’s last remark about what a fight she gave that judge just pronounces the fact that Raquel as a *polaca* did not participate willingly and did not demonstrate pleasure in her new role. In this sense, these characteristics break with the traditional notion that the *polaca*, as the Trans-Atlantic “Jewess”, enjoyed a luxurious life manipulating and seducing wealthy men only to ruin them.

While *O ciclo das águas* and *La polaca* present the brothel as a somewhat “secure” space in which interpersonal relationships and solidarity can develop, *El infierno prometido* reveals the contrary by accentuating the representations of the abject elements of this lifestyle even more than seen in *La polaca*. Raquel’s brothel depicts unity and strength amongst the prostitutes as

they face challenges and adversity. However, in Dina's case, the dynamic of the brothel reveals this lifestyle as rather solitary as it delves into the intricacies and complexities of the *Varsovia's* operations.

Dina and Rosa are mere commodities in this narrative and that sets the tone for the ambience in the brothel as well as between the protagonists. While the very nature of the prostitution ring is to make a profit and expand, it is this novel that most pronounces the exploitation. The economics and intricacies of the operation from the way in which the girls accumulate debt for clothing and living expenses to how they spend their earned money in businesses that are associated with the *Varsovia* are revealed in great detail. Rather than close-knit relationships amongst the girls, this text accentuates isolation as a characteristic of this life. The protagonists experience confinement within the brothel walls which results in isolation from their religious community, the prostitute community at large, the urban community surrounding them, etc. The seclusion the characters feel in their new world permeates the walls of the brothel as well. Through the threats of the punishment room, tight supervision and restrictions, the Madame and procurer instill fear in their commodities and Dina protects Rosa by keeping a distance.

Unlike the previous two novels that present the protagonists as indulging in personal hobbies and leisurely activities during their free time, this text addresses the physical repercussions and hardships that the protagonists experience. Dina and Rosa are not dancing in the parlor, nor is there any excitement expressed amongst them. Instead, in an interior monologue, Dina expresses her sadness in accepting that her reality will from now on consist of:

...encontrarse siempre con el mismo ardor en la vagina, con el mismo dolor en la cara interna de los muslos, encontrarse con la cocaína que ayudaba a seguir cuando habían

pasado más de veinticinco clientes y el cuerpo no daba más... Aunque de la cocaína había que cuidarse...(76)

This passage outlining Dina's reflection on her current reality emphasizes the physical toils her body experiences in graphic detail. The previous two texts do not address the effects of this lifestyle on the physical body, but pain is present throughout this novel in various contexts and each described in graphic detail.

When contemplating her reality, she refers to the burning sensation in her vagina, the pain of her inner thighs and the exhaustion her body feels at the end of an evening. The passage even addresses cocaine as her last resort to help her get through when her body cannot give anymore. Of the three texts in this textual analysis, this is the only one that addresses drugs as a part of the protagonist's reality. Upon arriving to the brothel neither Dina nor Rosa knew what cocaine was, let alone that it was physically harmful. Upon learning about the substance, she is careful and eventually stops using it altogether.

However, the fact that it is integrated to this novel at all is significant in emphasizing abject elements that break with the traditionally held images of glamour and pleasure. For the way in which cocaine is used is emblematic of the protagonist's conditions. It is not introduced as a recreational drug of choice used at fancy parties by high society, but rather the contrary. In this text, the protagonists are not even aware of its dangers or implications. Rosa and Dina take it when their bodies are so worn out that they cannot get through the evening without the boost. In the hopes that the cocaine would ease the pain and make the time go by faster, Dina snorts it right before the violent judge takes his turn. To her demise, the judge interpreted her blank stare as a challenge on her part and beat her even more than usual (144). This novel depicts the use of

the drug in harsh conditions of ultimate corporeal pain and exhaustion. For that reason, the protagonists consider it a means of survival for their physically demanding circumstances.

Yet this passage is not the only instance in which Dina addresses her physical state. Further along in the text, she continues to think of her life at the brothel and she reflects upon the pain: "...un cuerpo detrás de otro, la carne sobada y harta, las vaginas ardidadas que se mojaban con agua con permanganate en la palangana de la pieza y se untaban con vaselina..." (86). Once again when considering her life at the brothel, Dina's point of departure is the physical pain involved in her new life. References to her physical condition as tired flesh, burning and sore vaginas as well as emotional and mental exhaustion is embedded in the novel's descriptions of spaces, protagonists as well as their moods. Moreover, their free time consists of them barely holding their heads up at the dinner table when sharing meals and eating in silence because talking requires too much energy.

Thus far, the descriptions of this analysis address the vaginal soreness, and pain as well as the overall exhaustion they experience on a daily basis. However the abject elements not confined to the daily repercussions of their circumstances, but exposed on other dimensions as well. Both *La polaca* and *El infierno prometido* address the issue of violent visitors that abuse the women of these texts. As described earlier, Raquel resists her first encounter and as a result is beaten to the point where her body physically reacts in vomiting and urinating on herself.

In the case of Rosa and Dina in this text, the beatings are not as a result of the women resisting, but rather the behavior of the solicitors themselves without any particular provocation. Violence is present throughout, for early on in the text Rosa is beaten by one of the visitors. However the case that pronounces the abject elements through violence the most is Judge Tolosa, who becomes Dina's regular solicitor. On the first encounter she is left: "...boca abajo,

el ceño fruncido mientras esperaba que se fuera la dolorosa contracción de los músculos del ano” (120). With each visit Dina is left with visible wounds such as bite marks, slashes, bruises and swelling, but the text also delves into the blood seen from her anus and vagina as she washes off.

This text delves into the physical pain and violence associated with prostitution in ways unseen in *O ciclo das águas* and *La polaca*. The violence and pain are absent in Scliar’s text and the violence in *La polaca* that Raquel experiences the first night upon resisting her solicitor is presented as a consequence to her behavior. *El infierno prometido* does not address these elements as isolated incidents, but rather reveals them as an integrated part of the protagonist’s new reality as prostitutes in Buenos Aires. Unlike Scliar and Schalom’s texts, Rosa and Dina’s brothel is not a place of music and dance or of entertainment because they are physically and emotionally too worn out for those activities. Instead, their daily routine consists of pain, soreness and exhaustion to the point that even conversing together is too tiring, for on various occasions Rosa visits Dina’s room at the end of the night and she politely declines (125).

*El infierno prometido* interweaves historical data with the fictional elements of the narrative and it is through epigraphs as introductions to the chapters that the historicity can in part be directly traced to Donna Guy’s study. However, it is not just its relationship with history that contributes to the construction of a different kind of *polaca*. Myrtha Schalom’s novel is an account of Raquel Lieberman’s life and while this *polaca* is very different from Esther in Scliar’s text, there is a clear distinction in the way the narratives present the lives of their protagonists. The presence of cocaine as well as the use of the abject in graphic details in Drucaroff’s text address the physical and mental states of the protagonists in a way that is completely absent in *O ciclo das águas* and *La polaca*. Furthermore, the solidarity, nurturing and leisurely activities

found *La polaca* and the glamorous gifts, clothing and luxury that Esther experiences in *O ciclo das águas* are non-existent in Rosa and Dina's lifestyle.

In this sense, this text creates a complete rupture with the traditional images and representations associated with the figure of the *polaca*. Esther of *O ciclo das águas* closely resembles the "typical" trans-Atlantic "Jewess", and if we juxtaposition her with *El infierno prometido*'s Dina, the only element they share in common is the exoticization of the physical appearance that the *polaca* acquired. Granted, Esther consciously embarked upon a complete makeover in order to alter her physical appearance and become the *polaca* of the Brazilian imaginary, but upon embracing her new life and reality, it in no way resembled Dina's experience.

*El infierno prometido* draws attention to the pain, solitude, exhaustion and abandonment the protagonists face. Of the three narratives, this novel most emphasizes the intricacies of the *Varsovia* as an extensive international operation. Therefore, of the protagonists in the three novels, Dina and Rosa most resemble slaves of the prostitution ring, not *femme fatales* who revel in luxury and glamour while taking pleasure in bringing men to their ruin. *La polaca* and *El infierno prometido*, both narratives of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, are texts that not only revisit the figure of the *polaca*, but participate in dismantling the traditionally held notions of this construction and re-write her in a way that is more coherent with the historical context from which she emerged. In this sense, the *polaca* as a seductress and "belle juive" whose intentions include corrupting man is questioned and her stereotyped representations in these narratives evolve to an intricate figure with a complex interiority.

## II. CIRCUMCISION: THE FINAL CUT IN THE CRYPTO-JEW'S IDENTITY CRISIS

The “Jewish” body is a construction of anti-Semitic rhetoric that emphasizes both “real” and unreal characteristics that identify differences between the Jewish subject and his surrounding community. Circumcision, a sacred ritual performed on newly born Jewish males, is a significant component of this construction as it is a visible or “empirical” sign of Jewish identity. The way in which circumcision is interpreted and represented through cultural productions of different periods varies. As an act that represents religious pertinence to the Jewish community, it is understood by Otto Weininger as a castration that leaves the Jewish male in a neutral state, that is to say, without gender (Richardson 27). This theory evolves to state that the Jewish male inherits effeminate traits of weakness and maliciousness. The body is then converted into an agent that generates disease and corrupts other individuals (Richardson 28).

In *The Jew's Body* (1991), Sander Gilman traces the construction of the Jewish body with special emphasis on representations of the nineteenth century. With Determinism and Positivism in full force, the physical markers of “Jewishness” were used to justify pseudoscientific representations of Jewish identity not only as a race, but a pathological one (77). It is not uncommon, then, to find manifestations of these “empirical findings” of the “Jewish” body in cultural productions of this period. However, in this study—one that examines portrayals of the Inquisition in twentieth century texts—the representations of circumcision are far more complex than that of upholding universalized, anti-Semitic images of “Jewishness”.

In this analysis I propose that circumcision as a symbol of religious and cultural pertinence, in these texts, undergoes a shift in narrative function. Sabina Berman's play *En el nombre de Dios* (1991) and José Emilio Pacheco and Arturo Ripstein's screenplay *El santo*



*oficio* (1980) are cultural productions that reveal the complexities of the crypto-Jew's subjectivity through circumcision. This complexity emerges as the protagonists confront internal conflicts stemming from their double lives.<sup>7</sup> The representations of circumcision can also expose a social dimension from within the Jewish community itself. In the case of Moacyr Scliar's *Á estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* (1987), a Brazilian novel that explores the encounters between the Europeans and the native communities of Brazil, the interchange between the Jewish protagonists and the indigenous people exemplifies the conflicts in the self/other dialectic.

Scliar's novel problematizes circumcision in two distinct ways by first addressing issues such as "authenticity" amongst Jews through the inclusion/exclusion dynamic within the Jewish community, and then stressing the sense of empowerment these subjects experience when they obtain the freedom to practice the ritual. As I engage in close readings of these three texts, I argue that rather than representing illness, pathology or weakness, the references to circumcision or the act itself occur at determining moments that reveal an awareness of the protagonists' subjectivity as Jews.

The homogenizing project of the Inquisition produced the identity of the crypto-Jew. This subject faced many challenges not only in avoiding persecution, but also in leading a double life by appearing Christian in the public realm while maintaining traditions and practices of the Jewish faith in the private sphere. The process of performing Christianity and participating in that culture in order to survive is one element that develops the complexities of the *converso*

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<sup>7</sup> The terms "Crypto-Jew" and *converso* are used to identify Jewish citizens that officially converted to Catholicism to avoid the persecution of the Inquisition. While many subjects did abandon their Jewish faith and practiced Catholicism as New Christians, there were also many who continued to clandestinely uphold the Jewish rituals and traditions. Consequently, these subjects represented ambiguity in Medieval societies as the surrounding community questioned whether or not these newly converted subjects were truly devoted to the Christian faith or not.

subjectivity. These subjects attempted to hold on to any remnants of Judaism to which they still had access. Yet, over time, it becomes inevitable that in the need to appear Christian, they abandon many Jewish practices and rituals that symbolize religious and ethnic identity, including dietary laws, weekly Sabbath and prayer rituals as well as access to holy texts and literature. *Converso* narratives portray the internal conflicts that crypto-Jews face in the struggle to maintain an identity that the state prohibits.

Circumcision is an example of a deserted practice precisely because of the repercussions it entailed—in other words; circumcision transformed the subjects into immediate targets. However, it is critical to this analysis to note that avoiding this ritual is represented as a sacrifice for the crypto-Jew's narrative, one that implies its own consequences for this subjectivity. In *The Body in Pain* (1985), Elaine Scarry considers circumcision to be the physical memory of the covenant that deems a mark on the body to be a sign of God's peace with man (235). The Hebrew Bible clearly states that the failure to circumcise results in exclusion from the group: "the uncircumcised male...shall be cut off from his people" (Gen. 17:10-14). Circumcision as a ritual that marks the body with a cultural memory of the covenant is a sign that contains the power of both inclusion and exclusion because it simultaneously signifies belonging to the Jewish community, while excluding this collectivity from the society that surrounds it.

While the Jewish faith allows deviations of the law for the purpose of survival, the abandonment of the act of circumcision is portrayed in these texts as a significant element to the *converso* subjectivity that impacts their interiority. It is the most visible sign of religious pertinence and it represents the physical memory of the covenant. The encounter between Rafael and Afonso, two of the *converso* protagonists of *Á estranha nação de Rafael Mendes*, and an indigenous community in Brazil reveals that circumcision serves as a medium through which the

Jewish community is complicit in an act of exclusion of a subject they do not consider “authentic” enough. The indigenous community considers itself one of the lost tribes of Israel that arrived to Brazil centuries before. Despite their loss of contact with other Jewish communities, this group, with few resources available, tries to uphold and maintain their faith and traditions.

The protagonists question the authenticity of this community’s Jewish heritage in their way of practicing the faith. The narrative identifies three important elements of Judaism that are still present in this community: the *Torah*, Hebrew and prayer.<sup>8</sup> Their description in the novel emphasizes the improvisations that the community makes despite having lost contact with the culture. The only *Torah* scrolls they have are damaged from the humidity and are therefore torn and hard to read, while the protagonists are astonished and excited to see that the elder greets them in Hebrew. It is an ancient version of the language employed by the lost tribe from centuries before and for that reason, is incomprehensible to the protagonists. And, finally, the community has mostly forgotten the prayers, because, according to the elder, of centuries of isolation.

This elder initially bewilders Rafael and Afonso. When he greets them in Hebrew, Rafael is the one that recognizes the language. The narrative voice emphasizes that Afonso “was not well versed in the language of the nation,” whereas Rafael, upon seeing the scrolls of scripture, devotedly “stroked the parchment, which was rather damaged by the effects of time, of humidity; the letters were almost completely faded, but even so he was able to read a few sentences of the holy text” (134). These descriptions create a distinction between the

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<sup>8</sup> The Torah is the text of the five books of Moses that is in the form of scrolls.

protagonists who were in contact with Judaism until their recent departure from Portugal and the lost tribe who, over the centuries, lost access to prayers and texts.

However, the determining moment that defines the exclusion from within the Jewish community, is the protagonists' disgust upon seeing the elder's penis when urinating. Rafael observes the elder and notices that "He was indeed circumcised, but his member was deformed" (134). Upon noticing, the elder quickly and self consciously explains that not only did they lose the ritualistic blade and now have to use a conch, but that "we lack the ancient skills" (134). They squat in front of a fire and the elder begins to chant in the native language, while the narrative voice remarks, "He was again just an old aborigine, ugly and toothless" (134).

This scene is significant to this study because both sides of the encounter feel the exclusion: Rafael and Afonso as well as the elder himself. The protagonists do not grimace at the decaying Torah scrolls or the forgotten prayers; in fact, the narrative clearly states that Afonso himself is not familiar with Hebrew, yet his identity as a Jew is not questioned. The determining moment of exclusion occurs upon seeing the elder's penis that is circumcised, but not in a traditional fashion. The protagonists do not react in the same way to the elder's circumcision as they do to the ancient Hebrew and the scrolls, —indeed, Rafael reacts with disgust. The fact that the elder is defensive and compelled to justify his "deformed" penis only confirms his awareness of his practices as "less authentic."

Despite their knowledge of Hebrew, the observance of the few rituals they still know of and the *Torah*, the protagonists cannot accept this community as Jewish. Indeed, it is through the sight of the elder's "deformed" penis that Rafael and Afonso consciously discard them as such. In this sense, the signifier of authenticity is not in the practices, but the physical marker of pertinence, circumcision. Ironically, the experience of the indigenous group parallels that of the

crypto-Jew. Just as the lost tribe of Israel lost contact with the cultural traditions, that at one time identified them as Jews, so too have the *conversos* had to abandon many religious practices. As will be seen in the following analysis, the future generations of Rafael Mendes and the protagonists of the other texts cease to practice circumcision for the purpose of survival. In this sense, the crypto-Jews that arrive in Brazil and reject the descendents of the lost tribe will meet that very same fate. Here, circumcision functions to exposes the complex intricacies of the Jewish community from within as the question of authenticity arises between two groups of the same faith—that is, the Portuguese protagonists who have just fled the Inquisition and the indigenous community that identifies itself as one of the lost tribes of Israel.

The following analysis of *Á estranha nação de Rafael Mendes*, *En el nombre de Dios* and *El santo oficio* explore circumcision from another dimension. Now, the protagonists find themselves facing the conflict of being uncircumcised Jews. While in the three cases the protagonists are “officially” Christian, they identify themselves as Jews in hiding, revealing their inner struggles of trying to uphold their true identity while facing the limitations imposed upon them by the Inquisition. In a sense, the protagonists of *El santo oficio* and *En el nombre de Dios* face the same dilemma as the elder of the indigenous tribe in Scliar. The circumstances of the situations vary, but the consequences are the same: both subjects are unable to maintain their faith, practices and rituals. Circumcision, then, plays a central role in their subjectivity as it occurs at determining moments of their identity crisis.

The following scenes are indicative of the importance that this practice holds for the literary crypto-Jew, for they each reveal a different dimension of the identity crisis involved in a double life. Though the three protagonists engage in circumcision, they each have a very different approach, each of which problematizes this ritual and reveals the complexities of

*converso* identity. In the first example taken from Scliar, I examine how the ritual is represented as a performative spectacle that symbolizes the recovery of not only a deserted practice, but the identity as a whole. The following two examples present the moment of circumcision as a reaction to the conflicts and struggles they face as subjects who internalize two conflicting identities, that of the Catholic and the crypto-Jew.

In a future generation of Rafael Mendes, a generation that is already settled in Brazil under Portuguese rule, the opportunity to circumcise oneself is automatically seized and celebrated precisely to prove one's devotion and to officially resume "true" membership in the Jewish community. In their efforts to expand their slave and sugar trade, Holland invaded the region of Pernambuco (where the majority of the crypto-Jewish communities settled in Brazil) from 1630-1654. In this very short rule over the Portuguese settlers in Brazil, the crypto-Jews were not persecuted by the Inquisition and were permitted to practice their faith openly.

This episode from *Á estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* presents the Jewish community's excitement upon being able to recover their faith and identity without the fear of persecution. The narrative portrays circumcision as a public declaration and celebration of devotion and empowerment. "Vicente Nunes was bursting with pride" as he has himself circumcised in the public square and his name changed to Abraham and his wife's to Sarah. While the ritual of the *bris* is traditionally public, in this literary representation, it becomes a spectacle as the protagonist "howled like a madman...still enveloped in bloodied bandages, he showed the brethren of the nation his prepuce, which he later buried in the soil of New Amsterdam" (141).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Bris* is Hebrew for the the ritual of circumcision, traditionally performed on Jewish males eight days after they are born.

Circumcision is celebrated as an act of empowerment by which Vicente and the rest of the Jewish community can resume the practices that they abandoned generations before. The three acts, —the circumcision, changing of names and burial of the foreskin— together form a re-appropriation, not just of their faith, but in a more complete sense, of their identity.

Many *conversos* changed their names so as to not raise suspicion from their surrounding societies. Traditionally, the naming of male children takes place during the circumcision ceremony. However, given the opportunity to practice Judaism openly, Vicente does not choose just any Hebrew name; rather, he and his wife name themselves Abraham and Sarah, after the patriarch and mother of the Jewish people. Vicente assumes the role of the “founding father” by taking the initiative to be the first of the crypto-Jews of Recife, —just as Abraham was the first of the Jews to receive the covenant— to resume his identity as a leader, he encourages the community to follow suit and leave their fears of persecution behind.

The act of burying his foreskin in New Amsterdam soil is also a re-appropriation of space. These texts address the effects of the Inquisition not in their space of origin, —Spain and Portugal— but in the colonies, Mexico and Brazil. One of the elements that *Á estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* addresses is the homelessness that many of its subjects experience. The Mendes family, representative of the crypto-Jew’s experience in Brazil, is a wandering one that migrated from Portugal to Brazil. Once there, they wandered throughout the country as they explored the forests, coastline and jungles before settling in Recife. Vicente Nunez’s act of burying his prepuce at the moment of Dutch rule is symbolic of grounding his roots in New Amsterdam, a space in which he and his community no longer face persecution and no longer have to practice their rituals in hiding.

The three actions, —circumcision, naming himself after the patriarch and burying his foreskin in “New Amsterdam”— are elements that together symbolize the recovery of the abandoned identity. Yet it is the way in which Vicente appropriates his identity that is relevant to this analysis. The performative circumcision in the public square, the names chosen and the burial all form part of a celebratory spectacle of empowerment that encompasses three dimensions of subjectivity that were lost in the hands of the Inquisition.

Vicente Nunez’s scene represents circumcision as part of a liberation in which the opportunity to recover the ritual is seized with pride and carried out as a break with the oppression of religious persecution. The circumstances of Pernambuco falling under Dutch rule were exceptional (and short lived) and Vicente Nunez underwent his transformation when his identity as a Jew and practicing openly were no longer forbidden. Therefore, short of the Portuguese regaining Pernambuco (which occurred 24 years later), Vicente went from being an uncircumcised crypto-Jew to an openly practicing Jew under no external threat whatsoever.

The following two scenes from *En el nombre de Dios* and *El santo oficio* bear different circumstances as the protagonists are living in Mexico at a time where the persecution of the Inquisition is fierce. The ritual of circumcision in these texts is neither open nor celebrated; rather, it is practiced at moments of frustration, anger or guilt. In this sense, these texts delve into the *converso* subjectivity, exposing the inner struggles and conflicts embedded in the crypto-Jew’s identity by portraying circumcision as a kind of release or breaking point of the protagonist’s crisis.

One dimension that is relevant to the *converso* subjectivity is hybridity. “La ficción marrana,” Ricardo Forster’s study on the crypto-Jew’s identity crisis addresses the impossibility of remaining Jewish as an inherent trait of this subjectivity (9). The impossibility he describes



not only refers to the lack of contact with Judaism, but also to the interference that occurs when a subject leads a double life of contradicting identities. Participating in the two faiths simultaneously without access to Judaism in the practical sense creates a space in which the two cultural and religious practices interact. As Forster notes, the subject does not consciously know when he discontinues being Jewish and begins to truly adopt the Catholic culture. However, the subject has both of these traditions ingrained in such a way that he is no longer one or the other, but a hybrid of both (10).

Sabina Berman's play *En el nombre de Dios* and Emilio Pacheco and Arturo Ripstein's screenplay *El santo oficio* are texts that address the inevitable repercussions of participating in Christianity in the public sphere yet trying to maintain Judaism in the clandestine, private space. I will examine the precise moment in which circumcision occurs and how the protagonists approach this ritual. In so doing, I aim to analyze the narrative function that the practice holds in these texts and how it differs from that of the previous scene present in *Á estranha nação de Rafael Mendes*.

Both productions are historical narratives that portray the life of Luis de Carvajal, known as the first Jewish author in America. Originally from Portugal, the Carvajal family was extensively involved in trade, the official reason for their move to Mexico City. However, because they were converts from Judaism to Catholicism, there is suspicion that the persecution of the Inquisition was a factor in their migration. In 1590 Carvajal was accused of being a Judaizer and over the course of the next six years he "reconciled" with the Christian faith but was again called in to the Inquisitorial trials. After a series of torture sessions and interrogations, he and his entire family were burned at the stake in Mexico City in 1596.

Both narratives present Luis de Carvajal's story and address the complexities of *converso* identity, though with different approaches. *En el nombre de Dios* depicts a heterogeneous space in which there exists the possibility of reconciliation between conflicting religions. That is, the play places special emphasis on Jojutla, a colonial town in which members of the church, state, the indigenous population and the Crypto-Jews coexisted in a syncretized manner. In this sense, *En el nombre de Dios* is a production that contextualizes the story of the Carvajal family within the social climate of the colonial period. It not only acknowledges the existence of the indigenous population, it also delves into cultural and religious aspects that play a role in the development of modern Mexican identity. However, before discussing the importance that this place holds for Luis de Carvajal's subjectivity, I will first address the identity crisis he confronts prior to visiting Jojutla.

In this production, Luis de Carvajal is conflicted with his *converso* identity and expresses his frustrations with practicing his faith clandestinely from the play's start. One Shabbat evening as the family lights the candles and blesses the wine in the dark quarters of the house, Luis directs himself to the audience and expresses: "Siempre fue así: todo en secreto...en Portugal, en España y también del otro lado del mundo, en el Nuevo Reino de León..." (344). As everyone practically whispers the prayers, Luis reacts by lifting his glass and exclaiming "L'chaim! To life!" And "Shabbat Shalom!" (345). His family tries to hush his reactions, reminding him that the officials and spies of the Inquisition wander just outside their home and that he is placing the whole family in danger of being discovered. He reacts in anger, throwing down his chair and leaving the table.

This scene introduces the Carvajal family as practicing Jews and reveals the same frustration of not being able to practice openly that extends into the next scene and provokes

Luis' auto-circumcision. The next day as Luis and his sister are out for a stroll. Viviana is reading verses of Genesis aloud:

El Mozo: Es una marca que se le hace a los varones de nuestro pueblo, ya oíste: para hacerlos gente de Dios.

Viviana: Ah. “Y el varón...” ¿Y dónde se les hace la marca?

El Mozo: En...aquí. (Señala su muslo)

Viviana: ¿Tú la tienes? Enséñamela.

El Mozo: En nuestra época no la hacemos porque es...

Viviana: ...peligroso

El Mozo: Peligroso, sí.

Viviana: Todo es peligroso. “Y el varón no circun-ci-dado será cortado — ¡Cortado dice, Luis! — cortado de mi pueblo.”

*Luis camina hacia el fondo. Queda de espaldas. Viviana sigue leyendo.*

Viviana: “El ánima que no estuviere circuncida-da será borra-da...del libro de la vi-da, vida.

*Luis desenvaina su cuchillo. Allí, está de espaldas, las piernas separadas.*

Viviana: ¿Qué haces?

El Mozo: No te vuelvas

Viviana: Ah, ya sé: mea. (*Retrocede unas páginas. Lee.*) “Y siendo Abraham de e-dad de no-venta y nueve años, Jehova le apareció y dijo-le: yo soy el Dios, todo-poderoso; anda delan-te de mí y sé perfe-, perfecto.” “Anda delante de mí y sé perfecto.”

*La espalda de Luis se yergue. Luis clava en el piso el cuchillo. Entran voces cuchicheadas.*

Coro: Mazal Tov. Buena Suerte. Felicidades. (346-47)

The moment in which Luis circumcises himself reveals the complexities of *converso* identity. It is an impulsive reaction to the anger and frustration that builds up from the previous scene in which he is not able to celebrate Shabbat openly.

His explanations to Viviana demonstrate that he is well aware of the significance that circumcision bears on Jewish identity. It is no coincidence that he turns away and unsheathes his knife as a reaction to the passage precisely as she reads that the uncircumcised shall be cut off from God's people and erased from the Book of Life. The moment of his circumcision manifests itself as a release from his identity crisis for not only is he restricted in the way he practices (as seen in the previous Shabbat scene), but he does not even bear the physical memory of the covenant God made with his people. As such, he symbolically emulates the covenant practicing the ritual on himself just as Viviana narrates the moment in which Abraham officially became one of God's people.

In this literary depiction of circumcision, just as in Vicente Nunez's case in *Á estranha nação de Rafael Mendes*, the meaning of the ritual represents religious identity and pertinence. In a Saussurean sense, Luis de Carvajal and Vicente Nunez convert their bodies into signifiers of Jewishness. In Luis's case, by enacting the circumcision simultaneously with the narration of Abraham's, he is reconciling the physical signifier (his circumcised body) with the signified, the word of God from the Bible.

The chorus's reaction with "Mazal Tov!" congratulating Luis after his circumcision indicates an acceptance to the community as an official member. However, being physically marked as Jewish does not reconcile all the dimensions of *converso* subjectivity because these subjects, circumcised or not, still have to practice their faith clandestinely. This does not by any

means undermine the importance of bearing the physical memory of the covenant; rather, it sheds light on the complexities and contradictions of the crypto-Jew's identity. Vicente Nunez, at full liberty to practice Judaism openly, does not just get circumcised; rather he addresses other elements of the Jewish subjectivity as well.

Clearly Vicente Nunez faced different circumstances as he recovered his identity under Dutch rule. By situating the action with the heterogeneous space of Jojutla, in contrast, Berman provides Luis with the possibility of reconciliation between the two conflicting religious identities, not by abandoning one or the other, but by accepting his identity's condition of hybridity. While Luis's reactions to not practicing Judaism openly reflect his frustrations, he actually expresses his identity crisis to his brother at his father's funeral when he says: "...Pero a mí lo que me heredó mi padre fue un conflicto...Un conflicto que además debo guardar, día y noche, secreto...Te miro, Agustín, y me da rabia tu simpleza. Si pudiera también te lo arrancaría. O te infectaría con mi extraña complejidad" (360). It is shortly after this conversation that Luis goes to Jojutla to stay with Agustín and he does not reappear in the play until the Inquisition summons the family.

Jojutla is a town in which the indigenous presence is strong. Felipe Núñez (confidante and friend of the Carvajal family) describes the town as theatrical because the Chichimecas wander in the streets dressed up as Romans or the way people dressed in ancient Jerusalem (368). He notes that the church also participates in this "spectacle": "Era una iglesia como nunca vi antes. Pintada con colores fuertes, amarillos, rojos, verdes, negros. Con altar con trozos de espejo en lugar de oro" (369). Jojutla appears as a sincretic space in which the population, predominantly Chichimeca, influences the traditional infrastructures of the Spanish presence, the church. Felipe is astonished by what he sees in the streets and hopes to find refuge

in this institutional space, with which he expects to feel familiar, only to find that the church is just as foreign to him as the town itself.

The lawyer, hired by the Inquisition to investigate the Carvajal family's devotion, demonstrates a lack of respect towards this heterogeneous space by smoking his cigar in the church. When Núñez confronts him about this behavior he reacts sarcastically by stating “¿Y quién me va a decir que no? ¿Un indio? Cuando entren los dominicos lo apago.” (369).

This scene serves two functions: on the one hand it presents Jojutla, a colonial town as a syncretic religious and social space. It is not just the indigenous residents that are dressed in anachronistic attire, but the church itself. In other words, the most influential institution in the time of the Inquisition, in this scene, represent a space in which the Chichimecas actively contribute their cultural elements to the imposed Catholic one. In this sense, Jojutla is a space in which heterogeneity is not only present, but permeates into the institutional pillars of the colonial model. On the other hand, Núñez and the lawyer's reaction to this space are just as significant. Their descriptions of the town as a spectacle and the lack of respect towards the church allude to their incapacity to accept not only the syncretized characteristics of the Chichimecan influences, but on a more general scale, the possibility of a heterogeneous society.

However, Jojutla seems to impact Luis, a subject who struggles with the conflicting identities inherent in a *converso* in a different manner. Though the play does not explore Luis's interiority during his residence in Jojutla, the letters he writes to his mother explore the possibility of a consolidation between Judaism and Catholicism. The audience learns of these letters through the lawyer, who intercepts them as evidence for the Inquisitors. In a conversation with Núñez, the lawyer states: “...cartas interceptadas de Luis a doña Isabel. Disquisiciones teológicas con citas de San Agustín y del rabino Maimonides, todo *revuelto y enmarañado*...”

(369).<sup>10</sup> This quote reveals that Luis seeks a way of confronting his identity through an unconventional approach. The terms “revuelto y enmarañado” —expressed cynically by the lawyer— imply that Luis’s study interweaves the ideas of these two influential figures of both the Catholic and Jewish faiths. It does not seem coincidental that these ideas emerge during his stay in Jojutla, a space in which the Catholic and indigenous cultures undergo the same consolidation he hopes to achieve between the oppositional forces of his own identity.

As the lawyer continues, he explains: “...Bueno pues, el Luisito ha estado estudiando un libraco suyo, *La guía para los perplejos* se llama, y siguiéndolo está inventándose un catolicismo judío....Leyéndolo me educó; ¿qué cree? El condenado quiere abarcarlo todo y ordenarlo de una vez” (370). Both figures, Rabbi Maimonides and the priest, St. Augustine, while clearly theological figures, approach spirituality and the meaning of religion from a philosophical point of view.

Luis’s philosophical study of Maimonides and St. Augustine reveals his attempts to reach a reconciliation in which the Catholic Jew *already* exists in the *converso*. By accepting this fused religion, the crypto-Jewish identity is then acknowledged and accepted for what it is —not entirely Jewish or completely Catholic— an irreducibly syncretized identity. Jojutla, as a heterogeneous space that already absorbed both indigenous and Catholic cultures into infrastructure, is significant in this production, for it is the space in which Luis conceives a consolidation between his conflicting identities.

José Emilio Pacheco and Arturo Ripstein’s screenplay *El santo oficio* (that was made into a film) also portrays Luis de Carvajal’s story, but it presents the circumcision scene from a very different approach. Though this text presents its subject with the internal conflict of practicing

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<sup>10</sup> Emphasis is mine.

two faiths simultaneously, but here, Luis has more personal contact with the Catholic Church as he works for a priest as a scribe and translator of Biblical texts. On the same token, he is also shown to be active as a practicing Jew as he frequently attends a clandestine synagogue and is very close to Rabbi Morales. In this sense, because of the intimate contact with both religions, Luis's experiences speak to what Ricardo Forster considers the impossibility of the *converso* subjectivity. As will be examined in the circumcision scene, Luis can no longer decipher between the two religions he practices; his identity is so embedded in both, that one simultaneously influences the other.

Therefore, if *En el nombre de Dios* constructs a syncretized space in which the *possibility* of conciliation between the conflicting identities is introduced, then the screenplay takes this identity crisis one step further, as the protagonist's auto-circumcision is representative of the consequences of the *converso* identity as an *always already* hybrid subjectivity. Circumcision is a sacred ritual of belonging, the sacrament of the Jewish faith, but that is not its function in this text. Unlike Scliar's Vicente Nunez and Berman's Luis, whose circumcisions were obtained in order to physically bear the sign of religious identity and pertinence, Luis's auto-circumcision in this production is an impulsive reaction to absolve sins he committed.

In this reading of *El santo oficio*, I argue that in search of absolution for his sin of lust, Luis resorts to circumcision, which in the Jewish tradition, functions not as a ritual linked to penitence, but rather acquiring the physical memory of the covenant. In this sense, circumcision as a reaction to Luis' guilt reveals that the Jewish and Catholic traditions embedded in his identity manifest themselves in a heterodox manner, as neither Jews nor Catholics circumcise in order to absolve their sins.



Prior to the circumcision scene, Luis is with the prostitute Justa Mendez, a Crypto-Jew towards whom he expresses romantic interest. In previous encounters he was jealous that she danced with other men and expresses this to her. He repents for his jealousy and gives her a sonnet with the Catholic prayer for confessing one's sins: "Pequé, Señor, más no porque he pecado..." (69). That same evening, they sneak into a cell of a deaf and mute woman on the church grounds in order to be alone. Justa undresses herself and seduces him; however, Luis glares at her in fury and she leaves (71).

Luis' interactions with Justa are indicative of the role that guilt plays in his subjectivity. The fact that he writes her a sonnet in the form of a confessional prayer reveals that the way he addresses his guilt stems from the Catholic tradition. The circumcision occurs in the next scene:

*Lleva el sambenito, aceza, transpira. Desciende hasta la orilla del riachuelo, se acerca a un arbusto, saca unas tijeras, se levanta el sambenito, cierra los ojos.*

Luis: Vaya el sacrificio de mi circuncisión para tu mayor gloria, Adonay.

*De un tijeretazo se corta el prepucio. Grita del dolor, arroja las tijeras al río. El sambenito se mancha de sangre. Luis sube la pendiente. Llega a la cima. Da algunos pasos vacilantes y se desploma. (72)*

Luis' attire is of interest in this scene. He is wearing a *sambenito*, a Catholic garment that he was given to wear while working at the church. That he wears it when he performs his auto-circumcision and actually stains it with his blood visually reveals elements of the conflicting identities he lives —this is to say the blood from the Jewish circumcision stains the Catholic garment.

His reaction is also critical to this analysis in that he sees the circumcision as a sacrifice he makes for God. Circumcision in the Jewish tradition is not defined as a sacrifice made by the

people, but as an agreement of the covenant by which one officially becomes a member of this faith. However, in the Catholic tradition, self-flagellation and physical suffering for one's sins is considered a sacrifice individuals make in search of absolution. This production, in particular, emphasizes self-flagellation as the priests carry their *cilicios* with them wherever they go in order to absolve themselves of their sins whenever they feel necessary.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the fact that Luis decides to circumcise himself directly after his encounter with Justa and exclaiming the circumcision as a sacrifice are indicative of the Catholic influences in his interiority.

In this production, as in the other *converso* narratives of this study, it is precisely the moment of circumcision that reveals the complexities of crypto-Jewish subjectivity. Luis de Carvajal may resist Catholicism in his attempts to maintain what he can of his "original" faith. He attends the secret synagogue, celebrates Shabbat and reads the Biblical texts available to him, but the nature of his condition as a crypto-Jew in constant contact with both religions inevitably produces a new identity. This text problematizes traditional notions of *converso* subjectivity as it presents Luis, as a hybrid subject, despite Luis's own lack of awareness of the Catholic influences upon his religious identity. Unlike the previous examples of circumcision scenes, the driving force that leads Luis to circumcise himself is not the need to reconcile his physical body with his spiritual identity, but to absolve sins of impure thoughts. In this sense, not only is the guilt of the Catholic tradition deeply embedded in his subjectivity, but he addresses it by means of a Jewish ritual.

The rhetorical strategies that address the Jewish body generally part from external communities and are usually of an anti-Semitic nature. The "Jewish" body is a construction whose representations evolve accordingly with the discourses of their era. Nineteenth century

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<sup>11</sup> *Cilicios* are spiked belts that the priests would use for self flagellation.

Determinist and Positivist thinkers employed pseudoscientific theories to deem the Jewish body inherently pathological for its “physical” differences (Gilman, 77). Though circumcision is not a characteristic one is born with, it was absorbed into these discourses as a physical marker of illness. Otto Weininger’s text *Sex and Character*, (1903) published at the dawn of the twentieth century, is considered a groundbreaking text that portrays the male Jew as without gender and therefore, weak (Richardson, 28).

Representations of “Jewishness” in nineteenth and early twentieth century texts reflect this rhetoric where circumcision, a physical sign of difference, is employed to perpetuate and uphold universalized markers of “Jewishness.” However, by the mid-twentieth century, there emerge thinkers that begin to question the universalized representations of “Jewishness” and these discourses. With the development of disciplines that explore cultural studies and identity politics, academic scholars questioned the traditional approaches to otherness and contested symbols and images of anti-Semitic rhetoric by examining them with a critical eye and deconstructing their origins.

The texts of this study reflect these emerging approaches to “Jewishness”. Here, the representations of circumcision reveal its importance within the Jewish community, not from the perspective of the external subject. As uncircumcised Jews, these protagonists bear the consciousness of the religious significance of being circumcised. Therefore, unlike other literary representations of the circumcised penis as a marker of “Jewishness,” the narrative function of the ritual in these texts reveals the complexities of *converso* identity. In this sense, circumcision as portrayed in these narratives presents the possibility of understanding this ritual as a tangible sign that acquires symbolic power. Indeed, these scenes reveal a shift in circumcision’s narrative function.

There are two ways in which we can see this shift in the narrative function of circumcision. First, the moments in which it occurs are determining ones for the protagonists' identity crisis. This is a key element to this study because it is the precise moment in which circumcision is practiced that reveals the complexities within these characters' subjectivities. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, each scene addresses a different dimension of this identity. In these productions, circumcision serves as a signifier of authenticity and empowerment, but also a means of reconciliation between the physical body and spiritual identity. In addressing these dimensions of subjectivity and from the perspective of the uncircumcised Jews, these narratives participate in a break with the traditional discursive functions of the ritual that marks the Jewish body as inherently different.

## CONCLUSION

Physical characteristics that have been deemed as “Jewish” apply to practically every corporal feature. Hair, eyes, nose, skin, lips, hands, genitalia and feet all form part of the construction of the “Jewish” body, thereby applying the notion of physical “Jewishness” to the whole body, literally from head to toe. These characteristics have a long standing tradition of representing “Jewishness” in a wide variety of mediums that range from cultural and aesthetic productions to scientific and intellectual discourses. Consequently, the notion of the “Jewish” body not only became universal, traveling across the Atlantic to the Americas, but it infiltrated the communities on a global scale. The representations that were once coherent within their western landscape are now modified and transformed to still serve the function of distinguishing the “Jew” as *other* within the new American space. Whether it is the indigenous Brazilian Jew whose circumcision is performed with improvised local tools or Scliar's *polaca* who embraces her exoticism in her

new space, these texts revisit the traditional images of the “Jewish” body and participate in the dismantling of universalized representations.

One of the elements that play a significant role in these efforts to break with traditional representations of the “Jewish” body is the self-awareness of the protagonists. These texts address circumcision as a physical marker of belonging, but it is the conscientious process and reflections of this symbol that provides insight to the complexities and intricacies that this ritual bears on subjectivity. This reading addresses different dimensions of the *converso* identity including the conflicts that arise with the *lack* of a circumcision in the victims of the Inquisition. These protagonists face the trials of the conflicted double identity and often refer to their uncircumcised bodies as a lack of identity. In a different context, the chief of the indigenous tribe is well aware that as a Jew he is *other* to his surrounding Brazilian community. However, more interesting to note, is that even amongst Jews he experiences a sense of *otherness* as well, for his interactions with the Portuguese Jews his “deformed” penis accentuates difference between his “Jewishness” and theirs.

The orientalization and eroticization of the female Jew is due to the fact that she does not bear any physical markers of “Jewishness” in the same manner as her male counterpart. The construction of this figure results in the “Jewess” and the “Belle Juive” whose narrative and discursive function implies the destruction of man. Clearly the figure of the *polaca* as a Jewish prostitute embodies these representations, but what is significant in this reading is the way in which these texts re-write this figure into their historical narratives. Just as the males of this reading reflect upon circumcision and its significance for their subjectivity, so too do these narratives reveal the *polacas*’ interiority, offering insight to these protagonists’ self-awareness as they transform themselves into the Brazilian and Argentinean imaginary of what a “Jewess”

*should* be. By depicting this transformation as a *process* for survival that the women must undergo both psychologically as well as physically, these texts propose that the characteristics of a “*polaca*” are by no means inherent or embedded in their nature as “Jews”.

## CHAPTER TWO: MODERNITY AND CRISIS: PERPETUAL FAILURE AND TRAGEDY

The terms modernity and modernization signify different projects for different nations, but the rhetoric used to describe them is universal. Progress, development and production are but a few of the descriptors embedded in national discourses worldwide in order to address localized national concerns. In the history of Latin America, this rhetoric forms a significant part of nation building discourse that emerged in the nineteenth century with independence. This chapter delves into the way in which the relationship between the figure of “the Jew” or representations of “Jewishness” manifest themselves in two novels: Moacyr Scliar’s *A estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* (1986, Brazil) and *Los siete locos* (1929, Argentina). Both of these narratives address the different ways modernity affected their respective nations. In Scliar whether it presents itself as a capitalist, religious or socialist project, visions of progress traditionally propose utopic notions of wealth, virtue or at the very least an improved way of life in Brazil’s future. By placing the figure of “the Jew” at the forefront of modernity’s trajectory, *A estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* not only draws attention to the relationship between this figure and modern discourse, but more importantly, it reveals how representations of “Jewishness” and this figure shift in roles and positioning within the modern discourse.

In contrast, Arlt’s novel does not address modernity as the answer to improving an Argentinean future; rather it unfolds in the midst of an urbanized and industrial Buenos Aires that is experiencing the repercussions of modernization at its decadence. In this sense the presence of “Jewishness” emerges differently in this narrative, for rather than it appearing in

human form as a protagonist, it constitutes part of the novel's central critique of modernity on a global scale. Therefore, this text questions the meta-narratives founded in westernized Judeo-Christian discourses in order to accentuate that beneath the modern "enlightened" rhetoric of progress and improvement of man, there is a capitalistic motive that drives the colonial model. In this regard, in its Biblical references to both the New as well as the Old Testament, this novel participates in a deconstruction of the master narratives and proposes that the true religion of modernity is capitalism.

### **MODERNITY AND CRISIS: PERPETUAL FAILURE AND TRAGEDY**

Iconic foundational thinkers such as Andrés Bello, Domingo Sarmiento and José Martí addressed modernity as one of their primary concerns in their contributions to nation building discourse. Throughout the nineteenth century as Latin American nations became independent and embarked upon the challenging task of defining themselves, many protagonists used the term "progress" in different national and cultural contexts in expressing their visions for the future of their nations.<sup>12</sup> The debates and preoccupations the intellectuals had then continue to be relevant in twenty-first century thought, for many of today's scholars persist to question and ponder modernity in their cultural contexts.

While thinkers such as Angel Rama, Jean Franco, Julio Ramos and Walter Mignolo (a mere few of the protagonists that address this issue) approach modernity with different projects in mind, they often share Jürgen Habermas' definition of modernization as a point of departure

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<sup>12</sup> Brazil's national motto: *Ordem e progresso* (Order and Progress) is just one example of how nineteenth century European rhetoric of modernization penetrated Latin American national discourses. Chile's national motto, *Por la razón o la fuerza*, (By reason or by force) employs the term *reason*, one of the key terms of the Enlightenment period.



for their arguments. In *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* Jürgen Habermas defines modernization as:

A cumulation of various processes that mutually reinforce themselves: formation of capital, mobilization of resources, development of production forces, increase in production of labor, centralized political power, formation of national identities and the secularization of values and norms. (2)

By introducing modernity as a phenomenon that “has a long history” and as an “incomplete project”, Habermas acknowledges the complexities involved in addressing this concept in modern terms (3). Yet even with a disclaimer, this overarching definition that encompasses nearly every dimension of a society’s infrastructure takes certain assumptions for granted.

Many thinkers believe that in the context of Latin America, certain aspects that European intellectuals consider fixtures of their reality are simply not applicable to the Latin American cultural and social spheres. In *The Modern Culture of Latin America* Jean Franco studies the trajectory of Latin America’s literary history and emphasizes its role in shaping social consciousness as well as establishing a sense of history. Literature has a long-standing tradition of being a pedagogical tool for educating the masses and as such, also serves as a medium through which intellectuals can voice social criticism and protest (19).

While Jean Franco’s study recognizes the importance of the written word in the construction of nation and identity, Jean Franco and her contemporaries also emphasize the struggle for the appropriation of a Latin American literary voice. As the nations attained independence from Spain and Portugal, the debate about civilization, identity and the future of the nation arose; however, the literary approach to social criticism often mirrored the style and content that was prevalent in the Western traditions. Franco considers the Latin American

reproductions of the “historical novels, Balzacian social novels, Chateaubriand-type novels of Indian life” as ill-fitting, for they do not capture the American experience in their own terms (19). The struggle to embrace a voice that reflected a Latin American reality persisted throughout the century. At the turn of the twentieth century, in an attempt to become a modern state, many intellectuals looked to positivism as the modernizing tool. However, their utopic visions, influenced in large part by European notions of a modern state, were incoherent with these authors’ surrounding communities.

As Jean Franco observes, Latin American thinkers were eager to adopt foreign models of modernity, but they failed to realize that those modern structures could not thrive so long as feudal and oligarchic systems continued within their nations (23). In *Divergent Modernities* Julio Ramos refers to the disjunction between the European models and the Latin American reality as “uneven”, for the “uneven division of labor, urbanization, and the incorporation of Latin American markets into the world system or global economy” contributed to Latin America’s dependent condition and consequently, an uneven modernization (xiv).

Ramos’ term “uneven modernity” refers to the economic repercussions that Latin American nations faced when importing European models of modernity. However, this notion is not particular to Latin America’s positioning within the global markets, for it also translates to the social realm of these countries as they address concerns of national identity. In aesthetic and cultural productions of the nineteenth century the urge to simulate canonical narratives from the European traditions dominated the literary scene; at which point the “uneven” conditions of modernity in the Latin American space were not yet conceived. In the twentieth century however, cultural productions address the disparities of European and North American notions of modernity in the Latin American context from a critical lens. Indeed, these productions reveal a

shift, for their foreign presence that may have traditionally resembled royalty or prestige, take on a decadent representation.

Brazil was no exception to this Latin American trend and in its trajectory of cultural thought, early thinkers were also eager to import the emerging liberal ideologies that were thriving in Europe. In *Misplaced Ideas*, Roberto Schwarz addresses the “unevenness” between Western notions of modernization and Brazil’s reality by closely examining the national system of labor: slavery. Clearly a labor model that thrives on the exploitation of others with the purpose of maximizing production at the expense of its subjects is the antithesis of Europe’s liberal ideology. Indeed, Brazil’s dependence upon slavery as well as the foreign markets deems it a prime example of Ramos’ notion of an “uneven modernization”. For Schwarz argues: “The rational study and continual modernization of the processes of production, with all the prestige that went with the revolution they were causing in Europe, made no sense in Brazil” (21). Just as Julio Ramos and Jean Franco observe, Schwarz concurs that the Western concepts of modernity and progress were completely disconnected with Brazil’s national circumstances.

The notion of importing culture and ideologies to the Latin American space is remnant of the colonial mold from which the nations emerged. Consequently, these discrepancies that intellectuals recognize as problematic for addressing modernity in Latin America manifest themselves as clashing dialectics. In *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* Angel Rama states that:

Los conflictos del regionalismo con la modernización son conflictos dialécticos: religión y moral católica vs. paganismo y salvajismo indígena, libertad de comercio contra monopolio colonial, emancipación republicana vs. coloniaje imperial, principio europeo vs. principio americano, liberalismo vs. conservadorismo, progreso positivo vs.

oscurantismo religioso y atraso indígena, pensamiento social revolucionario contra pensamiento retrógrado oligárquico. (71)

In establishing their theoretical framework, both Rama and Habermas part from broad parameters for defining modernity. Rama's observation of the dynamic between foreign ideals and the local traditions reveals how these clashing dialectics permeate every component of national identity and culture. In the same vein, Habermas' overarching definition of modernization allows the aforementioned scholars to address the elements that best speak to their particular interests.

In the context of this study however, I find that rather than addressing particular elements of modernity and their effects on their cultures, the narrative I examine here exemplifies a wide variety of the components in Ramos and Habermas' definitions. "Modernity and Crisis: Perpetual Failure and Tragedy" explores how different projects of modernization are intertwined with the figure of the 'Jew' in *Á estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* by Moacyr Scliar (Brazil 1986). Modernity as progress has, over the years, come to mean different things. The colonization of the Americas, the Expulsion of the Jews and Moors from Spain, Independence from European colonial rule, the socialist movements as well as the industrial revolution are but a few examples of the different disguises that modernity embodied over time. This novel depicts Brazil's attempts at embracing foreign notions of modernization as failures. Regardless of the time period or the ideological framework they emerge from, the results are consistently the same: death of the protagonist leading the projects. Indeed, it is precisely the irony and tragedy embedded in each of the episodes that satirizes the trajectory of modernity and accentuates the absurdity of importing these notions to Brazil's national landscape.

Scliar addresses the diverse projects as failures: *A estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* accentuates the absurdity of the notions in the first place and reveals how the projects never materialize; *Los siete locos* on the other hand presents the consequences or aftermath of the modernized notions in Buenos Aires. The anticipation of destruction and political turmoil as well as the complete lack of faith in the institutional models of society, (the Judeo-Christian tradition, for example) all contribute to a state of crisis in which modernity is not merely deteriorating, but whose effects are festering and heading towards implosion. In line with the chronological context of the arrival of these ideas and notions to the Latin American space, before delving into the scenes in which modernity is already in place and facing its destruction, this reading will first address the two episodes of Scliar's narrative that depict colonialism and slavery.

In *Local Histories/Global Designs* Walter Mignolo claims that "...the historical coexistence between the expulsion of the Jews and the Moors from Spain and the 'discovery' of America is at the same time a landmark for both modern colonialism and colonial modernities — that is, of modernity/coloniality" (49). Clearly, when addressing these projects as two sides of the same coin, there is an implicit understanding that both projects of modernization and colonialism are executed by leaders of western hegemonic models. Indeed, one cannot consider the history of the "discovery" of the Americas and the resulting "emergence of a new commercial and financial circuit" (to employ Mignolo's terms) without recognizing the role of the Spanish and Portuguese imperials. As each episode of *A estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* proposes a different modernizing project, this narrative parallels Mignolo's modernity/coloniality model, but presents it with a twist. The protagonists are indeed the vehicles of the modern ideas that travel across the Atlantic, but they are not colonizers in the traditional sense of the term, for

figures such as Pizarro and Cortés claimed a hegemonic position in the Americas; these protagonists however, are portrayed as victims themselves of the modernizing projects of the Expulsion. The ambiguity of these figures' identity as European but also persecuted subjects intertwines the figure of 'the Jew' with projects of modernity *and* coloniality; thereby shifting between the margin and center of the hegemonic model.

In this sense, by not presenting the colonial 'heroes', but the victims of the Inquisition at the forefront of Brazil's discovery, the novel problematizes the modernity/coloniality model. It is this element of irony that leads me to suggest that the victims of the Inquisition as agents of modernizing projects in the Americas are analogous to the disjunction between Latin American reality and the imported western notions of modernity. The relationship between the figure of 'the Jew' and modernization fluctuates within the different historical contexts, but by presenting the Jewish protagonists in the double role as refugee of the Inquisition while at the same time the frontrunner of the 'discovery' of Brazil, the narrative adopts Mignolo's modernity/coloniality model by bridging the expulsion of the Jews with the colonization of the Americas.

Moreover, the paradoxical role these protagonists fill and the conflicts they encounter reveal the complexities of the *converso* subjectivity, an identity that the Inquisition produced. In the previous chapter the close reading of *Á estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* examines how circumcision, as a symbol and ritual, pronounces the protagonist's cultural and religious identity in a context of crisis that was the Inquisition. It explores the complexities of *converso* subjectivity and the abandonment of certain rituals and practices as a means of survival on the most personal and intimate level: the relationship between the body and spiritual identity. In this analysis I examine this narrative from a broader lens, for the point of interest now lies in how

this text portrays the relationship between ‘the Jew’ as a victim of the Inquisition and his surrounding community.

As I engage in a close reading of two episodes I focus my attention on two elements: the interpersonal relationships amongst the protagonists and the failures of the modernizing projects. The way in which the protagonists address each other and coexist with their surrounding communities is indicative of their self awareness (or lack thereof) of their social positioning. In this sense, the interactions amongst themselves as Jews through the relationship between Rafael Mendes and his counterpart are just as important as the interchanges between these protagonists and their surrounding communities. The dynamic between the two figures is consistent throughout the narrative, thereby providing significant insight to the dialectical nature of *converso* subjectivity. In the same vein, the way the protagonists approach these communities and interact with their “other” reveal how they view themselves.

This brings me to the next point of this analysis: the failure of the modernizing projects in this narrative. The novel proposes a wide variety of modern concepts that range from generating personal wealth through a capitalist model that exploits a labor force, to developing an industrial system for massive modes of production, to abolishing slavery and adopting a socialist labor and production model. Yet despite the fact that these projects imply very different approaches, the common denominator that they all share is their collapse. In this regard, if the novel presents all modernizing projects as perpetual failures and the protagonists at the forefront of these attempts experience tragic deaths, we can deduce that the text does not criticize the ideological nature of the projects in question by favoring one model over another, rather it accentuates the absurdity of the notions in the circumstances of Brazil. Therefore, if the previous chapter focused on the interiority of the *converso* subjectivity through the intimate space that is the body, this reading

explores it in the public realm, through their personal relationships and interactions amongst themselves and with their *others*.

The central focus of the novel is Rafael Mendes' family lineage as it traces it back to the generation that arrived to Brazil fleeing from the Inquisition in Portugal, to the most current Rafael Mendes living at the time of Generalísimo Francisco Franco's death in 1975. Each episode depicts one generation of the family from the perspective of two protagonists: Rafael Mendes and his counterpart. Regardless of the circumstances, the two protagonists are consistent in their approach to the situations they face throughout the novel. Mendes tends to be quiet, serious and respectful to those around him. He is generally rather cautious and more religious than his counterpart, which marginalizes him from the communities that accept him.

His counterparts consistently reside at the opposite extreme. They tend to be domineering, restless and less devoted to their identity as clandestine Jews. In this colonial narrative, they learn the language of the locals and integrate themselves in those communities, but they are also the agents of hegemonic models of massive production and exportation that resemble those of the European Imperial entities. Rafael's approach may be perceived as aloof, for he maintains a distance from the communities that surround him, particularly in the context of prayer and meals, but his interactions reveal empathy and respect for the people he encounters in different communities. His counterparts however, blatantly exude a superior demeanor towards their surroundings even when he himself is a persecuted victim. In this sense, the dynamic between Rafael Mendes and his counterparts parallels Mignolo's colonial/modernities model, for the two protagonists resemble two sides of the same coin: Rafael Mendes is aware of his positioning as a "colonized" subject while his counterpart assumes the role of the colonizer.



I find that this relationship between the two protagonists of each generation speaks to two different theoretical frameworks: Roberto Schwarz's notion of "dialectical criticism" and Walter Dignolo's concept of the "in-between" subject. In *Misplaced Ideas* Roberto Schwarz questions the theoretical debates concerning the discourse of imitation in Brazilian society. He finds that essentially, the copying is not an issue, but it is emblematic of a deeper rooted social symptom, for he argues that it's not imitating in general that proves absurd, but "*the copying of one class that constitutes the problem*" (11). Schwarz considers copying as unavoidable within any culture and therefore concludes that the problematic factor in the context of Brazil is not that it exists at all, but that it is only accessible to the bourgeois class (15).

Nevertheless, he does address the replica and states that:

...the anachronistic juxtaposition of forms of modern civilization and realities originating in the colonial period is a mode of non-being or even a humiliatingly imperfect realization of a model situated elsewhere. Dialectical criticism, on the other hand, investigates the same anachronism and seeks to draw out a figure of the modern world, set on a course that is either full of promise, grotesque or catastrophic (16).

I propose that the roles adopted by the protagonists resemble Dignolo's colonial/modernities model, however, the results of their approaches (particularly those of the counterparts) speak directly to Schwarz's notion of a dialectical criticism. Consequently, it is through the juxtaposition of the two approaches and the tragic results of their attempts that we can recognize the contradictions and paradoxes that are embedded in the *Latin American* modern reality. Indeed, I find that the primary narrative function of Rafael Mendes' counterpart is to represent the component of the "dialectical criticism" that emphasizes the disjunction between his social circumstances and the European notions of modernization in Brazil.

On the other hand, the generations of Rafael Mendes that live during Brazil's colonial period symbolize the notion of the "in-between" subject on various levels, for they are persecuted victims of a hegemonic model of power and are in constant negotiation from their positioning within that hierarchical social structure. In *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* Mignolo states that the fractured locus of enunciation from a subaltern perspective defines border thinking as a response to colonial difference (10). As a result, border thinking is a tool of survival for colonized subjects, for they must acquire the capacity to negotiate between two dialogic situations: the hegemonic model of power and the subaltern system of knowledge. Similar to Hegel's notion of the "master/slave dialectic", these individuals must have a clear understanding of both systems at play and consequently develop a double consciousness that Mignolo considers "border gnosis". Indeed, "border gnosis" as a "form of knowledge produced by modern colonialism at the intersection with colonial modernities" is a fitting description of the contrast in the ways in which Rafael Mendes and his counterpart address their circumstances (12). Contrary to his counterpart, Rafael Mendes has a clear notion of his status as an "in-between subject" and reacts to his surroundings accordingly and it is precisely this knowledge, embedded in his consciousness that leads to his survival and continuation of future generations.

As a Portuguese Jew, the first Rafael Mendes that arrived to Brazil already had the double consciousness embedded in his subjectivity, for he came from Europe, not as a national hero but as a refugee. He and his subsequent generations are in contact with the subaltern systems of knowledge not just from their personal experience, but also through their encounters with the indigenous and runaway slave communities in the New World. However, it is *how* they use this awareness that determines their fate. While the two protagonists of every episode are inseparable friends, they take on very different approaches to their situations that ultimately yield

opposing results. In many episodes Rafael Mendes can be seen as a bridging character that struggles to maintain his identity, while at the same time identifying with the community that harbors him. He shows the capacity to negotiate between the two cultures all the while maintaining a strong awareness of his position within society as a victim of his European origins, a refugee in his new space. Even in future generations, when the Jews obtained a more secure circumstance in Brazil, Rafael's sense of border gnosis is still embedded in his consciousness.

In the case of the counterparts, however, just as the attempt to implement foreign models of modernization resulted in failed projects that never saw their realization, so too do the protagonists of this narrative prematurely meet their tragic end. Consequently, their role in this narrative is twofold: while they serve as the vehicles through which the foreign ideas travel across the Atlantic, their tragic ends also symbolize the absurdity of the ideas themselves. For just as Roberto Schwarz deems the importation of foreign ideals to Brazilian society out of place, all of Rafael Mendes' counterparts propose a different ideological trend that did not prove coherent with Brazil's socio-political climate. While the contexts change throughout the narrative, the structure is consistent: the counterparts die tragically in their attempts to modernize their surroundings while Rafael Mendes manages to survive his circumstances and provides continuity through future generations.

As a result, I propose that not only does the contradictory dynamic provide what Schwarz deems a dialectical criticism, but even more so, the protagonists' perspectives and approaches represent a *subaltern/colonial mimetic* dialectic. I do not refer to the word *mimetic* in the same terms that Homi Bhabha and Franz Fanon employ it in their discussion of post-coloniality, but in the context of this narrative's structure Rafael's counterparts aspire to implement modernizing projects that are thriving in Europe, and that are led by figures of power within their local socio-

political structures. In this sense, the counterparts are mimicking the European model of massive modes of production in their new spaces with the hopes that they yield the same prosperous results. By dismissing the importance of their positioning within the European model, these protagonists fail as colonialists and die as *colonial mimics*.

The narrative's title *The Strange Nation of Rafael Mendes* merits discussion, for the dialectical relationship between the protagonists parallels the complexities of modern Brazilian national identity. Roberto Schwarz associates the act of imitating foreign notions of modernity with the bourgeois class. If it is the counterparts of the narrative that assume that role, then Rafael Mendes' position speaks to the modern Brazilian national, for he is one who survives due to his capacity to negotiate between his "western memory" and "border gnosis". Indeed, while the narrative places the Jewish immigrant experience on the forefront of national development, the trajectory of his family history resembles that of modern Brazilian history. Over time and with the subsequent generations, the Mendes family loses awareness of its roots, to the point where the most recent Rafael Mendes is completely unaware of his *converso* lineage and attributes his existential tendencies to a mid-life crisis. In this sense, the title's evocation of the *nation* implies that Brazil's survival through adverse circumstances such as colonialism, western notions of modernity as well as political instability and turmoil, require the "double consciousness" that Mendes has embedded in his awareness.<sup>13</sup>

I propose that the narrative parallels Brazilian national identity with the Rafael Mendes' of the text. While Rafael Mendes has the "Western memory" ingrained in his consciousness, his capacity to recognize his positioning within the global scale leads him to accept his

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<sup>13</sup> While this analysis does not delve into the political context of the narrative, it is worth noting that the repetitive mention of Spain's dictator Francisco Franco is a narrative strategy to dialogue with Brazil's own Getulio Vargas's dictatorship that was in power from 1930-1945.

surroundings, integrating himself in the new societies without forgoing his cultural identity. In “La ficción marrana” Ricardo Forster delves into *converso* subjectivity by stating that this figure represents the modern subject par excellence, for his fragmented condition as “El marrano es lo que no representa y representa lo que no es” positions him in both the center and margins of his community (134). The term “fiction” in the title of the article can be applied to different aspects of “marrano” identity. First it draws attention to the constructed nature of this subject. Second, projects such as the Inquisition made these marginal populations the unwitting protagonists of the mega-fiction that is modernity. As a result, survival in the real circumstances of torture and death required them to react by creating a fictional identity that fit within the nation’s hegemonic model. In this sense, Forster’s title also implies that as active agents, these subjects partook in the writing of their own identities (135).<sup>14</sup>

This notion is present within the narrative because as each generation reflects different trends and national preoccupations, so too do the protagonists of each generation rewrite themselves accordingly. While Rafael Mendes’ fiction is consistently in survival mode, his counterpart repeatedly participates in the trendy modernizing models of his times. Indeed, in one of the episodes Rafael Mendes actually confronts his counterpart, pondering: “Wasn’t being a New Christian troublesome enough? Wasn’t it bad enough to have the Inquisition at his heels?” to which his counterpart, Bequimão (originally Beckman), responded: “You’re just a coward” (156). This passage exemplifies the dynamic and interactions between the two protagonists as they settle in to their new communities.

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<sup>14</sup> The term *marrano* literally translates as “swine” in Spanish. In *The Jews of Latin America* Judith Laikin Elkin states that as a clandestine Jew, the *marrano* was viewed as a hero, whereas the *converso* that genuinely did renounce the faith was viewed by Jews as a traitor (5).

In these terms, as we read the generations and their protagonists as their own fictions, we can see that the content of the counterparts' narratives differs as it reflects different contexts and modernizing projects, but the form of their fictions remains the same: their blindness to their positioning within the community leads to the failure of their ambitious projects and ultimately result in their tragic deaths. Rafael Mendes' fiction, on the other hand, is consistent in its form and content throughout; regardless of the circumstances, this character reacts according to his border knowledge: in survival mode by integrating himself with the oppressed community and solely focusing on continuity.

In the following reading of two generations, I examine the failure of the projects and the surrounding contexts of that impossibility. I argue that the tragedy of the situations is directly associated with the protagonist's lack of consciousness of his positioning within the hegemonic model at work. In one generation, Rafael and Álvaro are captured by runaway slaves in the Brazilian jungle. Zambi, the leader of the *quilombo* Palmares, spares their lives because despite the fact that they are white men, he feels solidarity with the Jews as victims of the Inquisition. Indeed, he actually considers them "their brothers in misfortune" and therefore allows them into the *quilombo* on the condition that they contribute to the community by means of physical labor (165).<sup>15</sup>

The generation of Afonso and Rafael Mendes is the first to arrive in Brazil and it is the indigenous community that harbors them and integrates them, providing them with the skills to survive in their new environment. Once again, Rafael Mendes is grateful to the natives and

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<sup>15</sup> Interactions between Jews as victims of the Inquisition and runaway slaves as victims of modernization in Brazil are not unique to this narrative. The Brazilian film *Quilombo* (1984) directed by Carlos Diengues is a cultural production that presents an encounter between a Jewish/indigenous family hiding in the jungle and the runaway slaves on their way to Palmares, one of the most established and well known *quilombos* in Brazil. While it is a brief scene, it reveals a cooperation and solidarity between the two victims of the colonial project.

reciprocates through agricultural labor. Afonso fully immerses himself in the new culture. He learns the language and marries the chief's daughter. Yet immediately upon meeting the locals he was conjuring ways to exploit the land and its inhabitants.

Each of the protagonists of both generations addresses this community from their particular perspectives. In the case of Álvaro's generation, Rafael is grateful that they spared his life and contributes to the community through exhausting physical labor. Álvaro, on the other hand, "begins to instill certain ideas..." that imply exploiting the members of the *quilombo* for personal gain (166). His intricate plans include creating a vision of "progress" for their new community. Through conversations with M'bonga, Zambi's advisor, Álvaro leads them to believe that they can be more than "a mere hideout" and that they have the resources to "progress" into an independent nation (166). For this, they need to create their own currency and laws in order to establish a "commercial interchange with the other republics" (166). In actuality, he has no intention of aiding the community in becoming an independent nation; rather his motives are purely self indulgent. He exposes the community to a vocabulary of international exchange and modern markets that not only mimic European national rhetoric of modernity, but more importantly, are completely irrelevant in the context of the self-sustained *quilombo*.

From the onset, Álvaro's interactions with the members of the community are part of a conniving and manipulative scheme to become wealthy at the expense of runaway slaves. His approach to the same people that spared his life and harbored him represents a colonial model in which he considers himself superior and attempts to dominate and control the subjects. Indeed, even Álvaro's skeptic reasoning towards the existence of gold in the *quilombo* divulges western consciousness, for he cannot fathom why they would: "run away from their masters, leaving behind their homes (even if they were only plantation slave quarters) and guaranteed meals (even

if they consisted of plain portions of food) and go into the jungle?” (168). It’s inconceivable to him that the slaves would want to leave their conditions; hence there must be something that he considers valuable in the jungle.

The European consciousness is so embedded in Álvaro that even his reaction towards gold reflects the western concept of value, for freedom is evidently not as significant a motive as wealth for seeking refuge in the jungle. Therefore, unlike Rafael and Zambi, Álvaro does not consider himself as part of the oppressed population, but as part of the powerful elite, capable of participating in the hegemonic model as an exploiter of the “other” for his own gain. The juxtaposition of the two identities accentuates further Schwarz’s notion of dialectical criticism in the narrative, for Álvaro’s plan to resell the runaway slaves back to the Portuguese when he himself is pursued by them reveals just how disconnected he is from his circumstances. In the same regard, this scene reinforces how Rafael Mendes serves to personify his counterpart’s alter ego; he is the protagonist whose moral compass guides him not only in his religious identity, but in his interactions with others as well. Consequently, it is no surprise that Rafael is rarely in agreement with his counterpart’s schemes; but as a supportive friend, he ultimately remains loyal despite his concerns.

Furthermore, this generation offers insight to the clashes that arise between the two protagonists. Álvaro’s manipulative nature does not just apply to the community he wishes to exploit, but includes Rafael Mendes as well. In his scheme he leads Rafael to believe that they will help the *quilombo* become a nation and assigns him the responsibility of drafting a constitution, to which he reacts with wonder and admiration, for he considers “he has been given the honor of witnessing the birth of a nation” (169). Completely unbeknownst to him, Rafael is actually serving as an accomplice to Álvaro’s conniving plot to take advantage of the *quilombo*



members. The fact that Álvaro also manipulates Rafael is indicative of the rifts between them, for he is conscious of the fact that Rafael would disapprove of the project and not permit him to carry it out. However, beyond the immediate repercussions of being honest with Rafael, this approach is also characteristic of the typical colonial narrative.

*A estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* is a narrative that presents the arrival and colonization of Brazil from a Eurocentric perspective, only to parody this model through humor and irony. By examining the failures of the two plans, I seek to advance the premise that this narrative satirizes the importation of modernity to Brazil. I argue that the failures often manifest themselves through humor, irony and references to “madness”, all of which accentuate the notion of the “absurd” that is often associated with foreign concepts of progress in the Latin American space. One element that provides a significant twist to the colonial mold and presents the two protagonists as Schwarz’s notion of dialectical criticism is insanity. When Rafael learns of his counterpart’s scheme he actually employs the terms “crackbrained” and “madness” to describe Álvaro’s condition for conjuring those ideas (170). He contemplates his counterpart’s mental state when he learns that the plan entails selling the runaway slaves back to the Portuguese. The notion of acquiring wealth at the expense of betraying and exploiting the same community that harbored them not only bewilders and angers Rafael, but compels him to question: “Could it be that Álvaro is insane? That he has lost his mind...?” Rafael reflects upon his counterpart’s recent behavior and sadly concludes that: “No. He’s not crazy...*Unfortunately* not.” (170).<sup>16</sup> As a representation of Álvaro’s alter ego, Rafael’s reaction to the plan exemplifies a conscience and by considering it “villainy to say the least”, he accentuates the project as insane (170). Rafael’s narrative function is to accentuate further the polarity between the colonized subject and the

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<sup>16</sup> Emphasis is mine.

representative of the hegemonic model in place. In this generation, he reinforces Schwarz's notion of "misplaced ideas" not just by representing the in-between subject, but by participating in the dialectical criticism when he questions the mental condition of his counterpart. The role of madness emerges from his interior and represents a break with the traditional colonial narrative because he, sharing a similar background with Álvaro, challenges the ethical and moral implications of this "modernizing" project. Therefore, rather than presenting a modernizing project in an idealistic light as "progressive" and "industrious", the allusion to these ideas as "insane" and "villainy", in addition to the fact that the project does not even materialize are elements that emphasize the "absurd" nature of these ideas.

Indeed, Rafael's reaction to the schemes is consistent throughout the generations, for he employs adjectives such as "mad" and "insane" to describe his partners. In this regard the dialectical criticism has a deep impact because the source of the questioning and the critique is Rafael, the protagonist's closest ally. The fact that he himself views the ideas as absurd and questions his partner's mental condition draws attention to the correlation between the "insanity" of the protagonists and the "absurdity" of their ideas. This association not only implies that the imported notions of modernity in Latin America are absurd, but that their source is insanity.

Absurdity is prevalent in the modernizing notions of this narrative, but it is also deeply embedded in the failures and tragedies of these projects that inevitably include interactions between the protagonists and their surrounding communities, but more importantly parody the traditional colonial narrative. Afonso's plan of abusing the land and natives by planting massive quantities of sugarcane for exportation to Portugal and Álvaro's scheme to sell the runaway slaves back to slavery both deteriorate prior to their projects development. Afonso, of the first generation to arrive in Brazil, considers the natives "lazy" because they only grow what they

need for the community (134). His idea to export sugar is an ambitious and selfish project, for its sole purpose is to accumulate wealth from his perspective, for the notion of mass production and exportation does not form part of the local community's imaginary. Yet success in his terms requires a workforce, a sugar mill as well as working relations with the European traders that would export the sugar abroad. Clearly, this project stems from a western notion of progress and growth, for the demand and value of sugar in Europe makes it a strong commodity.

Afonso's project however, does not evolve beyond the planning stages. It would seem that under his circumstances (a Jew who has escaped the Inquisition in Portugal), his biggest challenge would be to reach an agreement with the Portuguese. However, considering the wealth this project would generate, he successfully established a working relationship with a captain of a Portuguese ship to import a dismantled sugar mill, providing the necessary tools for the processing. Ironically enough, the setback to his project lies in an unforeseen struggle to gathering a labor force. His reaction of disdain and shock when the natives refuse to plant beyond the need for consumption reveals that he expected to command them without resistance. In his attempts at persuading the locals, Afonso "...tried to explain to them that their efforts would be rewarded with many mirrors, glass beads, and belt buckles. The Indians would laugh at him" (136). This passage is allusive on various levels, for it not only emphasizes the clash between the local reality and the imported notions of modernity, but it reveals the relationship between Afonso and the native community.

The act of offering the Indians trinkets such as beads, mirrors and belt buckles while he expects to "make a fortune with sugarcane" divulges a condescending attitude towards the natives as childlike and inferior beings (136). Viewing the indigenous subjects in that way is not surprising, for historically, the western colonial construction of the native communities has

associated them with naïve and infantile behaviors. The revelatory element of this interchange lies in the way the indigenous community reacts to his suggestion: with laughter. The natives not only refuse to provide the labor; they ridicule the idea altogether. Despite his persuasive efforts, Afonso is unsuccessful and turns to violent measures. He chases them with a whip, terrorizes them and even resorts to beating his wife (137). Nevertheless, his efforts to transform the indigenous community are in vain, even through tyranny. In this regard, this scene may contain elements that resemble a conquest narrative, but the subtle twists such as presenting the natives with agency where they not only can *speak*, but laugh, problematize the traditional formula. Indeed, the resistance by part of the native community was not a setback in the project, rather the reason for the plan's failure.

The scene in the *quilombo* shares elements in common with the encounter of the indigenous community; for the runaway slaves also harbor the refugees and provide them with food and shelter. However, the projects' failures are due to different factors. Afonso's project does not materialize because he cannot form a labor force from the indigenous community. His rage and frustration consume him to the point where he challenges Mendes to a duel and loses his life. In Álvaro's case, the project also fails before even being proposed, but the reason is directly associated with his inability to acknowledge his positioning within the very hegemonic model in which he wishes to participate.

Despite being a prisoner of the *quilombo*, Álvaro schemes to manipulate the community, but before he can even propose his ideas to Zambi, the Portuguese carry out a surprise raid. Instead of fleeing and hiding from his persecutors like everyone else, Álvaro runs towards the Europeans screaming: "Stop it, you white shit asses! Don't damage my goods!" at which point he is shot in the chest and killed (171). Even though he arrived to the *quilombo* as a refugee, in

his ambition to become wealthy and a man of enterprise, Álvaro lost sight of his condition as a Jew and therefore could not acknowledge the impossibility of leading a project that implied interactions with the Portuguese. Ultimately it was his denial and greed that led to his death.

In this representation of modernity in Latin America, it is significant that both Afonso and Álvaro meet their tragic ends with their projects detained in the planning stages. However, I find that the elements of humor in the tragic deaths impact further the absurdity of the projects. The indigenous community ridicules Afonso when he proposes the sugarcane plantation, but the humor lies in the way his rage consumes him and his behavior. The minute his project is rejected by the natives, his anger and frustration overcome him, provoking irrational and mad conduct. The morning that he challenges Rafael Mendes, his lifelong friend, to a duel, he appears before his tent “naked in the yard, with a cudgel in his hand; like an Indian, he had painted himself with annato” and is yelling in front of everyone: “Come out here you cur!” and “Come and fight, you bastard!” (136). Even during the duel, his rage prevents him from making any accurate hits, thus stumbling around aimlessly, he falls to Rafael’s fateful blow. That night, “...the Indians ate the body of the Jew Afonso Sanches, a fugitive from the Inquisition” (137). This reading reveals that as his frustration consumes him, he evolves into a caricature, from the image of him “chasing the savages with a whip” to clumsily stumbling over himself naked in a duel, and ultimately becoming a stew, Afonso Sanches embodies the absurdity that his project signifies for that community.

Álvaro running towards the Portuguese yelling profanities also proves to be a caricaturistic image and in both cases, their ambitions consume them to the point of madness. These scenes take the indigenous community and the slaves, two exploited populations in Brazilian history, and empower them when confronted with “insane” notions of modernity. The

indigenous subjects of this novel, not only speak, but *laugh* in refusal to aid Afonso in his quest for wealth. The runaway slaves established an intricate, self-sustaining community that prides itself on complete independence from the Europeans. I explore these two scenes that are similar in content and outcome because I find they serve two narrative functions that break with traditional representations of modernity in Latin America. Firstly, unlike many long standing representations, this text breaks with the typical colonial narrative in the way it presents the subaltern peoples. Unlike texts like Cortés and Columbus' accounts that depict the natives as docile children, the indigenous and runaway slave protagonists are assertive in their encounters with the Europeans and participate in self-governing models of community, for neither group embraces the newcomers as royalty, nor do they subject themselves to the exploitative projects the counterparts propose.

Secondly, and perhaps more relevant to this study is the way in which the narrative presents modernity in Brazil. The use of parody, irony and humor combined with the subaltern/colonial mimic dialectic that the protagonists represent all support the overarching notion of the novel that westernized modern projects are incoherent with Brazil's reality. Therefore it is of no surprise that both Afonso and Álvaro die not only tragic, but ironic deaths. By placing Jews, Europe's own subalterns as fugitives, at the forefront of hegemonic modernizing projects and presenting them as the loci of madness, absurdity and failure, the text parodies traditional colonizing narratives in which the European newcomers appear enlightened, strong and welcomed by the native populations with open arms. On the same token, Rafael Mendes achieves continuity because of his "border gnosis" that manifests itself in his interactions with his counterparts and his surrounding communities. I find that the title of the narrative as a "strange *nation*" of Rafael Mendes paired with his capacity to negotiate within the

hegemonic model as a marginalized “in between” subject are both characteristics that parallel modern Brazilian identity.

### **“EL ASTRÓLOGO” AND JOSEPH DE CASTRO: THE UTOPIC VISION**

As agents of schemes whose sole purpose is to acquire personal wealth at the expense of others, Afonso and Álvaro embody the failures of projects that are influenced by capitalist ideals. However, that is not the only type of failure the narrative proposes, for a unique element of this text is that it does not discriminate against western concepts of modernity by confining the failures to capitalist models; rather it addresses a wide variety of imported ideas and notions that also proved incoherent with Brazilian reality. Joseph de Castro is a counterpart of a different generation and his vision of modernity includes a separation from materialism, for these protagonists experience a different facet of Brazilian history. The previous analysis explores scenes in which the protagonists are wanderers fleeing from persecution, but Joseph’s generation represents the European merchant community that settled in Recife, Brazil. His generation lives under Dutch rule and is therefore at liberty to participate in the world market as merchants and international traders without fear of persecution. In this sense, Joseph and Rafael Mendes are in the social and economic positioning that Afonso and Álvaro envisioned for themselves generations ago.

In this analysis I examine another generation of *A estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* along with Roberto Arlt’s *Los siete locos* in order to argue that in a context in which the models of massive production and industry are already in place, there still exists a relationship between modernity and “the Jew” that continues to yield the same results of failure and tragedy. Despite the fact that these scenes represent a different point on the historical continuum of modernity in

which the protagonists are no longer pursued by national projects, there still emerges a criticism of the modern system in place that contradicts the interests and values of the surrounding community. In the case of *Rafael Mendes* the text depicts a generation that is indeed settled and experiencing the wealth and affluence that their predecessors Afonso and Álvaro envisioned. Unlike the previous scenes where modernity's failure was strongly associated with the protagonist's marginalized positioning within westernized hegemonic models, this generation that does not suffer persecution or destitution presents a conflict from the center. In this sense, this modern project may emerge from the opposite end of the spectrum in its socialist nature, for Joseph's visions include simplistic and communal living, but it still yields the same results as all the other attempts at importing modernity: tragedy.

*Los siete locos* addresses modernity in its decadence by depicting the Buenos Aires of the thirties. As one of the most important urban spaces in South America, Buenos Aires once symbolized a modern marvel in its cityscape. This narrative however, does not present the city in its moment of glamour and splendor, rather its deterioration. Loneliness and emptiness burden the protagonists as each of them represents a failure. Erdosain is a failure in every facet of his life: as a husband, an inventor and when that does not work out, as a mid-level balance collector. Haffner, the procurer, appears to be the only "successful" character in the running of his brothels, but his nickname of "el Rufián Melancólico" is indicative of his emotional state. Collapse is the common denominator the protagonists share in common and the decay extends beyond the characters into the urban space. In this sense, the protagonists as well as the city reveal a new era that breaks with long standing notions of the cityscape as modern and progressive.

Indeed, the nineteenth century thinkers such as the chronicler Gómez Carrillo and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento deemed Buenos Aires utopic and considered it "the enchanted



city” for the high fashion and merchandise, describing it almost as a fetish. Sarmiento envisioned progress in Buenos Aires in the form of science and industry. Yet these are just a few intellectuals that associated modernity in Argentina with capitalist ideals. Over time however, these notions of development through massive production and industrialization evolve into signifying disaster and a locus of crisis at which point there emerges a criticism of the capitalist model and its exploitative consequences. *Los siete locos* is an example of a narrative that depicts that facet of Buenos Aires and anticipates the violence and oppression still to come.

Under Dutch rule in Recife, Joseph and Rafael live in a thriving Jewish community that is at the forefront of the sugar trade. Lifelong friends and partners in the lens grinding business, these protagonists have very different perspectives towards their lives. Rafael has a family and is content with his profession and his place within society and therefore lives comfortably without questioning the ways of his community. Joseph on the other hand, is restless and unhappy with the views of his people. He scorns them for an obsession with sugar and is concerned that the community’s preoccupation with material things will hinder the Prophet Elijah’s arrival. His visions for a modern society are of a utopic nature, for “Elijah’s planet” is where people do not mistreat each other and no one enslaves or exploits others, rather, love is what reigns (145).

Walter Benjamin’s “Capitalism as Religion” deems capitalism a religion by drawing attention to the characteristics that this economic model shares with the function of religious institutions. He introduces the concept as: “...capitalism essentially serves to satisfy the same worries, anguish and disquiet formerly answered by so-called religion” (259). He defines these worries as: “a mental illness, which suits the capitalist epoch. Spiritual (not material) hopelessness in poverty, vagabondism-begging-monasticism... “Worries” originating in the fear of hopelessness that is community-based, not individual material.” (261). Benjamin’s claim

that capitalism replaced religion in its role to address these worries of humanity is central to this analysis.

One of the first indications that Joseph is not just criticizing his community's materialism, but is concerned that capitalism replaced religion in Recife, is a conversation he has with Rafael. In expressing his concerns about the future, Joseph exclaims: "But, will the prophet ever come here? Intrigue and corruption reign in Recife. And the people of the nation have *sold out* to sugar!" to which Rafael reacts with concern about Joseph's rebellious tone, "particularly about the implications of such statements, clearly *heretic*" (146).<sup>17</sup> The presence of both religious and economic terms in this interchange accentuates the ambiguity of the role that religion plays in their community. In literal terms Joseph's exclamation about "selling out" to sugar draws a direct association between the Jews and the devotion they are displaying for the capitalist sugar trade.

Rafael's obscure use of the term "heretic" speaks to Benjamin's notion, for it is difficult to decipher whether he interprets Joseph's comment as heretic because it insults the Jewish community to which they belong, or if he considers it heresy to disdain the sugar trade that provides their comforts and wealth. Despite the fact that the term "heresy" by definition, implies a variance with the religious doctrine, neither of the aforementioned possibilities refers to the spirituality of the community.

While Benjamin's notions can apply to both Scliar and Arlt's texts, they are relevant to the novels in different ways, for the central preoccupation of the protagonist in Scliar is the lack of religious devotion by part of his community. *Los siete locos* is a narrative that criticizes modernity and capitalism by drawing attention to its failures. In doing so, this text satirizes

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<sup>17</sup> Emphasis is mine.

Judeo Christian rhetoric that contributes to the notion of modernity and exposes it as hypocrisy. In this regard, while Joseph embraces religion and aims to bring awareness to his community, “El astrólogo” seizes capitalist endeavors in his efforts to break from the decadent “modernized” Argentine society in order to create a “new” one.

Benjamin’s claim that capitalism replaced religion in consoling “community based worries” can be seen in the introduction of Joseph’s generation of Scliar’s novel. While Joseph abhors material possessions, it becomes evident that his community associates stability with luxury in characterizing Recife as the “Jerusalem of the New World, a city where the splendors of the Mosaic faith could be celebrated in a magnificent synagogue entirely decorated with jacaranda and gold” (142). This description of Recife’s Jewish community combines the celebration of the freedom to practice their faith openly with the grandeur of their temple, emphasizing the presence of both religion and wealth at the heart of the community.

While it seems that this generation leads the modern life that their ancestors envisioned by having both the freedom to practice their faith without persecution as well as acquiring economic success, Joseph’s notion of progress resides in leading a simple yet spiritual life. Consequently, his attempts at modernity do not include the same goals of acquiring personal wealth and participating in the global markets, rather the opposite: leading a righteous and communal lifestyle in order to summon the Messiah. Therefore, Joseph’s struggle is not as an outsider trying to manipulate surrounding populations; instead, he participates in a criticism from within with the aims of bringing awareness to his own community.

Joseph embarks upon the task of transforming the Jews of Recife by publishing a booklet he titled *The Tiny Creatures of the Sugar Business* in which he criticizes the Europeans for their dependence on sugar and accentuates the relationships between the commodity and the colonial

hunger for expansion that in turn lead to the collection of material possessions. He then describes a world within a crystal globe of “miniature human beings who feed exclusively on sugar. They are Jews; Jeovah has punished them for their pride, reducing them to insignificant proportions” (148). In this world the entire city is built from sugar, from the landscape and houses to the animals of this land, everything was made of sugar.

This scene speaks directly to Benjamin’s first characteristic of how capitalism replaced religion, for he claims that “...capitalism is a pure religious cult, perhaps the most extreme there ever was. Within it everything only has meaning in direct relation to the cult: it knows no special dogma, no theology. From this standpoint, utilitarianism gains its religious coloring” (259). Joseph’s depiction of the Jewish community as self contained in the crystal globe of sugar implies that the community has become a cult that worships its prized commodity and therefore, speaks directly to Benjamin’s definition of capitalism as a cult. The claim that the people “feed exclusively on sugar” and that their material possessions such as their homes and livestock are also made of sugar asserts that for this particular community, nothing else exists outside of their product. Moreover, even the preoccupation of destruction revolves around the loss of sugar, for the leaflet states:

What the nobleman feared the most was a heavy rainfall (like the one in the Deluge: Jeovah’s punishment for his whimsy) which would dissolve this enchantment, washing away tons of sugar, which would end in muddy rivers and stormy green seas. To ward off this danger; a gigantic white umbrella was kept permanently open over the city. (148)

The greatest fear of this city is not harm or the death of its inhabitants, rather the obliteration of its commodity. In this regard, this scene, particularly the city’s greatest fear, exemplifies

Benjamin's notion that from within this community's cult of sugar, all meaning (including its own destruction) revolves around their gross product.

*Los siete locos* approaches its criticism of capitalism differently. In this narrative, the protagonist "El Astrólogo" embarks upon establishing his "secret" society by recruiting seven men and assigning them pivotal roles for the ruling of mankind. In his discourse to his recruits he introduces his project in stating that his secret society will not only reflect his ideas, but will serve to educate future rulers. He justifies his cult in stating:

Ya sé que Ud me dirá que han existido numerosas sociedades secretas...y eso es cierto...todas desaparecieron porque carecían de bases sólidas, es decir, que se apoyaban en un sentimiento o en una irrealidad política o religiosa, con exclusión de toda realidad inmediata. En cambio, nuestra sociedad se basará en un principio más sólido y moderno: el industrialismo, es decir, la logia tendrá un elemento de fantasía, si así se quiere llamar a todo lo que le he dicho, y otro elemento positivo: la industria, que dará como consecuencia el oro (95). In his declaration, El Astrólogo emphasizes that the element that sets his secret society apart from previous models is the absence of an abstract, metaphysical belief system, whether it be political or religious.

The relationship between "Jewishness" and modernity is central in Scliar's narrative, for just within the exploration of these three generations, Afonso, Álvaro and Joseph, we see modern endeavors of production on a massive scale, colonization, slavery and finally, with Joseph, ideals that resemble a socialist model. However, "Jewishness" is not prevalent in Arlt's novel, rather its presence is noted through tangential references. Unlike Joseph that rejects materialism and embraces his faith, el Astrólogo draws attention to the failures of the institutions that traditionally bear the role of providing absolute truths. His discourse deconstructs the role of religion in mankind and actually states that humanity has lost all theological belief. When

addressing Judaism as an example, he states: “El judaísmo acercó sus narices al Debe y al Haber del mundo y dijo: ‘la felicidad está en quiebra porque el hombre carece de dinero para subvenir a sus necesidades’... Cuando debió decir que: ‘La felicidad está en quiebra porque el hombre carece de dioses y fe” (93). There are two elements of this quote that I consider significant: firstly the way in which he describes Judaism; and secondly, how this reference preludes a series of contradictions within the Astrologer’s speech.

El Astrólogo’s claim on Judaism reduces the faith to a “Credit and Debit” system supports the long standing generalization that money plays a central role in Jewish identity and therefore produces greedy and ambitious citizens, much like those of Joseph’s community. While his perspective on religion as a whole proves to be negative, the criticism he makes of Christianity and Buddhism speaks to favorable characteristics of these faiths. In his conversation with his recruits he states: “...Me pregunté si un rey del cobre o del petróleo llegaría a dejarse despojar de sus flotas, de sus montañas, de su oro y de sus pozos, y me di cuenta de que para privarse de ese fabuloso mundo había que tener la espiritualidad de un Buda o de un Cristo...y que ellos, los dioses que disponían de todas las fuerzas, no permitirían jamás su exacción” (92). The gods of copper and oil in this quote refer to leaders of enterprise, (ergo, human beings) that from his perspective, have the power to rule the world in the best interest of their gross product. The references to Christ and Buddha allude to qualities of selflessness and project an ability to reject power for the sake of preserving the beauty of their world. The employment of the term “espiritualidad” to address that capacity describes them favorably and places these figures in a superior position to humanity that does not apply to his views on Judaism.

Nevertheless, his claims on Judaism’s failures for being a religion of “credit” and “debit” reveal that el Astrólogo recognizes a direct association between capitalism and religion where

capitalism absorbs and becomes its own religion. This notion in Benjamin's terms is not related to Judaism, but el Astrólogo seems to emphasize that the correlations he draws between the Jewish faith and money place this belief system not on a spiritual level as with the references to Christ and Buddha, but instead, on a mortal dimension: that of consumption. While his observation does not express disdain towards the capitalistic attempts in the narrative, it is through his interpretation of Judaism that he recognizes the relationship between money and religion. In *The Jew's Body* historian Sander Gilman traces the relationship between "the Jew" and money back to the medieval period. One of the most influential writers that delineated this relationship was philosopher and theologian St. Thomas Aquinas who criticized the Jews for charging interest (124). In his view, the notion of "money making money" by earning interest is a perverted exploitation of money's true function (124). In this regard, the relationship between representations of "Jewishness" and modernity appear in this text, not as protagonists as we have seen in other narratives, but as a perspective and approach that the protagonist deems mortal and associates with consumption, not with the spiritual qualities that religion traditionally entails.

This analysis in no way implies that the role of "Jewishness" is as central to the text as it is in Scliar's, but I do propose that even as a tangential reference in regards to el Astrólogo's views on the world, it bears a presence in this narrative. Moreover, the fact that in his plans he advocates the replacement of religious institutions with economical ones reflects an influence from his notion of Judaism. Yet that is not the only element of the Jewish faith that he draws upon in his speech. When discussing his plans and assigning positions for his secret society, he decides that someone must play the role of god and as he is brainstorming, he exclaims: Y nosotros les daremos a todos los sedientos de maravillas un dios magnífico, adornado de relatos

que podemos copiar de la Biblia...Una idea que se me ocurre: anunciaremos que el mocito es el Mesías pronosticado por los judíos... (96).

El Astrólogo gathers elements from different cultures and religions when devising his plan and does not discriminate in doing so; for he mentions his desire to mimic an Arab leader and the characteristics he seeks in choosing the new god resemble myths from other backgrounds. However, it is worth noting that two factors, the role of god and the economic structure of the society are directly drawn from what he considers to be Jewish influences. It is not the interest of this study to imply that el Astrólogo's grand scheme for his secret society that will rule the world would be Jewish by any means, for central to his argument is that the abstract nature of religion failed humanity. Furthermore, by whimsically incorporating elements from different religions, cultures and schools of thought, this novel creates a sense of chaos and alludes to the failures of all *modernizing* institutionalities, whatever the traditions they draw from. Be that as it may, the two elements: the figure of god and the structure of the new society do reveal a relationship between "Jewishness" and modernity. The fact that el Astrólogo refers to it as a faith that revolves around a "Credit and Debit" model already uses modern rhetoric to describe it (in his terms) and positions it within his discourse addressing modernity.

The way in which he expresses himself also reflects modern form of discourse, for his presentation to his recruits is a potpourri of ideas and notions, images and metaphors all of which resemble a stream of consciousness, except it is not a part of his internal thought process, rather spoken to his colleagues. In this speech to his recruits, el Astrólogo contradicts himself in his perspective towards humanity's downfalls and failures, revealing his struggles with the repercussions that can develop from such power in the hands of financial institutions. For example, before divulging his plan he states:



Ahora bien, cuando llegué a la conclusión de que Morgan, Rockefeller o Ford eran por el poder que les confería el dinero algo así como dioses, me di cuenta de que la revolución social sería imposible sobre la tierra porque un Rockefeller o un Morgan podía destruir con un solo gesto una raza como usted en su jardín un nido de hormigas (92).

This passage suggests that while he acknowledges the relationship between power and money, he is also weary of how that power could result in destruction. Yet his conclusion that a social revolution would be impossible under the reign of a financial “god” is perhaps of more interest, because it contradicts how he proceeds in his speech, for this declaration seems to imply that in conjuring his “utopia”, el Astrólogo would deny the financial figures that position of power. Yet, as his speech unfolds he states: “...entonces me acordé de que los únicos que podían devolverle a la humanidad el paraíso perdido eran los dioses de carne y hueso: Rockefeller, Morgan, Ford...y concebí un proyecto que puede parecer fantástico a una mente mediocre...” (93). Contrary to his previous statement that feared the power of successful entrepreneurs, el Astrólogo embraces these capitalist icons as gods in the flesh and models his plans of ruling the world after an enterprise.

The presence of the Astrólogo’s contradictions throughout the text are worthy of exploration. In *Comunismo literario y teorías deseantes* literary critic Juan Duchesne Winter addresses el Astrólogo’s tendency to contradict himself and observes that “el Astrólogo es un gran artifice de ilusiones y mentiras, no sólo porque él mismo lo va indicando implícita y explícitamente, sino porque no son exactamente estúpidos y pueden captar las contradicciones de sus peroratas” (100). All of the contradictions and cynicism in the Astrólogo’s soliloquys as well as his conversations with the other society members discredits him and encourages the reader to question his true role. Indeed, Duchesne Winter explores this very concern in posing the

question of relevance in regards to the Astrólogo's ideas and explores: "...¿dónde radica la pertinencia de sus enunciados?...Lo pertinente es el explosivo entusiasmo sin causa y sin cauce ideológico ni político que moviliza el discurso del Astrólogo entre los congéneres del sufrimiento y la rebeldía" (101). While I concur in his observation that the relevance to the Astrólogo's conflicting ideas and visions lies in the fact that there is no particular affiliation to any framework or ideology, I find that the presence of "Jewishness" as a framework in this narrative confirms the relationship between "Jewishness" and modernity.

El Astrólogo and Joseph of Scliar's novel share two things in common: their disappointment in the state of the world and the fact that they take it upon themselves to alter it, but their approaches could not be more disparate. In fact, it is precisely their glaring differences that are worthy of discussion. Joseph is an active member of a community that resembles the generalization that the Astrólogo refers to in his speech. Joseph's frustration with the Jews of Recife is that they are too obsessed with material things and as a result, the community has deviated from the religious and spiritual aspects of their identity. While the Astrólogo is exploring sources of gold and possible forms of income to place capitalism at the center of his secret society, Joseph is struggling to bring awareness to his community.

The two protagonists share more differences than commonalities in every aspect of their development, yet read together, we can examine the intricacies of the relationship between "Jewishness" and modernity in their oppositional manners. Still, they do share a common style in their approaches to change their worlds, for both address their projects in a cynical manner. Joseph publishes a lampoon of his community and el Astrólogo recruits members of the underworld to carry out his plans. Indeed, Joseph's attempts to depict his community as reduced figures of sugar that subsist on their product parallels el Astrólogo's employment of figures such

as the procurer, thief and gold seeker. Yet, the element that truly accentuates the irony and cynicism is *how* el Astrólogo plans to employ the capitalist model. He conjures an intricate scheme that considers the major components of a capitalistic plan. El Astrólogo employs the “Rufián Melancólico” to establish a prostitution ring to raise the funds for the secret society and Erdosain, the failed inventor is to create their industry’s gross product that they intend to mass produce: a copper rose.

In his proposal el Astrólogo exclaims: “Organizaremos prostíbulos. El Rufián Melancólico será el Gran Patriarca Prostibulario... todos los miembros de la logia tendrán interés en las empresas... Explotaremos la usura... la mujer, el niño, el obrero, los campos y los locos” (96). Resorting to prostitution in its literal sense as a means of capital is a clear indication of his cynicism aimed at criticizing the exploitation that serves as the foundation of capitalist models. The copper rose as their commodity is an extension of that, for unlike Joseph’s community whose industry provides a necessary product to both the local and global markets; the copper rose is an extension of el Astrólogo’s cynicism that supports Joseph’s frustration with his community: the materialism that the capitalist model perpetuates is senseless.

Ironically enough, when el Astrólogo is trying to sell this product to his recruits, he describes it as “tendría muchas aplicaciones” but no one asks the critical question of how this object could have its use. Furthermore, it is interesting to examine which elements of the secret society el Astrólogo had to justify to his recruits. Oddly enough, the protagonists were taken aback with the notion of brothels as a source of income; despite the parallels between prostitution in the literal sense and the exploitation of the labor force that supports industrialism. The Astrólogo had to justify his reasoning for resorting to the sex trade for income, but no one ever questioned the function or use for the copper rose as their gross product, which draws

attention to a sense of absurdity that is present in both the existing model that el Astrólogo wants to modify as well as his visions for an improved future.

Joseph and el Astrólogo's perspectives, plans and visions could not be more disparate. While Joseph does everything in his power to propose a break with materialism and capitalist ideals in order to embrace a spiritual lifestyle worthy of the Messiah's arrival, el Astrólogo envisions replacing an exploitative capitalist model with what he considers "industrial mysticism" that just cynically resembles the same principles and infrastructure of the current system in place. Both protagonists deem their current societies as failures and in their attempts to improve their communities, they themselves fail as well. The publication of his lampoon provoked outrage amongst the Jews of Recife and as a result, they publicly burned his leaflets and ex-communicated Joseph from the community. While Rafael Mendes did everything in his power to come to his counterpart's defense with the leaders of the community, Joseph, unable to reconcile his beliefs with the current reality of his people, committed suicide.

Joseph's predecessors Afonso and Álvaro failed because their ambitions entailed assuming the role of the colonizer within a hegemonic model in which they themselves were being pursued. In this regard, their visions of becoming colonial mimics in their conditions were absurd and unattainable. Joseph's circumstances were entirely different. His community actively participates in the world markets and is does not face religious persecution, yet he suffered the same fate as his predecessors. Ironically enough, his community enacted that which el Astrólogo predicted would happen if anything threatened the commodity of a financial god. El Astrólogo stated in his speech that the repercussions to gods like Rockefeller, Ford or Morgan were the obliteration of a force that endangered their product. Joseph, resembling such a force suffered those very consequences. While Afonso and Álvaro's notions differed from Joseph's,

the characteristic that the three generations share in common is absurdity. Just as his predecessors' visions were unattainable for their circumstances, so too were Joseph's expectations unrealistic, for in the eyes of his thriving community, the thought of giving up their possessions and positions within the sugar trade was absurd and threatening to their lifestyle.

On a global scale the topic of modernity has a long standing history. Whether it is a question of defining it, tracing its origins and historical trajectory or transforming its meaning as we have seen with the Enlightenment period and proceeding movements of the twentieth century, it is a phenomenon that has peaked the interests of intellectuals across disciplines and remains a fertile topic of study today. The relationship between "Jewishness" and modernity is prevalent in studies that address significant moments of crisis: the Inquisition of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the effects of the Enlightenment period on the Jewish communities throughout Europe and the *pogroms* of Eastern Europe that provoked large waves of immigration and the Holocaust are all events that intertwine "Jewishness" with modern discourse. However, this relationship is not unique to the Jewish communities of Europe, for that dynamic is also present in Latin America. Indeed, the relevance of modernity in Latin American critical thought is immeasurable and its presence in cultural productions reveals that preoccupation.

In their own style and approach these two novels present the trajectory of modernity by portraying the different forms in which it has appeared on the Latin American cultural scape. By addressing colonialism, slavery, the global markets and the exploitation of land and people as well as the industrial revolution and socialist movements, these texts encompass the significant endeavors that have impacted Latin America. In line with Roberto Schwarz and Julio Ramos' assessments that these imported notions of progress result in "misplaced ideas" and an "uneven modernity", these narratives depict these attempts as absurd and they repeatedly fail throughout.

The analysis of these two texts delves into how they resort to elements of “Jewishness” in their depictions of modernity in the Latin American context. Scliar’s narrative reveals the ways that modernity has shifted in meaning and endeavors in Brazil’s national history. It problematizes the colonial narrative by placing victims of the Inquisition at the forefront of the hegemonic project, but it also presents the struggles with the attempts to import a socialist model at a time when slavery is prominent and the sugar trade reigns the nation. Through the dynamic between the two protagonists of each scene, this text provides insight into Brazilian national identity, for Rafael Mendes, the only character to achieve continuity due to what Mignolo deems “border gnosis” has lost parts of his identity in his negotiations with the “imported” colonial other. The fact that the novel depicts the most recent generation of Rafael Mendes as a subject riddled by his *converso* identity that no longer has knowledge of his origins or past, can be read as a parallel to the condition of Brazilian national identity. His predecessors that were unable to reconcile their positioning within the national scene and therefore unable to develop the border knowledge; represent the modern notions they so desperately desired to import. As a result, they and their endeavors fail perpetually. In this regard, by intertwining the figure of the ‘Jew’ with modern discourse, this narrative makes a bold statement about Brazilian national identity.

While this relationship is not at the forefront of Arlt’s novel, it is important to emphasize that the presence of “Jewishness” is indeed embedded in its discourse of modernity. Walter Benjamin makes no mention of Judaism in his claim of the relationship between Capitalism and religion, in fact, he addresses Christianity and states: “Christianity in the time of reformation did not encourage the emergence of capitalism, but rather changed itself into capitalism” (261). Yet, both of these narratives seem to draw an association between that economic model and exclusively the Jewish faith. Joseph is in search of religion in circumstances where his

community seems more enthralled by capital than spirituality and el Astrólogo resorts to Judaism as a “Credit and Debit” belief system, modeling his secret society after an economic model. Both protagonists satirize the failures of modernity and the repercussions the capitalist model brings upon society and it is through his speech and conversations with his recruits that el Astrólogo addresses all the facets of modernization as universal failures on a global scale.

### **CHAPTER THREE: OFFICIAL AMNESIA CONTESTED: THE DEMYTHIFICATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN TWENTIETH CENTURY SPANISH TEXTS**

The previous chapter addresses the portrayals of the Inquisition through Walter Mignolo's notion of modern colonialism and colonial modernities because the protagonists of Scliar's novel flee Portugal as refugees and they attempt to colonize the Americas upon their arrival through projects that include massive modes of production and global exportation. In this respect, the Latin American cultural productions that address the Inquisition depict the complexities of identity from the perspective of its victims and can therefore address both sides of the modern projects: the ambitions that fuel them as well as the repercussions they have on the local communities. I find that the notion of the two sides of the same coin can also apply to Spain, for amongst the modern intellectuals there emerge two contrasting interpretations of the same historical event.

As I delve into twentieth century peninsular texts that address the crisis of modernity and identity, there are two elements of interest: firstly, when addressing modernity and national identity in Spain, I find that these thinkers also refer back to the Inquisition as a point of reference; and secondly, the difference in the interpretation of the event is not influenced solely by geographical location in relation to the Atlantic, for even within the peninsula, there appears to be a divide between those that deem it the "Expulsion" and those that consider it the "unification". I consider it beneficial to examine the historical context in regards to the impact of the Expulsion/unification on modern Spanish identity because I find that this difference in perspectives is particularly relevant in the cultural productions that emerged during Franco's



dictatorship. The way in which the texts of this period employ “Jewishness” not only reveals a dialogue with national myths, but more importantly, contribute to a shift in narrative function of anti-Semitic rhetoric. This chapter explores the way in which crisis, modernity and “Jewishness” manifest themselves in twentieth century Spanish texts. I find that in their attempts to address national identity in a state of crisis, just as the Latin American cultural productions of the previous chapters, they also intertwine representations of “Jewishness” with modern discourse. Therefore if this study began with the exploration of the Crypto Jew as a by-product of modernity, it seems appropriate to conclude with the remnants of the subjectivity that propagated the trans Atlantic voyage in the fifteenth century.

King Ferdinand and Queen Isabela deemed themselves the “Reyes Católicos” and took an active role in the construction of a homogeneous Catholic Spanish identity by ordering the expulsion of the Jews and Moors from the peninsula. However, as we have already seen in previous chapters that address the colonization of the Americas, in the efforts to erase identities that resemble difference, the Expulsion actually produced subjectivities that because of their clandestine nature, resulted in an even more ambiguous and marginal presence.<sup>18</sup> Yet an integral part of the campaign that establishes Spanish identity as homogeneously Catholic includes an active effort to obliterate the mention of the marginal identities through national rhetoric. Instead of employing the term “expulsion” that not only implies the presence of difference, but aggression and exclusion; historians and philosophers alike often refer to this historical event as

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<sup>18</sup> I employ the term subjectivities in the plural form because while this study emphasizes representations of “Jewishness” and the narrative function of Crypto Jew identity in texts that revisit the Inquisition, it is important to note that the Expulsion of the Jews and Moors of 1492 produced *two* subjectivities: the Crypto Jew as well as that of the *morisco*. The *moriscos*, descendants of the Muslim population that converted to Christianity in order to remain in Spain, also undertook the task of negotiating their identity in the public realm while trying to maintain their faith and traditions in their private spaces. This subjectivity posed such a threat to national identity that in 1609 King Felipe II imposed what would be a second expulsion that targeted the remaining *morisco* population.

the “gran unificación”, a term that does not make reference to the erasure of the communities, but rather implies the opposite: solidarity and unity.

Clearly the national discourse of being “one Catholic nation” was incoherent with the nation’s reality, for the Inquisition was implemented in 1478 to seek out “heretics” that did not fit in the national mold. The persecution of marginal identities through interrogations, torture and executions was not officially abolished in Spain until 1836.<sup>19</sup> The fact that the Inquisition was still legally active in the nineteenth century draws attention to the disconnect between the national vision of identity and the diversity present in the demographic. Despite the paradox within the Spanish population, for centuries after the Expulsion the official discourse created the imaginary of Spain as a homogeneous country with the Catholic religion at the core of national identity. However, this widespread illusion of homogeneity was not effective, for just as we have seen with the previous readings, when a nation grapples with the complexities of modernity, identity appears before the critical lens.

The “Generación del 98” is a group of thinkers and writers whose publications made a significant contribution to the discussion of modernity in twentieth century Spain. The initial members of this intellectual circle included Ramón del Valle-Inclán, Pío Baroja, Miguel de Unamuno, Ramiro de Maeztu, Jacinto Benavente and Rubén Darío, though the membership fluctuated and eventually included other Spanish writers such as Antonio Machado and Ángel Ganivet, Rubén Darío soon left that group and pursued his interests in Modernismo. The characteristic that best defines this circle is their open and objective approach to criticism of the

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<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that while the last recorded “auto de fe” performed by the Spanish government took place in Valencia in 1826, by the nineteenth century, such violent spectacles were no longer accepted. Therefore the victim (accused of heresy) was hung and the act of “burning” the corpse was only simulated theatrically with images of flames.

Spanish culture and people. In *The Generation of 1898 in Spain* literary critic Donald Shaw defines this group for their "...new and more 'objective' vision of reality; a new interpretation of Spain's artistic tradition; a new interest in the Spanish landscape; and a new literary style" (3). Yet the trait that is most associated with their contribution today is the political and social criticism that they address in their works. Indeed, Shaw states that the common thread amongst these intellectuals is their interest in regeneration of the country, for rather than being preoccupied with literary style, their focus was more philosophical (6).

Their concerns addressed the Spanish identity from an existentialist and pessimistic point of view, expressing their views on the Spaniard's "actitud ante la vida". In a sense, their generation breaks with romanticism in its world view, for these contributions reveal anguish, anxiety and doubt about the future of the nation (6-7). Central to their worries is the "Spanish problem" that could be felt in both the intellectual as well as the practical realm of national life. The nation lacked industry, commerce and urbanization, all of which were thriving in the northern European countries. Political and religious leaders encouraged the "Europeanization" of Spain in practical terms, to increase production and become a competitive force in the European market. After the loss of the colonies in 1898 Spain faced "poverty, underdevelopment, social injustice, regional separatism, lack of investment, inadequate education, and a crying need for changes in the political power-structure (9).

However, the "Generación del 98" was more concerned with intellectual growth, drawing from German and French philosophers in order to "modificar la mentalidad de nuestro pueblo" (9). As a result their texts addressed the "Spanish problem" primarily from the perspective of an intellectual drought, though the lack of scientific and industrial growth came through in many of their publications. Despite that, the "Generación del 98" considered the "spiritual reconstruction

as the first priority” and insisted on saving the “Spanish spirit”. Their publications made it into Madrid’s newspapers and leaflets as well as their own literary journal, and these sources combined contributed to the widespread notion that Spain did not just lack in industry, but it also lacked in “spirit”.

One of Franco’s greatest challenges during his dictatorship was to diminish the pessimistic notions that the “generación del 98” imprinted on national discourse. Indeed as Jo Labanyi points out in *Myth and History in the Contemporary Spanish Novel*, Franco dedicated a greater part of the first twenty years of his regime to confronting the widely used expression “el gran problema español” and he did so by creating a national imaginary that there did not exist any “problem” in Spain (Labanyi, 55). In *Narrating the Past* David Herzberger traces the conscientious efforts by part of the Franco regime’s historians to re-write national history in a way that is coherent with the dictatorship’s adage of “Una España, una raza, una religion”. Herzberger denotes that approaching history from this slogan produced two repercussions: firstly, the historians established and sustained dominance over the narration of time and its events and as a result, history emerged as a myth, not a past. Secondly, despite the fact that the regime’s academics fabricated their version of national history, the Spanish people accepted it as an absolute truth. In this regard, Franco’s historians established “realities” that denied the existence of alternative versions of national history (17). Ergo there was a distinct, calculated effort to mythify the very history that only decades earlier, the “generación del 98” so bitterly denounced in their publications.

Consequently, the construction of Spanish identity was not an arbitrary product; rather a careful choice, for the official historians of the regime revisited the national discourse of the “Reyes Católicos” and exploited the nostalgic celebration of Spain’s “homogeneous” past. One

example of this strategy is Federico García Sanchiz's declaration in 1945 in which he juxtaposes Spain's national history with the rest of Europe and states:

España es el único país donde no puede haber ni ha habido, ni hay ninguna diferencia entre la moral y carácter religioso; porque en España el hispano y el cristiano están unidos, y forman una totalidad sustancial...Uno no puede ser español y no ser un católico, porque si uno no es católico, no puede ser español. Quién diga que es español y no católico no sabe lo que dice... (Herzberger 26).

This passage is just one instance of how Franco's historians campaigned a fabricated notion of history and nationalism that nullifies the existence of *otherness* in Spain. The field of national historiography was untouchable under the dictatorship except for particularly appointed intellectuals that contributed to the myth of cultural homogeneity in Spain. Indeed, by revisiting the vision of the "Reyes Católicos" the historians deemed 1492 as the true birth of the nation with the Expulsion of Jews and Moors as part of the "gran unificación". As a result, the academics vindicated Castille as Spain's crib and King Ferdinand and Queen Isabela as the national heroes (Herzberger 24). Consequently, the writers of the national myth participate in an erasure of marginal identities in two ways: geographically and chronologically. By establishing Castille as the geographic parameters of the country's birth, the myth automatically excludes the marginal cultures such as the Basque and Catalán regions; and by designating the year 1492 as the country's official commencement, the narrative denies the existence of the Jewish and Moorish influences that contributed to the nation's space and culture for 800 years. In this regard, the regime's historians eliminate national space *and* time, tearing out the pages of the nation's history in order to redefine national identity on their terms.

The contributions of the “generación del 98” and the participation of writers that took it upon themselves to contest official historians all contribute to problematizing modern Spanish identity and revealing it for its complexities. As a result, national identity in “modern” Spain has long been the locus of fertile discussion and debate amongst politicians, intellectuals and artists alike. The preoccupations that are most relevant to this chapter’s readings stem in large part from the contributions of the “generación del 98”, for identity in a time of crisis is one of the principle concerns that dominate their writings. Their publications reveal the points of contention amongst themselves in their assessments that do not just address the source of the modern crisis, but more importantly, what it means to be a Spaniard. Consequently, these productions serve as a platform for political discourse and whether it is through the form of a novel, essay or speech, they participate in an intertextual dialogue in order to voice their perspectives and react to each other’s publications.

While the perceptions of identity may differ amongst these intellectuals, it is difficult to overlook the common point of reference they share: the Expulsion. Indeed, regardless of their position, they all seem to reflect upon it as a pivotal historical moment that highlights nationality. Consequently, relying on this particular national memory as a point of departure inevitably intertwines “Jewishness” with modern discourse in Spain. While it is significant to recognize the representations of “Jewishness” in a national rhetoric that for centuries has denied the presence of marginal identities, it is perhaps of more interest in this study to examine its function in the text. The symbols and images employed in these narratives all stem from traditional and modern forms of anti-Semitic rhetoric. However, I find that the way in which they apply the universalized notions not only reveals the text’s interpretations of the nation’s history, but more importantly, their perspectives on the “Spanish condition”. In this regard, the productions of this

chapter resort to the Expulsion as a way to speak to the crisis and it is the way they interpret that moment in the national memory (whether it be remembered as the Expulsion/Inquisition or the “gran unificación”) that determines whether these texts perpetuate the national myths or participate in breaking with it.

In *Constructing Identity in Contemporary Spain* literary critic Jo Labanyi reads Spanish modern history and identity through Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* in stating that “the whole of modern Spanish culture —its study and its practice—can be read as one big ghost story” (1). Her observation addresses cultural production, for she considers that the exclusive focus on “high culture” “has systematically made invisible —ghostly—whole areas of culture which are seen as non-legitimate objects of study because they are consumed by sub-altern groups” (1). Labanyi’s claim about exclusivity is not particular to the realm of high and popular culture, for the “making invisible” of sub-altern groups is a tendency that forms part of the nation’s approach towards *otherness* throughout its history. She later states that “the return to demand reparation of the victims of modern Spanish history is also a demand for recognition of the popular and mass-cultural forms whose modes of consumption constitute the lifestyle of the ‘ghosts of history’; that is, modernity’s losers” (8). In this passage Labanyi refers to the representations of the Basque, Catalán and Gypsy populations that emerge in film, theater in post dictatorship popular culture.

However, I would like to advance this premise and suggest that the efforts to “make invisible” the sub-altern groups is not particular to what she considers to be modern Spain, for it extends beyond cultural production and affected the Jewish and Moorish communities as far back as the medieval period. Furthermore, Derrida notes that “inheritance, and generations, generations of ghosts, which is to say about certain *others* who are not present, nor presently

living, either to us, in us, or outside us, it is in the name of justice” (xix). This notion is significant to understanding the “ghost” of “the Jew” in this analysis because the texts were written under the influence of the grand myth that there are no Jews in Spain. Unlike the previous texts of this study that include Jewish protagonists, the Spanish narratives of this analysis do not contain Jewish characters, rather remnants of “Jewishness” that are drawn from national discourse of the past. Therefore, the manner in which representations of “Jewishness” appear in twentieth century Spanish texts resembles that of the specter. The “Jewishness” that exists in the modern Spanish imaginary is the result of the construction of the national rhetoric that dates back to the Expulsion and Inquisition. Therefore the presence of “Jewishness” in these novels resembles an “inheritance” of the anti-Semitic representations that have been passed down from generation to generation, but even that inheritance is based on a “ghostly” presence because its source is a fabrication of national discourse, not real and tangible individuals.

In Derrida’s terms the specter appears when:

No justice... seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some *responsibility*, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism. (xix).

This passage reveals that Derrida’s ghosts were once victims of discriminatory and oppressive models that were beyond their control. More importantly, this quote also draws attention to the term “disjoin” which, borrowed from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, is pivotal to Derrida’s claims that the specter appears when “time is out of joint”. He considers it a “disjointed now that always



risks maintaining nothing together in the assured conjunction of some context whose border would still be determinable”, in other words, a “disjointed now” is a moment of crisis (3). I propose that in these twentieth century Spanish texts, the notion of the “disjoint” in time and “the living present” speaks directly to moments of crisis that modernity and the dictatorship generated in the nation. The fact that the specters appear in and out of these texts in the form of “Jewishness” intensifies the relationship between modernity, “the Jew” and crisis in Spanish history.

As I engage in a close reading of four Spanish texts, I will explore the way in which Jewishness emerges as a specter of the Spanish “Jew” in order to propose that “Jewishness” is not only deeply embedded in modern discourse, but that despite the use of the same anti-Semitic images and representations, its narrative function is malleable and therefore shifts depending on how the texts employ them. When read chronologically these narratives reveal a progression of how “Jewishness” is intertwined in modern discourse throughout different crises, for the texts address a wide range of events that affected Spain. Whether it is the loss of the colonies in 1898, the frustration with separatist movements of the Catalán and Basque regions at the beginning of the twentieth century, or Franco’s dictatorship, there is an ironic element to the way intellectuals and politicians address these “disjointed” moments, for in their denial of the Semitic existence in Spain, that presence seems to reappear repeatedly throughout their discourse.

The way the first two texts address history and national identity exemplify the cultural productions that interpret the Expulsion as “la gran unificación”, for Pío Baroja’s *El árbol de la ciencia* (1911) is a novel that addresses Spain’s condition as stagnant and “backwards” and attributes this condition to the Semitic influence of the nation’s past. *España invertibrada* (1921) by the famed Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, (one of Pío Baroja’s

contemporaries) is a text that celebrates Spain's homogeneous identity and avoids any mention of the presence of the Jews or the Moors on the national map. Therefore, Baroja's approach of blaming the "Semitic" influence in the "Spanish demeanor" (to use his terms) and the absence of marginal identities in Ortega y Gasset's assessment of the nation's crisis, both sustain and perpetuate the long held myth that Spain has always been one Catholic nation. The role of national memory in all of these narratives implies

On the other hand, Ana María Matute's *Primera memoria* (1959) and Luis Martín Santos' *Tiempo de silencio* (1961) are both novels that were published during Franco's dictatorship. In their efforts to speak against the regime's discourse, these narratives resort to national memory and problematize national myths by offering their interpretation of the Expulsion. *Primera memoria* makes it a point to reiterate the presence of "Jewishness" and *otherness* on two levels: in the nation's demographic as well as drawing attention to the past by addressing the violence of the Inquisition. As a result, not only does this novel serve as a reminder of the nation's dark past, (as the title already implies) but in its descriptions of the people, it emphasizes that the influence of *otherness* is still present. In this regard, *Tiempo de silencio* (1961) complements that reading because it also uses representations of "Jewishness" and plays with national memory, (by addressing the lack thereof) but in a parodied and ironic manner.

The role of memory in all of these texts participates in a "haunting" of the nation's past. Derrida considers haunting to be "The animated work becomes that thing, the Thing that, like an elusive specter, *engineers* a habitation without proper inhabiting, call it a *haunting*, of both memory and translation (18). Despite the fact that Baroja's novel acknowledges the past as a glorious "Unification", the Semitic influence that supposedly no longer exists persists into the

present. By contributing to the “Spanish condition”, this *non presence* haunts his visions of a modern and progressive future. In this context, the specter serves as an inescapable reminder of the flaws within the national myth of homogeneity for its presence draws attention to the “disajointed” element of the novel’s argument. By attributing the nation’s lack of modernity to the Semitic presence, the narrative function of “Jewishness” perpetuates the anti-Semitic rhetoric that is deeply embedded in national discourse. However, the fact that the specter of “Jewishness” is there at all accentuates the haunting presence. Unlike the disconnect between the functions of the specter and “Jewishness” in *El árbol de la ciencia*, the haunting in *Primera memoria* and *Tiempo de silencio* substantiates the shift in narrative function of “Jewishness”. In these texts, the specters appear as reminders of the nation’s dark past and highlight the failures disguised in the name of “unification”.

In this sense, these four narratives, which chronologically span from the beginning of the twentieth century to Franco’s regime in full force, provide insight to two dimensions: firstly, they exemplify the different ways in which “Jewishness” is employed in texts that address modernity; and secondly, they reveal how over the course of the twentieth century, the images and symbols that traditionally perpetuated anti-Semitic sentiments shift to fulfill a different purpose: that of dismantling long held myths of national identity. The first two narratives serve this study as examples of traditionally held notions of *otherness* in Spain and they reflect the conservative views that upheld the myth of homogeneity in Spain. Furthermore, Franco was rather committed to that vision and throughout his dictatorship he invested a great deal in sustaining an official condition of amnesia in regards to the nation’s past. Consequently, the two novels published under his dictatorship speak directly to that lack of memory on the national scene.

The chronological order of the publications is significant in recognizing how the narrative function of “Jewishness” changes according to its historical context. However, the sequence is not the only revelatory factor of how anti-Semitic representations are employed in cultural productions. The novels of this analysis engage in an intertextual dialogue in which *Tiempo de silencio* speaks directly to *El árbol de la ciencia* and *España invertebrada* in its efforts to highlight the discrepancies in national discourse on Spanish identity. The references to Ortega y Gasset’s claims and the parody of *El árbol de la ciencia* are well studied and Jo Labanyi’s analysis in *Myth and History in the Contemporary Spanish Novel* is one of many critics to address the way in which Martín Santos’ text dismantles Ortega y Gasset’s determinist perspective.

In fact, both Labanyi and Herzberger tangentially touch upon the topic of race in their analyses when making a reference to the significance of “pureza de sangre” in Spanish national rhetoric.<sup>20</sup> Their studies of history and narrative address the obsession with bloodlines that both the “Reyes Católicos” and Franco shared in common by drawing attention to how it manifests itself in national discourse. However, I find that while they do recognize the discrepancy between the official discourse and the nation’s actual history, by addressing race as a tangent, they take for granted the significance of the representations of *otherness* that emerge in this period’s debates and productions that refer to the nation.

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<sup>20</sup> “Pureza de sangre” or “purity by blood” is a notion embedded in national discourse of fifteenth century Spain. It ensured that even through religious conversions, people of Jewish or Moorish backgrounds would not be granted the same privileges or access to society as their surrounding Catholic community. The Spanish Government kept records of converts and traced bloodlines for generations after the conversions in order to maintain difference amongst Christians. Therefore, despite the absorption of *otherness* into the same, there still existed an internal distinction between Christians and “New Christians”.

In this analysis, I propose to advance further the examination of marginal and underlying references to “Jewishness” in order to reveal how these modern novels employ it as a tool to contest nationally held myths on identity. The fact that they resort to the already clandestine and “invisible” (yet universalized) Semitic images in order to dismantle the notion of homogeneity in Spain reveals a strategy of highlighting that which is “hidden” in plain sight. As a result, this chapter addresses how “Jewishness” manifests itself in these texts on two dimensions: memory and the body.

### **“TRACES” OF “JEWISHNESS” IN NATIONAL MEMORY**

In *España invertida* José Ortega y Gasset expresses an urgency to address what he deems to be the crisis of his time: Separatism. At the turn of the twentieth century there emerged regionalist movements in Vizcaya and Cataluña that campaigned their nationalism and petitioned a territorial secession. These efforts for national recognition of cultural diversity and identity from within the peninsula posed a threat to the long held myth of homogeneity. Indeed, as Ortega y Gasset develops his argument, it becomes self evident that his interpretation of the nation’s history is in line with a nostalgic vision of Spain consisting of one Catholic culture. In light of the separatist movements he embarks upon addressing what he considers to be the source of the crisis by tracing the historical trajectory of modernity in Spain. He describes the state of the nation as: “la grave enfermedad que España sufre” emphasizing that the fragmented condition the nation experiences is really a culmination of deeper rooted issues that are resurfacing with the loss of the colonies (14).

In his reflections upon the current condition in Spain, he states: “...España fue un tiempo la raza más perfecta, pero que luego declinó en pertinaz decadencia” (14). This “time of glory”

that emphasizes the “perfect race” refers to the “gran unificación”, a time when: “Era España una masa homogénea, sin discontinuidades cualitativas, sin confines interiores de unas partes con otras. Hablar ahora de regiones, de pueblos diferentes, de Cataluña, de Euskadi, es cortar con un cuchillo una masa homogénea y tajar cuerpos distintos en lo que era un compacto volumen” (38). This passage is a precise indication of his interpretation of historical events, but to support this claim, there are elements that one must assume.

To consider Spain as “one homogeneous mass without parts” one has to already accept a myth that the nation emerged after the Expulsion, for clearly this notion does not accurately represent the nation’s cultural map prior to that event. Yet his text does not establish the “Genesis” of the nation from the beginning, rather it builds towards that notion, which confirms further that these illusions are to be self-implied. In this regard, when he continues to state “España es una cosa hecha por Castilla... Castilla logró conquistar para sus fines el espíritu claro, penetrante de Fernando el Católico, todo se hizo posible”, one already associates the birth of the nation with King Fernando’s rule (39-40). If we examine Ortega’s interpretation of the past along with his observations of the nation’s present condition as “diseased” we can detect a sense of irony. He criticizes the nation for its separatist movements and views their efforts as resulting in the “cutting” of a homogeneous nation. However, by establishing the “Genesis” of the nation as the reign of the “Reyes Católicos” and defining “...1480-1600 el gran siglo de España”, then he himself, through the use of a selective memory, participates in a “cutting” of the nation (105). Therefore, his vision of national identity is based on a myth (105).

Yet his interpretations of historical events serve as a segway to support his wider concern that is modernity in Spain. While Ortega’s contributions to twentieth century Spanish thought are significant, they form part of an extensive conversation about modernity (or in this case, lack

thereof) that can be directly traced to Pío Baroja's novel *El árbol de la ciencia* published ten years earlier. Typical of the "generación del 98", this text presents a pessimistic view of the "Spanish condition" and reflects upon the lack of modernity in Spain. The narrative begins with Andrés Hurtado, the protagonist, as a medical student who is disillusioned with the lack of professionalism displayed by his cohort and the mediocre ambition and interest by part of his professors. However, the frustration he experiences is not just with his formation as a young doctor, for it seeps beyond this realm to the nation's lack of growth. Indeed, the narrative employs the medical profession to demonstrate how limited the nation's resources are in the field of science overall. Upon completing his education, he himself fulfills the role of the mediocre physician, for he leaves Madrid and travels to the countryside providing his medical services to the rural areas of Spain, emphasizing further that the nation as a whole lacks the resources and knowledge for better hygiene and healthier lifestyles.

Through his impressions, frustrations as well as philosophical exchanges with his uncle, the novel exposes his grim world view. The pessimism permeates throughout the text and is evident from the beginning as Hurtado makes observations about Madrid: "En un ambiente de ficciones, residuo del pragmatismo viejo y sin renovación, vivía el Madrid de hace años. Otras ciudades españolas se habían dado alguna cuenta de la necesidad de transformarse y de cambiar; Madrid seguía inmóvil, sin curiosidad, sin deseo de cambio" (12). While this reflection refers to "other Spanish cities" that are contemplating change, he never experiences that notion of transformation first hand, for his travels only include the rural areas of the country that he considers worse off than Madrid. Nevertheless, this perspective of stagnation in Madrid and the "backwardness" of the rural towns that drive his frustration are ingrained in each element of society: higher education, rural life, family dynamics, science, and even at the most visible level

of architecture, for he describes the buildings of the university and the city as decadent and “makeshift”.

Andrés Hurtado exemplifies the typical protagonist of this genre, for most of his life is spent in complete dissatisfaction. For a few years he found contentment in the life of a hermit, translating scientific and medical articles from a French publication. However, this peaceful period of his life was short lived, for both his wife and child died in childbirth; at which point, Hurtado committed suicide. In this sense, the novel ends in the same state of stagnation with which it began: with no hope for a future in sight. Throughout his life, he grappled with the frustration of being ahead of his time, trying to educate people about health and hygiene, all the while being ridiculed for his “absurd” eating habits and lifestyle. The fact that he was most content as a hermit translating foreign medical research draws attention to the lack of intellectual stimulation available to him amongst his peers. All these elements contribute to the novel’s aim of presenting the repercussions of “Spain’s condition”.

Anguish and frustration are recurring themes in early twentieth century Spanish literature that address modernity in Spain, and this text is no exception. However, Baroja’s works are not only widely read internationally, but his texts sparked interest and dialogue amongst his contemporaries and writers of future generations. In this respect, *El árbol de la ciencia* serves as a precursor to philosophical and critical debates from the time of publication (1911) through Franco’s dictatorship. While most of the critics and thinkers agreed that Spain lacked the progress and transformation that occurred in other European nations, the topic that generated an intertextual dialogue and debate that is examined here is the source of the “Spanish problem”. In his contemplations, Hurtado claims that Spain’s condition as lacking modernity and therefore considered inferior to France and Germany can be directly traced to the racial origins of the



Spanish people. In his view, the Semitic influence in Spain is to blame for the nation's deficiencies. The second segment of this chapter addresses heterogeneity in the demographic of Spain's past and present through these texts, at which point we will explore textual examples of the role race plays in the debates, but the following analysis examines how the memory of that heterogeneous "past" is intertwined in the discussion of modernity.

In contemplating the history of the world and its influence in Spanish culture, Hurtado's uncle, Iturriz states: "¡Cómo se ve el sentido práctico de esa granjería semítica!... ¡Cómo olfatearon esos buenos judíos, con sus narices corvas, que el estado de conciencia podía comprometer la vida!" to which Hurtado later replies: "El semitismo, con sus tres impostores, ha dominado al mundo, ha tenido la oportunidad y la fuerza... Hoy después de siglos de dominación semítica, el mundo vuelve a la cordura, y la verdad aparece como una aurora pálida tras de los terrores de noche" (135). While this segment of the conversation refers to the history of the world, they are also addressing Spain's past and the influence of the Jews and the Moors in developing identity.

As the conversation develops, Iturriz reflects back on the Inquisition as a time of glory and pride as he exclaims: "¿Hay nada más interesante que la Inquisición, de índole tan semítica, dedicada a limpiar de judíos y moros el mundo? ¿Hay caso más curioso que el de Torquemada, de origen judío?" to which Hurtado answers: "Sí, eso define el carácter semítico, la confianza, el oportunismo... Todo eso tiene que desaparecer. La mentalidad científica de los hombres del norte de Europa lo barrerá" (134). This conversation is indicative of the theoretical framework of the times, but it also reveals the irony that is deeply embedded in the notion of homogeneity in Spain. The memory of the Inquisition as that of national glory and "cleansing" is stated in the same conversation in which they are discussing the remnants of the Semitic influence amongst

their people in the present, and while it is an accusatory tone that they attribute the lack of progress to *otherness*, this argument still draws attention to the fact that homogeneity as they imagine it does not exist.

Perhaps Ortega recognized the irony in that argument, for *España invertebrada*, published ten years later, speaks almost directly to Baroja's *El árbol de la ciencia*. He reinforces the notion of Spain's "greatest decision" in expelling the Jews and the Moors by excluding the mention of the Semitic race that is so central to Hurtado's argument. That's not to say that Ortega does not address race, for he confronts the discussion directly, but circumvents the Semitic presence by revisiting the Roman influence in France, England, Italy and Spain, for he considers it the neutral element of the development of these European nations. He addresses his interpretation of the role of race in Spain's current demise when he states:

A primera vista parece lógico buscar el principio decisivo que las diferencia [the four European nations] en la base autóctona, de modo que Francia se diferencié de España lo que la raza gala se diferenciase de la ibérica. Pero esto es un error. No pretendo, claro está negar la influencia diferenciadora de galos e iberos en el desarrollo de Francia y España; lo que niego es que sea ella la decisiva (95).

In this sense he revisits Baroja's text and disagrees in two ways. Firstly, he does not consider race to be the source of Spain's "spinelessness" as the title of his essay implies, and secondly, he makes no mention of the Semitic presence in his assessment. Yet, what I find more interesting is that he makes one mention of the Muslim presence, but in a footnote to clarify: "Pero, dado el desconocimiento de la propia historia que padecemos los españoles, es oportuno advertir que ni los árabes constituyen un ingrediente esencial ni la génesis de nuestra nacionalidad, ni su dominación explica la debilidad del feudalismo peninsular (95). The fact that

this statement that dismisses the Arab influence in Spanish identity is made in a footnote and not a part of the text, is indicative of his efforts to shift the focus away from Hurtado's notion that the Semitic presence is to blame for Spain's lack of modernity.

Indeed, the essay can be read as a reaction to Hurtado's claims in *El árbol de la ciencia*, for Ortega refers to race tangentially by dismissing it and in doing so, he not only discards the central argument in *El árbol de la ciencia*, but he creates a space in which he can present his assessment on Spain's current condition. In his view, the lack of modernity can be attributed to the lack of an assertive bourgeoisie class to lead the nation. Therefore, the lack of science, academia and culture that he deems to be abundant in the northern European nations, is associated with his notion that the masses rule Spain, not the upper class. His thoughts on modernity in Spain aside, the repercussions of his contribution are far more significant to this study. By restructuring history and geography, the two pillars of a nation's identity, this text not only denies the heterogeneous characteristic of Spanish culture, but it contributes to the reshaping of national memory and the long standing myth that Spain is a homogeneous nation.

The dialogue that exists between these two texts is essential to the reading of dictatorship literature in Spain. As already mentioned, Franco's historians rewrote national history in a way that reflected Ortega's interpretation. Consequently, writers and thinkers alike took it upon themselves to speak against Franco's infamous adage of "Una España, Una raza, Una religion" by revisiting national memory and emphasizing *otherness* in their texts. Ana María Matute's *Primera memoria* is a text that exemplifies this approach. The novel, published in 1960, during Franco's dictatorship reflects back on the Spanish Civil War and plays with the notion of memory to address the current state of oppression and violence. Unlike Ortega and Baroja's texts that interpret the Expulsion to be the "gran unificación", this narrative adds a third element

to the Expulsion/Unification duality by reflecting back on this historical event as the Inquisition and parallels the nation's dark history to its present.

In this regard, while all three terms Expulsion/Unification/Inquisition are not interchangeable, they are inevitably intertwined, and depending on the text's aims, they are used selectively. The previous two texts of this analysis reveal different interpretations of the repercussions that this event has had on modern Spanish identity and they may address history from different perspectives, but their common denominator is their assessment, for despite their difference in opinions, they agree that the Expulsion did indeed attain Unification and consider it an achievement by part of the Spanish crown. *Primera memoria* revisits this event, not from the Expulsion or the Unification, but the violent and oppressive consequence to this project: the Inquisition. Ironically, as this narrative parallels the paranoia, violence and persecution of the Inquisition with the happenings of the small island town during the war, the depiction of the Inquisition does not yield the unifying results that the project was intended for, rather the opposite: further division. As a result, this text plays with memory on three different dimensions: written at the time of the dictatorship, it uses the Civil War as context for the plot, which is already resorting to a violent and dividing past, nevertheless, the novel still digs further back into the lost archives of the nation's memory and resorts to the Inquisition to emphasize stronger the parallels of the oppression of the past and the present, yet what really stands as the common thread of all three moments is division.

The novel is told in the first person by Matia, a young girl coming of age during the time of war. She and her cousin Borja are staying with their grandmother on an island (she never specifies where exactly) because both of their fathers are fighting in the war. Since this is an account of a young child who does not understand the details of the war or cause, there is no

mention of their father's loyalties, but it is understood through Borja's taunts that they support opposing sides. As the title implies, this novel is told as a memory and as such, Matia addresses herself in the present conditions or time in the form of parentheses to indicate a break from the act of writing her memories of she and her cousin's adventures. The geographical isolation from the war being fought on the mainland, the fact that she was a child during these events and the element of temporal distance (she is an adult reflecting back) all contribute to this novel's dreamlike narration. The stagnancy that Baroja and Ortega's text address is experienced differently in *Primera memoria*, but it is felt nonetheless. Indeed, what began as the children on the island for summer break became a limitless extension in which time was suspended. As a result, the war gathered momentum on the mainland and the island town's tensions and feuds developed into representing a microcosm of the nation's conflicts.

The novel makes references to the Inquisition throughout the text, but as the tensions of the town escalate, so too does the resemblance of that ambience increase. The first mention of it occurs as they are exploring an old monastery at which point, their tutor states: "Esta es una isla vieja y malvada. Una isla de fenicios y de mercaderes, de sanguijuelas y de farsantes. Oh, ávaros comerciantes. En las casas de este pueblo, en sus muros y en sus secretas paredes, en todo lugar, hay monedas de oro enterradas" (22). This quote makes indirect references to the fortunes of the Crypto Jews that lead their lives secretly behind walls. The term "malvada" or cursed alludes to the current condition as struggling with this secretive history that like a specter, is hidden, but nevertheless there, haunting the islanders of its past. Moreover, reading this description, one cannot help but hear the echoes of *El árbol de la ciencia*, for in Hurtado's descriptions of his friends, he uses the same terms to describe both Julio and Aracil:

Julio era un verdadero fenicio; procedía de Mallorca, y, probablemente, había en él sangre semítica... Aracil era un ejemplar acabado del tipo semita. Sus ascendientes debieron ser comerciantes de esclavos en algún pueblo del Mediterráneo... Miraba los bienes de la tierra con ojos de tasador judío (36-37).

In this sense, these two passages read together provide a description that implies “Jewishness” in both the nation’s past and present in the form of the specter, for the ghost of “the Jew” floats in and out of texts that refer to the “Spanish condition”. These characteristics that appear in these texts as references to “Jewishness” are not tangible or even relevant to the present reality from which the narratives are written; rather they are what Derrida terms “traces” of the past. As Derrida states: “Furtive and untimely, the apparition of the specter does not belong to that time, it does not give time, not that one...” (xx). Therefore, “traces” in Derrida’s description: “...a trace of which life and death would themselves be but traces of traces, a survival whose possibility in advance comes to disjoin or dis-adjust the identity to itself of the living present as well as of any effectivity” is a more accurate way to identify the way in which the specter of “the Jew” in Spain emerges in these texts, for the depictions do not address a complete presence or being, rather traces of “the Jew” that reappear from national discourse of the past.

As Matia and her cousin are rummaging in their grandmother’s attic, amongst a bat’s carcass; they find an old book that belonged to their grandfather: “...encontró el libro de los judíos, aquel que describía cómo los quemaban en la plazuela de las afueras... Borja lo leía, paladeándolo, para aterrizarme” (34). While the references of the Jewish presence may begin as that of a ghost, as hidden in the attic where time stands still or within the town’s walls, the memory has its physical place on the island, for one of the plazas is known to everyone as the “plazuela de los judíos” that Matia always refers to as: “la plazuela donde quemaban a los

judíos” (98). As her cousin Borja gets restless, he starts to form a gang to resist the town bullies “los de Guiem” who perform their mischief in that very plaza, setting bonfires and threatening others of the town.

The rivalry amongst the youth parallels the war and the narrative intertwines the intermittent updates of war stories with the tensions between the gangs. One anecdote from Extremadura made an impact on the town and resulted in increased tensions between Borja and Guiem’s gangs. The news described: “En un pueblo de Extremadura han rociado con gasoline y han quemado vivos a dos seminaristas que se habían escondido en un pajar. Los han quemado vivos, malditos... Están matando a toda la gente decente, están llenando de Mártires y Mártires el país” (38). After this incident, the town delinquency increases and one of Guiem’s gang’s new behaviors includes creating life size straw dolls that resemble their enemies or the town’s undesirables and burning them in bonfires at the “plazuela de los judíos”. This is a clear representation of the “autos de fe” of the Inquisition where they would burn heretics at the stake in public plazas.

In this sense, in her depictions of the times, Matia’s memory associates the Civil War to the rivalries and feuds on the island. However, the significant dynamic of the town is that the feuds are not just amongst the youth, for the division seems to be generational between the foundational families of the island. While the elder members of the community use gossip and contempt to address their rivals, the younger generation (Matia’s cohort) reveals a steady progression of aggression and humiliation that escalates to reenactments of the public torment that formed part of the Inquisition. While the element of division is self implied especially in the context of Spain’s Civil War, it is the generational aspect that sparks my interest. The feuds and rivalries that exist between the families of the island community are inherited from generations

back, the language of “us” versus “them” is not particular to the young delinquents that are restless and looking for any reason to cause trouble, but is present in the elders as well. The fact that the division is generational emphasizes that the war serves as a catalyst that escalates the aggression that has long been embedded in their community’s dynamic. As a result, by drawing attention to the divided condition of the island’s inhabitants, this novel makes a bold statement about national identity and history, for it highlights the fact that the violence is not situational, directly associated to the war, but deeply ingrained. Furthermore, if this novel is an account of her first memory and it is riddled with divisions of the local island community and the Civil War, then I propose that the constant reference to the violent and dividing repercussions of the Inquisition resemble her first memory of the nation’s history. In this regard, the specter of the past reappears in the nation’s discourse at precisely the moments of crisis, when “time is out of joint” in the context of the Spanish Civil War and written during the dictatorship, moments in which the nation is “out of joint”.

In this sense, this narrative participates in the breaking with long held national myths of homogeneity and solidarity, for there is no recollection of those qualities whatsoever in her accounts. On the contrary, her interpretation of personal and historical accounts highlight aggression, violence and oppression and this text makes it a point to remind us of those elements. Even within their own gang, Borja always bullies his friends and keeps their loyalty through threats and manipulation. Yet unlike Baroja and Ortega’s texts that reflect upon the Expulsion/Unification as a thing of the past, *Primera memoria* literally brings the nation’s former confrontations with *otherness* into the present. In the beginning of the narrative the references to the Inquisition are through their grandfather’s book in the attic or in reference to the name of the plaza. When they find the book, she refuses to listen to Borja read it, for the images



and descriptions are too much for her to bear. However, as the narrative progresses and the violence and feuds in the community reach their height, the narrative voice brings our attention back to history by reminding the reader of *the plazuela's* historical function. Months after finding the book, Matia gathers the courage and reads a passage from it: “Era de ver cómo prendían en el fuego sus carnes, cómo las llamas lamían sus entrañas: cómo se rasgaba su vientre en dos, de arriba abajo, con un brillo demoniaco...” to which she contemplates: “Aquella era la misma plaza donde ocurrieron, siglos atrás, aquellas escenas” (140). The timing of this passage is significant because it serves as a prelude to more violence and humiliation in the island community.

Indeed, it becomes self evident that the plaza evolves from being a point of reference to center stage for violence and humiliation, thereby reliving its own past by resuming its role as a space for reenactments of the spectacle that was so central to the Inquisition’s strategies. Aside from the spectacle of burning dolls that resemble people of the town (a recurring act performed by Guiem and his gang), there is another scene of torment in which the adults partake in the humiliation of Malene, a middle aged single mother. As the children are being tutored, their teacher describes the event:

Ayer por poco apedrean en la plaza a Sa Malene... Por insolente. Pero los Taronji lo han impedido...Le han rapado el cabello...Nada más. La han llevado a la plaza de los judíos, allí donde a veces hacen hogueras los muchachos, y las mujeres le han cortado el pelo.

Así han dado ejemplo (157)

This scene occurs towards the end of the novel when frustrations and emotions are at their peak. Nevertheless, it is indicative of how the narrative intertwines the past with the present emphasizing that things really have not changed across time. The “unification” that Baroja and

Ortega's texts celebrate does not form part of this novel's world view, rather it breaks with that notion and proposes the opposite, for this text highlights the Inquisition as the nation's first memory and from this interpretation, the repercussions are not that of homogeneity and unity, rather an emphasized division that is still prevalent in the nation's condition.

### **THE "JEWISH BODY" AS THE SPECTER'S ARMOR**

The long standing myth that Spain is one homogeneous nation implies that uniformity exists in the demographic. For years many of Spain's intellectuals and artists alike perpetuated this myth by excluding *otherness* as part of national culture and identity. Nevertheless, while there is a blatant denial of heterogeneity in the Spanish people and a constant celebration of the Expulsion/Unification, representations of "Jewishness" in the demographic remains a constant in cultural productions. This part of the chapter's analysis will continue to explore the four Spanish texts in order to examine how these representations of the "Jewish" body are employed to speak to national discourse. In this reading I will propose that just like the narratives used their interpretations of history to address modernity or current political strife, they also resort to "Jewishness" as a race and representation of *otherness* to dialogue with each other and on a wider scale, nationally held myths of identity. The specters of "Jewishness" do not only haunt through the memory of the past, for they are present in the people as well. Derrida claims that the specter as a:

...becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather some 'thing' that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other. For it is flesh and phenomenality that give to the spirit its spectral apparition, but

which disappear right away in apparition, in the very coming or the return of the specter (6).

In the previous study, the specter appears as what Derrida terms “the essence”, for the characteristics of avarice, complacency, ambition and money have all been associated with “Jewish” demeanor in national discourse. However the specter also makes its appearance through the physical generalizations of the body.

While Derrida states that “Nor does one see in flesh and blood this Thing that is not a thing, this thing that is invisible between its apparitions, when it reappears”, implying that the specter does not always appear in carnal form, in the same claim he also states: “This Thing meanwhile *looks at us and sees us not see it* even when it is there” (6).<sup>21</sup> I propose that while the specter of “Jewishness” is not present as a living, breathing individual, it is a “Thing” that appears in the “traces” of particular features or associations that echo the presence of the past. I suggest that the physical “traces” that the specter assumes in the demographic is a more distinguishable appearance of the “ghost” of “the Jew” in these texts, for not only is it recognizable, but more importantly, it is inescapable. In this regard, the physical traits are what Derrida terms “armor” that contributes to the ambiguity of this presence in the narratives. He defines it as: “The armor may be but the body of a real artifact, a kind of technical prosthesis, a body foreign to the spectral body that it dresses, dissimulates, and protects, masking even its identity (8). Therefore, the “Jewish body” as the product of a construction of anti-Semitic rhetoric in these texts serves as the specter’s armor through which the narrative can detect the presence of the specter. Indeed in his reading of *Hamlet* Derrida clarifies that “The body is with the King, but the King is not with the body. The King is a thing” (9). In this analysis, the King

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<sup>21</sup> Emphasis is mine.

as a “thing” that appears as a figure, parallels the way that the figure of “the Jew” has been written in twentieth century Spanish texts. Its specter appears in and out of the narratives either through its essence or its armor, all of which participate in the construction of “Jewishness” as recognizable and detectable.

As we have seen, *El árbol de la ciencia* proposes that the lack of modernity in Spain can be attributed to the Semitic origins of the Spanish nation. The previous analysis draws attention to the irony in this novel’s argument, for as much as Hurtado celebrates the “Unificación” as the greatest national decision and considers his nation to be homogeneous; he contradicts himself when describing Spain’s demographic. The specter of this feature can be detected in the “traces” of “Jewishness” in the physical characteristics and demeanor in the descriptions of the characters. Indeed, in his conversations with his uncle, they concur that in Spain, there are two races: Iberian and Semitic which he defines as: “...en España, desde un punto de vista moral, hay dos tipos: el tipo ibérico y el tipo semita. Al tipo ibérico asignaba el doctor las cualidades fuertes y guerreras de la raza; al tipo semita, las tendencias rapaces, de intriga y de comercio” (36). The conversation began with a celebration of the past and the Expulsion of the Jews and Moors, yet the novel proceeds with Hurtado using images and representations of “Jewishness” to describe his three closest friends and classmates: Julio, interested in money and traveling the Orient, has what he considers to be all the Semitic inclinations, Aracil, who is also obsessed with money, is a Semite by example and his ancestors must have been merchants from the Mediterranean, and finally, Montaner is also classified as a Semite for being lazy, complacent, weak in character and a pacifist (36-37). The characteristics he describes in his cohort describe reveal the specter in the form of the “essence” of “Jewishness” which in his terms is a constant presence.

Ironically, or perhaps purposefully, there are no descriptions of “Iberians” in such detail; in fact, one must assume that the “Iberian” is defined by what the “Semite” is not. On the same token, the “Jewishness” in these narratives does not describe actual Jews, for none of the texts actually define any of their characters as Jewish by identity. In this sense, the “Jewishness” is present as what Derrida considers “traces” or remnants of this presence’s past. Therefore, the specter in the form of these traces serves a function in the narrative, for from this perspective, the obsession with money and commerce as well as the inclination towards complacency all stunt the cultural and scientific progress of the nation. In this sense, the “Jewishness” that is so ingrained in his cohort supports his overarching argument of intellectual and cultural stagnancy. Nevertheless, intentionally or not, this novel’s philosophical interpretations of race and national history beckon specters of the past that draw attention to the lack of homogeneity and solidarity through the use of these descriptions of Hurtado’s contemporaries.

Ortega’s text that also criticizes the “modern” Spaniard may not seem to propose a more optimistic view for the future, but by denying this racial presence in the national demographic, he proposes a more optimistic view for a modern state by shifting the focus from race to social class. In this sense, he considers that so long as the bourgeoisie embrace a leadership role in the nation’s productions, modernity is feasible. However, it is precisely the blatant exclusion of *otherness* that sparked a reaction that can be seen in *Primera memoria* and *Tiempo de silencio*. If this text contributes to the national discourse of homogeneity and the absence of race in Spain, these two narratives serve as reminders that heterogeneity does indeed exist, and not as a historical presence, but as an integrated part of the current demographic that haunts the nation’s present.

The previous analysis examined how *Primera memoria* parallels different historical events in order to speak against the dictatorship that was in full force at the time of its publication. In its aims to break with nationally held myths on history and identity the novel serves as a reminder of the Inquisition as the nation's first memory, and therefore intertwines this historical event with the oppression of the present times. However, juxtapositioning the Inquisition and the Civil War for its violence and oppression addresses national history, but it is not the only way that *otherness* appears in the narrative. The specter of "the Jew" appears in the armor of the physical traits amongst the people of the town. The Taronjí family, an influential presence of the island town, is one of the protagonist's in the community's feuds. When Matia describes them she states: "Los Taronjí...rubios y pálidos, con sus redondos ojos azules, de bebés monstruosos y *grandes narices judaicas*. (Ah, los Taronjí. La isla, el pueblo, los sombríos carboneros, apenas se atrevían a mirarles un poco más arriba de los tobillos, cuando pasaban a su lado)" (28).<sup>22</sup> The fact that she describes this family in this way could lead one to interpret this as an attempt to accentuate their contempt through a pejorative statement. However, when addressing Guiem, she describes him as: "Hasta Guiem, tozudo y pesado, *gran nariz rabina*, torpe y cauteloso, logró entender una escalera de color..." (35).<sup>23</sup> These observations that address both sides of the town's feud, employ representations of "Jewishness" to describe two of the most influential presences of the town.

Whether they are really Jewish or not is irrelevant because the specter of the nation's dark past presents itself in these texts as traces of the "Jewish body", in this case, through facial features. By utilizing the "Jewish" nose as its armor, the ghost haunts the narrative by literally

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<sup>22</sup> Emphasis is mine.

<sup>23</sup> Emphasis is mine.

facing the protagonists making its presence inescapable. The characters that Matia describes represent what Derrida terms: “the ‘visor effect’: we do not see who looks at us...his apparition makes him appear still invisible beneath his armor” (7). Matia recognizes the “Jewishness” in the noses, but the “Jewish” identity remains *invisible*, therefore, “the Jew” is present without really being present, sustaining the illusion that there “are no Jews in Spain” while simultaneously the “traces” of this presence haunt her of the memory of the past.

The fact that she describes los Taronjí for their “Jewish noses” but then states that no one in the town can look them in the face is significant to this argument. While the narrative is unclear as to whether it is shame or intimidation that prevents the community from facing the Taronjí family, the lack of eye contact with the members of the family strengthens the specter’s haunting through their faces. Derrida states that: “This spectral *someone other looks at us*, we feel ourselves being looked at by it, outside of any synchrony, even before and beyond any look on our part, according to an absolute anteriority (which may be on the order of generation, of more than one generation)...”(7). Yet what connects the narrative’s description to Derrida’s claim is the notion of *inheritance*. The “Jewish nose” is a trait of the Taronjí *family*, not one particular member as is the case with Guiem. In Derrida’s terms the spectral gaze is present in the Taronjí family as an inherited feature whose appearance returns as a “trace” of generations past.

*Primera memoria* embarks upon providing a wider scope of *otherness* by integrating another identity that is not Jewish. There are two incidents in which an ambiguous identity presents itself in her accounts. Lorenza, her grandmother’s servant speaks to her son in another language that she cannot decipher. His nickname is “El chino” but his family’s origins are never mentioned. In one of her adventures with her cousin, Borja, they attend a gathering at an estate

(their grandmother prohibits them from socializing with this family, but in their rebellion and out of curiosity, they go anyway) in which Sanamo plays a song on the guitar. The members of the family were the only ones who knew the words, at which point, León, a friend of theirs asks them if it is either Andaluz or Italian to which Manuel says no. Matia remembers that “No quería decir de qué país era la música que interpretaba, como tampoco le gustaba decir dónde nació” (172). Neither of these two characters or their families take ownership of their racial identity, one can confer that they could be of Gypsy or Muslim origins, but it is not concrete. Nevertheless, the ambiguity and mystery spark curiosity and interest in the reader that once again leads us to realize that even on this small island, heterogeneity is prevalent and the references to “Jewishness” are ghostly.

While *Primera memoria* is not in direct dialogue with *El árbol de la ciencia* or *España invertebrada*, it speaks to those two texts by proposing a third dimension to the Expulsion/Unification dialectic: the Inquisition, for by revisiting it, the narrative directly addresses the violent repercussions to that model. In this sense, by drawing parallels between the past and present and portraying heterogeneity in the demographic, this text participates in the questioning of long held national myths of history and identity. Consequently, the representations of “Jewishness” in this novel fulfill a different function than that of *El árbol de la ciencia* because while in both narratives the presence is in the form of a haunting “trace”, in this novel; its purpose is to emphasize division as a “condition”.

*Tiempo de silencio* (1961) is a novel that is in direct dialogue with both *El árbol de la ciencia* and *España invertebrada* in its aims to discredit their claims on modernity in Spain. In “Fiction as Mask: *Tiempo de silencio* literary critic Jo Labanyi traces the intertextuality between these two texts and engages in an analysis that explores how this narrative employs myth in an



ironic manner in order to discredit the contributions of the “Generación del 98” and deconstruct the national myths that were so deeply embedded in the dictatorship’s rhetoric. While irony is also central to Labanyi’s argument, her study offers a different focus of the novel, primarily to highlight the ways in which the text employs a mythical approach to dismantle myth. In addressing irony she states:

Indeed the ironic nature of much of the text forces the reader to challenge its authority, replacing its literal sense with an alternative version. The characters use language as a tool of mythification to give their lives a false appearance of solidity; the reader learns to recognize that truth lies in the ambiguous zone of silence and darkness between and beneath words (55).

As I engage in my analysis of the narrative I too will draw from the silences and absences within the novel in order to reveal that the irony in this text can also be read as a tool that addresses heterogeneity in a “homogeneous” nation.

Published during Franco’s dictatorship, I propose that this novel employs Nazi anti-Semitic representations and images in an ironic and parodied manner in order to dismantle long held myths about history and identity by confronting the national amnesia deeply embedded in Franco’s national discourse. The narrative takes place in twentieth century Madrid where Pedro, a medical researcher, is trying to find the cure for cancer. Unfortunately, due to lack of resources and funding, there is a shortage of mice that impedes him from conducting his study. In desperation to continue the project, his research assistant, Amador embarks upon the task of finding mice on the black market. His contact Muecas intercepted the stock of mice shipped in from Illinois that was originally destined for Pedro’s study. In her analysis of the Muecas family and the shantytown, Labanyi considers that this presence speaks to the “Generación del 98” and

Ortega's glorification of the vertical hierarchy of the class system (61). The shantytown and its inhabitants in this reading serve to criticize the notion of social determinism that is so prevalent in national rhetoric. Her study suggests a parallel between the racial determinism in Baroja's text with the criticism of social class in *Tiempo de silencio*.

In her reading, the role of race is tangential to the larger argument of using myth to demythify. Her analysis states that "*Tiempo de silencio* reminds the reader that the Spanish obsession with racial purity goes back to the Inquisition, which the narrator –via the German painter – relates to Nazism" (61). She expands on anti-Semitism by tracing it to the nationalist ideology of modern Spain and states: "...the exiled historian Sánchez Albornoz...argued that the Arabs and Jews had corrupted Spain's authentic inheritance, constituted by the 'original' racial substratum of Celtiberian, Roman and Visigoth" (61). Labanyi's analysis limits the presence of "Jewishness" to the textual references to the Inquisition and the Holocaust in Pedro's soliloquys. However, as she already states, this novel compels the reader to read this novel in its silences and ambiguities to extract the deeper meaning. As I engage in a close reading of the Muecas family, I propose that Labanyi's reading of race overlooks the significance of the representations of "Jewishness" in this narrative, for I consider Muecas and his family to be written ambiguously to resemble Jews depicted in Nazi anti-Semitic rhetoric, and while the narrative never blatantly establishes their identity as Jews, I propose that their characteristics paired with their relationship to the mice address the absence of *otherness* in plain sight.

In chapter one, *Does a Jewish Body Exist?*, this project explores how Determinism and Positivism of nineteenth century European thought placed a great deal of emphasis on pseudo scientific frameworks that analyzed "Jewishness" as a physiological condition. The analysis on prostitution in Argentina and Brazil addressed syphilis as one of the diseases strongly associated

with Jews. While that generalization was dominant in the global community, Europe also attributed pathology and the black plague to the Jews and this association was accentuated by Nazi anti-Semitic rhetoric. In *Mein Kampf* Adolf Hitler considers the Jewish community to be a plague in Europe whose only purpose is to spread disease and this theory became central to Nazi propaganda. In fact, one of the most famous films of Nazi propaganda *Der Ewige Jude* (1940) (*The Eternal Jew*) depicts Jews as a parasitic disease of society. The film begins with an image of a mass of rats rampaging from the sewers overtaking the streets and destroying everything in its way. The film describes how just as the rats contaminate society with disease and vermin, so too do the Jews corrupt their surroundings.

Another representation that the film addresses is the “shapeshifter”. The narrator of the film uses a cautionary tone warning citizens from being deceived by the “Jew” in disguise. It expands on this notion by describing the ways in which the “Jew” has the capacity of disguising himself and his identity in order to manipulate and deceive his surrounding community. The images show Jews in traditional clothing (cloak, skull cap, prayer shawl, hair locks, beards and prayer fringes) and then show pictures of assimilated Jews that are clean shaven and wear modern western suits. The narrator warns its citizens to be aware of these subjects, emphasizing that their capacity to blend into the mainstream poses the biggest threat to the German community. In *The Imaginary Jew* (1981) Alain Finkielkraut considers that hatred and violence against Jews in the first half of the twentieth century can be directly attributed to assimilation. He states that anti-Semitism evolved into racism the minute you could not point out a Jew in a crowd (83). The anxiety and paranoia that this subject generated in the European community is deeply embedded in Nazi propaganda.

*El tiempo de silencio* presents a relationship between the Muecas family and the mice and these images of anti-Semitic Nazi propaganda. I suggest that the narrative does not employ “Jewishness” with the purpose of perpetuating these generalizations, rather it employs them ironically in order to propose that not only is heterogeneity an integral part of Spain, but that perhaps the denial of its presence is that which stands between Spain and modernity. The fact that the members of the Muecas family are immigrants to Madrid from Toledo is significant in this novel. Historically, Toledo served as the capital for two different communities: the Visigoths and the Jews. Labanyi reads the origins of the Muecas family as a way to contest the myths of race planted in Ortega’s and Baroja’s texts. As already mentioned, Ortega circumvented the Moorish and Jewish influences by reaching further back in history and addressing the Visigoths, Romans and Celtiberians. Therefore, Labanyi considers that the family represent the descendents of the Visigoths (she notes however, that they are not of the “superior” Visigoth blood, rather the malnutrition of the family leads her to conclude that they are of St. Vitus Dance) (61).

Labanyi’s reading of race is drawn from a dialogue between *Tiempo de silencio* and *España invertebrada*. However, I find that in addressing race this narrative is in direct dialogue with Baroja’s *El árbol de la ciencia*. Both protagonists Pedro (*Tiempo de silencio*) and Hurtado (*El árbol de la ciencia*) are mediocre in their fields and fail in their endeavors. They both express a notion of “superiority” in the sense that Pedro considers himself superior to the Muecas family in social standings and Hurtado considers himself superior to his “Semitic” cohort. In this regard, I am led to read the role of race in this novel as a direct objection to Hurtado’s claims on the Semitic corruption in the Spanish people. Yet, even with the unquestionable parallel between these two protagonists, one of the features that Labanyi does not address in her analysis is that of

Muecas and his family's demeanor. As I proceed in a reading of this family, I draw attention to the "traces" of "Jewishness" in Muecas and his daughters.

Muecas dedicates himself to selling research animals on the black market. He intercepts shipments, gathers stray dogs and cats and sells them to scientists in need of subjects. He has a history of cheating his clients by reselling the same specimens to researchers, for Amado describes their relationship to Pedro: "No es la primera vez. Antes fueron gatos. Cuando les metían los alambritos en la cabeza y se olvidaban y él iba y los vendía otra vez, hasta que al ir a meterles los alambritos se encontraron con los viejos todos oxidados" (14). The illicit and fraudulent dealings contribute to Amador considering Muecas a "Shape shifter", for as his last name and therefore the family name, implies, he has the capacity of showing one face to them and another to a different audience. In his description, Amador comments: "Y componiendo en su rostro los gestos corteses heredados desde antiguos siglos por los campesinos de la campiña toledana y haciendo su voz naturalmente recia una cierta composición meliflua, consiguió articular con algún esfuerzo..." (57).

This description depicts Muecas as not trustworthy and capable of transforming into a different character on demand. Reflecting back on the descriptions of the Semitic race in *El árbol de la ciencia* the obsession with money and business as well as the figure of the "shapeshifter" are traits that Hurtado associates with "Jews". Yet the characteristic of the shape shifter is not particular to him, for as they meet his daughters, he describes Florita as: "...del mismo modo de su padre, también ella era capaz —aunque más joven— de inventarse dos distintas personalidades y utilizarlas alternativamente según el rango del interlocutor" (59). The descriptions in these passages resemble "Jewishness" in the Muecas family.

As their name and descriptions imply, they are a family of shape shifters that are not to be trusted. The fact that they are from Toledo, confirms further that this family is not an “Iberian” family in Hurtado’s terms. Indeed, the characteristic of the shape shifter is not particular to this production, for Hurtado of *El árbol de la ciencia* describes one of his friend Aracil as: “Otra de las condiciones de Aracil era acomodarse a las circunstancias; para el no había cosas desagradables; de considerarlo necesario, lo aceptaba todo” (37). While Aracil’s description is not necessarily expressed in a negative light, Hurtado considers it a Semitic trait to be so malleable and his perspective of Semitism is pejorative. Despite Labanyi’s claims that the references to race in *Tiempo de silencio* refer to the Visigoths, there is an undeniable association of the Muecas family with Nazi anti-Semitic rhetoric that emphasizes *otherness* within the central space of Madrid.

The reference to Toledo in “ancient” terms serves as a reminder of the Jewish community of Medieval Spain, a time when it was not only a significant presence, but played an important role in the nation. Furthermore, Muecas’ description as an ancient and decadent figure extends beyond his physical characteristics to his surroundings. When Pedro contemplates upon the slums he thinks to himself: “...quizá no era solo el cancer lo que podía hacer que los rostros se deformaran y llegaran a tomar el aspect bestial de los fantasmas que aparecen en nuestros sueños y de los que ingenuamente suponemos que no existen” (52). The point of interest in this reflection is the association between the ghost as an entity that should no longer exist and Muecas’ characteristics as a protagonist that incarnates ancient traits. I propose that from this description of Muecas, as a representative of an ancient presence that resides in Madrid’s underworld and who dedicates himself to the black market, just like the mice, is *invisible* to mainstream society.

Despite these representations, the novel only identifies one character as Jewish, a German painter whose role is practically irrelevant to the plot, however, on the level of enunciation his presence leads us to connect the images and symbols associated with “Jewishness” to the Muecas family. The narrative voice addresses him as: “...un pintor alemán de apellido confuso...la escasa humanidad que el alemán emanaba...la melancolía atónita del alemán-ratón canceroso...” (81). The description of the German Jew as a cancerous mouse and later the definition of the term “magma” as “los judíos cuando todavía están en su ghetto reproduciéndose entre sí indefinidamente”, establishes a direct relationship between “Jewishness” and Muecas’ daughters that live in the slums of Madrid and help raise the lab mice. While the German Jew’s role in the narrative is marginal, the fact that he is a Holocaust survivor encourages the reader to turn to symbols and representations that are present in Nazi anti-Semitic rhetoric.

Just as the film *Der Ewige Jude* associates rats and vermin to the Jews of Europe, so too does the relationship between Muecas’ daughters and the mice reveal representations of “Jewishness”. The daughters are introduced to the novel in the following manner:

[...] ninguna de las dos rubia, ninguna de las dos con dieta adecuada durante la gestación en vientre toledano, *crían también cepas*. De ahí surgirá tal vez la nueva posibilidad de que el cáncer inguinal no sea inguinal, sino axilar...De que no sea sólo mortal para el ratón y para el ratón y para la rata, sino que casualmente inoculado durante la cría poco cuidadosa a las dos <<a Toledo ortae>> muchachas no rubias... (11).<sup>24</sup>

This passage accentuates two characteristics: that they are not blonde and that they are from Toledo. While the novel never makes mention of what features are considered to be the “mainstream”, the emphasis of these two traits highlights marginality. The way it describes

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<sup>24</sup> Emphasis is mine

Toledo as a place where gestation is malnourished only reinforces the notion that the girls represent deficiency.

As the description continues, they describe the girls as containing “crecidad gruesas tumoridades , secretoras de toxinas...del que hemos obtenido, cultivándolo en repetidos pases en ovario de muchacha toledica mal nutrida de la madre careció...” (12). These passages not only draw attention to the marginalization of the daughters, but associates them with the same genetic cancer as the mice. In considering that the girls “también crían cepas” he associates them as one and the same as the mice. In this sense, this novel draws a direct association between the daughters and anti-Semitic representations that depict Jews as rats.

However, the function of this association in this narrative is not the same as that of the anti-Semitic representations of Nazi propaganda. I find the fact that the cancer in the girls and the mice is genetic and not contagious implies that, like the specter’s appearances, it is a condition handed down from generation to generation and in this sense can be read as the element of their identity that marginalizes their presence. Furthermore, unlike the propaganda that considers the Jews as undesirables and therefore expendable, the daughters’ role in this narrative is essential to scientific research, for they are the only ones that can raise the lab mice. Amado informs Pedro of their pivotal role, for he states: “Las cuidan las hijas. Si no ya estarían muertas y no pariendo como paren que me creo que paren sin parar” to which Pedro asks: “¿Qué poder tienen las mal alimentadas muchachas toledanas para que los ratones pervivan y críen? ¿Qué es lo que les hace morir aquí en el laboratorio?” (14).

Despite the constant mention of the deficiency in Toledan origins, this conversation acknowledges the pivotal role that this family has in their medical research. The manner in which the novel develops the two subjects (the daughters and the mice) along with the genetic



disease that they both suffer from, is an ironic representation of “Jewishness” that places Jews on the national map. The two figures are both scarce and suffer from a genetic condition that is not contagious. While anti-Semitic rhetoric addresses this presence as a threat because it is uncontrollable, this narrative presents it from the other extreme: a clandestine space whose presence is completely contained and more importantly, *necessary*. I propose that this narrative addresses the relationship between “Jewishness” and modernity from a very different perspective than what is proposed in *El árbol de la ciencia* and *España invertebrada*, for rather than attributing the lack of modernity to the heterogeneous characteristics of the nation’s past, this novel proposes that perhaps the problem lies in the denial and marginalization of *otherness*. The text concludes in a similar fashion as *El árbol de la ciencia* in that both of Muecas’ daughters die (Flora of an abortion gone awry and Dora is killed by her jealous boyfriend) and with them so too do the mice leaving Pedro unable to conduct his research. The ending reinforces the preoccupations of the narrative’s predecessors, but further emphasizes the significance of the participation of the Muecas family in the advancement of scientific research.

This narrative takes a different approach to race than we have seen in *El árbol de la ciencia* and *Primera memoria* and this is most pronounced in the way it addresses “Jewishness”. While none of these texts defines their characters as actually Jewish, the previous two novels actually employ the terms “Semitic” or “Jewish” to describe physical characteristics or demeanor. By making tangential references to the Inquisition and the Holocaust and employing symbols and representations of “Jewishness” to the Muecas family, this text writes the figure of the “Jew” in a subtle manner, presenting *otherness* as that which is mentioned, but cannot be mentioned. The few times that the novel actually addresses race, it is through the mice, however,

the way in which it describes it speaks directly to the way the “Jewish race” is addressed in Nazi anti-Semitic rhetoric. In one of his reflections, Pedro considers:

Una raza de ratones cancerígenos degenerada y supervivente milagrosamente a pesar del *niu dial* para la época de la escasez crítica decretado por F.D. Muecas, enderezada al logro de una supervivencia imposible en el ambiente regalado del laboratorio había de ser una raza muy considerable. ¡Oh cuán plástica la materia viva; siempre nuevas sorpresas alumbra para quien las sepa ver! ¡Oh cuántas razas de estorninos diferentes, convertidas ya en subespecies, pueden poblar los bosques de un archipiélago! (33)

This passage is indicative of the narrative’s subtle and indirect approach towards race that is not seen in the previous narratives. There is never an indication of a race in particular, yet it is riddled with images associated with “Jewishness”. The notion that Jews have the capacity to reproduce under any circumstances is a universalized representation that was exploited fully in Nazi anti-Semitic rhetoric. Propaganda such as *Mein Kampf* and *Der Ewige Jude* present the Jewish community multiplying like rats. The fact that Muecas is incorporated in Pedro’s reflection propels us to draw a direct association between “Jewishness” and the mice.

Yet unlike the previous two narratives of this analysis, this passage addressing race is not only ambiguous, thereby forcing the reader to draw his/her own conclusion, but as one of Pedro’s reflections, it is also *silent*. Just as Labanyi states in her analysis and what the title implies, it is through the silences and absences that one can read this novel, for it plays with the duality of presence and absence of national imaginaries throughout. Firstly, the influence of the “generación del 98” and their preoccupations with modernity and heterogeneity echo throughout as this novel addresses stagnancy and decadence. While Hurtado constantly expressed his frustrations with the lack of resources and level of ignorance surrounding him, Pedro never

addresses the absurdity of lacking lab mice and having to travel to the slums of Madrid to purchase them on the black market. In this sense, *Tiempo de silencio* addresses the imaginary that the “generación del 98” constructed by not attributing the mediocrity of Spanish identity and culture to the people.

Secondly, the imaginary of national history and identity under Franco’s regime is completely dismantled in this narrative, for the novel parodies both *El árbol de la ciencia* and *España invertibrada* by signaling out *otherness* as a part of the present nation. By associating the Muecas family as “Jewified”, this novel not only contests the notion of heterogeneity as a characteristic of medieval Spain, but positions it center stage as a necessary presence.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, just like *Primera memoria* addresses *otherness* unrelated to “Jewishness” in an ambiguous manner, this narrative also makes tangential references to the Basque, Catalan, gypsy and Arabic identities in silence through Pedro’s soliloquys. In this sense, addressing these marginal communities by their proper names in a silent manner, while at the same time presenting the Muecas family front and center, but without a specific category, places them in a more subversive position than the aforementioned identities of *otherness*. I suggest that the silencing of this family’s cultural identity while writing it through all the representations of “Jewishness” emphasizes the fact that this narrative speaks about that which cannot be spoken.

The reading of these three novels as well as Ortega’s philosophical contribution to twentieth century Spanish thought provides a spectrum through which we can observe the shifts in narrative function of “Jewishness”. *El árbol de la ciencia* divides the Spanish nation into two

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<sup>25</sup> I use the term “Jewified” in this description because the novel does not identify the Muecas family as Jewish. However, their “true identity” becomes irrelevant because their descriptions and characteristics all form part of the universalized representations of “Jewishness”. Therefore while I cannot consider them “Jews” in the literal sense, for lack of a better term, “Jewified” describes them as a constructed entity from these images and representations.

distinct races and while none of the characters of the novel are actually Jewish, it can identify “Semitic” “traces” in all his friends and acquaintances. This novel contradicts itself in the way it presents “Jewishness”, for it attributes the lack of modernity to the “Semitic” influence and refers to it as a nuisance of the past, an issue that the “Reyes Católicos” rectified with the Expulsion, yet he is able to detect the specter of “Jewishness” through “Semitic” “traces” in his own contemporaries, drawing attention to the fact that the terms homogeneity and unification are not actually embedded in the nation’s fabric. Despite this discrepancy, the narrative function of “Jewishness” in this text is still to perpetuate the long held notion that heterogeneity in general and the “Semitic” presence in particular contributed to the nation’s current demise.

*Primera memoria* and *Tiempo de silencio* are narratives that break with the long held myths of the role of the Expulsion/Unification in national history. By placing the Inquisition literally at center stage of the novel, *Primera memoria* serves as a reminder of the dark side of that dualism and brings the past into the present in order to question the myth of unity in Spain’s history. In one of her reflections, as the adult Matia is writing her memoir, she interjects the memory and addresses this thought from her present circumstances: “(Aquí estoy ahora, delante de este vaso tan verde, y el corazón pesándome. ¿Será verdad que de niños vivimos la vida entera, de un sorbo, para repetirnos después estúpidamente, ciegamente, sin sentido alguno?)” (22). Her pause from narrating from the past in order to address a reflection of the present situation reinforces the notion that division has formed a part of the nation from its very beginning and still remains. While the text does not specify, one can conclude that the present she addresses in that passage refers to the dictatorship. Furthermore, the quote written from a collective “we” can be read as the nation, for as the close reading indicates, the narrative can be read as the nation’s first memory. In this sense, the Inquisition, so deeply embedded in the

novel, can be read as the nation's childhood. The way the novel plays with memory on different dimensions proposes that *otherness* has always formed a part of the nation and as such, the Inquisition resulted in deepening division, not solidifying identity as was its purpose. In this sense, the violence and aggression that the Inquisition perpetuated amongst the people resonated through time. In reading this passage as the nation's lifetime, I propose that in moments of crisis that were the Civil War and the dictatorship, neither the people nor the nation learned from the experiences of their childhood.

*Tiempo de silencio* employs representations of "Jewishness" in an ironic manner, for it applies the images that are deeply ingrained in Nazi anti-Semitic rhetoric to the dismantling of national and historical myths that Spain is one homogeneous nation. In this regard, this novel takes the most radical approach to "Jewishness" and proposes a narrative function that embarks upon representing the other extreme: that of deconstructing the long held traditional applications of anti-Semitic rhetoric. Indeed, the discourse that was originally designed to promote homogeneity, and that has formed part of hegemonic models throughout time, is in this novel, not only being used to point out the existence of heterogeneity in present times, but furthers that advance by proposing that perhaps the problem lies in the illusion of homogeneity. In this sense, the fact that the images and representations are so heavily charged with anti-Semitic connotations almost becomes irrelevant, for their function in the narrative is to dismiss their traditional purpose. *Primera memoria* and *Tiempo de silencio* share similar projects in their aims to dismantle nationally held myths of memory and identity, and while their approaches are very different, they both resorted to representations of "Jewishness" in order to speak to the national crisis.

## CONCLUSION

It seems appropriate to conclude this study with the “ghost” of “the Jew” in Spain because while many writers of the Social Realism genre (as well as their successors) devoted their works to the deconstruction of nationally held myths, (including that of homogeneity) the idea that there are no Jews in Spain is still prevalent today. While it is true that statistically the Jewish population has been miniscule since the Expulsion, (about 0.01 percent according to the national census of 2009) the presence of “Jewishness” has made its way into the cultural productions throughout time: Cervantes, Quevedo, Fernando de Rojas, Benito Perez Galdós are but a few of the writers that have included the figure of “the Jew” in their texts.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the physical presence of a Jewish community (or lack thereof) is disproportionate to the impact that “the Jew” or “Jewishness” has in a culture’s imaginary, as the historian Norman Cohn observed, “anti-Semitism can be found among people who have never set eyes on a Jew and in countries where there have been no Jews for centuries” (Bauman, 38-39).

The myth of homogeneity that was so prevalent in Spain did not translate over to the Americas in the same way; however, until recently, the way that “Jewishness” has been incorporated in Latin American cultural productions parallels that of Spain in resembling a “ghost”. The circumstances of a “Jewish” past in this geographical space differ greatly from that of the Iberian Peninsula, but they are nevertheless, intertwined. The appearance of “Jewishness” can be seen primarily in works from the nineteenth century to the present, as central to a novel such as “el hablador” of Mario Vargas Llosa’s *El hablador* (1987) or marginal within the

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<sup>26</sup> In her historiography of Jews in Latin America Judith Laikin Elkin states that the Jewish population is a minority in any geographical space, yet “they have profoundly influenced arts and letters, science and economy, the administration of justice, and foreign policy, to name only major areas” (Laikin Elkin xiv).

marginal as is the case of “Bromberg” of Roberto Arlt’s *Los siete locos* (1929), or, floating between significant and tangential roles as we so often see in the works of Borges, this presence has always formed a part of cultural production.<sup>27</sup> The fact that in the realm of criticism or the social sciences this presence has gone undetected or considered too insignificant to examine emphasizes further the invisibility of this figure.<sup>28</sup> However, as I have suggested throughout this study, texts written in the second half of the twentieth century begin to reveal a different direction for the “writing” of “the Jew”.

The figure of “the Jew” or the presence of “Jewishness” began as a construction of anti-Semitic discourses that throughout time has evolved into a metonymic device with the capacity of symbolizing a wide range of contradictory characteristics. As such, the narrative function of this presence has fulfilled the role of metaphor or allegory for national, political and social concerns. Therefore, understanding the trope of “Jewishness” is imperative to the recognition of the ongoing narrative shift that can be detected in cultural productions today. Over the course of the past decades the writing of “Jewishness” has opened its narrative function in a way that problematizes both the traditionally held notions of its metonymy as well as that of identity. While my interest lies in the examination of “Jewishness” as a rhetorical strategy within narratives, the emergence of cultural productions that address Jewish Latin American identity cannot go unnoticed. The “hyphenated identity” has provoked an abundance of productions

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<sup>27</sup> Though scant, there are remnants of “Jewishness” in literature of the colonial period. Bento Teixeira’s *Prosopopéia* is but one example. Texts of the nineteenth century include: *Los gauchos judíos* (1910) by Alberto Gerchunoff, *María* (1867) by Jorge Isaacs, just to name a few.

<sup>28</sup> As I have mentioned in the introduction, many of the scholars that embark upon the study of “Jewishness” in Latin America encounter this issue. Indeed, the intellectuals that have contributed to this area of study address the conundrum of the *invisibility* of this presence in cultural production and social studies in their own works. Jeffrey Lesser, Naomi Lindstrom, Darryl Lockhart, Erin Graff Zivin, Edna Aizenberg, Judith Laikin Elkin and David William Foster are but a few that have addressed this phenomenon.

from all regions of Latin America and can be seen in mediums that range from film, narrative and poetry. These productions provide insight to the intricacies of “Jewishness” by drawing from a wide range of experiences such as: being descendants of Holocaust survivors, immigrants in a new land, negotiating identity in between two contradicting communities, as well as proposing questions from within the Jewish community by exploring the parameters of “authenticity”, in asking the question how “Jewish” is “Jewish” enough? Or what makes a “Jew” a “Jew”?<sup>29</sup>

The genre of the hyphenated identity is a significant addition to the “writing” of “the Jew” in twentieth century Latin American literature, but it is not the only contributing factor to the shift in this figure’s narrative function. “Jewishness” as a recognizable characteristic in the form of demeanor and physical traits is still employed as a vehicle to address wider preoccupations. However, as I have suggested in my readings, this presence that traditionally maintained and perpetuated anti-Semitic sentiments, in these texts, reveals a shift in its narrative function. The “Jewish body” was traditionally constructed to create difference between “the Jew” and his surrounding community by signifying illness, promiscuity and particularly in the male, the lack of gender. However, the way it is depicted in the texts of the first chapter serves to deconstruct those very notions by presenting *the polaca* not as inherently seductive and corruptive, but a conscious construction in order to fulfill that role. Rather than presenting circumcision as a castration and weakening of the male body, these texts propose a different function: that of empowerment and actively reconciling the spiritual identity with that of the physical body.

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<sup>29</sup> Texts and films that present this facet of Latin American identity are countless, but some of the contributors to this genre are: Ana María Shúa, Ilán Stavans, Marjorie Agosín, Luisa Futoransky, Alicia Steimberg, Alicia Gorodischer, Margo Glantz, Daniel Burman, Rosa Nissan, Sara Berman, of course there are many others.



Modern discourse in the contexts of the Inquisition, the Enlightenment and nineteenth century pseudo-scientific Determinist theories excluded “the Jews” from the vision of modernity either by expelling them from the national space and therefore the national “vision”, or by assimilating them and “absorbing” them in the national scene or, in the case of Determinist theories, establish them as a different race, excluding them from the “mainstream” communities. By aiding in the construction of the figure of “the Jew”, this figure became the by-product of this discourse, intertwining this figure with projects of modernity. However, as I have engaged in the reading of Moacyr Scliar’s *A estranha nação de Rafael Mendes* the Jewish protagonists are not only *included* in this process, but they are positioned at the forefront of these endeavors and with the purpose of signaling out their perpetual failures in the Brazilian space.

The development of post-colonial theory and cultural studies proposed a new approach to the interpretation of historical and social constructs that have influenced the notions of modernity, identity and nation on a global scale. By revisiting the pillars of academia that are history, philosophy, letters and the social sciences, these scholars questioned the ways in which hegemonic discourse has shaped long held notions of truth and power. In the Americas this has manifested itself in the revisiting of the “discovery” which is now read and analyzed as the “encounter” and the “construction” of the Americas. The recent attention to “the other side of the coin” when addressing the colonization of Latin America has drawn attention to the subaltern, placing emphasis on the contributions of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega and Guaman Poma to the meta narrative.

I suggest that just as these scholars engage in a new way of reading these long held notions that have been so central to the hegemonic models of nation and identity, the shift in the writing of “the Jew” also provokes a shift in the *reading* of this figure and “Jewishness”. The

writing of “the Jew” in modern Spain and during Franco’s dictatorship contributed to the questioning of the national myth of homogeneity and proposes an interpretation of historical events that encourages readers to consider the repercussions of the “Gran Unificación” and examines the memory of “the Jew” while simultaneously singling out “Jewishness” in their surrounding communities. The narrative function of this figure in these texts proposes a different reading of the past that yields a distinct interpretation of national memory and long standing myths of identity.

While the figures of the Crypto Jew and *la polaca* are indeed depictions of the socio-historic contexts from which they emerge, they are in their own way, trans Atlantic remnants of the Latin American past. The *Conversos* that made it across the Atlantic integrated to the colonies by contributing their trades and skills, and while there is no doubt that some of them continued to practice Judaism, there is no way to single out the Crypto Jew identity. The obscure nature of that subjectivity as a baptized Christian that still practices the Jewish faith in private, contributes to the analogy of the “ghost” in this conclusion, for as a product of crisis, these figures were hidden in plain sight. Since the identity was practiced clandestinely, aside from the archives from the Spanish Inquisition, there is little if any concrete knowledge of these individuals. Therefore, the ambiguity embedded in this subject contributes to the construction of this identity as a literary presence. Consequently, as the texts of this study demonstrate, this figure is reappearing in narratives that question the “success” of modernity as a hegemonic project.

*La polaca*, though a real historical presence as a victim of the international prostitution rings of the nineteenth century, is a constructed Latin American equivalent of the “Jewess” or “belle juive”. Traditionally, she is read as an inherently seductive figure whose purpose is to

corrupt man and bring him to his demise and the fact that she is drawn from the historical context of the prostitution ring further strengthens the impact of that construction. However, as this study suggests, these texts revisit this figure and problematize that notion by presenting her as just that: a construction. The act of revisiting historical events while placing the abject and oppressive repercussions to this figure's circumstances compels the reader of this narrative to reduce her from being the "seductive Jewess of the Southern Cone" to a victim of the white slave trade. Therefore, while the prostitute is a very real individual, with the emergence of narratives that dismantle the exoticized notion of seduction as an inherent trait, *la polaca* can no longer be read in the unilateral manner of the past.

The conscious act of revisiting the construction of "the Jew" in the Latin American imaginary is not particular to cultural productions. Scholars of the visual arts, literature, history, philosophy and the social sciences are contributing to the shift in the function of "Jewishness" in their explorations. In *Rethinking Jewish Latin Americans* (2008) historian Jeffrey Lesser states: "Each chapter takes a new approach to the study of Jewish Latin America, rejecting the a priori assumptions that have defined most work on this topic, including high levels of anti-Semitism, Zionism as primarily oriented toward Israel, and the myth of all Jews being affiliated with community institutions" (5). This passage is indicative of the direction of Latin American Jewish Studies today that breaks with preconceived notions of "Jewishness" in the Latin American cultural scape. In "The Scene of the Transaction" literary critic Erin Graff Zivin advances this premise by approaching "the Jew" as:

...metaphor, carefully examining the ways in which ideas of 'Jewishness' are imagined and used *rhetorically* in order to address preoccupations with issues such as nationality,

modernity, capitalism, foreignness, and sexuality: issues critical to the elaboration of urban and national identities in early twentieth-century Brazilian society (108).

These studies are a mere example of the contributions that embark upon the task of addressing long held notions of “Jewishness” that have become embedded in national imaginaries. They not only participate in the dismantling of these images and representations, but are also adding depth and dimension to this once “undetected” presence in Latin American cultural productions. It is these contributions to this up and coming field that propose a new way to read, write and study “Jewishness” in Latin America.

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