Panel I: Legal Regimes and Trade Litigation
Jessica Marglin: Commercial Integration through Law: Jews and Notarization in Moroccan Shari’a Courts
Constanze Kolbe: The Business of Religion: Etrogim Trade and Litigation in the Nineteenth Century Adriatic
Alyssa Reiman: Commerce in the Courts: Italian Jews and the Consular Court System in Nineteenth Century Egypt
Hanna Sonkajärvi: Commercial Litigation between Alsatian-Jewish Merchants and Non-Jewish Merchants in the Mid-Nineteenth Century Brazil

Panel II: Cross National Networks, Marketing and Consumption
Cornelia Aust: Jewish, Polish, European: Bankers and Entrepreneurs at the Mid-Nineteenth Century: A Warsaw Perspective
Kevin D. Goldberg: Making Jewish Wine in Central Europe

Panel III: Mobility across and beyond the Eastern Mediterranean
Julia Phillips Cohen: Cosmopolitans for Empire: Ottoman Jews & Political Economy from the Margins

Panel IV: Realigning identities
Paris Papamichos-Chronakis: Merchants who Feared the Nation. Jewish Commercial Politics during the Balkan Wars, 1912-1913
Stephanie Seketa: Economic Nationalism and the Making of a “British” Corporation: J. Lyons versus Thomas Lipton in WWI Britain

Panel V: Marginality
Devi Mays: Becoming Illegal: Sephardi Jews in the Transnational Opium Trade
Niki Lefebvre: “The Other Essential Job of War”: Jewish American Merchants and the European Refugee Crisis after the Anschluss
The standard scholarly narrative about the experience of Jews in Islamic courts focuses on the disabilities Jews suffer as non-Muslims. Islamic law only accepts testimony from free Muslim men; non-Muslims, slaves, and to some extent women are excluded from providing oral evidence. Outside observers, from European diplomats to contemporary scholars, conclude that courts applying Islamic law are thus inherently discriminatory against Jews. Recent scholarship demonstrating Jews’ relatively frequent appearances in shari‘a courts in the Ottoman Empire has almost uniformly been interpreted as occurring despite the restrictions they faced. But Islamic law is far more diverse than is often assumed. The experience of Jews in Moroccan shari‘a courts demonstrates that generalizations about Islamic law fail to capture the way shari‘a was actually applied in every context.

The particularities of Islamic law in Morocco fostered a set of procedures that were exceptionally favorable to Jews. The vast majority of Muslims in North Africa follow the Mālikī school of law. While no single school is especially friendly to non-Muslims, the Mālikī school has one provision which, in practice, proved crucial for Jews. While Islamic law in general prefers oral testimony to written evidence, the Mālikī school accepted notarized written documents as evidence in court with far greater ease. Indeed, notarization by two professional witnesses, known as ‘udūl, could stand in for the oral testimony of those individuals actually involved in a particular case. In the Maghribi context, this acceptance eventually became a preference; by the nineteenth century, shari‘a courts in Morocco almost exclusively relied on notarized documents, rather than oral testimony, as evidence for everything from commercial transactions to crimes like theft and even murder. Although Jews were not considered eligible to deliver oral testimony in court, they had equal access to the services of ‘udūl. And when a Jew presented a contract in court that was written according to the requirements of Islamic law and signed by two ‘udūl, his evidence was equivalent to that presented by a Muslim. In other words, because of Moroccan shari‘a courts’ reliance on written evidence, Jews had equal access—at least, theoretically—to the guarantees provided by Islamic law.

My paper argues that the development of evidentiary requirements in Moroccan shari‘a courts made these legal institutions particularly fruitful venues in which Jews could cement their integration into the broader Moroccan economy. Drawing on hundreds of commercial documents that Jews amassed in Moroccan shari‘a courts over the course of the nineteenth century (up until French colonization in 1912), I demonstrate the extent to which the nature of Islamic law in Morocco made Islamic legal institutions particularly accessible to Jews. The accessibility of shari‘a courts, in turn, positioned Jews to play a particularly central role in the broader economy. Jews were required to use shari‘a courts whenever their commercial undertakings involved Muslims. And these courts played a central role in commerce; they provided the assurances Jews needed to conduct business, especially when this involved selling on credit (which was increasingly the case in the nineteenth century). Jews’ equal access to shari‘a courts provided them with more than just the guarantees of Islamic law; these institutions allowed Jews to participate in the Muslim-dominated economy in a way previous scholarship has entirely missed.
This paper looks at the trade regime practices in the 19th century Adriatic in the field of the Etrog trade. The Etrog is a religiously inscribed citrus fruit that is purchased once per year by Jewish communities all over the Adriatic for the festival of Sukkot. Using the archives of the Jewish community of Trieste and the Trade Court archives of Corfu, this paper argues that the Etrog trade during the nineteenth century is a way to think about the Ionian-Adriatic as a commercial and a legal space. The nineteenth century Etrog trade actually shows how the Adriatic and the Ionian Sea, two regions which are usually studied apart, have to be seen as connected regions. The Etrog trade commercially tied the Ionian Islands, the Ottoman mainland and Hapsburg Trieste with northern and Eastern Europe as well as the Balkan peninsula. It also functioned as a multi-ethnic network, involving Christian Orthodox producers, Jews as taxing agents as well as shipping merchants, and Jewish consumers.

The Etrog trade also shows that although commercially tied, these regions were not legally tied together. The Napoleonic legal code was adopted by most of the countries of the Adriatic, but effectively did not create a homogenous legal space. Each legal code was only an interpretation of the French model, which prevented the same jurisdictional framework. The code’s application in the Ionian Islands was highly local, making it difficult to sue foreigners.

This trade network was one that was dependent on the Christian Orthodox producers, the Jewish and Christian merchants shipping the fruits as much as it was dependent on the trans-regional dimension, namely the Eastern and Northern European as well as Balkan Jews buying the fruits. Only when this balance collapsed and new areas of cultivation in Ottoman Palestine emerged, this network ceased to exist.

Alyssa Reiman
Commerce in the Courts: Italian Jews and the Consular Court System in Nineteenth Century Egypt

Investigating the notion of “Jewish commercial cultures” is critically important for the fields of Mediterranean and Jewish history. In one notable case of a Jewish commercial culture, Italian Jews, particularly from Livorno, were an integral part of networks of people, commodities, and ideas that connected Italy with the Mediterranean basin during the modern era. Over the course of the nineteenth century, Livorno entered a period of economic decline, and Jews left the city in increasing numbers for economically dynamic port cities in the Mediterranean such as Tunis, Alexandria, and Salonica.

Through an analysis of the archives of the Chamber of Commerce in Livorno and the Tuscan, Italian, and British consulates in Egypt, this paper will examine Jewish mobilities between Livorno and Alexandria and the commercial networks that continued to connect the two cities. The paper will mainly be based on a close reading of consular records such as bankruptcy proceedings, inheritance disputes, and business contracts, in order to explore the complex commercial culture of Italian Jews in late nineteenth century Egypt. Appealing to the consular courts became a way to both create and dispute commercial connections. Creditors and debtors, husbands and wives, business partners and neighbors, all appear in the consular court records as legal and economic actors, seeking ways to exercise power and agency over their everyday lives by playing the competing legal systems in Egypt off of each other to try and settle their disputes.
This paper will address questions including: How did the spaces through which Jews moved inform their commercial practices and networks? When did Italian Jews in Egypt use consular courts to support their commercial endeavors and when did they ignore them? How did age, social class, nationality, and gender have an impact on an individual’s use of the consular court system? How did their identities as merchants, Jews, and Italians abroad overlap? Italian Jews in Egypt used the consular court system to validate a multifaceted and shifting set of cultural allegiances and economic pursuits; the interconnections between legal pluralism and commercial networks in Alexandria reveal a cosmopolitanism beyond the cultural and linguistic diversity that existed in the city.

Hanna Sonkajärvi
Commercial Litigation between Alsatian-Jewish Merchants and Non-Jewish Merchants in the Mid-Nineteenth Century Brazil

Brazilian law courts’ records reveal various cases of bankruptcy and economic litigation involving Alsatian Jews in the mid-nineteenth century, from the 1830’s onwards. Some of them were members of the same family and were engaged across the country in commercial activities such as peddling, banking and the selling of jewellery. Many of them made use of networks that were created around their common origins as Alsatians and Ashkenazim as well as their use of German language; yet others adhered to French associations in Brazil and especially Rio de Janeiro. A number of these immigrants actively relied on their relatives in France for conducting their businesses in Brazil. In 1871, when Alsace was annexed by Prussia, some of the Alsatian Jews publicly declared their intention to remain French citizens at the pages of the business newspaper “Jornal do Comércio”. Instead of focussing on their family or community based networks, I propose in my paper, to enquire into commercial litigation between Alsatian-Jewish commercial agents and non-Jewish merchants in the mid-nineteenth century Brazil. Taking cases of bankruptcy and contract breaking as a starting point, I shall enquire into the dynamics of such processes: Who were the respective litigants and their witnesses, how were these legal proceedings conducted and did the Jewishness play a role before the court or in the public (especially newspapers accompanying the legal proceedings)? How did the Jewish actors with business relations to France try to back up their activities by relying on or arguing with French contract law and French notarial records? By providing first answers to these questions the paper will allow for a discussion of the importance of legal instruments in forming cross-cultural exchanges.
Panel II
Cornelia Aust
Jewish, Polish, European: Bankers and Entrepreneurs at the Mid-Nineteenth Century: A Warsaw Perspective

By the end of the eighteenth century no Jewish community existed in the city of Warsaw, which held a privilege de non tolerandis Judaeis, though an increasing number of Jews lived in Praga across the Vistula and on noble estates around the Polish capital. Protestants of German descent owned the major banks in Warsaw until the last decade of the eighteenth century. Only half a century later, the most important banks in Warsaw belonged to Jews or Jewish converts to Christianity, whose ancestors had arrived in Warsaw around the turn of the century, in the politically instable period between the partitions of Poland and the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

My paper will provide an analysis of the composition of this new Jewish business and banking elite. The city of Warsaw developed in the nineteenth century from a royal town into a metropolis (small though on the European scale), partly a Jewish metropolis. My paper aims at pointing to similarities and differences in the business connections between the entrepreneurs of the turn of the century and those of the mid-nineteenth century. Though Poland had ceased to exist with little hope for immediate national redemption, a strong Polish national movement developed inside the multi-ethnic Russian empire. Thus, Jewish entrepreneurs and bankers had to find their role as transnational commercial agents in a European setting and their place within the Polish nation, while still fighting for complete legal emancipation. Thus, I seek to analyze the links and contradictions between their professional, Jewish and cosmopolitan identities in a national and imperial setting.

As this paper constitutes an epilogue to a study of members of the Jewish mercantile elite in Central Europe from the mid-eighteenth to the early-nineteenth century, it will be based primarily on secondary literature and published sources, but provide a fresh and transnational view on a Jewish banking and entrepreneurial elite, which with few exceptions has been analyzed solely within a national context. I will also take into account the fact that not all members of the Jewish business elite in Warsaw (and Poland) belonged to the acculturated camp, but show the links between converts, acculturated and traditional / Hasidic Jewish entrepreneurs. Moreover, the focus on Warsaw questions a perspective, in which usually western Europe is at the center with eastern Europe being one of its peripheries.

Kevin D. Goldberg
Making Jewish Wine in Central Europe

Jewish wine merchants (Weinhändler and Weinkommissionäre) had for centuries connected peasant winegrowers (Winzer) with regional and distant wine consumers. In many regions of Central Europe, including Rheinhessen, Moravia, Tokaj-Hegyalja, and the Steiermark, Jews played transformative roles in the local wine economies. Merchants provided winegrowers with much needed capital, product knowledge, and transport assistance, as well as having existing relationships with potential buyers. While Jewish merchants had been involved in the wine trade for centuries, the emancipation period, around 1870, was an important transitional moment for the activities and representations of these Jews.
In some ways, the success of Central European Jewish wine merchants helped to spell their own demise. For many of these merchants, the success and expansion of their businesses came at a time of contraction for the Central European wine trade, more generally. Winegrower anxiety—generated mostly by a globalizing, industrializing, and commercializing wine trade—found a relatively easy scapegoat in Jewish merchants. Jews were accused of adulterating wine, mislabeling, and other unfair business practices (unlauterer Wettbewerb). This led to the perception that Jews were both profiting from and destroying the peasant-vintner class. My article in the journal Agricultural History explores the overlap of the Judenfrage and Kunstweinfrage in pre-World War I Germany and Austria.

This presentation will begin to explore both the success and demise of Central European Jewish wine merchants; a social group hitherto unstudied (less than understudied). Drawing comparisons between Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, my paper will address the organizational strategies, selling innovations, and familial patterns of Jewish wine merchant firms. In addition, the presentation will consolidate loose strands of Central European viticultural history into a coherent narrative, initiating a project with the long-term goal of culminating in a full-length book study.

I am in the process of revising my doctoral dissertation into a book manuscript (tentatively titled The Fermentation of Modern Taste: German Wine from Napoleon to the Great War), and have commenced research for my second project, a comparative study of Jewish wine merchants in Germany and Austria-Hungary (from the late Habsburg period to the Anschluss). Research for this presentation and participation at the workshop in Bloomington will permit me the opportunity to test hypotheses as well as to discuss the work of other attendees. Though Imperial Germany stands at the center of my past research, I am moving in the direction of a wider engagement with Central European Jewry and German-speaking Europe, more broadly. As part of this plan, I have designed and taught courses on Central European Jewry and have begun to familiarize myself with the Austrian-Hungarian historical literature. [Return to Top]

Daniel Rosenthal
Carmel in the Shtetl: Palestinian Wine and the Commodification of Zionist Ideology in Eastern Europe, 1895-1939

This paper uses the case of the Carmel Wine Company (Hevrat carmel) to assess the level of success in the creation of an international commercial market that targeted the Jews of Eastern Europe. This company best represents how Zionist labor in the Yishuv (Jewish society in Palestine before 1948) was commodified and marketed to the masses in the European Jewish heartland; this phenomenon intersected with the process at the end of the Second Industrial Revolution whereby capitalists began to mass produce Jewish sacramental objects, challenging what had been the exclusive domain of cottage industries. The millions of Jews that lived in the borderlands of the Russian, German, and Austro-Hungarian Empires were overwhelmingly poor, yet represented an untapped consumer base for the growing number of multinational businesses that catered to the needs of religious Jews. [Return to Top]
The Carmel Wine Company was formed by Eliyahu Ze’ev Levin-Epstein in 1895 to distribute the Carmel-branded wines and cognac produced under the auspices of the Baron Edmond de Rothschild in Palestine. Rothschild had purchased the land for wineries in Rishon Le’tziyon and Zikhron Ya’akov in the 1880s in order to help expand Jewish agricultural settlements. He later built wine cellars and provided advisors from his French estates to lend technical expertise to early Zionist vintners, a factor that would come to be highlighted in advertisements to convince discerning palates that a Near-Eastern wine was up to European standards. Levin-Epstein, one of the founders of the settlement of Rehovot near Jaffa, set up the distribution company along with several business partners in order to further Jewish colonization and create a general demand for wine produced by Jews in Palestine. He was successful not only in securing Rothschild’s backing, but also in gaining permission from Theodore Herzl to use the Zionist leader’s likeness on bottles of wine and marketing materials.

With the establishment of retail outlets in many of the major Jewish population centers of Eastern Europe like Warsaw and Odessa, Carmel was positioned to capitalize not only on the growth of Jewish nationalist sentiment, but also on the growing consumer drive among poorer Jews. Contributing to the success of the endeavor was a bifurcated approach to marketing where one set of advertisements targeted the more well-heeled and another the poor Jewish masses. In Russian and Polish periodicals typically read by the Jewish intelligentsia, Carmel advertisements directly linked the product to the Zionist movement and to the Baron Rothschild’s French wine estates. In the Yiddish-language press read by the poorer masses, Carmel’s products were marketed as necessary sacramental commodities, and advertisements highlighted items like the sweet port intended for use during Passover.

Using the existing records of the Carmel Wine Company, press reporting on the attitudes of Eastern European Jews towards wine produced in Ottoman and British Palestine, advertising materials, and written accounts of Jewish consumption of these products in Eastern Europe, this paper will contribute to the historiography on the economic origins of Zionism, the development of consumer culture in Eastern Europe, and relations between the early Yishuv and diaspora Jews. Wine consumption illuminates a new way of looking at support for Zionist endeavors in Eastern Europe. Ultimately, these economic relationships show how poor Jews in this region became modern consumers. [Return to Top]
Panel III
Ariane Wessel
Social advancement in the period of globalization. Jewish grain traders at the Berlin commodity exchange 1860-1914

Within the framework of my dissertation project, I am studying the economic and social advancement of Jewish grain traders in Berlin. Most of these Jewish traders immigrated to Berlin in the 1860s from the eastern provinces of Prussia, and their enterprises developed within only one generation to very successful, globally operating companies which dealt at the stock exchange and expanded into the banking sector. Their owners became more and more integrated into the elite of the business bourgeoisie of Berlin. The goal of my research project is to highlight and explain the sources and the impact of this economic and social advancement.

My hypothesis is that there are two main reasons to explain this success:

First, there was a limited time frame in which great changes in the grain trade and especially in Berlin took place which offered at the same time new possibilities to the traders: The trans-local and global grain trade via stock exchange was a new phenomenon which developed in the second half of the 19th century. In this context, Berlin became particularly important due to several locational advantages and the possibility of dealing in futures at the Berlin stock exchange. As a result, Berlin was connected to the international market and set the prices for grain for the whole German Empire and beyond.

Second, the grain traders who immigrated to Berlin in the 1860s and entered this new business field in the days of globalization, brought along the necessary social and cultural capital as a result of their specific Jewish history. They had contacts and networks within their home countries and regions, primarily the agricultural eastern provinces of Prussia, and they came from families that had been involved in agricultural trade for generations.

In addition to these two main arguments, there is a further precondition for the increasingly large-volume transactions on the stock exchange with its corresponding risks: a relationship based on trust between business partners was necessary.

For this reason, the “new-comers” in particular used their Jewishness as social capital and cooperated with partners whom they could assess. Therefore, a religion-based network was an important element. This includes family relations and social contacts in professional meeting points, societies, clubs or the Jewish community. Towards the end of the 19th century the Jewish business community of Berlin became more and more connected with the non-Jewish community, in part as a result of increasing conversions to Christianity and the declining influence of religious ties in an increasingly professionalized and secular world. Nevertheless, the Jewish business community in the days of the German Empire still represented a more or less closed group with its own societies, clubs, charity organizations, religious traditions and internal marriages.

The underlying sources for this project are - among others - files of the supervision authorities for trade and the stock exchange, files of the “Korporation der Kaufmannschaft” (Corporation of Merchants), and contemporary literature on commercial issues.
Also a profound prosopographic research in several archives and libraries was done to identify the grain traders with their professional and social ties. 

Evangelia Matthopoulou
Jewish commercial practices in the Eastern Mediterranean, 1933-1939

The paper seeks to discuss Jewish merchants’ practices and motives in the Eastern Mediterranean in the 1930s. Profoundly, the 1920s was a decade of steady inflow of Jewish industrial migrants and successful entrepreneurs from the USA and Europe into Mandated Palestine, who embraced the national aspiration of returning to Zion. The aforementioned groups comprised the force of modernization and acceleration of Palestinian economic growth as well as export trade with the major parts of British Empire as a means of strengthening the national cause. As the paper will discuss, the recession of the 1930s led some Jewish merchants to redefine their ‘strategy’ in commerce. Corporate companies with commercial connections throughout the world appeared to be losing their access to their principal trading partner, Great Britain, due to Palestine’s exclusion from the Imperial Preference System of 1932. The adaptation of those Jewish merchants to the new conditions was rapid. They created new trading routes to gain back their access to Britain by establishing commercial companies on a British ground closer to Palestine in the Mediterranean. That was the case of Jewish merchants who established industrial export companies in British Cyprus. The Jews took advantage of the preferential status of trading raw materials and exporting cheap manufactured goods (from Sudan to Siam and from Solomon Islands to Great Britain through Cyprus and Palestine), as well as the fact that Cypriot land and labor were cheaper than Palestine. Some of those companies were international firms which used to network all around the world, especially within the British Empire. Others were private export companies in the citrus industry.

Mandated Palestine due to her direct shipping service with the UK was nothing more than the hub which connected Jewish merchants with European markets, while Cyprus was the place where trading products were manufactured. The paper aims at highlighting the national and economic incentives of those merchants in the Eastern Mediterranean and to explain how they took advantage of the economic challenges to create trade and profit in the region by establishing themselves beyond the national home. In addition, this paper will examine the extent to which the merchants’ commercial practices were successful.

The proposal is based on the Ph.D. research undertaken at the State Archives of the Republic of Cyprus. The Secretariat Archives, especially the Jewish merchants' correspondence with the colonial government, provided valuable and ample evidence on their trading activity and the establishment of trans-Mediterranean commercial networks.

Julia Phillips Cohen
Cosmopolitans for Empire: Ottoman Jews & Political Economy from the Margins

During the second half of the nineteenth century, as the global market for Eastern-style items expanded, Ottoman merchants began to reorient their business to buyers abroad, repackaging wares such as carpets, tapestries, jewelry, lamps, divans, pillows, tables, armor, and later, “Turkish” tobacco and coffee, as Eastern
curiosities and luxury items. Trips to Ottoman concessions at world’s fairs as well as a growing tourist industry within the empire increasingly brought these merchants into direct contact with a foreign clientele. Among those engaged in the selling of things Oriental in the late Ottoman world were a number of Sephardic Jewish merchants resident in the Ottoman capital, as well as the Ottoman port cities of Izmir and Salonica.

This paper follows these late Ottoman Jewish merchants from their native cities to various European and American destinations. While many initially travelled to represent their empire and sell their wares during international exhibitions, some decided to strike roots in the new locales they visited, making homes in cities such as Paris, Berlin, London, Philadelphia, Chicago, New York, and San Francisco. In the process, they became part of global networks, with family members and business partners stationed in different continents.

This presentation aims to understand the effects these networks had on their individual members and their sense of their place in the world. It asks how the products they sold, the business connections they maintained, and the marketing strategies they employed affected the self-image these merchants projected, both within the empire and abroad. [Return to Top]
Panel IV
Paris Papamichos-Chronakis
Merchants who Feared the Nation. Jewish Commercial Politics during the Balkan Wars, 1912-1913

Historiography on the Balkan Wars has for long focused on nationalism and ethnic violence treating the conflict as a pivotal moment in the formation of nation-states and national identities in the Balkans and the subsequent minorization of non-Christian ethno-religious groups. Complicating this narrative, this paper focuses on a different kind of collectivity, the merchants of Salonica, mapping their cross-ethnic and transnational mobilization during a period of ethnic tension and territorial fragmentation. In late 1912-early 1913, the Jewish-led, multi-ethnic commercial elite of the city successfully mobilized local merchants and commercial institutions, the Greek administration, as well as European dignitaries, diplomats, commercial associations and chambers of commerce all over western and central Europe in a concerted effort to retain the jurisdiction of Salonica’s Commercial Tribunal over all of the former European provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Using a wealth of previously untapped material (from French, British and Italian consular reports to international petitions and the local Greek and Jewish press), the paper explores the nature of group mobilization and commercial politics in a period of war revealing the interconnected frameworks of transnational civil society action and local politics. In a period of war late Ottoman credit networks which bound together European providers, Salonican importers and Macedonian retailers turned into political networks sustaining the political formation of a different kind of collectivity, the Salonican merchants, by fusing together Jewish, professional and local identities.

Nadia Zysman
Factory, Workshop and Homework: A Spatial Dimension of Labor Flexibility Among Jewish Migrants in the Early Twentieth-Century Buenos Aires

My paper analyzes gender roles within the Jewish community of Buenos Aires between 1880 and 1960 with a particular view to how changes in those roles related to migration and the world of garment.1 The paper is based on two premises: first, that migration as such tends to transform gender roles, since it engages pre-migratory norms and practices with those of host societies, both of which are further inflected by transnational dynamics themselves; second, that the impact that migration has on gender relations is often particularly shaped by the labor market.

The case of garment provided not only an economic niche into which Jews, as comparative latecomers, could flock because access to this industry did not require large capital investments as an initial threshold, but also turned into a vehicle for the transformation of gender roles. Since Jews, in contrast to other immigrant groups in Argentina, had a more even sex ratio upon their arrival, Jewish women were demographically predisposed to turn into pioneers of female participation in the labor market. The world of garment, my hypothesis holds, further supported this development because in contrast to other industries

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1 Using the expressions “world of garment” or “garment worlds” I follow a broad understanding of what elsewhere is called textile industry, including household workshops, distribution chains, and the retail sector, not only formalized manufacturing.
it allowed a great deal of informal female work, all the more so since clothing was not necessarily a sector considered improper for women, whether in the Americas or in the Jews’ countries of origin. From this perspective it does not come as a surprise that Jewish women took an active part in the labor and feminist movements in Buenos Aires.2 To analyze this process and its corollary spillovers for Jewish community life and gender roles in Argentina more broadly forms the principal empirical aim of this paper.

In other words, what happened in garment mirrored in miniature many broader developments that the community embarked upon over time and as such represents an empirically manageable terrain to explore in detail the particular characteristics of a Jewish community in global comparison. In order to assess the interrelationship between migration, work, and ideas about gender I collected a variety of primary sources allowing me to chart both discourses about gender and the everyday social fabric on which they rested.

So, by looking specifically at what came closest to an ethnic economic niche in one of the foremost immigrant societies of Latin America—namely the garment world of Buenos Aires, in which Jews played a crucial role—my research ultimately hopes to speak to broader contemporary debates in academia and the public at large by addressing the ways in which migration, gender, and labor markets interact.

Stephanie Seketa

Economic Nationalism and the Making of a “British” Corporation: J. Lyons versus Thomas Lipton in WWI Britain

Hypothesis:
As one of the first British manufacturers of processed food Lyons was frequently on the cutting edge innovation. Lyons often gained first-mover advantages in an ever-changing industry from the turn of the twentieth century through two world wars which allowed them to not only win international acclaim and tremendous profits, but also build a family fortune and business empire that spanned multiple generations. I am interested in using this Jewish family business to reveal how international networks functioned to help or hinder family firms before and during the world wars with the rise of economic nationalism and Anti-Semitism. A key moment of conflict for Lyons can be seen in 1914 when they sued Lipton for libel after Lipton employees advertised that Lyons was a German company doing business with the Germans after the outbreak of war and that the directors were German Jews. Lyons had built its empire using international social networks and business affiliations. The tension reflected in the libel case illustrates a turning moment for the company who had to create a company brand amidst economic protectionist policies and civic consumerism that marketed the firm as an All-British company. The company began as a family firm in 1887 and over the course of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries it transformed into a vertically integrated multinational conglomerate. Lyons’s brands were household names. The company was named after Joseph Lyons, but the founding members were from the Salmon and Gluckstein families, and grew out of their partnership as Salmon & Gluckstein Tobacconists. Lyons began as a catering company that provided refreshments to exhibitions, and entertainment spectacles such as Venice in London. They also opened tea shops, corner house restaurants, and hotels. Through the study of Lyons we can see the tension between

two contradictory forces just after the turn of the twentieth century: economic nationalism and global networks that were the backbones of many successful businesses. In this paper I will examine one of the international networks that Lyons was a part of and how transnational connections such as these were perceived as contradictory to national loyalty with the eventual outbreak of WWI. Using the libel case and internal Lyons’s documents I posit that Lyons, and subsequently other firms, were not only well aware of their precarious position during this tumultuous time period, but that they took active steps to create company brands and reputations separate from the families behind the firms.

Techniques and Sources:
I have used modern social networking analysis to research one of the transnational networks that Lyons was actively engaged in. In doing so I am utilizing modern social networking software to visually map the overabundance of business connections that I have gleaned from primary and secondary sources. In addition to this innovative method of mapping the transnational I have also examined business and court archives (Lyons and Salmon & Gluckstein) and many contemporary newspapers articles and advertisements. [Return to Top]
In January of 1932, the *New York Times* proclaimed that two men had been apprehended in New York’s busiest pier for attempting to smuggle 92 kilos of heroin immersed within 35 barrels of olive oil, which constituted the largest drug bust in that port’s history. The two men, who respectively claimed Spanish and Mexican nationalities, were both Sephardi Jews from Constantinople, though residents of Mexico who had been travelling in France before coming to the United States; similarly, the supplier and refiner of the opiates was a Constantinopolitan Sephardi Jewish family with roots in the opium trade that extended well into the Ottoman period, and with familial and commercial connections in Izmir, Athens, Marseille, and beyond; further, the informants who had alerted American consular officials in Istanbul as to the vessel and the means by which the heroin was transported were Sephardi Jews. And the drugs in question, though passing through the Mediterranean and sequestered in New York, were in fact destined for Mexico, only one of a number of similar transports that followed this route out of Istanbul to Veracruz. Indeed, Sephardi Jews had been involved in opium production and refinement from the early years of the 1800s, but their methods of refining, transporting, and distributing their wares shifted in response to changing borders, international regimes of illegality, growing nationalism, and migratory restrictions.

This paper examines the history of Sephardi involvement in the opium and later heroin trades in and beyond the eastern Mediterranean in the late 1800s and until the mid-1930s when the Turkish state redistributed opiate production and refinement out of Jewish hands. It explores how individuals responded when the products they produced and sold, and increasingly they themselves, became illegal within the various states that their trade and migrations traversed. It argues that Sephardi Jewish migrants responded to commercial and immigration restrictions and new regimes of illegality along the various nodal points of their diaspora by mobilizing commercial, familial, and patronage networks that traversed the Mediterranean, Atlantic, and Caribbean. Drawing on court, immigration, secret police, and consular records, as well as press sources from Turkey, France, the United States, and Mexico, this paper traces the development of the illicit trafficking of opium and heroin, which followed preexisting Sephardi commercial and familial trajectories and which was sometimes literally embedded within licit merchandise. It thus explores how migrants circumvented legal regimes at local, national, and international levels, the fluidity with which they played divergent legal systems against each other, the persistence of deep transnational ties in spite of state attempts to legislate against precisely this type of behavior, and how such ties enabled individuals to adapt when their merchandise, and they themselves, became illegal. [Return to Top]

Niki Lefebvre

"The Other Essential Job of War": Jewish American Merchants and the European Refugee Crisis after the Anschluss

In the summer of 1938 Ira Hirschmann, then Vice President of Saks Fifth Avenue of New York, and Louis Kirstein, Vice President of Filene’s in Boston, crossed paths at a trading house in Paris. At the time, Kirstein was entrenched private political negotiations with high-ranking officials in the Roosevelt Administration to bring individual European refugees to the United States, Britain, or Cuba. Hirschmann had just attended the
disappointing international conference at Evian, France, his first U.S. government appointment related to
the refugee crisis. Despite their close association through the shared foreign trading houses of their
respective department stores in Paris, Vienna, and Berlin, Hirschmann and Kirstein rarely collaborated in
their refugee work. Yet both men drew on remarkably similar networks of trade and diplomatic partners
abroad and influential U.S. government officials in Washington to achieve their goals. This paper considers
the private efforts of Louis Kirstein and the public advocacy of Ira Hirschmann to redress the European
refugee crisis between 1933 and 1945 in the context of a retail industry led by Jewish American department
store executives. Although retailers failed to collaborate in a successful large-scale public boycott of
German imports after 1933—and some continued to conduct trade with Germany after 1938—the
individual campaigns of Louis Kirstein and Ira Hirschmann reveal an informal network of Jewish merchants,
diplomats, and government officials who took great personal risks to pursue what Ira Hirschmann called the
“other essential job of war”: saving people.

This paper is taken from the final chapter of my dissertation, “Beyond the Flagship: Politics and
Transatlantic Trade in American Department Stores, 1888-1945,” which aligns the study of department
stores with current scholarship that places the United States within transnational contexts. Reimagining
department stores as multinational corporations enmeshed in transatlantic trade networks unveils new
paths through which Americans connected to the world and through which foreign events shaped
Americans. As Nazism spread across Europe in the 1930s Jewish American merchants faced especially
challenging decisions about how to manage their stocks of German imports and their buying operations in
Berlin and Vienna. At the same time, longstanding trade connections in these vital centers of the Third
Reich granted many executives advance notice of deteriorating conditions for European Jews, as well as
influence within powerful transatlantic networks of like-minded businessmen, diplomats, and government
officials. Drawing on personal, business, and government documents at the Franklin D. Roosevelt
Presidential Library, Harvard University’s Baker Business Library, the University of Delaware Library, and the
Library of Congress, this presentation considers the role of transatlantic Jewish American merchant and
diplomatic networks in the relief work of Kirstein, Hirschmann, and other American department store
executives. Although Kirstein died in 1942 after having privately secured passage out of Europe for dozens
of refugees, Hirschmann went on to become the first special attaché to the U.S. War Refugee Board and
eventually negotiated the release of tens of thousands of prisoners from certain death in concentration
camps under Romanian control. Despite their different approaches, the work of Kirstein and Hirschmann
reveals the vital role of transatlantic Jewish commercial and diplomatic networks in combating the greatest
crisis of the twentieth century.  