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**Criminal activity amongst Jews as response to modernity and Migration -- Odessa (1870-1914)**

**Introduction**:

Jewish society in Eastern Europe from 1772 onwards was a new society, facing challenges and realities that traditional Jewish societies did not face. This paper analyzes the phenomenon of organized criminal activities within Jewish society in late 19th and early 20th century Eastern Europe, using Odessa as a case study. I propose that criminal activities within the Jewish community were reactions to the crisis of both modernity and living under new political regimes.

The decline of rabbinical authority and the rise of alternatives to the communal and spiritual leadership of the community combined with the urbanization of Jewish society created a deep crisis within the community. Following the partitions of Poland (1772-1795), most East European Jews lived under the Russian and Habsburg empires. These enlightened absolute regimes intervened much more than their Polish predecessors in the affairs of the Jewish community.

Organized Jewish criminal activities accompanied modernization in large East European cities. This phenomenon occurred in many cities in the19th century, where Jews dwelt in large numbers - Warsaw, Lodz, Lvov, Zhitomir . In Comparison to these cities, Odessa is unique in three facets:

*First* - Odessa was a new settlement. Not only was it created by the Russian Empire shortly after the partitions of Poland (1794), but it was also a new settlement for Jews in areas of the Pale of Settlement uninhabited by Jews before the early 19th Century.

*Second* - Odessa is a port city, a rarity in the Russian Empire. Insights gained from the vast research on port cities and of Jews in port cities during the last twenty years are very helpful researching Odessa.[[1]](#footnote-1)

*Third* - the transformation of "Polish Jews" into "Russian Jews" created a new version of modern Jews. As a cosmopolitan city Odessa had a unique place in this process. Odessa, as Sicher puts it[[2]](#footnote-2), has its uniqueness within the Jewish East European experience.

Criminality and social deviance were some of the reactions to the transformation of societies from traditional to modern patterns in society. During such transformations the old system lost its legitimacy and the ways of the new system have not yet been embedded within the transforming society. Both the city of Odessa and Russian Jewry were new creations in late eighteenth century. The city of Odessa was created in 1794 when Jews were not allowed to live within the Russian Empire before the first division of Poland in 1772. Indeed, Jewish society in Eastern Europe was re-shaped between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries. Those changes occurred due to external changes, i.e., living in new empires - Russia and Austro-Hungary and internal changes, i.e., social, religious, and ideological changes within Jewish society.

The first change meant adjusting to life under new regimes, namely the Russian Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As we shall see, after occupying Polish territories where many Jews resided, Russian authorities decided to limit Jewish settlements to former Polish territories, not allowing them to enter old Russia, where they were not allowed to live since the fourteenth century. Russian authorities decided also to relocate the Jews in cities within the former Polish territories (known as Pale of settlement). As a result of this policy the Jewish population of the Russian Empire became urban.

Mobility and migration were part of the day-to-day life for many Jews during the late nineteenth century. This, as well as the fact that, unlike their predecessors, Russian authorities did not allow Jews (and other non-Russian groups within the Empire) the same autonomy they had under Polish regime, affected Jewish society.

A second major change occurred simultaneously within Jewish society - a change which had nothing to do with the ruling powers in Eastern Europe. Since the late eighteenth century East European Jewry underwent significant changes. Until circa 1760 Jewish society was a homogeneous under unified religious leadership; however, since the late eighteenth century it became a much more versified entity. New forces entered the Jewish political, cultural and religious landscape. Many Jews advocated the secularization of Jewish society and termination of rabbinical rule in the community.

Thus, reactions to the challenges that faced Jewish society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries created a new and much more complicated Jewish society. Criminal activity was but one of the reactions to this crisis. From the late nineteenth century Jews engaged in two main criminal activities: immigration related crimes and white slavery (prostitution and trafficking). The latter became the main criminal activity of Jews in the port of Odessa over which they had a monopoly.

Georg Simmel’s theory on Metropolis and mental life can contribute to our understanding of the phenomenon of new urban populations in new cities (especially port and border cities). In the new environment, claimed Simmel, "the deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of the historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life. The antagonism represents the most modern form of the conflict which primitive man must carry on with nature for his own bodily existence".[[3]](#footnote-3)

Simmel emphasized that the eighteenth century brought about "liberation from all the ties which grew up historically in politics, in religion, in morality and in economics in order to permit the original natural virtue of man, which is equal in everyone, to develop without inhibition"[[4]](#footnote-4).The nineteenth century, however, "may have sought to promote, in addition to man's freedom, his individuality (which is connected with the division of labor) and his achievements which make him unique and indispensable but which at the same time make him so much the more dependent on the complementary activity of others"[[5]](#footnote-5). Simmel claimed that the result of these changes brought about a major change. A "fundamental motive was at work, namely the resistance of the individual to being leveled, swallowed up in the social- technological mechanism".[[6]](#footnote-6)

Frederick Jackson Turner’s classic Frontier thesis may prove useful here[[7]](#footnote-7). Ports, I would suggest, were a juncture where new populations and new settlements met. In passing between countries and continents, a new kind of people appeared, people who found new solutions to new problems that were created by their new environment. The frontier produced characteristics of informality, violence, crudeness, democracy, and initiative that allowed immigrants to leave behind the old habits and embrace new ones. This happened in border cities and in port cities. Ports, being temporary by nature provided a space which enabled getting rid of the old and embracing the new. When new populations met new cities (in our case, new Jews meeting new Odessa), the juncture sometimes took a criminal turn.

Theories of marginality and marginal people also serve as useful explanations[[8]](#footnote-8). Marginalization is an individual cultural adaptation style involving rejection of both the values of the dominant "host" culture (here the Russian Empire) and the values of the culture of origin (here the Jewish Community)[[9]](#footnote-9). People experiencing such changes tend sometimes to transgress into the criminal scene, especially in spaces like port and border cities. According to Eldering & Knorth, "Marginalization refers to a process by which a person becomes distant from the conventional institutions in society (e.g., family, school, labor market)"[[10]](#footnote-10). I assert that this applies not only to youth but also to elderly. Elders run the risk of becoming delinquent when they migrate, physically and culturally from a traditional to a new and more modern environment.

This was a case of new Russian Jews encountering a new regime (the Russian Empire after 1772) and new space (Odessa from 1794).

**Odessa - a new settlement**:

The city of Odessa was officially founded in 1794 as an Imperial Russian naval fortress on the ruins of a former Ottoman fortress named Khadjibey (or Kotsyubiiv). The fortress was under the rule of the Lithuania-Poland kingdom and since 1480 of the Ottoman Empire. The Russian Empire occupied the fortress in 1789 from the Turks, and the territory ceded to Russia in 1792. A new fortress was built in 1792–93, and in 1794, a naval base and commercial quay were added. In 1795, the new port was named Odessa for the ancient Greek colony of Odessos, the site of which was believed to be in the vicinity.[[11]](#footnote-11) An independent settlement of Moldavanka already existed near the new military base. During the 19th century it was incorporated into the city of Odessa. Established by Rumanians, Moldavanka became, from the mid-19th Century, the Jewish quarter of Odessa[[12]](#footnote-12).

**Nineteenth century East European Jews - A new form of Jewish Society**

Jewish society in the 19th Century Russian Empire was a new form of society in two ways:

1. In 1772, before the breakdown of the Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom - also known as the first partitions of Poland - Jews were not allowed into Russia. Most of East European Jewry lived within the boundaries of the great Polish-Lithuanian Empire. Between 1772 and 1796 this political entity disappeared. Poland was partitioned between the Russian Empire, the Austro- Hungarian Empire and the German Kingdom of Prussia[[13]](#footnote-13). Eventually in 1796 most of about a million Polish Jews resided within the Russian Empire - an Empire that until 1772 forbade Jews to live in its boundaries[[14]](#footnote-14).

Most of the Jews in the Russian Empire lived in the provinces of Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania, where they had been living for many years before. The Russian Regime opted to leave the Jews in areas where they were living anyway. This policy was decided because the new regime was unable to get rid of the Jews, crucial to the smooth functioning of the Ukrainian economy. Ukraine was nicknamed "the granary of Eastern Europe". This was the most important reason Russia decided to occupy Poland. Driving the Jews out of the new occupied territories contradicted Russian interests. Most of the Jews were thus forced to stay in what became to be known as the “Pale of Settlement”[[15]](#footnote-15). Only a few Jews - who were important to the industrialization of Russia, were allowed to dwell in what was known as the “*Old Russia*”[[16]](#footnote-16).

However, allowing Jews to settle only within the Pale of Settlement was but one facet of Russian policy towards the Jews. Russian Jewish policy represented a huge change in relations between the Jews and the authorities. Under Polish rule, Jews hardly were in touch with government officials. The Jewish Community transferred taxes to the local administrators and in turn the authorities allowed the Jews to run their community without interference. The Russian Empire operated in a different manner. Governing Russia according to the principles of 'Enlightened Absolutism' the Russian Czars tried to establish a modern state unified under the rule of the Czar. An attempt was made to "russify" all religious and ethnic groups within the Empire[[17]](#footnote-17).

Nineteenth century Russian rulers - especially Czar Nicolas I (who ruled Russia between 1825 and 1855) promoted policies of industrialization and russification[[18]](#footnote-18), affecting the multicultural population of the Russian empire, especially in the Ukraine[[19]](#footnote-19). As part of this policy, Jews - along with others - were transferred into the large industrial centers - one of them was the port city of Odessa[[20]](#footnote-20).

The Jewish population of the Russian Empire had to adjust to the new regime and its policies[[21]](#footnote-21).The Jewish way of life under the new regime changed drastically. Freeze and Harris[[22]](#footnote-22) demonstrate this in their collection of everyday lives of Jews in Russia. Some Jews reacted, as we shall show, to the new reality also by adopting deviant and criminal behaviors.

1. Polish (now Russian) Jews were “new” in another sense. From 1760, new - religious as well as secular - movements rose within East European Jewish society. Two new movements reshaped Jewish society in Eastern Europe: Hasidism and Enlightenment (Haskalah). Hasidism offered a new version of religious leadership, emphasizing the role of the individual in religious behavior. Hasidism also introduced a new kind of religious leadership and a new, more ecstatic daily religious behavior[[23]](#footnote-23). Enlightenment and secularism also became an important component of East European Jewish life, offering a non-religious option for Jews. Religious observance was rejected by many Jews who nevertheless still lived within Jewish society[[24]](#footnote-24).

Now, for the first time since the early Middle Ages, Jewish society was no more a homogeneous religious society[[25]](#footnote-25). Migration into the urban centers[[26]](#footnote-26) together with the deterioration of authority of religious leadership created opportunities for groups hitherto on the margins of Jewish society. Furthermore, as result of migrating to large cities (including Odessa) the structure of occupations among Jews changed significantly[[27]](#footnote-27).

Immigration from small cities and villages to the new urban centers weakened the role of rabbis within the Jewish communities even further[[28]](#footnote-28). In classical Jewish settlements rabbinical institutions were part and parcel of the communal organization. However, migration to the new settlements like Odessa was of individuals. A few men and fewer women came to the cities. The newcomers lived within non Jewish neighborhoods, proving that Jews can live outside of Jewish society. Only after the new communities became large enough, religious institutions were established, and rabbis were recruited. Religious observance was very difficult to obtain. People began belittling the value of religious commandments – the center of Jewish religious life.[[29]](#footnote-29) In new spaces, like Odessa, religious meticulousness ceased to be the basis of communal existence. Rabbis and rabbinical establishments gradually became less important.

**Jews in Odessa**

The first significant group of Jews came to Odessa in the 1850s[[30]](#footnote-30). Most Jews in the Pale of Settlement lived in small townships known as “Shtetl”[[31]](#footnote-31). Odessa was by this time a tax-free port city, and most of the town’s Jews operated small businesses on the outskirts of the port[[32]](#footnote-32). With industrialization and the rising importance of Odessa’s port, the Jewish population grew[[33]](#footnote-33) and in 1897 some 165,000 Jews lived in the city, constituting 37% of its population. At the core of Odessa Jewry’s commercial and cultural elite since the 1820s were emigrants from Galicia - mostly from town of Brody - who first opened branch offices while still living outside the city, and then moved to Odessa. They were working mainly as intermediaries in the grain trade. Some emerged as leading grain exporters[[34]](#footnote-34).

 Migration into the urban centers, like Odessa, together with the deterioration of authority of religious leadership created opportunities for groups hitherto on the margins of Jewish society. Furthermore, as result of migrating to large cities (including Odessa) the structure of occupations among Jews changed significantly. Immigration from small cities and villages to the new urban centers weakened the role of rabbis within the Jewish communities even further.

At its beginning, Jewish immigration to Odessa was migration of individuals, not of groups or families. A few men and occasionally women came to the city. In this sense, the frontier paradigm very much suits Odessa. Only a handful of Jews lived in Khadjibey - the oldest extant local headstone of Odessa.

As mentioned, Jews came to Odessa as individuals and later a community was formed. By 1794, though, the community had a synagogue (subsidized by local Russian authorities), a burial society, a Talmud Torah, a Hekdesh (hospice for the poor), and a Kehilah (organized Jewish community structure). The first rabbi, Itahak Rabinowich was appointed in 1809. Within a few years of the city’s founding, Jews (who numbered 135 in 1797) had been elected to municipal office, setting a pattern - unusual in Russia - that would continue until the last quarter of the nineteenth century.[[35]](#footnote-35) Odessa’s Jews were not very religious, and it is no wonder that Odessa became one of the most important centers of the Haskalah (Enlightenment) Movement in Eastern Europe[[36]](#footnote-36).

Though Odessa was the most secular Jewish community in the Russian empire, still may of its Jews remained traditional Jews, and Yiddish - not Russian or Hebrew - remained their major spoken language. In 1900, 200 traditional schools (Heders) still existed, in which 5.000 young children received traditional religious education.[[37]](#footnote-37)

The development of Jewish Odessa was very similar to that of the city itself. From the beginning, Odessa was a multinational city, with substantial numbers of Armenians, Turks, Tatars, Poles, Greeks [their number was much reduced by the end of the 19th century], and Jews, as well as some French and English. Under the leadership of a series of energetic, tolerant, and economically progressive administrators (some of whom were foreign-born), Odessa’s economic foundations were established, and its port facilities improved.[[38]](#footnote-38)

The creators of Odessa as a Jewish Cultural center were its Jewish Economic elite members. They reflected the unique Odessa sense of mixing Judaism and cosmopolitanism.[[39]](#footnote-39) At the core of Odessa Jewry’s commercial and cultural elite since the 1820s were emigrants from Galicia - mostly from town of Brody - who first opened branch offices while still living outside the city, and then moved to Odessa. They were working mainly as intermediaries in the grain trade. Some emerged as leading grain exporters. Wealthy families - the Rafalovichs and Efrusis, as well as a small cluster of other families of Galician origin - eventually represented the apex of local commercial life. Galician Jews soon assumed communal leadership, overseeing local synagogue life and launching the city’s first modern Jewish school. Its director, Betsal’el Stern (appointed in 1829), and many of its first teachers were followers of the Galician Haskalah.[[40]](#footnote-40)

 In fact, traditional Jews exerted only limited influence in Odessa. Some Orthodox rabbis in Odessa tried to build ties between Orthodox, mild, and extreme enlighten Jews. The most famous was the German born Rabbi Schwabacher.[[41]](#footnote-41) By 1903, more lineal rabbis were elected to serve the Odessa community.[[42]](#footnote-42)

**Odessa – a center of Jewish Criminality facts and myths**

**Odessa - Sin City: Literary Myth and Historical Facts**

Odessa was and is still known in Russian folklore as ‘sin city’ or the ‘city of thieves.’ It was During the 1920's and 1930's, the image of Odessa as the Jewish city of sin or city of thieves emerged. [[43]](#footnote-43). During the 1920's and 1930's, the image of Odessa as the Jewish city of sin or city of thieves emerged. Much of the literature portraying criminal activity in the late 19th and early 20th century is associated with Jews. Eleanor Vanden Heuvel claimed that Jewish writers portrayed port cities as sin cities as a way of redefining Jewish identity[[44]](#footnote-44). However historical research showed that Jewish involvement in criminal activities in Odessa was less than the percentage of Jews in the total population - yet still the image remains[[45]](#footnote-45).

Much of this perception is due to the portrayal of deviant activities of Jews in the writings of important Jewish authors most notably Isaac Babel[[46]](#footnote-46). The villain hero in Babel’s work (especially “Odessa tales” or “Odessa Stories”) was a character by the name of Benya Krik[[47]](#footnote-47). The characterization of this fictional hero is based on a real gang leader in Odessa known as Mishka or Moyshe Yaponchik (his real name was Moisei Wolfovich Vinnitskiy). The fictional Krik, also known as the King, was the leader of a group of thugs and smugglers who operated in the Jewish ghetto *Moldavanka* in Odessa[[48]](#footnote-48).

The real Moisei Wolfovich Vinnitskiy, was born into a family of a Jewish wagon-builders. Vinnitskiy was around four years old when his family moved to Odessa (indeed to Moldavanka). Vinnitskiy's mother, Doba Zelmanovna, gave birth to five sons and a daughter. Sometime durinng 1897 Mishka lost his father. At first, he worked at a mattress factory as a trainee, while also attending a Jewish school. Later, as an electrician, he received a job at the "Anatra" factory[[49]](#footnote-49).

At the time of the pogroms against the Jews in Odessa in October 1905[[50]](#footnote-50), Vinnitskiy participated in the Jewish self-defense activities. Later he joined the organization of anarchists- communists Molodaia Volya (=Young Will). It was probably during that time that he received his famous street name, presumably for the shape of his eyes[[51]](#footnote-51).

Alas, fiction never represents real life[[52]](#footnote-52). Though Jewish criminals (real and fictional) in Odessa were portrayed as running contraband[[53]](#footnote-53), this was not the main Jewish criminal occupation. In the later parts of the nineteenth century, two criminal spheres were run mainly by Jews. One was ***immigration related crimes*** and the other was ***trafficking and prostitution***, that occurred not only in Odessa but in other port cities like Istanbul, Alexandria, London, Marseille, New York, and especially Buenos Aires.

**Immigration related Crime**

Jews were abundant if not most immigrants from the Russian Empire from 1870 to 1914. It was estimated that two million Jews left the Russian empire in those years (out of a total Jewish population estimated at 5.5 million in 1880)[[54]](#footnote-54). Most immigrating Jews came mainly out of the inner parts of the Pale of settlement[[55]](#footnote-55). Many of them used Odessa as the embankment point for their migration either to Central and West European ports or Mediterranean ports[[56]](#footnote-56).

Among other things potential immigrants needed immigration permissions. In Odessa and other Russian border towns they needed assistance with leaving the Russian Empire. The need to provide temporary housing as well as to obtain documents vital for immigration created a demand for "migration agents"[[57]](#footnote-57), many of them criminals[[58]](#footnote-58). Soloducha reported: “All kinds of Agents. Official, firm [company] owners and covert and helpers of all kinds - appear in huge numbers…”[[59]](#footnote-59).

Alroey identified two groups of agents. Official representatives of shipping companies and the second: villains, pretending to act as official agents and professional criminals and smugglers[[60]](#footnote-60). In many cases negotia[[61]](#footnote-61). Soloducha[[62]](#footnote-62) described how the agents deceived the immigrants. For example: Russian law allowed registering all members of a family in a single passport.

This created many problems. Soloducha described cases of families where some of those registered in the passport were delayed in the departure port due to health issues. In some cases, the entire family was detained. The agent disappeared and the family could not migrate[[63]](#footnote-63). In other cases, fictional families were created, the agent registering people who were not relatives as members of a family[[64]](#footnote-64).

A famous Jewish author and immigration activist, Alexander Harkavy[[65]](#footnote-65), reported[[66]](#footnote-66) on many passports related cases in his diary[[67]](#footnote-67). He also published a book in 1905, advising immigrants on how to avoid troubles while emigrating[[68]](#footnote-68). Harkavy was an employee of the *Jewish Colonization Association* (JCA) - an organization aiding Jewish immigration established in 1891 by Baron Maurice de Hirsch. In 1912 JCA published a brochure in Yiddish dedicated to the activities of unauthorized agents describing many activities by such swindlers[[69]](#footnote-69).

Those who were forced to stay in Russia while waiting for permission to emigrate had to find lodging near the port. These cheap hotels were run by other agents and were highly crowded. People, of both sexes, lodged sometimes three or four in a single bed. Criminals took over those lodgings, driving away the owners or buying the property very cheaply[[70]](#footnote-70).

Passport obtaining was a major problem in many incidents. Ber[[71]](#footnote-71) described in detail the difficulties an immigrant faced trying to obtain a passport. Sometimes people were not awarded a passport and had to look for forged ones. One report stated that forged passports, provided by criminals, cost much more than the sum of 15 rubles needed for a legal passport.[[72]](#footnote-72)

According to Russian law men could obtain passports, but women could not. A woman wishing to emigrate had to register in her father’s or husband’s passport. Immigrating women needed to be accompanied by men in whose passport they were registered, many of them were criminals using forged passports[[73]](#footnote-73). In many cases women were raped while traveling to their destination. Upon arrival were bought by local brothel handlers, thus becoming prostitutes in the new country.[[74]](#footnote-74)

Odessa Jewish criminals offered solutions to such problems. Prospective immigrants were lodged in crowded facilities near the port owned by the gangs. They terrorized other potential landlords, running them out of business[[75]](#footnote-75). They also provided falsified registration in passports to women[[76]](#footnote-76). This was also related to the trafficking issue, discussed next.

**Trafficking and Immigration**

Jewish criminals many of them from the Jewish Ghetto Moldavanka in Odessa[[77]](#footnote-77), operated brothels within the Russian empire[[78]](#footnote-78) and organized international trafficking networks, transferring/relocating young girls and young women from Eastern Europe to Turkey and the Middle East (via the Black Sea) on the one hand and to Central and Western Europe and from there to the Americas, on the other hand[[79]](#footnote-79).

During late nineteenth century, Odessa became a center for trafficking to Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the North and South America. Police statistics from the Russian Empire[[80]](#footnote-80), the Polish districts (mainly Warsaw)[[81]](#footnote-81); Austrian Empire[[82]](#footnote-82); Germany, New York, Istanbul and Argentina[[83]](#footnote-83) establish that this specific criminal activity (sometimes referred to as “white slavery”) was very much a Jewish occupation. Jews were also prominent in shipping "white slaves" out of the neighboring Hapsburg Empire as well[[84]](#footnote-84). For example, research from 1908 by Zionist officials indicates that in 1907, hundred and four out hundred twenty four pimps tried in Russian courts (84%); eighty of ninety three pimps entering Argentina and Brazil (86%); sixty eight of hundred and one Hungarian pimps (67%) and thirty eight of thirty nine pimps (97%) in the Austrian province of Galicia were Jews[[85]](#footnote-85). Even the vocabulary used in this trade came mostly from the Yiddish language[[86]](#footnote-86).

How did the Jewish community in Odessa and in other places[[87]](#footnote-87) react to this particular Jewish occupation? Especially since most of the young women victimized were Jewish[[88]](#footnote-88). The Jewish public was very much aware of the phenomenon. The issue was discussed most thoroughly in the Hebrew and Yiddish press[[89]](#footnote-89). Many stories of young women and in some cases very young (age 14-15) and their misfortunes were published[[90]](#footnote-90). Jewish Newspapers reported at length the activities of the men and women running this industry, including naming them and their various nicknames, the houses they operated from, etc. Thus, Menahem Sheldorf, (A.K.A. Shlomo Bloom or Shlomo Haimowitz) from Odessa, who escorted at least 24 young women from Eastern Europe to Argentina, was mentioned in newspapers, warning young women and their fathers of his malice[[91]](#footnote-91).

Many of the reports warned parents of young women about the various ways criminals took to mobilize young and often innocent victims[[92]](#footnote-92). Newspaper reports encouraged parents (especially fathers) of young girls and women to protect their daughters from the possibility of being kidnapped and becoming prostitutes either in Russia or sent abroad[[93]](#footnote-93).

At the same time, in many places, including Odessa[[94]](#footnote-94), criminals were important financial contributors of the Jewish community. In many cases religious leaders of the community even supplied character testimonies in favor of those criminals in courts. (Many such cases are known in other port cities such as Buenos Aires[[95]](#footnote-95), Alexandria[[96]](#footnote-96) and Rio de Janeiro[[97]](#footnote-97)).

Yet pimps, madams and prostitutes were not allowed to be buried within the center parts of the Jewish cemeteries. According to Jewish tradition, people with dubious character, people who committed religious offences and people who committed suicide are buried at the outskirts of the cemetery in special sections. Most of those engaging in the prostitution industry were buried in these special sections or in some cases (New York & Buenos Aires) in separate graveyards.[[98]](#footnote-98)

Ambivalence was the name of the game. Trafficking was regarded as a horrible crime. Other criminals, dealing in less morally threatening activities, were buried right in the center of the communal cemetery[[99]](#footnote-99).

Jewish women worldwide organized battling against prostitution and trafficking[[100]](#footnote-100). The *Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women in London* - JAPGW[[101]](#footnote-101) and the *Jüdischer Frauenbund* - JFB (The League of Jewish Women) in Germany[[102]](#footnote-102) are just a few examples. The English Organization was formed by Lady Battersea[[103]](#footnote-103) and German by Bertha Pappenheim. Pappenheim also formed a similar organization in Eastern Europe based in Warsaw[[104]](#footnote-104).

Women's organizations were supported in combating prostitution by other Jewish Philanthropic organizations - *Jewish Colonization Association* (JCA) is a notable example. Thus, JCA co-operated with JAPGW in 1912, helping 15 young women who emigrated from Russia and went to work as prostitutes in London[[105]](#footnote-105).

Why did trafficking take hold in port and border cities more than in other urban centers? Urban networks provide a possible explanation. Charles Tilly claimed that social networks played a major role in urbanization[[106]](#footnote-106). Robert Lee added that port cities played an essential part in the urbanization process, especially in Europe[[107]](#footnote-107). Trafficking needed networks, and port cities like Odessa provided such network operations[[108]](#footnote-108).

The phenomenon discussed here coincided with the huge waves of late 19th early 20th century migrations. The role of port cities in this period of migration was very significant. In the case of prostitution, the network spread, as we saw, from the ports of origin to ports of destination (Odessa to Buenos Aires is for example). In some incidents the network had a familial basis. Many reports in Hebrew newspapers describe such networks. For example, Joseph Bord and Yehuda Banda, who smuggled women from Eastern Europe to Argentina, were brothers in law. Bord's assistant was one Napoleon Dikfaden. Dikfaden's wife Sara served as a 'Madame' in a brothel in Buenos Aires.[[109]](#footnote-109) Anton Hirschfeld, a Hungarian Jew, and his wife sent young women from Budapest to Odessa.[[110]](#footnote-110)

Young girls were "harvested" in East European small cities as well as metropolises - again many in Odessa - and were promised husband, lodging and work in the new world or in the new countries[[111]](#footnote-111). They arrived at ports in Western and Central Europe accompanied by young men[[112]](#footnote-112). Sometimes traffickers were intercepted. David Herman (A.K.A. Hermann Roder), assisted by his wife, tried to smuggle six young women, but was spotted by police in the port of Hamburg and was sent back to Russia. According to the report in Ha-Tzfira, Herman was successful in smuggling young women from Odessa and Warsaw via Hamburg to Argentina, at least twice before.[[113]](#footnote-113)

Young men as well as older women were very instrumental in recruiting prostitutes. Men ntrapped young women, seducing them in various ways[[114]](#footnote-114). Older women also served as intermediaries, offering the young women, coming from villages and small cities to the big city of Odessa, different ways to adjust to life in the city. Those women (known in Yiddish as Reiferke) provided the young girls work and lodging[[115]](#footnote-115). Young men were introduced – sometimes by females working in the trafficking industry - to young women, recruiting them to work in the prostitution industry[[116]](#footnote-116). In some cases, young women were drugged and raped. This enabled the brothel owners to take control[[117]](#footnote-117). Drugged and humiliated, these women were sent from Odessa to serve as prostitutes in port cities in Europe, the Middle East and America.

Other women were conned into prostitution. While in Odessa and other origin cities, these women were treated with respect and were persuaded to sail to other countries. They were promised workplace, or a potential husband in the new country[[118]](#footnote-118). Since women were not granted passports, they had to be registered in men’s passports - many of those falsified[[119]](#footnote-119). On board, they were raped, beaten and upon arrival were handed over to local brothel owners. Sometimes they were auctioned to competing brothel owners[[120]](#footnote-120). Being in unfamiliar surroundings, they were unable to resist or escape[[121]](#footnote-121).

Why did trafficking and prostitution become a unique Jewish occupation in the late 19th century? The late Israeli anthropologist Abraham Stahl claimed that prostitution was a by- product of the transition from traditional to modern society[[122]](#footnote-122). Indeed, claimed Stahl, prostitution was a by-product of passage between cultures. In the discussion I offer a different explanation

**Discussion**

In this paper I tried to analyze Jewish criminal activities in the Port city of Odessa during late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I claim that during the nineteenth century East European Jewish society underwent a huge change from a traditional homogeneous society to a modern diversified one. Life under Russian rule was also very much different from living under Polish regime. This process of modernization created a social, political, and cultural crisis within the Jewish society.

Engaging in criminal activities was one of the responses to this new situation. Historians agree that criminality is much more common in Port cities and border cities, where many Jews resided[[123]](#footnote-123). An attempt was made to portray Jewish criminal activities in Odessa, the main port city of the Russian Empire[[124]](#footnote-124). Such activities in Odessa were not unique and occurred in other Jewish urban centers as well[[125]](#footnote-125).

Using Simmel's theory on urbanization and other theories on Marginalization, the reasons for criminal activities by Jews in Odessa were investigated. My main claim is that migration (both internal - within the Russian Empire and international), was the main reason for the two major criminal occupations of Jews in Odessa: Immigration related crime as well as prostitution and trafficking.

Immigration related crimes.

Many of the Jews emigrating out of the Russian empire went via Odessa. Many emigrants and especially women became depended on agents. The need to provide passports and emigration permits, and the fact the women were not awarded passports brought about the need for migration agents. Many of those agents took advantage of the emigrants' plights[[126]](#footnote-126).

Prostitution and trafficking

Trafficking was the 'Jewish' specialty in crime - not only in Odessa. Running prostitution establishments within the Russian empire was a Jewish realm. However, Jews operated international trafficking as well. Indeed, Jews were much more prominent in international trafficking than in running local brothels. Many young women were shifted from Eastern Europe to Western Europe, the Middle East (especially Turkey[[127]](#footnote-127), Egypt and Palestine) and North and South America.

The great distress of women, who entered the general workforce en masse, was due to the terrible conditions accompanying the Industrial Revolution. Due to the urbanization of East European Jewry, many young Jewish women migrated from the shtetls to cities such as Warsaw, Lodz, and Odessa. Migration from villages to cities, which caused both difficulties in adapting to life in the city and a loss of direction in life affected vulnerable women who had no work or prospect of marriage in the city[[128]](#footnote-128). Yiddish speaking men approached these women and recruited them into the prostitution industry. Many young Jewish women were sent to serve as prostitutes in other port cities in the old and the new world[[129]](#footnote-129).

It was virtually impossible to work as a prostitute in small towns and shtetls where everyone knew everybody else and prostitutes were ostracized. In large cities, prostitution took place in certain quarters controlled by the Jewish underworld, to which the authorities turned a blind eye. In 1908, the American consul in Odessa reported that “All the business of prostitution in the city is in the hands of the Jews”[[130]](#footnote-130).

In addition to the general causes of prostitution: economic distress, loss of parental authority and the weakening of the family because of poverty, another additional factor was the restriction of settlement placed on Jews (Pale of settlement)[[131]](#footnote-131). This caused overcrowding, poverty, and unemployment, creating a fertile environment for crime among unemployed men, while several young Jewish women found refuge from economic distress by working as prostitutes.

However, the increase in prostitution among Jews is related mainly to the large waves of immigration from Eastern Europe. The migration of young men from Europe to the New World and to the Middle East, Western and Central Europe, created large concentrations of men and led to the increased demand for prostitutes in those locations[[132]](#footnote-132). Furthermore, the marriage of bourgeois men was delayed until they had sufficient resources to support a family, and in many cases waiting for a bride arriving from Europe[[133]](#footnote-133). Because gender norms of bourgeois society did not permit sexual relations outside marriage with women of their own class, single young bourgeois males turned to prostitutes. Young women were sent to those new centers[[134]](#footnote-134).

Relating trafficking to immigration and immigration networks[[135]](#footnote-135) theories explain the role of Jews in the international prostitution industry. Leman and Janssens identified that human trafficking networks are comprised of two basic components: rational and cultural[[136]](#footnote-136). The rational component of the network was building a business. The cultural component was based on Yiddish culture. The network operated in Yiddish[[137]](#footnote-137), not in Polish or Russian, keeping it within the Jewish realm.

This fits the Jewish case very much. During late 19th century Odessa became an important component of these migration networks[[138]](#footnote-138). Odessa, as well as Warsaw and other Jewish metropolises, was the basis of such networks[[139]](#footnote-139).

The case of Odessa is special but not unique. Similar criminal activities, migration networks and international trafficking organizations were to be found in other Jewish major urban centers within the Russian empire and outside it. Odessa still had its special attributes: new settlement, port city (one of a very few in the Russian empire), with a cosmopolitan population. All those enhanced processes that occurred within the Jewish society in the Russian empire.

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198,233 (49.09%) Russian; 124,511 (30.83%) Jews; 37,925 (9.39%) Ukrainians; 17,395 (4.31%) Poles; 10,248 (2.54%) Germans; 5,086 (1.26%); 1,437 (0.36%) Tatars; 1,401 (0.35%) Armenians; 1,267 (0.31%) Belarussians; 1,137 (0.28%) French. *First General Population Census of the Russian Empire* - [Первая Всеобщая перепись населения Российской Империи],

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110. 'Hungary', *Ha-Maggid*, 19 March 1903. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Vincent, 2005, passim. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Don Armando. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Anon, *Ha-Melitz* 27 July 1888; *Ha-Tzfira*, 24 July 1888 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Bristow, 1982, 63-64 & Anon, 'Live Merchandise Commerce' *Naye Welt*, [New World], 19 February 1910 (Yiddish). [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. *Ha-Maggid,* 19 September 1889; *Ha-Tzfira*, 18 January 1889 & 7 February 1889 are just two of many news items describing older women misleading young girls by promising them marriage or work and entrapping then to work in brothels. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. *Naye Welt*, op. cit, 1910.(Yiddish) [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Y"L, 'Women Trafficking and Immigration', *Der Yudisher Immigrant*, 13 November 1912. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Vincent, 2005, Glickman, 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Alroey, 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Vincent, 2005; Mirlman, 1986. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Y"L, 1912. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Abraham Stahl. 'Prostitution amongst Jews as by-product of passage between cultures’

*Megamot*, 24(2) (1978), 202-225 (Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Lee, 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. On Jewish communal activities and organizations in Odessa around 1900 see: Alexis Hofmeister, *Selbstorganisation und Bürgerlichkeit: jüdisches Vereinswesen in Odessa um 1900*, (Leipzig: Series: Schriften des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts, volume 8, 2007), (=Ph. D. Dissertation, Koln University, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Marianna Hakkarainen, 'Jewish tradition faces the Soviet economy: moral dilemma of "shadow" entrepreneurship in the former Pale of Settlement, Ukraine', *East European Jewish Affairs*, 43(2), (2013), 190-205 [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Alroey, 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Istanbul was the port nearest to Odessa and many young girls were sent via Odessa, some of them were shifted to other ports under the Ottoman rule; see the sources published by Rifat N. Bali, *The Jews and prostitution in Constantinople, 1854-1922*, (Istanbul: ISIS press, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. A report in *Ha-Tzfira,* 30 January 1890, tells the story of a young women aged 19, who migrated from her shtetl to Warsaw and found work in the tobacco industry. The young woman found lodging with a Jewish widow. A local gang of pimps tried to recruit her as a prostitute, offering her many temptations. Those attempts failed, but in many other cases they succeeded. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Donna J. Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina*, (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska press, 1990), 5-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Bristow, 1982, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Richard H. Rowlands, 'Geographical patterns of the Jewish population in the Pale of settlement of late 19th century Russia', *Jewish Social Studies*, 48(3-4), (1986), 207-234; see also Marianna Hakkarainen, 'Jewish tradition faces the Soviet economy: moral dilemma of "shadow" entrepreneurship in the former Pale of Settlement, Ukraine', *East European Jewish Affairs*, 43(2), (2013), 190-205, Hakkarainen refers not only to the soviet period but also to pre-soviet times. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. See for example: Francesco Cordasco & Thomas Monroe Pitkin, *The White Slave Trade and the Immigrants: A Chapter in American Social History,* (Michigan: Blaine Ethridge Books, 1981). [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Maureen E. Montgomery, *'Gilded Prostitution': Status, Money, and Transatlantic Marriages, 1870-1914*, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 1989). Though her research concentrates on higher class society, some of Montgomery’s conclusions apply also to other groups. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Elizabeth Alice Clement, *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Here I follow Dirk Hoerder, 'Segmented Macrosystems and Networking Individuals: The Balancing Functions of Migration Processes,' in: Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen (eds.), *Migration, Migration History, History. Old Paradigms and New Perspectives*, (Bern: Lang, 1997), 73-84; see also: Clé Lesger, Leo Lucassen, & Marlou Schrover, 'Is There Life Outside the Migrant Network? German Immigrants in 19th Century Netherlands and the Need for a More Balanced Migration Typology,' *Annales de Démographie Historique*, 104, no. 2 (2002): 29-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Leman & Janssens, op. cit. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Albert Londres who worked as a doorman in a brothel in Buenos Aires wrote a memoire demonstrating that the whole prostitution operation was run in Yiddish. See: Albert Londres*, Der ̣Weg ̣eyn Buenos-Ayres [Sic!]: di soydes̀ fun froyenhandl*, [The way to Buenos Aires; the secrets of trading women] (Yiddish), (Warsaw: A. Shklyar, 1928). [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Keely Stauter-Halsted & Nancy M. Wingfield, 'Introduction: The Construction of Sexual Deviance in Late Imperial Eastern Europe', *Journal of the history of Sexuality*, 20(2), (2011), 215-224. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. James O. Finckenauer & Elin J. Waring, *Russian Mafia in America, Immigration, Culture and Crime*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), esp. pp 49-51;This was the case regarding migration to other places, see: Tobias Brinkmann, 'Points of Passage: Reexamining Jewish Migrations from Eastern Europe after 1880', in Tobias Brinkmann (ed.), *Points of Passage: Jewish Transmigrants from Eastern Europe in Scandinavia, Germany and Britain 1880-1914*, (New York & Oxford: Berghahn, 2013, esp. p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)