In the midst of a wave of anti-Semitism in Argentina following the abduction of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann by Mossad agents, the Jewish bi-weekly La Luz expressed its deep concern for the future of the Argentine Jewish community:

> For Argentine Jewry, the stormy year we have just left behind us was the saddest of the hundred years of its existence in this country. This intolerable situation has caused Jews in some circles to think that Jewish life may be impossible in Argentina [...] one thing is clear now: The beautiful ideal, enveloped in rosy expectations concerning the future, which the Jewish settlers brought with them...began to crumble with each Jewish child slashed with swastikas, each Jewish institution shot at [...]. The painful dilemma is posed: Does the Jewish community have a future here, and is it worthwhile for Jews to continue living in Argentina?

This was neither the first nor the last time that such an alarm was sounded by Jews in this South American republic. The first time was during the 1919 pogrom in Buenos Aires known as the ‘Tragic Week.’ The repression of labor unrest in Buenos Aires was accompanied by a series of violent acts by volunteer squads of ‘patriotic’ youth against the ‘rusos,’ that is, the Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe identified as Bolsheviks and anarchists because of their origins and faith. These ‘rusos’ were supposedly plotting to overthrow the Argentine government and establish rule by worker councils. The number of Jewish victims in this ‘pogrom’ is still a matter of debate. Pinie Wald was arrested as the would-be dictator of a Soviet republic in the Southern Cone.

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1 La Luz, 5 October 1962.
The future of the Jewish community was most recently the subject of doubts and soul-searching following the 1994 bombing of the AMIA (Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina, or Argentine Jewish Mutual Aid Society), and again during the 2001–2002 economic crisis that severely hit the middle classes to which most Argentine Jews belong. On 18 July 1994 a car bomb exploded in front of the AMIA building in the center of Buenos Aires, killing 85 people and wounding hundreds. The attack—which had been preceded by the March 1992 bomb attack on the Israeli embassy in the Argentine capital—destroyed the building that housed the AMIA and several other Jewish community organizations, including a library and community archives. In the aftermath, Jews in Argentina came together to mourn, to fight for justice, and to remember the victims. The financial crisis at the beginning of this century had dramatic consequences for community institutions, which were unable to honor their obligations. Entire families lost the means of living normal lives. This situation gave rise to wide-spread Jewish poverty and, for the first time in the community’s history, hunger among several Jewish Argentine families.

Still, during my many visits to Buenos Aires in the past decade, I could not but notice what a rich and varied life Argentine Jews enjoy. Contrary to the image portrayed in too many studies on anti-Semitism in Argentina, Jews have integrated very well into Argentine society, economy, and culture, often without rejecting the Jewish component of their individual or collective identity.

Before establishing the historical context for the main axis of discussion and analysis in this book, I would like to share the following story. A couple of years ago, my wife and I went to Tel Aviv’s cinematheque to watch a documentary entitled El año que viene… en Argentina ("Next