

COMPETING GERMANIES

INTRODUCTION

Argentina's Competing German Theaters

There exists a single German people, which is not subject to borders, but instead can be found anywhere where German people live who speak German, think in German, and feel themselves to be Germans.

—JOSEPH GOEBBELS, REICH THEATER WEEK,
VIENNA, 1938

Reprinted in the widely read Argentine newspaper *La Razón*, Joseph Goebbels's speech at the 1938 Reich Theater Week pinpointed the root of the bitter conflict that had enveloped German Buenos Aires at least since 1933.¹ Celebrating the Nazification of Austrian theater, Goebbels asserted that, essentially, claims to German identity were not defined by political boundaries, but rather were contingent upon national affection and cultural representation. Not only did Goebbels underscore the importance of culture in National Socialist visions of Germanness, but he unwittingly bolstered the position of exiled German antifascists, who posited themselves as the true representatives of Germany by upholding German culture's accomplishments in painting, music, literature, and theater.

1. "Semana del Teatro en Viena," *La Razón*, June 14, 1938.

For this reason they named the first large antifascist conference in exile, held in Paris in 1935, “In Defense of Culture.”² In Argentina, too, supporters and opponents of Nazism weaponized culture to define and claim a single legitimate German identity, as well as attack their adversaries and advance their own agenda among the nation’s large German-speaking populations. Moreover, in nominally neutral Argentina these cultural battles were waged with an impassioned urgency. For nationalists, antifascists, and Zionists in Buenos Aires, the enemy was not only across the ocean—it was across town as well.

“The Argentines Came on Boats”

Contrasting the South American country with his native Mexico, Carlos Fuentes affirmed Argentina as a nation of immigrants when he commented: “The Mexicans come from Indians (indios), but the Argentines came on boats.”³ From 1881 to 1930, nearly six million immigrants entered Argentina. Across the Americas, only the United States received a greater number of immigrants in this period. Primarily as a result of these arrivals, Argentina’s population increased more than fourfold, from 1.8 million in 1869 to 7.9 million in 1914, when foreign nationals comprised 30 percent of the population.⁴ In Buenos Aires, the number of inhabitants skyrocketed from 177,787 in 1869 to 2.4 million in 1936, of which 870,000, or 36 percent, were foreign nationals.⁵ Most immigrants hailed from Italy and Spain, accounting for 39.4 percent and 35.2 percent of foreign nationals in the country in 1914, respectively. By comparison, German, Austro-Hungarian, and Swiss citizens made up 3.4 percent of the total number of foreign nationals in Argentina, having dipped from 4.2 percent since 1895.⁶ Between 1857 and 1914, there were

2. Hermand, *Culture in Dark Times*, xv.

3. Leiva, “La inmigración en la Argentina de posguerra,” 8.

4. Bryce, *To Belong in Buenos Aires*, 14.

5. “Del Archivo: El Censo de 1936,” 106.

6. *Tercer Censo Nacional*, vol. 1, *Antecedentes y comentarios* (Buenos Aires: Talleres Gráficos de L.J. Rosso y Cía, 1916), cited in Bryce, *To Belong in Buenos Aires*, 17.

62,006 German, 136,079 Austro-Hungarian, and 33,057 Swiss immigrants to Argentina.⁷

Numbers for German speakers are more elusive, because many Swiss and Austro-Hungarians did not speak German, but some arrivals from other countries did. German speakers entering Argentina from neighboring South American countries may have been registered as Paraguayans, Brazilians, Bolivians, and so on. There also was a steady flow of German-speaking immigrants from the Volga region of the Russian Empire to the Argentine provinces of Misiones, Santa Fe, Entre Ríos, and Buenos Aires from the 1870s to the 1920s. At a recent symposium in Buenos Aires, Horacio Walter of the National University of La Plata claimed that there may well have been more arrivals from the Volga region than from Germany itself.⁸ If true, this would upend the math on German speakers, because according to government immigration data it would mean that the largest number of them were registered as Russians. Furthermore, the accuracy and comprehensiveness of government statistics must be taken with a dose of skepticism. In the last analysis, both historical and current calculations are imbued with conjecture.

Leo Mirau, a historical contemporary, calculated that in 1920 there were more than 100,000 Germans and over 200,000 speakers of German in Argentina.⁹ Buoyed by Argentina's neutrality during World War I and spurred by economic and political crises in Europe, during the 1920s the number of German-speaking immigrants increased, by some estimates reaching 25,000 annually in the early interwar period.¹⁰ From 1923 to 1930 Argentine authorities also noted immigrants' mother tongue and classified just shy of 94,000 entries as native speakers of German in this period. Ronald Newton calculates that this rate would mean that from 1918 to 1932 between 130,000 and 140,000 German speakers

7. Bryce, *To Belong in Buenos Aires*, 169.

8. Walter, "Los Alemanes de Rusia en la Argentina."

9. Mirau, *Argentinien von heute*, 119.

10. Anne Saint Sauveur-Henn, "Die deutsche Einwanderung in Argentinien," in Meding, *Nationalsozialismus und Argentinien*, 12.

entered Argentina, a figure corroborated by Heinrich Volberg.¹¹ By contrast, in his extensively researched book *To Belong in Buenos Aires*, Benjamin Bryce places the number of German-speaking immigrants from 1881 to 1930 at 100,000.¹²

Other forms of identification and affiliation, such as religion, social class, gender, and generation created contrasting communities of German speakers; however, most earlier immigrants favored the Wilhelmine monarchy over the Weimar Republic and, generally, welcomed National Socialism as a return to strong, conservative, patriotic government. Their presence was countered by the arrival of approximately 45,000 Jewish refugees and political dissidents during the Nazi regime. This influx meant that nearly 20 percent of German speakers in Argentina were victims of National Socialism, a figure that was much higher in the capital and, of course, had a transformative impact there.¹³ Adding these exiles to the existing population, Georg Ismar estimates that the total number of German speakers in Argentina during World War II was roughly 250,000.¹⁴ Argentina received just over 100,000 German- and Austrian-born emigrants in the decade following World War II, a significant percentage of whom were war criminals.¹⁵ Throughout the time in focus, German Buenos Aires was charged with sharp and constantly evolving social and political tension.

Setting the Stage

While this book on emigrant theaters in Argentina is anchored in German exile studies, its import to our cultural knowledge stretches

11. Newton, "Nazi Menace" in Argentina, 81; Volberg, *Auslandsdeutschtum und Drittes Reich*, 6.

12. Bryce, *To Belong in Buenos Aires*, 14.

13. Saint Sauveur-Henn, *Un siècle d'émigration allemande vers l'Argentine 1853–1945*, 249; Schwarcz, "Die deutschsprachigen Juden in Argentinien," 204; Jakisch, *El nazismo*, 158.

14. Ismar, *Der Pressekrieg*, 12.

15. Gerald Steinacher, "Argentinien als NS-Fluchtziel: Die Emigration von Kriegsverbrechern und nazionalsozialisten durch Italien an den Río de la Plata 1946–1955," in Meding and Ismar, *Argentinien und das Dritte Reich Mediale und reale Präsenz, Ideologie Transfer, Folgewirkungen*, 243–244.

across historiography, dramatic theory, and literary criticism to link the disparate disciplines of German, Jewish, Latin American, and migration studies. Its tight *mise-en-scène* of smaller emigrant populations enables a sustained, nuanced look at the way more universal themes such as denominationalism, multilingualism, hybridity, and integration emerge and develop across decades. Meanwhile, the aesthetic tangibility and social dynamism of live theater map emigrants' contributions to the pluralism that is integral to all national identities, perhaps especially in the Americas. In this sense, multiple scholars agree that immigrants and ethnic minorities are in fact "normative Latin Americans" or, in my view, normative Americans writ large.¹⁶ The challenges, clashes, and contradictions of forming a pluralistic society are the backbone of this book.

Dramatic literature and performances endure as occasions for memory and reinvention across both real and imagined borders of ethnicity, nation, and origin. The processes of remembering and reinventing inform cultural belonging and exclusion, especially when they are sculpted and reinforced by the volatile, in-the-moment interplay between actors and theatergoers. Thus, theatrical performances bring forth, manifest, and transmit senses of cultural identification and conflict within the intercultural matrix of the modern, cosmopolitan metropolis. The evolving laboratory of stage and city illuminates a key issue in the discipline of dramatic theory: the three-sided relationship of nation, history, and invention. The project of summoning a representative audience that will recognize itself onstage and abide by this depiction outside the theater depends on the ensemble and audience's mutual validation of certain works through their enshrinement in the repertoire.¹⁷ Actors and spectators then assent to complex and imaginative schemes to imbue or refashion cultural identity through the dramatic presentation of these works. The degree of variation in the repertoire and the plays' depiction show us how theater reflects and propels the

16. Jeffrey Lesser and Ranaan Rein, "Motherlands of Choice: Ethnicity, Belonging, and Identities among Jewish-Latin Americans," in Foote and Goebel, *Immigration and National Identities in Latin America*, 156; Bryce, *To Belong in Buenos Aires*, 15.

17. Kruger, *National Stage*, 3.

evolution of spectators' views of their history, values, community, and sense of nationhood. In this way, Argentina's emigrant theaters render the mechanics of the epigram of Germany's national poet, Friedrich Schiller: the planks of the dramatic stage are boards that mean the world.

These emigrants' world was mid-twentieth-century Buenos Aires. The cultural landscape of the Argentine capital during this time was unique. No other major metropolitan city witnessed immediate, local, and fully open competition between Nazi, anti-fascist, and Zionist educational, media, and cultural institutions throughout the World War II period. Like Joseph Goebbels, who seized upon the Reich Theater Week to internationalize claims to Germanness, German-speaking nationalists, antifascists, and Zionists in Buenos Aires believed theater was crucial to their highly politicized efforts at identity formation and community building. Each group devoted considerable resources to competing against its rivals onstage. During the 1930s German emigrants in the Argentine capital founded the nationalist German Theater and its antifascist adversary, the Free German Stage. Created in 1938 by nationalist German emigrants, most of whom had arrived in Argentina in the early twentieth century, the German Theater performed to sold-out audiences at the National Theater, a cavernous venue with a seating capacity of 1,155. In a strategy of retaliation, the next year German-speaking Jewish refugees founded the Free German Stage, the only professional exilic theater worldwide to stage regular performances throughout World War II. Intense competition between these populations and their theaters continued for decades after 1945. Shaped by shifting cultural-political agendas in Europe, Argentina, and among their own ranks, both ensembles eventually recognized the imperative of integration with Argentine artists and audiences. By invoking their mutual cultural heritage and urging unity against communism, the West German embassy pushed the emigrant blocs toward reconciliation; however, its efforts were a charade contingent upon an unsustainable and indefensible amnesia of the past.

Although Buenos Aires is its epicenter, this book analyzes the competition for German cultural representation across much of

Argentina, from the Patagonian Andes to the rainforest corridor in Misiones province. The period in focus begins with a celebrity guest performance funded by the German government in 1934, the first major theatrical production overseas after Hitler came to power, and then covers the escalating competition between Argentina's German theaters through World War II, Peronism, and the first decades of the Cold War. The discussion concludes in 1965, when the West German Federal Foreign Office attempted to mollify enduring antagonism in German Buenos Aires by relocating Reinhard Olszewski's German Chamber Theater from Santiago, Chile, to the Argentine capital. In the process, it eliminated subventions to the Free German Stage, effectively terminating its ensemble.¹⁸ Along the way, I address the following core questions: How did the German Theater and the Free German Stage contribute to transatlantic and transnational projects, such as delineating and consolidating German identity in South America, advancing political agendas, and integrating with the Argentine host society? Why, arguably more than any other form of art or cultural representation, did theater have such wide, enduring, and polarizing appeal in German Buenos Aires and beyond? Finally, how does putting theater at the center revise perceptions of German-speaking nationalist, antifascist, and Zionist populations in Argentina?

The conclusion revisits these questions, distilling the evidence presented and analyzed over the course of the book into a concise response to each. The dynamics of live dramatic events, which Freddie Rokem has referred to as "theatrical energies," are central to these discussions. The emotive spectacle of shared dramatic depictions can potentiate and elevate polemics from private to public discourse. In so doing their theaters defined, stabilized, coalesced, and then frequently redefined, disrupted, and cleaved nationalist, antifascist, Zionist, and apolitical blocs. Drawing from the broader context of German Buenos Aires as well as select theatrical presentations, this study highlights key themes, such as the influence

18. The Foreign Office relocated a new theater company to Buenos Aires, Reinhard Olszewski's German Chamber Theater, a postwar outfit formerly based in Santiago, Chile.

of theater on memory, community cohesion and polarization, national and political allegiance, and intercultural integration over the course of decades. To evaluate this impact, on- and offstage factors are considered, including repertory, cast, reception, funding, and, especially, performance theory. For example, even as many other factors shifted, Ludwig Ney's steadfast adherence to fascist drama theory and the positive reception of such presentations in the German and, later, the Argentine population demonstrates the constancy of National Socialist aesthetics among many nationalist Germans as well as their acceptability in Peronist Argentina. Concentrating on both fascist and antifascist theater reveals issues, interactions, and modes of analysis that have been underexplored in secondary literature on Germans in Latin America, and in migration studies in general. Thus, this work utilizes a fresh perspective to provide a more rounded portrait of diverse German trajectories from emigrants to immigrants in Argentina.

Extant Scholarship

According to the Society for Exile Studies, during the 1970s and 1980s scholars of German exilic literature created a framework that defined the field as research on "the circumstances of flight and . . . cultural, scientific, artistic, and political accomplishments of the German-speaking emigration from 1933 to 1945."¹⁹ Although the term *emigrant* is politically neutral, the implication has always been that exile studies was concerned with refugees fleeing fascist persecution, and representative publications by leading scholars confirm this agenda.²⁰ A sampling of studies from the same time span with a narrower focus on specific locations, art forms, and

19. *Exil*, Gesellschaft für Exilforschung, <http://www.exilforschung.de/index.php?p=2>.

20. Berendsohn, *Die humanistische Front*; Walter, *Deutsche Exilliteratur 1933–1950*; Durzak, *Die deutsche Exilliteratur 1933–1945*; Köpke and Winkler, *Exilliteratur 1933–1945*.

artists also emphasizes antifascists and refugees.²¹ It is impossible to catalog all publications in the field here; however, the yearbook of the Society for Exile Studies, *Exilforschung*, functions as a bellwether for the discipline. From its inception in 1983 to the present, *Exilforschung* has emphasized topics such as common destinations of exiles,²² Jewish exile,²³ remigration,²⁴ inner emigration,²⁵ as well as politics,²⁶ music,²⁷ women,²⁸ science,²⁹ and journalism in exile.³⁰ By the 1990s there was concern about the continuing relevance of the field, exemplified by Bernard Spies's statement that many Germanists considered exile studies to be an "obsolete, closed chapter."³¹ A few years later Claudia Albert claimed the discipline had grown stagnant, because for decades it had tended toward projects of meticulous data-collecting that often neglected issues of aesthetics, cultural theory, and migration. The foreboding title of Albert's article, "The End of Exile Studies?," underscored her uncertainty about the future.³² Perhaps in consequence, research in German exile studies has since expanded far beyond its original scope. Gender transitions, cultural transfer, migration and diaspora studies, linguistics, networks and transnational communities,

21. Emmerich, *Lyrik des Exils*; Lützel, *Hermann Broch*; Pfanner, *Exile in New York*; Spalek and Strelka, *Deutsche Exilliteratur seit 1933*; Wächter, *Theater im Exil*.

22. Koebner, Köpke, and Radkau, *Stalin und die Intellektuellen und andere Themen*; Koebner et al., *Fluchtpunkte des Exils und andere Themen*; Krohn et al., *Metropolen des Exils*.

23. Koebner et al., *Das jüdische Exil und andere Themen*; Krohn et al., *Jüdische Emigration*; Bannasch, Schreckenberger, and Steinweis, *Exil und Shoah*.

24. Krohn et al., *Exil und Remigration*.

25. Krohn et al., *Aspekte der künstlerischen Inneren Emigration 1933–1945*.

26. Krohn et al., *Politische Aspekte des Exils*; Krohn et al., *Exil und Widerstand*.

27. Krohn et al., *Kulturelle Räume und ästhetische Universalität*.

28. Krohn et al., *Frauen und Exil*.

29. Koebner et al., *Vertreibung der Wissenschaften und andere Themen*.

30. Krohn et al., *Publizistik im Exil und andere Themen*.

31. Bernhard Spies, "Exilliteratur—ein abgeschlossenes Kapitel? Überlegungen zu Stand und Perspektiven der Literaturwissenschaftlichen Exilforschung," *Exilforschung* 14 (1996): 11–30, at 11.

32. Albert, "Ende der Exilforschung?," 182.

multigenerational studies, and the possibilities of transfer and comparison across multiple historical situations are current themes.³³ Edited by Claus-Dieter Krohn, the massive, 1,356-page *Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration 1933–1945* covers German emigrant scientists, historians, philosophers, and pedagogues, as well as architects, writers, actors, musicians, and painters, across five continents.³⁴ Beyond famous exiles, scholarship now also includes less-researched emigrants to Palestine, Bolivia, Uruguay, Argentina, China, India, and other nations.³⁵

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw greater interest in antifascist art and literature in Latin America, including Arnold Spitta's *Paul Zech im südamerikanischen Exil* (1978) and Wolfgang Kießling's *Exil in Lateinamerika* (1980).³⁶ Numerous studies on exilic literature and theater in Latin America and, specifically, Argentina followed.³⁷ All emphasize victims of Nazism exclusively. Of course, ample research on pre- and postwar nationalist German emigration to Argentina also exists.³⁸ German scholars Holger Meding

33. For example, presentations at the 2018 symposium of the North American Society of Exile Studies at Loyola University Chicago included Pamela Caughie, "Between Nations, Between Genders: Transgender and the Experience of Exile"; Julia Elsky, *Heimatlose* and *en exil*: Adamov's French Translations of Rilke"; Sarah Voke, "Seher Çakir: Poetry Framed by Exile"; Wendy Pearlman, "Alienation in and from the Homeland: Narratives of the Lived Experience of Exile among Syrian Refugees in Germany and Beyond"; Shida Bazayr, *Nachts ist es leise in Teheran* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2016).

34. Krohn, *Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration 1933–1945*.

35. Buxbaum, *Transit Shanghai*; Bannasch and Rochus, *Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Exilliteratur*; Maaß and Philipp, *Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Exiltheaters*; Franz, *Gateway India*.

36. Spitta, *Paul Zech im südamerikanischen Exil, 1933–1946*; Kießling, *Exil in Lateinamerika*.

37. Naumann, *Ein Theatermann im Exil, P. Walter Jacob*; Rojer, *Exile in Argentina, 1933–1945*; Douer and Seeber, *Wie weit ist Wien*; Rohland de Langbehn, *Paul Zech y las condiciones del exilio en la Argentina*; Roca, *Días de Teatro*; Silvia Glocer, *Melodías del destierro: Músicos judíos exiliados en la Argentina durante el nazismo* (Buenos Aires: Gourmet Musical Ediciones, 2016).

38. Newton, "Nazi Menace"; Meding, *Flucht vor Nürnberg?*; Jackisch, *El nazismo*; Pace, *La via del demoni*; Goñi, *La auténtica Odessa*; Ismar, *Der Pressekrieg*; Ben-Dror, *Catholic Church and the Jews*; Steinacher, *Nazis on the Run*; Argachá and Busiello, *Nazismo y otros extremismos en Entre Ríos*.

and Georg Ismar extensively analyze current events and politics in nationalist German media, such as *Der Weg* and the *Deutsche la Plata Zeitung*, respectively. Meding implicitly links the neofascist *Weg* to the study of German emigrant literature—if not precisely exile studies—by referring to it as an “emigrant magazine.”³⁹ Yet, scholarship on German nationalists does not examine their artistic pursuits. Generally written by historians, research on nationalist emigration to Argentina appears to regard the cultural production of these emigrants as mostly outside its sphere of interest.

To sum up, despite the large-scale expansion of German exile studies and the plethora of historiography on Germans abroad, research on the artistic output of German nationalists abroad remains scarce. Additionally, while groups such as the Society for Exile Studies and the Austrian Society for Exile Research first defined themselves as dedicated to victims of Nazi persecution, both have long since exceeded their initial parameters. Nonetheless, they still exclude nationalist German emigrants, even though in the postwar period many of them were refugees.⁴⁰ To be sure, in German studies *emigration* is associated with victims of Nazism; however, reserving such a wide concept for this selective group is problematic. It is challenging to find a suitable term for the many nationalist German artists and journalists who resettled abroad if they cannot be referred to as emigrants. Furthermore, participation in cultural life forms an integral component of emigrant identity irrespective of political values.

While its focus on German drama abroad during the Nazi period continues the line of inquiry inherent in exile studies, this study encompasses not only Jewish and antifascist refugees, but also German nationalists. The first inclusive, book-length examination of German theater in Argentina, it argues that the cultural production of all Germans abroad merits study. Its emphasis on both victims and adherents of Hitlerism breaks sharply with the conventional purview of German exile studies. Furthermore, as reams

39. Meding, “*Der Weg*.”

40. Holger Meding, “Der Nationalsozialismus und die deutsche Einwanderung an den Rio de la Plata,” in Eick, *Nach Buenos Aires!*, 31–36.

of academic scholarship, popular history, and even pulp fiction attest, Argentina's fraught relationship with fascism extends beyond the World War II period. This book tracks Argentina's German-speaking refugees well into the postwar period; however, unlike previous models it also examines the cultural activities of German nationalists and postwar emigrants, some of whom collaborated on projects of fascist propaganda in Europe and later in Argentina. By including supporters, opponents, and victims of Nazism, I analyze the evolving relationships not only within, but also among antagonistic German-speaking populations. Despite their obvious differences, these factions and their theaters had much in common, including their countries and cultures of origin, language, and the mutual challenge of prospering as immigrants in Argentina. Furthermore, regardless of our perspectives today, emigrants during both Nazism and the postwar period saw themselves as refugees fleeing tumult, impoverishment, and persecution in their homeland. Thus, this study brings together groups and topics that scholars have tended to separate or bypass. In addition to investigating the conflicts that pervaded German Buenos Aires, I ask whether their common condition as emigrants in Argentina provoked nationalists, antifascists, and Zionists to take parallel tracks in community building, dramatic theory, integration, and transnational alliances, as well as fund-raising and commercial competition. Exploring these questions reveals elements of universality in the challenges intrinsic to immigration, and informs how to confront them.

Other than period newspaper and magazine reports and my own research there is nothing published on the German Theater.⁴¹ Nonetheless, the success and influence of this stage and its founder, Ludwig Ney, are indisputable. Not only did the German Theater perform Goethe, Schiller, and Lessing to tens of thousands of spectators throughout World War II, but Ney continued directing German- and Spanish-language performances of canonical European authors in theaters across Argentina through the early 1970s. No figure from any stage in German Buenos Aires can claim such longevity, and Ney's artistic adaptability, professional opportunism, and

41. Kelz, "El teatro y la concepción de lo nacional."

ideological constancy constitute a novel blend of border skills that problematizes conventional views on nationalist emigrants. I also discuss several other, lesser-known nationalist theater companies in postwar Argentina. Although research on German culture abroad traditionally has emphasized antifascist artists, the music, theater, literature, and painting of nationalist German emigrants are vital to this topic. During the Nazi period and for decades beyond, Argentina's German-speaking populations supported antifascist *and* nationalist theaters. No investigation of German cultural production in this country can be complete without examining both.

Scholarship on the Free German Stage is more plentiful, but this book is a pioneering study in several ways.⁴² Published research on the Free German Stage excludes Ludwig Ney's theater, even though Argentina's German ensembles competed in extraordinary proximity to each other. Performing at venues separated by just ten city blocks, the two troupes were inextricably linked. Not only did the German Theater spur antifascists and Zionists to establish their own competing theater, but each stage also influenced the repertoire, marketing, and the personnel of its rival for years thereafter. The contrasts, hostilities, and surprising approximations between these ensembles cannot be fully disclosed and analyzed unless both are in focus.

Extant scholarship on the Free German Stage also tends to focus on its founder, Paul Walter Jacob, marginalizing other members of the enterprise's twenty-plus-person cast, some of whom went on to

42. Wolfgang, "Paul Walter Jacob und die Freie Deutsche in Argentinien"; Naumann, *Ein Theatermann im Exil, P. Walter Jacob*; Pohle, "Paul Walter Jacob am Rio de la Plata: Rahmenbedingungen und Bestimmungsfaktoren eines exilpolitischen Engagements"; Pohle, "Paul Walter Jacob am Rio de la Plata: Der Kurs der FDB—eine exilpolitische Gratwanderung"; Pohle, "Paul Walter Jacob am Rio de la Plata: Exilprominenz und Zwang zur Politik"; Frithjof Trapp, "Zwischen Unterhaltungsfunktion und der Erwartung politischer Stellungnahme: Spielplan und künstlerische Konzeption der 'Freien Deutschen Bühne' Buenos Aires," in Koch, *Exiltheater und Exildramatik 1933–1945*, 118–137; Lemmer, *Die "Freie Deutsche Bühne" in Buenos Aires 1940–1965*; Rohland de Langbehn and Vedda, *Teatro y teoría teatral*; Germán Friedmann, "La cultura en el exilio alemán antinazi: El Freie Deutsche Bühne de Buenos Aires, 1940–1948," *Anuario del Instituto de Estudios Histórico Sociales* (2009): 69–87; Kalinna, "Exil und Identität"; Kelz, "Desde la emigración a la inmigración"; Kelz, "German Buenos Aires Asunder."

illustrious careers in Argentine theater and film. Many nationalist and antifascist artists were women, so this study also contributes to the history of female emigrants and their integration into the host society. Crucially, up to now scholars have not analyzed the dramatic presentations themselves, tending instead toward narrative history, biography, and, to a lesser degree, reception. While these approaches are informative, the Free German Stage was first and foremost a working theater company. Live performances were the bedrock of its existence. Fortunately, multiple sources inform investigations into the troupe's productions. In addition to reviews in local media, many of the original promptbooks—some of which diverge profoundly from published versions—are accessible at the Paul Walter Jacob Archive in Hamburg, and hundreds of photographs of performances exist in the Alexander Berger Collection at the Fundación IWO in Buenos Aires. I also have interviewed numerous thespians, whose memories help to illuminate productions at both stages. Drawing from theoretical scholarship, I pool primary sources to analyze several key productions at the Free German Stage and the German Theater, as well as their postwar incarnations.

This book on German theater in Argentina draws from primary sources in six languages from archives and personal collections in Argentina, Brazil, Germany, Austria, and the United States. Among these sources are oral testimonies, personal correspondence, and autobiographical writings. Memories can change and may reflect the interviewee's or author's aims of the moment, as well as their relationship to each other. Letters may also be shaped by the writer's personal objectives and his/her relationships to other correspondents. There are limits to the utility of oral history, personal letters, and autobiographical writings as a means of locating facts; however, these sources are indispensable for grasping people's interpersonal, emotional worlds and gaining a sense of the texture of daily life.⁴³ Impressions of one's cultural identity and national belonging, of a dramatic performance's personal and public

43. Farnsworth-Alvear, *Dulcinea in the Factory*, 204, in McGee Deutsch, 9.

resonance, and of discord or harmony in one's professional and social environments all fit into these categories. Therefore, such subjective perceptions add valuable emotional depth to this study. I have vetted interviewees' assertions of facts by comparing them with multiple primary and secondary sources. I have carefully evaluated every document, because all sources have biases, blind spots, agendas, and target audiences.

German Buenos Aires Onstage and Off

At the core of each colony's emphasis on the dramatic genre is the concept of theater as a community-building institution. In contrast to reading, generally an individual experience, the theatrical performance requires the bodily copresence and collaboration of actors and spectators, thus gaining a vital social dimension. Theater scholars have noted that the performance calls for a social community, since it is rooted in one and, on the other hand, since in its course it generates a community of thespians and theatergoers.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the collective sacrifices of time, effort, and money required to preserve the theater in times of crisis fortify the social union that the performance brings forth. Supporters of both the German Theater and the Free German Stage mobilized this social union to advance projects of theatrical nationhood, in which the emigrants' inchoate, tenuous sentiments of collective identity and national affection were articulated, developed, and reinforced through dramatic representation.⁴⁵ Collective identities, whether they are cultural, national, or even transnational, grow from a subjective understanding of history.⁴⁶ Both the German Theater and the Free German Stage vigorously participated in representations and debates about the past. Each produced dramatic depictions of recent and distant past events, in which thespians, theatergoers,

44. Max Herrmann, "Bühne und Drama, Antwort an Prof. Dr. Klaar," *Vösische Zeitung*, July 30, 1918, cited in Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*, 19.

45. Kruger, *National Stage*, 3; Holdsworth, *Theatre and National Identity*, 2.

46. Rokem, *Performing History*, 3.

reviewers, and sponsors selectively contested or underscored hegemonic understandings of the historical heritage on the basis of which their collective identities were being formed. Whereas antifascists strove to forge intercultural alliances through inclusive theatrical performances, German nationalists and, to an extent, Zionists aimed to create a bond among theatergoers that represented a nationality in the modern sense—an insular ethnicity organized by historic fiction into an imagined community.⁴⁷ In the liminal stages of emigrant identity construction, the German Theater and the Free German Stage also functioned as laboratories for what Sandra McGee Deutsch calls border skills: flexibility, adaptation, and reinvention.⁴⁸ Through the shared spectacle of dramatic performance, audiences and ensembles alike negotiated lines that defined their identities, such as victims and oppressors, emigrants and immigrants, conformists and dissidents, as well as Jews, Germans, or Argentines. On- and offstage thespians and theatergoers reacted to these lines in different ways, disputing, crossing and crisscrossing, evading, hardening, and reproducing them. Identity formation also relies on differentiation, that is, defining identity by representing cultural and political difference. By means of encountering difference through theatrical excursions beyond their colony's fringes, nationalists, antifascists, and Zionists imagined communities of illusory fullness by performing and sometimes even becoming what they believed they were not. Together, these tactics of staging cultural representation were vital for the ways in which theatergoers and thespians tackled the project of concocting collective identity through conformism and transgression. The German Theater and the Free German Stage unleashed volatile theatrical energies that intervened directly, forcefully, and sometimes unforeseeably in the ideological debates that splintered and suffused German Buenos Aires.

One must place this study on emigrant theater within the context of German Buenos Aires and, more broadly, German emigration to Argentina. German-speaking emigrants to Argentina were

47. Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 103.

48. McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation*, 3.

not a monolithic group. Most scholars divide emigrants into two populations: a nationalistic “old colony,” which arrived in Argentina between the late nineteenth century and the 1920s, and an anti-Nazi “new colony,” composed mostly of Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany. This book largely abstains from the terms “old” and “new,” because dates of emigration varied among members of each group. Many supporters of the Free German Stage belonged to earlier waves, and two leading actors at the nationalist German Theater arrived after 1933. The nationalistic and anti-Nazi colonies in Buenos Aires also fractured further into many distinct subgroups. While the repertoire and reviews of the German Theater dovetail with the National Socialist sociopolitical platform and conservative German drama theory, performances staged by other members of the nationalist population demonstrate salient divisions on several issues, most controversially Nazi racial ideology and integration with the Argentine host society. Later, tens of thousands of German emigrants to Argentina during the postwar period brought a new diversity to the nationalist faction. Having experienced National Socialism firsthand, many of them had a fundamentally different view of the Nazi period, World War II, and Argentina than less recent emigrants, the overwhelming majority of whom had not visited Europe from 1933 to 1945. Even though Ludwig Ney’s renamed New Stage struggled to negotiate the divergent viewpoints of its postwar audiences, both nationalist media and the West German embassy insistently utilized the stage as means of trying to prevent a new rift from opening in German Buenos Aires.

The anti-Hitler population likewise was characterized by variance and even outright conflict. Some scholars have already established subgroups of German-speaking Zionists, antifascist activists, and other emigrants who were not politically engaged.⁴⁹

49. Avni, *Argentina y la historia de la inmigración judía (1810–1950)*; Rojer, *Exile in Argentina, 1933–1945*; Schwarcz, *Trotz allem*; McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation*; Schirp, *Die Wochenzeitung “Semanario Israelita”*; Schnorbach, *Por “la otra Alemania”*; Neumeyer, Schopflocher, and Traub, *Wir wollen den Fluch in Segen verwandeln*; Eick, *Nach Buenos Aires!*; Alfredo Bauer,

Since members of each group were present on both sides of the curtain at performances by the Free German Stage, this theater brings the full diversity of the anti-Hitler colony into focus. Onstage their thespian representatives projected unity, but offstage sectarian organizations incited conflicts over political allegiance, national affection, and intercultural integration. Influence over the stage's repertoire signified control of the messaging at the most popular entertainment venue for all German-speaking refugees from Nazism. Therefore, the private correspondence, promptbooks, ticket sales, and media reviews of its performances locate the Free German Stage at the center of an impassioned power struggle among antifascists, Zionists, and more moderate theatergoers. Many antifascists saw the theater as a vehicle to fuel anti-Nazi activism and uphold essential German cultural values in exile, thus preserving a moral foundation for a reformed postwar Germany. Zionists, on the hand, argued that Jews must reject Germany altogether and clashed with antifascists on the issue of collective German guilt for Nazi crimes. They regarded the Free German Stage as an exclusively Jewish theater, and insisted that its repertoire convey a Zionist worldview. Finally, most refugees were neither antifascist activists nor Zionists. Although their voices were underrepresented in local media outlets, these predominantly Jewish theatergoers exerted a decisive influence at the box office by rebelling against Zionist and agitprop theater (though not eschewing political and religious drama altogether). The Free German Stage is a revealing lens for exploring the political, religious, and cultural engagement of this large group, which tends to be less prominent in scholarship on Jewish and German Buenos Aires. During the postwar period, efforts to deploy the theater as a means of reconciliation exacerbated tensions within the anti-Hitler population. Guest performances by thespians who had been popular in Nazi Germany enraged Zionists and many antifascists. These events even drew some nationalist Germans to the Free German Stage, where they sat alongside victims of Nazi persecution and watched Theo

La Asociación Vorwärts y la lucha democrática en la Argentina; Friedmann, *Alemanes antinazis en la Argentina*; Schopflocher and Niefanger, *Buenos Aires*.

Lingen, Hans Moser, Viktor de Kowa, and others perform with a cast consisting almost entirely of Jewish refugees. Attempting to unify German Buenos Aires against the proliferation of communism, the West German embassy also feigned reconciliation by enforcing an untenable code of silence among actors, audiences, and reviewers.

Through their theaters, I show that Argentina's German-speaking colonies were subject to intensely antagonistic, transatlantic political pressures, and some individuals enthusiastically espoused and perpetuated this hostility. Despite their political and religious discord, however, these groups also had much in common. During World War II and beyond, the rival factions in German Buenos Aires shared positions constitutive of exile: all were caught between isolation from their homeland and adaptation to the Argentine host society. Qualities associated with cultures of diaspora—taboos and postponements of return to the native country, connections among multiple communities, and forms of longing, memory, and (dis)identification—apply to nationalist, antifascist, and Zionist emigrants alike and found expression in their dramatic performances.⁵⁰ As actors and audiences of both theaters morphed from emigrants to immigrants, many of them underwent similar processes of adaptation and reinvention, including the struggles to establish financial stability, learn a new language, construct social and professional networks, and contend with the societal norms of a foreign culture. Moreover, in their competition to define the boundaries and center of Germanness, nationalists, antifascists, and Zionists shaped each other's cultural production and political objectives. Reciprocal tactics of representation, differentiation, and retaliation via dramatic performances were inherent in the projects of identity formation and community building that were underway in each of these competing populations. German Buenos Aires can only be fully understood by exploring the interplay that existed among its constituent groups. Indeed, considering their geographical proximity, it is hard to imagine otherwise.

50. Clifford, *Routes*, 10.

I also argue that cultural life constitutes an essential part of emigrant identity construction, regardless of its political tilt. Specialists on Germany under National Socialism note that the word “culture” probably appears more often in Nazi propaganda than any other term, with the possible exceptions of “race” and “nation.”⁵¹ Although historians who work on the political and anthropological aspects of nationalist German emigrants do not emphasize their artistic output, during World War II⁵² and the postwar period⁵³ German nationalist publications devoted a remarkable amount of space to poetry, short fiction, and serialized novels, as well as to reviews of concerts, theatrical performances, and cinema. Throughout the period in focus nationalist Germans stressed cultural activities to consolidate and project their sense of nationhood in Argentina. From 1934 to 1965, the German Theater and subsequent nationalist stages strengthened the cohesion of Argentina’s nationalist German population, reinforced its members’ ties to the fatherland, and

51. Hermand, *Culture in Dark Times*, 3.

52. The 1941 *Jahrbuch des deutschen Volksbundes in Argentinien*, for example, features ten poems, four short stories, a review of German cultural events in Buenos Aires, and an obituary of Josef Ponte, a German poet who had visited Argentina a few years earlier: Margit Hilleprandt, “September 1940,” 43; Hermann Löns, “Wir fahren gegen England,” 68; Heinrich Lersch, “Grabschrift,” 70; Will Vesper, “Mahnung,” 100; n.a., “Nun geht die deutsche Reise an,” 101; n.a., “Wir kehren heim ins Vaterland,” 101; n.a., “Aus Wolhynien sind gezogen,” 102; Werner Hoffmann, “Der verlorene Sohn: Ein Legendenspiel,” 132–134; Johannes Franze, “Das künstlerische Leben in Buenos Aires,” 134–141; Wilhelm Lütge, “Zum Gedächtnis von Josef Ponte,” 145–147; Wilhelm Rabe, “Ans Werk,” 146; Fritz Berkhan, “Wir haben gesiegt,” 158; Maria Kahle, “Das Gebet der Toten,” 167; Margit Hilleprandt, “Tito, der Seehund,” 175–177; Margit Hilleprandt, “Wolken, Wellen und Wind,” 177; Karl Schade, “Para éste no hay perdón,” 177–181; Karl Herrmann, “Erntedankfest,” 180; Maria Brunswig, “Der Totenkranz: Eine Geschichte aus Patagonien,” 197–201.

53. One example is the April 1948 issue of *Der Weg*, which included essays on Nordic music and a review of Wilhelm Furtwängler, as well as fictional works by German prisoners of war, Christian August Winnig, and a recent emigrant to Chile, Susanne Torwandt: Ernst Aufrecht, “Nordische Musik,” 220–223; n.a., “Wilhelm Furtwängler: Zu seinen Konzerten im Teatro Colón,” 260; n.a., “Zwei Gedichte eines deutschen Kriegsgefangenen,” 248–249; Christian August Winnig, “Im Kreis verbunden,” 228–233; Susanne Torwandt, “Menschen und Tiere am Rio Negro,” 234–239.

inculcated them with propaganda from successive governments in Germany. During the Nazi period, this included the cult of the leader, virulent anti-Semitism, and militaristic expansionism. After the war, conservative actors and reviewers denounced the Allied occupation and the expulsion of German inhabitants from Eastern Europe before eventually siding with the West German embassy in its crusade against communism. An enduring conduit for government messaging, theatrical performances also revealed divergences between nationalist emigrants and their European countrymen, thus undermining officials' efforts to forge a transatlantic National Socialist community and, later, hindering Bonn's attempts to unite and mobilize German Buenos Aires against leftist activism. Furthermore, earlier nationalist German emigrants often portrayed Argentina as a second homeland, thereby illustrating a fundamental distinction between older and newer waves of migration, as well as between themselves and Germans across the Atlantic.

Chapter Overview

A cursory glance at the table of contents reveals the asymmetrical chapter lengths of this study. The first two compact chapters provide historical and biographical foregrounding for the main body of the book. The following three chapters are lengthier, because they examine the competing theaters at the heart of this project. While this entire book is based on extensive archival research, the third and longest chapter draws from the exhaustive archive of Paul Walter Jacob, founder, manager, director, and lead actor of the Free German Stage from 1939 to 1949. Jacob's collection of promptbooks, correspondence, and personal notes permits a penetrating restoration of the institutional alliances, personal relationships, and theatrical presentations of this period.

The first chapter contextualizes Argentina's thriving German-theater scene in (1) German emigration patterns to Argentina; (2) the interplay between German emigrants and their Argentine hosts; and (3) the tensions among local nationalist, antifascist, and Zionist German-language religious, educational, and media institutions.

Primarily constituted by emigrants who arrived in the late nineteenth century and in the 1920s, the nationalist colony was characterized by nostalgia for the Wilhelmine monarchy, aversion to the Weimar Republic and, eventually, support for Hitler. The anti-fascists consisted of a minority of earlier emigrants who supported the Weimar Republic and mostly Jewish German-speaking refugees who fled to Argentina during Nazism. Nominally neutral until late 1944, Argentina permitted pro- and anti-Hitler German media, schools, and cultural centers to flourish, thus whetting extant hostilities among emigrants. Conflict also pervaded the refugee population, which was divided on issues of cultural identity, Jewish integration into the Argentine host society, and collective German guilt for the Shoah.

Four case studies in circum-Atlantic migration mark the origins of Argentina's competing German theaters. Beginning with his success as director of a state-funded touring ensemble in Nazi Germany, the second chapter traces the journey of the German Theater's founder, Ludwig Ney, from Europe to Paraguay and, ultimately, Argentina. Shifting to Jewish actors, I reconstruct three Jewish thespian refugees' flights to South America and explore how their work onstage both exposed them to Nazi persecution and facilitated their escapes to an unlikely reunion in Argentina. This discussion emphasizes the interdependency between actors and audiences at theaters in times of crisis, casting dramatic performances as a laboratory for testing survival strategies amid the rise of European fascism. Another focus is the evolution of theater management during the 1930s. Bereft of state subventions, stages were compelled to upend the tradition of cultural theater, adopting instead a market-based approach to repertoire and advertising similar to popular entertainment venues, like the cinema. This controversial model became the blueprint for the Free German Stage in Buenos Aires.

Founded in 1939 and composed entirely of professional thespian refugees, the Free German Stage fomented anti-Nazism through an international blend of lighter comedies and serious dramas, nearly all of which were banned in Germany. A box-office stalwart and psychological urgency, the lighter muse conveyed a buoyant message

of intercultural community to the theater's public. Yet, comedies also stirred tensions in the refugee population. Leftist antifascists and Zionists accused spectators of preferring escapist flights into a chimerical European past over engagement with current events. Against the resistance of most theatergoers, antifascist and Zionist activists demanded uncompromising agitprop and Jewish dramas. Based on private correspondence and ideological battles waged in local media, I examine the rancor that political and religious plays stoked among refugees. Finally, chapter 3 investigates backlash against the Free German Stage from Nazi Germany, nationalist German emigrants, and the Argentine government.

Founded in 1938 by the emigrant actor Ludwig Ney with funding from the German government, the German Theater staged dramas by propagandists, canonical authors, and members of the local community, instilling a sense of a common cultural heritage among its public. As chapter 4 shows, reviews in local media emphasized Nazi tropes, such as anti-urbanism, the leader cult, mania for Aryans and Teutons, the glorification of war, and racial anti-Semitism. Though they were Nazi loyalists who enthusiastically supported Ney's ensemble, local dramatists and theatergoers also emphasized their cultural hybridity and affinity for Argentina, which estranged them from the fatherland and undercut Nazi officials' efforts to construct a transatlantic National Socialist community. Later, when the war and the Argentine regime turned against Germany, comedies formed a larger proportion of the ensemble's repertoire. Spectators at both the Free German Stage and the German Theater embraced the comedic genre to cope with the overlapping psychological and emotional duress that they incurred as emigrant populations whose nations of origin were at war.

Spanning the period 1946 to 1965, the fifth chapter tracks the trajectory of Argentina's German theaters against a changing political landscape and new waves of European emigration. In the postwar period, director Paul Walter Jacob endeavored to attract all German speakers to the Free German Stage; however, his failed efforts at reconciliation underscored the polarized environment in the Argentine capital. Without ever renouncing fascism, Ludwig Ney adopted a strategy of interculturalism to succeed

professionally in Peronist Argentina. German-speaking artists from across the political spectrum embarked on cross-cultural projects, and their transformative impact on theater in Argentina is still evident today. Meanwhile, in its crusade against communism, the West German embassy intervened at both stages. Carefully staged depictions of German heritage and reconciliation reflected a specious contrivance, contingent on edited memories of the recent past. The intractable animosity ultimately led to a move away from German dramatists in favor of canonical European playwrights, such as William Shakespeare.