

GERMAN BUENOS AIRES ASUNDER

German emigration to Argentina has a history as old as the city of Buenos Aires itself. According to popular legend one of the original four founders of the city in 1536 was the German adventurer Ulrich Schmidl, who is celebrated for this feat in the drama *Utz Schmidl* (1940), penned by another German emigrant, Werner Hoffmann. Larger waves of German emigrants reached the River Plate in the latter third of the nineteenth century and peaked when hyperinflation ravaged Germany after World War I. Argentina had remained neutral in the conflict, which is attributable to the profitable business of exporting agricultural goods to both sides, resistance among the nation's huge Italian population against going to war with Italy, and ties between the Argentine and Prussian militaries. Argentina's neutrality was of great importance to German industrialists and policy planners, whose capital holdings in the country increased during the war years and were augmented again in the early 1920s by major investments in dependencies of German

chemical, pharmaceutical, metallurgical, electrical, and heavy-construction combines. In part because of German, British, and US investment, in the 1920s Argentina emerged as a far more prosperous and developed country than its neighbors.¹

The country was an appealing destination for tens of thousands of Germans seeking to escape hyperinflation as well as social and political turmoil in Germany in the 1920s. During the brunt of Germany's economic crisis in the early 1920s, over 25,000 Germans emigrated to Argentina annually, and from the end of World War I to the beginning of the global financial crisis approximately 135,000 German speakers entered the country.² While locally they split into many subgroups based on religion, social class, gender, age, and other factors, these emigrants were in general frustrated by financial and social instability in Germany and disseminated negative views on the Weimar Republic and nostalgia for the monarchy among Argentina's German population.

As noted in the introduction to this book, estimates of the number of German speakers in Argentina vary widely. The following statistics draw from previous scholarship to compile figures that are by no means intended to be authoritative. Immediately after World War I, roughly 30,000 German speakers resided in Buenos Aires alone, among them 11,000 who had been born in Germany.³ By the 1930s, due in large part to arrivals of Jewish refugees and a smaller number of political dissidents, there were 60,000 people of German descent in the city, 20,000 of them German born.⁴ As of 1937, approximately 47,000 German nationals lived in Argentina, and the total German-speaking population had reached 250,000,⁵ although some scholars put the number as high as 400,000.⁶

1. Ronald Newton, "Das andere Deutschland," in Jackman and Borden, *Muses Flee Hitler*, 307.

2. Saint Sauveur-Henn, "Die deutsche Einwanderung," 12.

3. Ebel, *Das Dritte Reich und Argentinien*, 23.

4. Volberg, *Auslandsdeutschtum und Drittes Reich*, 16.

5. Volberg, *Auslandsdeutschtum*, 9.

6. As noted earlier, in the introduction, this vast discrepancy stems primarily from uncertainty regarding the number of Volga Germans and their offspring.

Between 1920 and 1945, the percentage of Germans among total emigrants to Argentina rose dramatically, beginning with 6 percent for the time span 1920 to 1930 and reaching 28 percent from 1933 to 1945.⁷ Argentine emigration authorities estimated that 31,000 Jewish refugees fled to Argentina from Nazi Germany;⁸ however, this figure fails to account for the many illegal and unrecorded emigrants, as well as refugees who entered legally from other countries.⁹ The Jewish Philanthropic Society places the sum of Jewish refugees in Latin America at 101,500. The countries along Argentina's borders—Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil, and Uruguay—received a total of 50,300 refugees (12,000; 5,000; 800; 25,500; and 7,000, respectively).¹⁰ In particular, neighboring Paraguay, Uruguay, and Bolivia conducted a lucrative business selling visas to desperate Jews during the late 1930s. Borders were porous, and Argentina, with a GDP more than twice the average of the nations along its limits, offered refugees the brightest economic prospects in the region.¹¹ Argentina's large Jewish population of roughly 250,000 also attracted refugees from throughout South America.¹² These conditions, supplemented by ample anecdotal evidence, indicate that many Jews who initially disembarked elsewhere proceeded to take clandestine mountain, jungle, and river routes to settle in Buenos Aires. Most estimates place the total

7. Saint Sauveur-Henn, "Die deutsche Einwanderung," 11–13.

8. Jackisch, *El nazismo*, 158.

9. Ronald Newton estimates that the number of illegal Jewish emigrants exceeded the number of Jews who entered the country legally. Newton, "Das andere Deutschland," 304.

10. Hilfsverein deutschsprechender Juden/Asociación Filantrópica Israelita, *Zehn Jahre Aufbauarbeit in Südamerika/10 años de Obra Constructiva en América del Sud 1933–1943*, 9.

11. Alan Taylor, "Foreign Capital Flows," in *The Cambridge Economic History of Latin America*, ed. Victor Bulmer, John Coatsworth, and Robert Cortés Conde (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 76.

12. Newton, "Das andere Deutschland," 304.

number of German-speaking Jewish emigrants to Argentina from 1933 to 1945 at 45,000.¹³ Per capita, worldwide only Palestine received more refugees.¹⁴

Such statistics reflect a sweeping cultural and religious shift in German and Jewish emigration to Argentina. Until 1933 most German emigrants to Argentina were Gentiles; afterward the overwhelming majority were Jews. Unlike previous waves of Jewish emigration to Argentina, during the Nazi period most Jews arrived from central Europe and had belonged to cosmopolitan, professional social classes. Most earlier Jewish emigrants, by contrast, hailed from the shtetls of eastern Europe. The religious, social, economic, and cultural gaps between these groups were profound.¹⁵ Most German-speaking Jewish refugees were unwilling or unable to attend theatrical performances or read newspapers in Yiddish. Many earlier Jewish emigrants rejected the German language, which they associated with Nazism.¹⁶ Such divergences impeded efforts to form a cohesive Jewish community in Argentina. Furthermore, during the 1930s German-speaking emigration to Argentina morphed from a rural to an urban phenomenon. Many earlier emigrants formed colonies in the arable regions of the interior, especially in the provinces of Misiones, Santa Fe, and Entre Ríos, but after 1933 most settled in Buenos Aires to practice urban trades.¹⁷ This pattern of migration laid the foundation for an extensive network of antifascist and Zionist German-language educational, cultural, political, and media organizations in the Argentine capital.

To Govern Is to Populate? Argentina's Immigration Policy

After gaining independence from Spain in 1820, Argentina maintained a liberal immigration policy that favored Europeans in

13. Saint Sauveur-Henn, *Un siècle d'emigration allemande vers l'Argentine 1853–1945*, 249; Schwarcz, *Trotz allem*, 204; Jackisch, *El nazismo*, 158.

14. Rojer, *Exile in Argentina, 1933–1945*, 81.

15. Schwarcz, *Trotz allem*, 58.

16. Forum Sionista to Keren Kayameth Leisreal, November 18, 1942, Paul Walter Jacob-Archiv Korrespondenz (PWJAK).

17. McGee Deutsch, *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation*, 15–21.

general and northern Europeans in particular.¹⁸ Even today, the constitution still obliges the Argentine government to encourage European immigration to the country.¹⁹ The primary objective of this policy was to populate Argentina's rural interior; however, the nation also welcomed urban immigration until workers' protests caused restrictions in 1902 and again in 1910. Regulations were loosened during the prosperous 1920s, then tightened from 1930 to 1934 because of the global financial crisis. Although Argentina was reluctant to admit Jewish refugees, the total number of immigrants entering the country rose steadily from 21,000 in 1935, to 27,000 in 1936, then 44,000 in 1937, and finally 40,000 in 1938.²⁰ Immigration in 1938 would have surpassed the total for 1937 if not for tight restrictions passed in August of that year.

The growing number of refugees entering the country created concern among Argentine conservatives, who fretted about serving as a receptacle for Europe's unwanted.²¹ In August 1938, President Roberto Ortiz's administration issued a decree limiting immigration to persons with immediate family in Argentina and those with start-up capital who had the explicit intention of pursuing agriculture in the interior.²² Justified as necessary to prevent increased unemployment, the measures provoked a debate between the antitotalitarian newspaper, the *Argentinisches Tageblatt*, and nationalist media. The *Tageblatt* rejected the explanations of the Ortiz administration, claiming that recent emigrants had created jobs by launching small businesses.²³ Furthermore, the paper cited the Argentine constitution and claimed that the restrictive legislation opposed the will of the Argentine population as well as the nation's foundational legal document.²⁴

18. Rodríguez, *Civilizing Argentina*, 33–34.

19. www.argentina.gov.ar/argentina/portal/documentos/constitucion_nacional.pdf, 4.

20. Spitta, *Paul Zech im südamerikanischen Exil, 1933–1946*, 39.

21. Ebel, *Drittes Reich und Argentinien*, 138.

22. Spitta, *Paul Zech*, 34.

23. "Argentinien sperrt die Grenzen," *Argentinisches Tageblatt* (AT), August 26, 1938.

24. "Argentinien braucht Einwanderer," AT, October 23, 1938.

The *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung*, mouthpiece of the nationalist German colony, entered the immigration debate as well. Initially it focused on Europe, lauding successful government policies that had pressured Jews to leave Germany.²⁵ With time, the *La Plata Zeitung* became more aggressive and localized its perspective on the River Plate. Without directly referencing Argentina, in its Spanish section the newspaper indicated its approval of the new legislation by citing reports that the political and economic stability of neighboring Uruguay, which had a more open immigration policy, was threatened by the infiltration of undesirable Jewish refugees. The *La Plata Zeitung* quoted complaints in the Uruguayan newspaper *La Tribuna Popular* about the nuisance of Jewish emigrant street peddlers. Concluding with a warning against the penetration of the River Plate region by Jewish emigrants, the *La Plata Zeitung* admonished Argentine authorities to enforce anti-immigration legislation rigorously.²⁶

The debate on Argentina's immigration policy devolved into a bitter feud between antifascist and nationalist German media about integration and loyalty to the host country. Published by the homonymous political organization, the antifascist journal *Das Andere Deutschland* accused nationalist Germans of creating a fifth column to undermine Argentine sovereignty. The *Argentinisches Tageblatt* likewise expressed outrage at Nazi barbarism and exhorted the government to prevent toxic racism from poisoning the atmosphere in Buenos Aires. The paper made its position clear, declaring sympathy and solidarity with democratic Jews worldwide.²⁷ The nationalist *Jahrbuch des deutschen Volksbundes in Argentinien* countered by accusing antifascists of abusing the generosity and liberality of their Argentine hosts in order to extend their fight against Germany and everything German to Argentina.²⁸ Antifascist and nationalist media employed parallel methods, accusing the other German colony of disloyalty to their Argentine hosts, in an attempt to protect their own readership. Moreover,

25. "Zur Auswanderung der Juden aus dem Reich," *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung* (DLPZ), December 13, 1938.

26. "En el Uruguay comienzan a alarmarse de la silenciosa infiltración judía," DLPZ, February 8, 1941.

27. "Protest gegen Nazibarbarei in Argentinien," AT, November 15, 1938.

28. "Ein Nachwort zum Jahre 1938," *Jahrbuch des deutschen Volksbundes in Argentinien* (JdVA), 1939.

throughout the conflict neither side acknowledged the other as German, reserving this designation for itself.

The *Jahrbuch* defended nationalist emigrants by referencing Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, the seventh president of Argentina (1868–74), who had argued that German immigrants were “particularly desired by nations for their proverbial honesty, work ethic, and pacific, calm character.”²⁹ The *Jahrbuch* quoted Sarmiento in his native Spanish, aiming to demonstrate the nationalist colony’s history of integration and contributions to Argentine society. Mirroring the methods of German nationalists, yet supporting the opposite bloc, Free German Stage (FGS) founder Paul Walter Jacob argued in the yearbook of the Jewish Philanthropic Society that in addition to infusing Argentina with their industriousness and innovation, Jewish refugees were not merely transitory migrants, but immigrants who were in their new Argentine homeland to stay.³⁰

Both nationalist and antifascist German populations adopted the tactic of accusing the other side of treason against Argentina while claiming to be the more loyal, contributing immigrant German culture. The evolving relationships between the various contingents of German immigrants and their Argentine hosts is a central theme throughout this book. With mixed results, nationalist, antifascist, and Zionist blocs, as well as both the Free German Stage and the German Theater, sought to build strength and exert influence internally through collaborative projects with local Argentines who, of course, also were a diverse population. Furthermore, the embattled factions of German speakers weaponized integration as a competitive menace against the rival ensemble and its public.

The Infamous Decade: Argentine Politics in 1930–1945

Following a trajectory of growth and development that began in the 1870s, by 1929 Argentina’s liberal constitution and democratic government had enabled the construction of one of the

29. “Sarmiento,” *JdVA* 1939.

30. Paul Walter Jacob, “Wissenschaft-Kunst-Theater,” in Hilfsverein deutschsprechender Juden/Asociación Filantrópica Israelita, *Zehn Jahre Aufbauarbeit*, 140–142.

most ethnically diverse, politically open, and prosperous societies in the Americas. The nation's predominantly agricultural economy was a global breadbasket, and industrialization also was underway. In 1913 Argentina had the sixth highest per capita income in the world, and in 1929 it was among the world's ten wealthiest nations.³¹

Despite the apparent progress in Argentina from 1870 to 1930, some scholars argue that this period sowed the social decay and political authoritarianism that have troubled it ever since.³² For all its economic growth and democratic reforms, Argentina did not achieve a more even distribution of wealth and power during this period. Its development was corralled by an oligarchy that aimed to maintain both the status quo of class hierarchy and its hold on the country's wealth. Freedom and equality were limited by the state as it suppressed political demonstrations and incarcerated dissenters. Many Argentine criminologists, psychopathologists, and government officials shared the pseudoscientific theories of Nordic and Anglo-Saxon superiority to other races, including Africans, indigenous peoples, and Jews.³³ Drawing from the work of European theorists, such as the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso and the French neurologist Jean-Marie Charcot, Argentine studies attempted to link race to criminality and psychological disorders.³⁴ State scientists strove to engineer a supposedly superior citizenry, and the government advanced repressive control through racially discriminatory practices, such as immigration policy and even state violence against racial groups that it regarded as inferior. This narrative suggests that Argentina's ambivalence toward fascism in later decades originated in its supposedly golden era.

This era ended with the world financial crisis in 1930, which marked a turning point in the nation's history. The tumult had

31. Della Paolera and Taylor, *New Economic History of Argentina*, 3.

32. Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina*, 1–40, 63–71, 84–94, 186–195. See also McGee Deutsch, *Las Derechas*, 26–31; Zimmermann, *Los liberals reformistas*; Botana, *El orden conservador*.

33. Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina*, 68–69.

34. Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina*, 68–69.

grave repercussions for Argentina's vulnerable export market as well as its young and fragile democratic institutions. The crisis plunged Argentina into social and political turmoil. In 1932 journalist Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz lamented that more than three million unemployed men suffered persecution by the police and stigmatization by the press and endured the most despicable misery.³⁵ This socioeconomic cataclysm rapidly worsened and provoked a political emergency that destabilized President Hipólito Yrigoyen's liberal Radical Party and opened the way for regime change at the hands of conservative elements in the military and agricultural sectors.

On September 6, 1930, a military coup deposed Yrigoyen and proclaimed the fascist sympathizer José Félix Uriburu as president. Uriburu abolished the nation's liberal constitution in favor of an authoritarian regime, an act that future president Juan Perón saw as a pivotal event in Argentine politics. According to Perón, Uriburu brusquely terminated the law of universal suffrage and voter participation, marking the beginning of a new epoch in which members of the conservative oligarchy controlled the government.³⁶ Fourteen months later Uriburu was ousted by Agustín P. Justo, who exploited earlier democratic reforms to organize a democratic façade legitimizing his government. Elections occurred and a parliament with majority and oppositional parties also existed; however, the Radical Party, reported to have the support of 70 percent of the population, was impeded from presenting candidates in national and provincial elections. Instead, votes were fixed by the government under the euphemism of patriotic fraud.³⁷ This political system of electoral fraud, intimidation, and cronyism held sway throughout the 1930s, known in Argentina as the infamous decade.

Justo looked to fascist movements in Italy and Germany for political models. Since many members of the military oligarchy had been trained in Germany, maintaining friendly relations with Hitler's regime was a natural foreign policy. Domestically, the

35. Ortiz, *Política británica en el Río de la Plata*, 167.

36. Perón, *Yo Perón*, 90.

37. Spitta, *Paul Zech*, 17.

government cultivated nationalism by demonizing communism. The newly created Special Section for the Repression of Communism banned the Communist Party of Argentina and incarcerated hundreds of activists under the anti-Communist Social Defense Law. The regime also supported the foundation of fascist groups and allowed National Socialist sympathizers to organize and operate freely. Grassroots organizations collaborated with the German consulate to work to coordinate German-language schools and media, as well as cultural and social organizations, with Nazism immediately after Hitler came to power. Antifascists, contrarily, were subject to continual harassment, even violence. The *Argentinisches Tageblatt* was temporarily banned twice in the 1930s, and its offices were firebombed in 1934. A meeting of the antifascist cultural group the Pestalozzi Society was disrupted by storm troopers in 1934. Attacks on leftist newspapers and synagogues followed later that year.

Particularly divisive among Argentines and German immigrants alike was the annexation of Austria in 1938. Nationalist Germans celebrated with a mass rally on April 10, 1938, at Luna Park, a large venue in central Buenos Aires. Attended by nearly 20,000 people, the event had many features of the stadium rallies in Germany, including mass chorus renditions of the “Song of Germany” and the “Horst Wessel Song” featuring Nazi organizations and their Argentine fascist counterparts. Dancers and musicians performed against the backdrop of an immense red curtain emblazoned with the words “One Nation, One Reich, One Führer” in towering black Gothic letters. Nearby, at Plaza San Martín, the Argentine University Federation and other activists protested the event. The counterdemonstration turned violent as protesters burned German flags and stoned German banks and other locales. Shortly after the rioting the Argentine interim chancellor of the Foreign Ministry, Manuel Alvarado, apologized publicly to the Nazi chargé d’affaires, Erich Otto Meynen, deploring members of the media and special interest groups who offended the German nation and harmed the “cordial relations between the two peoples.”³⁸

38. Newton, “*Nazi Menace*,” 187.

The ministry's thinly veiled reproach of the antifascist community and its sycophancy to NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers Party) officials exacerbated the tensions among native Argentine citizens and German emigrants alike.

In 1937 a civilian lawyer, Roberto Ortiz, became president of Argentina. Although he had gained office through the system of electoral fraud, Ortiz allied himself with the Radicals and worked to restore legitimate democratic elections to the country. Ortiz contributed to a shift in public opinion against fascism and passed an official ban on the National Socialist Party in Argentina on May 15, 1939. He declared his sympathy with the victims of Nazism in a message to Congress in May 1940, declaring that Argentine neutrality in World War II did not signify indifference and insensitivity.³⁹ Provoked by public outrage against the Nazification of German schools, Ortiz passed legislation forbidding the instruction of racial prejudice in private educational institutions. The first two years of Ortiz's presidency also coincided with the greatest waves of refugees to the River Plate. Nearly all the founding members of the Free German Stage arrived in Buenos Aires in 1938 and early 1939. In August and again in October 1939, however, Ortiz bowed to pressure within his government and passed prohibitive restrictions on immigration, practically eliminating legal admittance to Argentina.

Advancing blindness forced Ortiz to cede power to his vice president and archenemy, Ramón Castillo, in 1940. Ortiz died in July 1942 without reassuming the presidency. Castillo was the political antithesis of Ortiz, and once in office he returned to the platform of Justo's regime. Though it remained nominally neutral in World War II, the new government was conservative, nationalistic, tolerant of fascist agitators, and unaccommodating to US calls for hemispheric solidarity. In a letter to the German embassy in 1942, chargé d'affaires Meynen reported that Castillo firmly believed in and desired an Axis victory in the war.⁴⁰ Further events confirm

39. Ismar, *Der Pressekrieg*, 31.

40. Meynen to Foreign Office (FO), July 20, 1942, Akten Büro Staatssekretär, Argentinien, Bd. 4, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (PAAA).

the tenor of Meynen's comments. When Ernesto Alemann, editor in chief of the *Argentinisches Tageblatt*, expressed his condolences after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in a telegram to the US ambassador, the Argentine postal service refused to deliver it, ostensibly out of concern for the preservation of the nation's neutrality. On the other hand, military airplanes delivered National Socialist newspapers to the rural Argentine interior for free.⁴¹ The government intervened against the screening of antifascist films such as Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940) and Emeric Pressburger's *49th Parallel* (1941), but the Nazi propaganda film *Victory in the West* (1940) was repeatedly shown to Argentine military officers.⁴² On December 9, 1942, *The Voice of the Day*, an antifascist German-language radio broadcast from democratic, pro-Allied forces Uruguay, accused the Argentine regime of abetting Nazi espionage and propaganda as well as placing its own commercial interests above a commitment to human rights and international law.⁴³

Conditions in Argentina worsened when a military conspiracy led by General Pedro Pablo Ramírez deposed Castillo in June 1943. Ramírez forbade political parties, dissolved student organizations, and restricted freedom of the press. In response to student protests, the government shut down all universities in October 1943.⁴⁴ For antifascists and Jews the situation became increasingly precarious. A temporary ban on Yiddish media in 1943 provoked a special report on anti-Semitism in Argentina in the New Yorker exile magazine *Aufbau*.⁴⁵ In June of the same year authorities shut down the *Volksblatt*, mouthpiece for exiled German Communists, and police briefly imprisoned one of its editors, Erich Sieloff. In consequence, the antifascist political organization and magazine *Das Andere Deutschland* temporarily relocated to Montevideo in 1944. Ramírez's policies also had repercussions for the Free German Stage, which was

41. Spitta, *Paul Zech*, 22.

42. "Charlie Chaplin," *AT*, December 30, 1940; "Sieg im Westen," *DLPZ*, June 19, 1941.

43. Paul Walter Jacob-Archiv (PWJA) VII c) 408, Walter A. Berendsohn Forschungsstelle für deutsche Exilliteratur, Universität Hamburg.

44. Cane, *Fourth Enemy*, 156.

45. "Die antijüdische Front," *Aufbau* 43 (1943): 3.

nearly compelled to disband in 1944. During the same period the nationalist German Theater had its heyday. In 1943, its ensemble began playing at the National Theater, which had a seating capacity of 1,155 spectators and boasted a prime location in the heart of the Buenos Aires theater district, steps away from the iconic Obelisk, ground zero of the Republic of Argentina.

Despite the nucleus of Nazi sympathizers in his government, Ramírez was forced to break off diplomatic relations with Germany in January 1944. The Allies had intercepted Argentine plans to purchase arms from Germany, and US officials also threatened to publish documents allegedly proving Argentine participation in a coup that had overthrown the pro-Allies Bolivian government in 1943. Another supporter of the Allies, neighboring Uruguay, grew alarmed and allowed a fleet of US warships to anchor in the River Plate. Furthermore, the Allies threatened Ramírez that they would break off diplomatic relations with Argentina, a measure that held catastrophic consequences for the Argentine economy, if Argentina did not do so with Germany. When Ramírez complied, almost certainly against his will, he enraged Nazi sympathizers in the Argentine military. Three weeks later he was deposed, and on February 24, 1944, the Axis supporters General Edelmiro Farrell and Juan Domingo Perón assumed the offices of president and vice president, respectively. Perón, who had gained national prominence as secretary of labor under Ramírez, also held the office of war minister in the new administration. Some scholars have speculated that the Farrell-Perón regime initially planned to try Ramírez for treason and reopen diplomatic relations with Germany.⁴⁶

Despite the political and economic disadvantages of its position, Argentina continued to support the Axis powers long after it was clear that fascism had lost the war. Even in May 1944 the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* reported that the new government was inciting attacks against Jewish property in Argentina.⁴⁷ The military oligarchy and the conservative elite governed according to neither the will nor the welfare of the populace. Instead it perpetuated

46. Newton, "Nazi Menace," 309.

47. Spitta, *Paul Zech*, 29.

the authoritarian system that ensured its monopoly on wealth and power. Rising nationalism and pretensions of hegemony in South America also motivated Argentina to oppose the United States and Great Britain, whom it saw as its principal competitors on the continent. The US government refused to recognize the Farrell-Perón regime and pressured others to follow suit. Facing Allied sanctions and mounting malcontent among its own population, on March 27, 1945, Argentina became the last country in the world to declare war on Germany. Argentina sent no troops to fight in the conflict; its declaration of war represented a purely cosmetic gesture of so-called hemispheric solidarity. In 1969 Juan Perón, who had become president of Argentina in 1946, reflected upon the measure: "Without question the war was decided by 1945. We would have remained neutral, but it was impossible to continue this policy. In agreement with the Germans in Argentina we declared war on Germany. Naturally, that was a mere formality."⁴⁸ Argentina resisted the Allied war effort throughout World War II. Even in the postwar period, Perón continued to sympathize with nationalist Germans. Nonetheless, throughout the period in question, Argentina's government permitted the expression of pro- and anti-Nazi positions with an openness that was singular worldwide in countries with a sizable German population.

Argentina's government and citizens are essential to this book's examination of German immigrant theaters. For all their success, both the Free German Stage and the German Theater always performed at the whim of Argentine authorities and were subject to a local environment beyond their control. Had the nation followed the repressive policies of neighboring Brazil toward its German population during World War II, neither stage could have survived. Thereafter, under Peronism, intercultural professional opportunities existed for nationalist and antifascist artists, facilitating both ongoing discord and integration into local society. In the Cold War, the West German embassy vigorously intervened at both theaters to advance its anti-Communist agenda. While Argentina's German

48. Meding, *Flucht vor Nürnberg?*, 50.

communities enjoyed unique liberties for much of the time covered in this book, their ability to exercise self-determination was always limited. This book therefore also evaluates how local external forces shaped the political and cultural altercations onstage in German Buenos Aires.

Trouble at the Theater: Ferdinand Bruckner's *Race* in Buenos Aires, 1934

Argentina's ambivalent political posturing permitted singularly open competition between its nationalist and antifascist German-speaking populations for nearly the full duration of Hitler's regime. The first high-profile clash occurred at the theater. Dramatic performances can bring forth a social community that unites actors and spectators; however, in the politically charged atmosphere of 1930s Buenos Aires, agitprop theater united certain groups by excluding and denouncing others. Productions of political theater thus exacerbated the animosity between antifascists and nationalists. Foreshadowing the competing German Theater and Free German Stage, the Spanish-language production of Ferdinand Bruckner's antifascist farce, *Race*, was a local harbinger of such antagonistic community building.

When *Race* premiered in December 1934 at the 500-seat Comic Theater, German Consul Edmund von Thermann immediately complained to the Argentine Foreign Ministry that its caricatures of Nazi leaders were injurious to Argentine-German relations. In turn, the ministry obsequiously appealed to the municipal censor to strike numerous offensive passages, the theater adhered to its demands, and performances commenced. To great acclaim, Bruckner's biting satire transcended nation and language. A derisory rendition of the "Horst Wessel Song," for example, was sung in both German and Spanish.irate, the German consulate fretted to Berlin that the play could seriously damage the Reich's reputation

in Argentina.⁴⁹ The *La Plata Zeitung* printed an indignant review, deploring scene after scene in which the German chancellor and the German people were reviled in the most hateful and egregious manner imaginable.⁵⁰ Nationalist Germans protested the performances, and on December 16, 1934, they organized a violent riot in the theater. Heinrich Volberg, a Nazi supporter who attended the presentation, reported the buildup to the event and the ensuing fracas. According to Volberg, a whispering campaign made sure that party members and supporters occupied about a dozen rows of the theater. In advance, they agreed to watch the piece in silence until a scene in which a drunken SA man played a record with the "Horst Wessel Song." At the first note pandemonium broke out. Whistles, noisemakers, loud boos, and jeers overwhelmed the thespians onstage. At the same time several men jumped onto the stage, smashed the record, tore down the swastika flag, and roughed up the actor portraying the SA man. The melee in the audience worsened when Argentine soldiers, who were among the spectators but allegedly had no idea what was happening, drew their bayonets and forced their way to the exits.⁵¹ The Argentine police then appeared at the premises and arrested sixty-eight members of the audience, who spent the night in jail but were released the next day when the German consulate paid municipal fines in full.

The riot caused the *La Plata Zeitung* to appeal for clemency and a halt to performances of the piece based on the 100-year, untarnished friendship between Argentina and Germany.⁵² The Comic Theater refused to yield, however, and presentations continued amid protests, disruptions, and threats of violence from German and Argentine Nazi sympathizers. On February 13, 1935, the police captured an Argentine with explosives in his possession, who confessed to plotting to firebomb the Comic Theater and named several accomplices. Many of the fourteen men implicated belonged to the Argentine fascist organization Civic Legion. The lone

49. Willi Köhn to Ministry of Propaganda (MP), December 18, 1934, Band R55, Akte 20553, Bundesarchiv Berlin (BB).

50. "Die Rassen" im Teatro Cómico," *DLPZ*, December 17, 1934.

51. Volberg, *Auslandsdeutschtum*, 124.

52. "Feindliche Hetzer," *DLPZ*, December 19, 1934.

German, Hans Hermann Wilke, an emigrant who worked at the German Bank of South America, was identified as the paymaster and sentenced to four years and six months in prison.⁵³

In the aftermath, the *La Plata Zeitung* alleged that the true culprit in the incidents had been the antitotalitarian *Argentinisches Tageblatt*. The *La Plata Zeitung* exhorted local authorities to put a stop to the machinations of this newspaper, which had close ties to fear-mongering rabble-rousers and cared nothing for honest journalism, but was interested only in cynical, self-serving muckraking.⁵⁴ For its part, the *Tageblatt* expressed sympathy for Bruckner's message and incomprehension regarding the municipal censorship and the riots at the Comic Theater. With an authoritarian, profascist government in power, a sharply polarized local population, large communities of German-speaking nationalists and antifascists, as well as increasing arrivals of Jewish refugees, already in 1934 Buenos Aires was fraught with violent and escalating political and cultural conflict.

Hitherto the hostilities had been confined to local German media outlets, but the spectacle of Bruckner's *Race* brought the simmering strife to an open uproar that incited emigrants and Argentines alike to action. Rehearsed, repeated nightly, and yet still spontaneous, live theatrical events consistently elevated to the public stage disputes that otherwise remained lurking behind the curtain. Live theater was not the origin—it was the detonator. In the coming years journalists, politicians, thespians, and spectators all mobilized the medium of theater to provoke and to polarize blocs of nationalists, antifascists, and Zionists, but also to attempt to reconcile them as well. This study explores the capacity of dramatic performances to potentiate, prolong, and surmount the polemics that suffused German Buenos Aires for decades.

A War of Words: German Media in Argentina

The most widely circulating German-language newspapers in South America during the World War II period, the *Deutsche La Plata*

53. Ismar, *Der Pressekrieg*, 101.

54. "Feindliche Hetzer," *DLPZ*, December 19, 1934.

Zeitung and *Argentinisches Tageblatt* are essential to any study of German emigration to Argentina.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the conflict-ridden history of these newspapers encapsulates the long-standing discord between Argentina's antifascist and nationalist German communities.

Founded by the German emigrant and entrepreneur Hermann Tjarks, the *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung* appeared without interruption from May 10, 1874, until October 18, 1944, when Argentina acquiesced to international pressure to ban pro-Nazi institutions. The *La Plata Zeitung* encouraged and actively recruited Germans to emigrate to Argentina, and by 1919 it was the most widely read German-language newspaper in the country. On March 2, 1878, the Swiss emigrant Johann Alemann, a journalist and expert on immigration policy, published the first edition of the *Argentinisches Wochenblatt*. The paper appeared daily as the *Argentinisches Tageblatt* beginning on April 29, 1889, and quickly became the *La Plata Zeitung*'s strongest competition for the German media market on the River Plate.

From the nineteenth century to the end of World War II, the two newspapers cultivated distinct readerships. The *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung* valued the preservation of German identity, whereas the *Argentinisches Tageblatt* advocated further integration with the host society. This divergence is reflected in their names: the "German newspaper on the River Plate" versus the "Argentine daily paper." Tensions between monarchist and republican German factions fueled feuding between the publications and their readers in the early twentieth century, and the animosity intensified upon the outbreak of World War I. Although economic interests caused Argentina to remain neutral during the war, anti-German sentiment was widespread and compelled the newspapers to take positions. Invoking its German heritage, the *La Plata Zeitung* unwaveringly

55. Beyond Ismar's *Pressekrieg*, scholarship on this rivalry is often tendentious, siding with the antifascists. See Gaudig and Veit, *Der Widerschein des Nazismus*; Schoepp, *Das Argentinische Tageblatt, 1933–45*; Manfred Pantförder, "Das andere Deutschland"; Arndt and Olson, *Die deutschsprachige Presse der Americas/The German Language Press of the Americas, 1732–1968*; Bussemeyer, *50 Jahre "Argentinisches Tageblatt."*

supported the German war effort. The *Tageblatt*, by contrast, viewed itself and its readership as Argentine and was a vocal critic of Germany's actions in Europe.

The rancor continued unabated after the war. The *La Plata Zeitung* had deep misgivings about the Weimar Republic, while the *Tageblatt* supported the new government. The tension stewed during the 1920s and accelerated into outright enmity with Hitler's rise. From January 1933 onward, the *Tageblatt* took a stridently antifascist position. The *Tageblatt* welcomed European refugees, nearly all of whom were Jewish, to Argentina and gained both readers and writers through this policy. Some of the better-known emigrants on its staff included Paul Walter Jacob, Balder Olden, Fred Heller, Carl Meffert, and Paul Zech. In the late 1930s, its circulation reached 28,000. The *La Plata Zeitung*, by contrast, was a staunch supporter of Nazism. As early as June 1931, the *Völkischer Beobachter* referred to the paper as "Hitler's banner" in Buenos Aires.⁵⁶ Likely motivated in part by large subventions from Berlin,⁵⁷ it denounced Jewish refugees as undesirables, and by 1935 had a circulation of 40,000 to 45,000.⁵⁸ The two papers' reactions to the Munich Agreement on September 29, 1938, which demanded that Czechoslovakia cede the Sudeten region to Germany, betrayed the irreconcilable dissension between the papers. Whereas the *Tageblatt* ran the headline "Agreement at Prague's Expense: A Nation Raped," the *La Plata Zeitung* celebrated the accord as a "Victory for Truth" under a giant headline "Peace!" flanked by portraits of Hitler and Mussolini.⁵⁹

Not only readers of the *La Plata Zeitung* were offended by the *Tageblatt's* reporting, which sometimes compromised journalistic integrity to defame German nationalists and galvanize the Argentine citizenry and government to punish pro-Nazi institutions.

56. Ismar, *Der Pressekreig*, 80.

57. The *La Plata Zeitung* received 25,000 reichsmarks in 1938 alone. Ismar, *Der Pressekreig*, 113.

58. Ismar, *Der Pressekreig*, 78.

59. "Einigung auf Kosten Prags: Eine Nation vergewaltigt," *AT*, September 25, 1938; "Frieden!," *DLPZ*, September 30, 1938.

The exposés it published about Nazi plots to annex Patagonia, as well as the provinces of Misiones and Corrientes, cited insidious sources and falsified documents with the express purpose of damaging relations between the nationalist colony and Argentines.⁶⁰ The *Tageblatt* relentlessly fought Nazism and supported refugees, often under very adverse circumstances, however its willingness to level wrongful accusations against the nationalist population exacerbated tensions among German immigrants and even alienated some opponents of National Socialism. A letter from a subscriber in Misiones exemplifies the reactions of many readers to its reporting: "Your newspaper has degenerated into a pack of lies. We are no friends of the Hitler regime, but we will not allow the entire nation to be dragged into the mud."⁶¹ Some Germans chose the *La Plata Zeitung* not to support Nazism, but to protest the *Tageblatt*'s offensive tone.⁶² Because of its tendentious standpoint the nationalist colony trusted nothing printed in the *Tageblatt*, including legitimate accounts of Nazi atrocities in Europe, which were absent from the *La Plata Zeitung*'s pages. The resultant animosity persisted long after the war's end, thwarting attempts at rapprochement by the West German embassy and the founder of the Free German Stage, Paul Walter Jacob.

The German writer Balder Olden, exiled in Buenos Aires and then in Montevideo, described the split between the nationalists and antifascists:

There are two villages, one Republican and one nationalist, although the nationalist one is not half as Nazi as people say. . . . The two villages are utterly separate. A young woman, who is employed by a German firm, went to the theater with me one evening and was fired the next day—"untrustworthy in her private life." We have a theater and

60. "Naziotische Umtriebe in Misiones," *AT*, July 10, 1940; "Die Tätigkeiten der Nazioten in Misiones," *AT*, July 17, 1940; "Die Geschichte Nazi-Verschöörung in Misiones," *AT*, July 21, 1940; "Bericht über Tätigkeit der Nazis in Misiones," *AT*, December 11, 1940; "Die Naziverschwörungen in Südamerika," *AT*, August 14, 1941.

61. Schoepp, "Das *Argentinische Tageblatt* als Forum der Emigration 1933–1945," 92.

62. "Leserbriefe," *AT*, April 29, 1939.

so do they. We each have a newspaper, a school, clubs, lectures—a German world and a German dystopia. . . . The separation is so absolute that you forget in one village that the other exists. I've been able to do it so far, at least.⁶³

While many scholars have taken this statement as evidence of a strict separation between two German-speaking populations, Olden's assessment represents a simplification.⁶⁴ First, Ben Bryce has argued convincingly that even far before World War I divisions existed among German immigrants along lines of education, religious denomination, gender, generation, and social class.⁶⁵ Furthermore, Germán Friedmann and I have pointed out that the quote itself is contradictory.⁶⁶ His friend's dismissal from her job after visiting the Free German Stage (FGS) proves contact between the two colonies. Attacks, reprisals, and other interactions between the two Germanies occurred regularly, making it hard for many people to be as successful as Olden in ignoring or even "forgetting" their adversaries.

Media coverage of the German theater scene was one area, however, in which the split was nearly absolute. The *La Plata Zeitung* covered Ludwig Ney's German Theater extensively from 1938 until 1944, providing publicity that was fundamental to the stage's success. The paper also reported frequently on drama in Germany and reviewed Argentine theatrical productions, but it never mentioned the FGS. For its part, the *Tageblatt* was one of the driving forces behind the establishment of the anti-Hitler FGS. The initial idea for the enterprise grew out of conversations between Paul Walter Jacob and Ernesto Alemann, owner, publisher, and editor in chief of the *Tageblatt*, who ran free advertising and reported on the troupe daily, while several members of the cast also wrote for the paper. Despite such close coverage, neither paper mentioned

63. Balder Olden, "Flucht und Hoffnung: Rückschau aus Buenos Aires," *Aufbau*, August 22, 1941.

64. Kießling, *Exil in Lateinamerika*, 73; Rojer, *Exile in Argentina*, 97; Lemmer, *Die "Freie Deutsche Bühne,"* 14; Ismar, *Der Pressekreis*, 29; Stuhlmann, *Vater Courage*, 146.

65. Bryce, *To Belong in Buenos Aires*, 163.

66. Friedmann, "Los alemanes antinazis de la Argentina y el mito de las dos aldeas."

the competing theater by name throughout World War II. After the war the *Freie Presse*, successor to the *La Plata Zeitung*, began reporting on the Free German Stage in December 1945,⁶⁷ but the *Tageblatt* did not print a single line about Ludwig Ney until 1956.⁶⁸ The war of words between the *Argentinisches Tageblatt* and the *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung* encompassed not only politics, but cultural life as well, including both theaters in German Buenos Aires.

German Schools

During his visit to Argentina as a delegate to the Congress of PEN Clubs in 1936, the exiled writer Stefan Zweig stated the tragedy of contemporary Europe lay in the inculcation of hatred in the minds of its children:

Day after day, from sunrise to sunset, they taught hatred, and then at night, they dreamt of it. When the war ended, it was impossible to put an end to the hatred which coursed through everyone's veins. They could not turn it off . . . men, women, and children remained intoxicated.⁶⁹

The author added that his most fervent hope was that the South American youth would never live under the hatred that agitated Europe in the 1930s.⁷⁰ But, as Zweig himself observed during his stay, the pedagogy of hate was already present in the Argentine capital.

In 1932, there were twenty German schools in Buenos Aires, with approximately 4,800 students, the largest concentration outside Europe. With few exceptions, by 1934 these institutions had been infiltrated by Nazi propaganda. The administration expelled all Jewish students, and other pupils subsequently remembered that the swastika and the "Horst Wessel Song" were ubiquitous in

67. "Marilou," *Freie Presse (FP)*, December 3, 1945.

68. "Zuviel für eine kleine Frau," *AT*, April 5, 1956.

69. "La propaganda del odio," *Crítica*, September 5, 1936.

70. "La juventud de Europa," *La Nación (LN)*, September 9, 1936.

the schools.⁷¹ In its annual report for 1938, the Humboldt School, the largest German school in Argentina, thanked the German embassy and the Nazi Party for financial support.⁷² Numerous schools received funds from the German embassy, and several teachers were dismissed for refusing to sufficiently support Nazism in the classroom.⁷³ Correspondence between administrators culminated in “Heil Hitler!”⁷⁴ and the Humboldt School calendar for 1938 celebrated the dictator’s birthday as a school holiday.⁷⁵ One teacher at the Goethe School, Werner Hoffmann, read from Hans Grimm’s *Volk ohne Raum* (1926) in class, and drew from the text to justify Germany’s territorial and military expansionism.⁷⁶ The same calendar also highlights a theatrical presentation by the German Theater, and Ludwig Ney himself also taught in the Goethe School’s drama program in 1938.⁷⁷ Ney worked in the arts curricula of the German school system through the early 1970s and was a key figure in connecting first-generation Argentines with their German cultural heritage.

In 1934, Ernesto Alemann spearheaded the creation of the Pestalozzi School to resist the spread of Nazism in local German schools. Stefan Zweig would later refer to the school and its pupils as “a little miracle.”⁷⁸ The first rector of the Pestalozzi School, emigrant educator and journalist Alfred Dang, emphasized that the faculty’s objective was to confront the demons of Nazi pedagogy with true humanity.⁷⁹ Furious, in a report to Berlin, Ambassador

71. Volberg, *Auslandsdeutschtum*, 187.

72. Annual report, Humboldt-Schule (1939), Goethe School Archive (GSA), Vicente López, Argentina.

73. Claudia Garnica De Bertona, “Max Tepp, un intermediario entre dos mundos,” *Anuario Argentino de Germanística* 5 (2009): 314.

74. Schroder to Preschel, November 13, 1940, GSA.

75. 1938 Calendar, Humboldt-Schule, GSA.

76. Mariana González Lutier, “La Comisión de Investigación de las Actividades Anti-argentinas: El caso de la Goethe Schule,” *Cuadernos DIHA* 5–6 (2019).

77. Photographs of *Urfaust*, 1939, GSA.

78. “An die ‘Pestalozzi’-Schüler,” *Schülerzeitung der Pestalozzi-Schule*, September 1936.

79. “Die Humboldt-Schule eine naziotische Drilanstalt,” *AT*, April 6, 1938.

Edmund von Thermann denounced the Pestalozzi School as adversarial to the new Germany.⁸⁰ In 1934, Dang became the first German in South America to be denaturalized by Hitler's regime.

From its inception, the Free German Stage collaborated with the Pestalozzi School and the Cangallo School, which also remained independent from the German embassy.⁸¹ This effort was made at both pedagogical and economic levels. The FGS participated in fund-raisers for the schools and offered discounted ticket packages to pupils, parents, and teachers.⁸² It initiated a close exchange between its ensemble and refugee children, mainly through dramatic representations of fairy tales. Conscious of the trauma that many pupils had experienced in real life, the cast edited the stories to shield Nazism's youngest victims from the violence, death, and fatalism in many tales.⁸³ In the spirit of both schools' pedagogical mission of intercultural harmony, the productions included songs in Spanish, new roles for immigrant children, and Argentine figures such as gauchos from the Pampas.⁸⁴ By infusing European fairy tales with local cultural markers, the presentations abetted the children's transition from emigrants to immigrants in Argentina. Furthermore, several pupils eventually acted with the adult ensemble of the Free German Stage.

Supporting Actors: Nationalist, Antifascist, and Jewish Auxiliaries

Whether motivated locally by self-interest, transnational agendas, or a combination of the two, the pre-World War I ties between local divisions of nationalist German groups in Argentina and their parent organizations in Germany facilitated rapid, transatlantic coordination upon the emergence of the National Socialist

80. Thermann to FO, May 10, 1934, Pestalozzi School Archive (PSA), Buenos Aires, Argentina.

81. PWJA VI h) 299.

82. PWJA VI c) 288.

83. *Schneewittchen*, PWJA VI j) 312.

84. *Die Prinzessin auf der Erbse*, PWJA VI j) 312.

state. The German Association of Employees was established in 1912 as a local division of the conservative German National Retail Clerks Association. When Hitler came to power, the Clerks Association coordinated itself voluntarily and changed its name to the German Labor Front. In April 1934, the Association of Employees in Argentina followed suit. Under the direction of Alfred Müller, who later took charge of the Nazi Party in Argentina, the Labor Front opened itself to professions beyond commerce, vastly increasing its representation in the German population. Following a decree passed on May 15, 1939, which obliged all Argentine organizations to cut their ties with foreign countries, the Labor Front changed the German version of its name to the League of Working Germans and feigned democratic reforms in conjunction with the new legislation. The Spanish version of its name was not altered, indicating the continuity of this organization after the 1939 decree.

As in Germany, local divisions of the German Labor Front and Strength through Joy in Argentina formed the labor and diversion wings of an organization devoted to building a close-knit community of working Germans in support of National Socialism. The group offered its members and their families vacation and recreational opportunities, including trips to Germany.⁸⁵ Until the decree of 1939, these programs were operated in conjunction with the Strength through Joy organization in Germany. The Labor Front also published a monthly magazine, *Der Deutsche in Argentinien*, which featured articles about current political and cultural events in Germany and Argentina. *Der Deutsche in Argentinien* reported a circulation of 10,000 for 1939 and was published until late 1944.⁸⁶ The magazine was clearly oriented to Germany, and it was committed to Nazism, including racial anti-Semitism. Contrary to antifascist claims, however, the magazine's contents do not demonstrate overt antagonism to Argentina.⁸⁷

85. Newton, "Nazi Menace," 71.

86. Volberg, *Auslandsdeutschtum*, 67. Figures for the circulation of *Der Deutsche in Argentinien* vary. In *Exil in Lateinamerika*, Wolfgang Kießling estimates a circulation of 700 in 1934. Volberg cites the publication's own statistics, while Kießling provides no source. Kießling, *Exil in Lateinamerika*, 64.

87. Dickmann, *La infiltración nazi-fascista en la Argentina*, 13–14.

Der Deutsche in Argentinien



1941

Irene Ney als „Lilofee“
Zur Aufführung des Festspiels „Lilofee“ von Manfred Hausmann durch die Ney-Bühne

Februar

Figure 1. Portrait of the German Theater's Irene Ney
in Manfred Hausmann's *Lilofee*.

Source: Der Deutsche in Argentinien, February 1941. Biblioteca Nacional
Doctor Mariano Moreno—Argentina.

The Labor Front exerted a profound influence on the German theater scene in Buenos Aires. Not only did *Der Deutsche in Argentinien* publish regular features on Ludwig Ney's German Theater, but the Labor Front also sponsored all the stage's performances during its inaugural year in 1938. The Labor Front and Strength through Joy were fundamental to Nazi propaganda and community-building efforts in Argentina, and they robustly deployed theater in this endeavor.

In 1937 the former member of the German parliament August Siemsen, a Social Democrat, led efforts to found *Das Andere Deutschland* (DAD), a multipurpose organization and political journal central to exiles in Argentina and the Southern Cone, until it folded in 1948.⁸⁸ Many antifascist activists in Argentina were members of *Das Andere Deutschland's* executive committee, including Walter Damus, Heinrich Grönewald, Hans Lehmann, Rolf Ladendorff, Ernst Lakenbacher, and Rudolf Levy. Since local authorities refused to permit the establishment of an explicitly political organization, DAD consisted in effect of several thousand subscribers to a journal bearing its name. The founder of the Free German Stage, Paul Walter Jacob, was a frequent contributor to DAD.

DAD served as a liaison with Spanish and Italian antifascists and cultivated links to refugees in the far-flung corners of the Southern Cone. These exiles gathered political intelligence, which DAD passed along to Allied forces. The journal also distributed summaries of world events to provincial newspapers, whose limited resources rendered them vulnerable to Axis news agencies' offers to send them fascist propaganda for free. August Siemsen's activities for *Das Andere Deutschland* and the anti-Nazi Pestalozzi School drew the ire of Nazi authorities, who denaturalized him in 1938.⁸⁹ After the Argentine government passed a decree prohibiting the activities of various antifascist political parties and organizations

88. For thorough study of DAD, see Friedmann, *Alemanes antinazis en la Argentina*.

89. Geheimes Staatspolizeiamt Referat II B 3, September 7, 1938, PSA.

on January 17, 1944, *DAD* temporarily relocated its operations to Montevideo, Uruguay.⁹⁰

Despite threats from abroad and within Argentina, *DAD* admonished German emigrants to participate in the fight against fascism. *DAD* indicted apolitical emigrants, accusing them of being no better than the Nazis themselves; however, the group never wavered from its faith in the integrity of German culture and the German people.⁹¹ Even after the 1938 November pogroms, *DAD* repeatedly insisted that the German citizenry were not guilty of crimes against Jews. Instead, the organization asserted that socialists, democrats, and pious Christians suffered similar persecution. The German people, it sweepingly declared, were in fetters. They were victims, not perpetrators.⁹² Throughout Nazism *DAD* championed the existence of another, better Germany which, it argued, was also the true Germany.⁹³ A nucleus for the most engaged anti-fascists in the region, *DAD*'s aggressive posture irritated some less zealous refugees as well as Zionist organizations, many of which indicted Germans collectively.

Numbering over 300,000, the pre-1933 Jewish population in Argentina was the largest in South America and had established Buenos Aires as an internationally prominent center for eastern Jewish cultural traditions. There existed numerous Yiddish newspapers, magazines, publishers, printers, and a widely acclaimed Yiddish-language theater, the Yiddish People's Theater or IFT.⁹⁴ In the 1930s Jewish refugees from Europe founded many new Jewish political, cultural, and social organizations. Some, such as the Jewish Philanthropic Society, were moderate in their religious and political positions. Founded in 1933, the Jewish Philanthropic Society assisted recent arrivals with social and economic integration. The group offered Spanish language courses, legal advice for illegal

90. Friedmann, *Alemanes antinazis en la Argentina*, 131–132.

91. "Ihr seid nicht besser," *AT*, August 28, 1938.

92. "Nacht über Deutschland," *AT*, November 20, 1938.

93. Heiden to Alemann, June 20, 1938, PSA.

94. Nouwen, Oy, *My Buenos Aires*, 140–141; Alejandro Dujovne, "Print Culture and Urban Geography: Jewish Bookstores, Libraries, and Printers in Buenos Aires, 1910–1960," in Brodsky and Rein, *New Jewish Argentina*, 98.

immigrants, and assistance in finding lodgings and employment. It also published a monthly magazine about events and services in the community. Within ten years its membership ballooned from 175 to over 2,000 heads of Jewish families. According to the Society, this number signified that 10,000 emigrants were linked to the organization, 20–25 percent of the total Jewish migration to Argentina during the Nazi period.⁹⁵

Other Jewish institutions, such as the Jewish Cultural League, affirmed Zionist religious and political beliefs. The Cultural League issued a monthly news bulletin, organized a youth group, rented sporting facilities in the suburb of Olivos, and had garnered a membership of 1,500 by 1942.⁹⁶ According to League president Juan Zweig, by serving as a Jewish religious and cultural center the organization aimed to replace the milieu Jewish refugees had left behind in Europe, thereby rescuing them from spiritual isolation and psychological depression.⁹⁷ Considering that conservative estimates place Jewish emigration to Argentina at 40,000, the Cultural League had relatively low membership figures, indicating that most German-speaking Jewish emigrants to Argentina were moderate in their religious and political beliefs.

Two smaller Zionist organizations were the Group of German-Speaking Zionists, founded in 1936 or 1937, and renamed the Theodor Herzl Society in 1940; and the Zionist Forum, which was originally named the Zionist Forum Bar Kochba and was founded in 1937.⁹⁸ These institutions collaborated with the Free German Stage, which they pressured to perform Zionist dramas. When the ensemble staged Nathan Bistrizky's *That Night* in 1942, the Zionist Forum proclaimed its mission on the playbill for the event. The group promised to make every effort to deepen and disseminate Zionist values, as well as fulfill Zionist ambitions.⁹⁹ As news of the Shoah reached Argentina, Zionists voiced broad and bitter

95. Schwarcz, *Trotz allem*, 114.

96. Schwarcz, 145.

97. Schwarcz, 145.

98. Schwarcz, 154.

99. PWJA VI b) 281.

indictments of German culture and Germans, which put them at odds with antifascists, and to an extent, the FGS itself.

Local Jewish media also were involved in debates between Zionists and less religious organizations. In April of 1940 Rabbi Günter Friedländer and the lawyer Bernhardi Swarsensky, a Zionist activist who was also the president of the Theodor Herzl Society, founded the *Jüdische Wochenschau*. The *Wochenschau* was the only German-language Jewish newspaper in South America to gain a supraregional presence and withstand competition from the New York periodical *Aufbau*, which circulated throughout the Americas. A hard-line Zionist publication, the *Wochenschau* reviewed all productions by the FGS. It reported on cultural and political issues that were of interest to Jews and exhorted Jewish emigrants to return to their Jewish roots and rely on the principles of Judaism as a guide for life.¹⁰⁰

The *Jüdische Wochenschau* and *DAD* clashed repeatedly. The *Wochenschau* rejected *DAD*'s appeals that all emigrants, whether Jews or Gentiles, should unite against Hitler. In an early, programmatic article Swarsensky clarified that unlike the members of *DAD*, Hitler had attacked him and his readership not as Germans, but as Jews. No Jew, Swarsensky continued, should ever forgive Germany for what it had done to the Jewish people. Only by returning to the Jewish spirit and way of life could they overcome the violent rupture that Nazism had inflicted on them.¹⁰¹ In stark contrast to *DAD*, the *Wochenschau* severed all ties to Germany, advocating instead a Zionist interpretation of Jewish values and the return of all Jews to Eretz Israel. Acute discord between Zionists and political antifascists on issues of German identity and collective German guilt caused relations among refugees to steadily deteriorate throughout World War II and the postwar period.

The FGS, whose cast and public were composed of moderate Jews, Zionists, and antifascist Gentiles, was caught squarely in the crossfire of these hostilities. The troupe performed under the auspices of German antifascist and Zionist institutions. Both the

100. Kelz, "Los escritos de Hardi Swarsensky."

101. "Einig wie nie zuvor," *Jüdische Wochenschau* (JW), May 13, 1940.

Jüdische Wochenschau and *DAD* regularly reviewed the performances of the FGS and ran advertisements free of charge. This publicity was essential for the theater; however, offstage Zionist and antifascist institutions exerted considerable pressure on members of its cast to commit more resolutely to their respective political and religious positions. Furthermore, most German-speaking emigrants were politically and religiously moderate. These emigrants saw the FGS as neither an antifascist nor a Zionist institution, but rather an entertainment venue. As a professional enterprise without state funding—and one targeting a very limited and economically distressed public—the theater needed to attract all subgroups of the refugee population to its presentations, otherwise it would not remain solvent. The refugee colony and the ensemble were constituted by distinct groups with profoundly divergent perspectives. It was a daunting challenge for the Free German Stage to negotiate these internal and external fissures without alienating any specific group or betraying its own moral principles.

The preceding cross section of German Buenos Aires establishes its theaters as crucial community-building institutions at the center of the city's antagonistic nationalist, antifascist, and Zionist populations. The Free German Stage and the German Theater were a nexus for partisan immigrant media, educational, cultural, religious, and political organizations—all of which publicly celebrated the ensembles as standard-bearers while simultaneously vying to influence them from behind the curtain. Sharply divergent at first glance, their shared role as cultural bulwarks of immigrant populations raises the question of whether these stages and their constituencies deployed parallel approaches to community building, intercultural relationships, and dramatic theory. The lens of theater brings victims and adherents of Nazism into focus. Beyond defining difference, I draw from theatrical performances to search also for connections, overlaps, similarities, and even mimicry between these antithetical, fiercely conflictive groups.