
Shattered Dreams of Anti-Fascist Unity: German Speaking Exiles in Mexico, Argentina and Bolivia, 1937–1945

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Between the late 1930s and early 1940s Mexico City and Buenos Aires became the centres of activity for the two most relevant anti-fascist organisations of German-speaking exiles in Latin America: the communist-inspired Free German Movement (Bewegung Freies Deutschland; BFD) and the social-democratic oriented The Other Germany (Das Andere Deutschland; DAD). Both organisations envisaged the creation of an anti-fascist front within Latin America, one which would allow for greater unity of action, and thus carried out extensive congresses at Mexico City and Montevideo in 1943. Due to crucial ideological and tactical differences, this dream of anti-fascist unity led to a power struggle between BFD and DAD, well illustrated in the impact it had on Bolivia. This article seeks a new perspective on how, thanks to the establishment of transnational networks, a continental debate on the meaning and methods of anti-fascism then took place, while also shedding light on the influence the Latin American context had in shaping the exiles' plans for a new Germany.

'I have learned however that Germany is not the only country where Nazism is possible.'¹

Between the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War, Mexico City and Buenos Aires became hosts to the two most significant anti-fascist organisations of German speaking exiles in Latin America: Free German Movement (*Bewegung Freies Deutschland*; BFD) and The Other Germany (*Das Andere Deutschland*;

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¹ Erhart Löhnberg, writing from Bolivia in 1946: Erhart Löhnberg to Miriam Pillard, 8 Dec. 1946, ED 204, vol. I/2, Löhnberg Collection, Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich, Germany.

DAD), respectively. Whereas BFD was led by internationally renowned communists who were able to benefit from the support and ideological sympathy of the Mexican government, DAD was in the hands of lesser known figures whose quest for social democracy was even hampered by the Argentinian regime. Entertaining dreams of building a continental anti-fascist front, both organisations held large-scale congresses in Mexico City and Montevideo in early 1943. Contrary to what the lofty rhetoric of unity employed on these occasions might suggest, their efforts ran counter to each other, in a conflict ridden attempt to become *the* umbrella organisation that would coordinate the activities of a united German anti-fascist front (*Einheitsfront*) in Latin America. Despite the fact that German exiles in Mexico apparently succeeded in leading the anti-fascist struggle on the continent, the truth was that the rivalry between BFD and DAD led to divisions and schisms that affected political migration across Latin America.²

The following article will analyse the German exiles' situation in both Mexico and Argentina, focusing upon the power struggle between BFD and DAD, which will be further illustrated in reference to the impact it had on Bolivia. The antagonism between the Mexico City and Buenos Aires based organisations reflected long-running feuds on the German and European left, as well as resentment that the Hitler-Stalin Pact (1939–1941) had stirred up among socialist and other left-oriented groups vis-à-vis communist parties generally, whose shifting allegiances were viewed with constant mistrust. However, the parts played by BFD and DAD must be seen in the light of contemporary developments in Mexico and Argentina, as German speaking exiles' activities were conditioned by the political situation of their host countries. Although often overlooked, it was interaction with local, Latin American, anti-fascist (and pro-fascist) cultures that really constituted the framework for attempts to build another Germany. Through both exile and contact with a non-European audience, anti-fascism became a transatlantic political culture. It did so thanks to its lack of ideological coherence, and to the appeal exercised by it being a 'binary of binaries', demanding a choice between humanism and terror – or, as it will be seen, between idealism and pragmatism.³

As practically the only Latin American country whose regime endorsed a left-wing agenda in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Mexico became a refuge for leading German communists regarded by other countries as 'undesirable', such as Ludwig Renn, Anna Seghers and Paul Merker. In Mexico, anti-fascism was linked to a revival of the progressive goals set by the Mexican Revolution (1910–1917) and was often defined as opposition to the lack of political freedom and economic autonomy, seen as prevailing not only in countries subjugated by the Axis but also in Latin

² Fritz Pohle, *Das mexikanische Exil. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der politisch-kulturellen Emigration aus Deutschland. 1937–1946* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche, 1986), 50.

³ Anson Rabinbach, 'Introduction: Legacies of Antifascism', *New German Critique*, 67 (1996), 11 and *idem*, 'Paris, Capital of Anti-Fascism', in Warren Breckman and Martin Jay, eds., *The Modernist Imagination. Intellectual History and Critical Theory* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 184.

America as a whole.⁴ Among left-wing groups, especially those close to the trade union movement and those with pro-communist sympathies, anti-fascism signified an attempt to move the official party further to the left, as well as signalling a mutually beneficial collaboration between left-wing forces and the state. It is notable that this strategy was not unlike the one followed by BFD, founded in Mexico City in 1941, whose privileged relationship with the Mexican government as well as its relative laxity in its choice of political allies were key to its success both in influencing fellow exiles in Mexico and in the international arena. A further advantage was Mexico's geopolitical situation, including its vicinity to the United States and the German exiles living there, whereas the country's pro-Allies policy lent credibility to the exiles' projects.

In Argentina anti-fascism was much less of a government policy than in Mexico, and more a civil society affair. Among socialist and even communist circles, which were mostly excluded from power, the fight against totalitarianism was inscribed within nineteenth-century political discourses. Consequently, anti-fascism was intertwined with liberal values – principles such as civil liberties and constitutional government – in order to oppose corrupt elections and coups d'état, and led to reflections on the dangers posed by a local variety of creole fascism (*fascismo criollo*). It is no coincidence that social democrats came to lead the anti-fascist struggle within Argentina's community of German speaking exiles in view of the country's rich socialist tradition – to which, half a century earlier, Germany made a significant contribution. A group of exiled members of the Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*; SPD) founded the Forward Association (*Verein Vorwärts*) in 1882, heralding the creation of the Argentinian Socialist Party in 1896.⁵ Based in Buenos Aires, DAD was founded in 1937 and, under the leadership of the social democrat August Siemsen, relied much less upon governmental support than on efforts to influence everyday life within the local German community, leading to educational and cultural ventures that survived the war years. Ironically, DAD's democratic approach to the issue of anti-fascist unity – that is, a unity built on a series of regional agreements – proved disadvantageous in comparison to the expedient decision making process within BFD as it was controlled by its communist leadership. DAD's attempts to enhance its international visibility were impaired by Argentina's position of neutrality during most of the war, while exiles fell prey to the country's political repression after the coup of June 1943.

The problematic interaction between BFD and DAD will be explored in reference to a third party: Bolivia. In the 1940s this country was far from isolated from international events or discourses, such as a paranoia about 'real or invented

⁴ Andrea Aclé-Kreysing, 'Antifascismo: un espacio de encuentro entre el exilio y la política nacional. El caso de Vicente Lombardo Toledano en México (1936–1945)', *Revista de Indias*, 267, 76 (2016), 573–610.

⁵ Germán Friedmann, *Alemanes antinazis en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno, 2010), 27; Sandra Carreras, Horacio Tarcus and Jessica Zeller, *Los socialistas alemanes y la formación del movimiento obrero argentino* (Buenos Aires: Buenos Libros, 2008), 7–22.

Nazi influences' that gained ground after the nationalist military coup of 1943.⁶ Additionally, Bolivia did not remain untouched by the competing ideological – and tactical – offers from BFD and DAD, which generated a passionate debate within its German speaking exile community. This is best exemplified in the correspondence of Erhart Löhnberg, who fought for the spread of DAD's ideals in Bolivia, while being wooed by the BFD's communist representative, Enzo Arian. As the latter wrote, anti-fascism presupposed a set of clear tasks: material and moral support for the western Allies and the Soviet Union, the rebuttal of all fascist actions and thoughts and the transformation of a dislike of Germany and the Germans into a hatred of Nazism and the Nazis.⁷ However, the devil lay in the details, that is, in defining what were 'the specific, individual methods'.

The triangle established between Mexico, Argentina and Bolivia throws light on the construction of transnational networks under difficult circumstances, with little or no personal contact possible and communication taking place mostly through letters which took around six weeks to reach their destinations. However, correspondence played a cathartic role. Not only did it offer those in exile the opportunity to write in their mother tongue, it also enabled exiles to reconstruct a lost Germany, as shown by the constant references in these letters to former acquaintances and places, as well as to previous political experiences. Moreover, this allowed their authors – who, after all, were not in exile *all* the time, but performed different roles in their host societies – to recreate a political sphere that did not exist in their everyday lives.⁸ In doing so, exiles faced a double task: to persuade both fellow exiles and existing German communities to abandon their political indifference and engage in action.

Anti-Fascism and German speaking Exiles in Mexico and Argentina

The efforts of politically engaged exiles in these Latin American countries had much in common, beginning with a rhetoric that – running like a leitmotiv through publications and speeches – exalted the cultural values associated with the 'true' Germany: the tolerant, pacifist and humanist homeland of Goethe, Lessing, Schiller and Beethoven.⁹ As Ludwig Renn insisted, the world needed to know that 'neither are all Germans Nazis, nor could Hitler be made synonymous with Germany'.¹⁰ This rhetoric came accompanied by the duty to denounce the influence of a 'fifth column' on the American continent, composed of diplomats and Nazi sympathisers within local German communities, but also in those sectors of Mexican, Argentinian or Bolivian society who found anti-Semitism and right-wing extremism appealing.

⁶ Laurence Whitehead, 'Bolivia since 1930', in Leslie Bethell, ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991), vol. 8, 21–5.

⁷ Enzo Arian to Löhnberg, 5 Oct. 1942, ED 204, vol. I/1, LC, IfZ.

⁸ I am indebted to Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas, whose ideas on the psychology and dilemmas of exiles helped shape my approach to this topic.

⁹ Friedmann, *Alemanes antinazis*, 13.

¹⁰ *Primer Congreso Antifascista. México, enero, febrero, 1942. Memoria-resumen* (Mexico City: Acción Democrática Internacional – Talleres de 'El Libro Perfecto', 1942), 45.

In doing so, the German exiles unintentionally unleashed what Friedmann calls a 'boomerang effect', as they brought hatred upon the Germans as a whole. They thus became obsessed with differentiating between 'good' and 'bad' Germans, especially when it came to debating crucial issues such as the persecution of the Jewish people.¹¹ Defending 'good' Germans became vital once the legal standing of Germans became tenuous, partly due to pressure exerted by the United States, especially once Mexico, Bolivia and, to a lesser extent, Argentina entered the war on the side of the Allies – in May 1942, April 1943 and March 1945, respectively. Last but not least, German exiles' search for an audience put them in touch with local anti-fascist cultures. If the fascist threat was global, it implied the search for a common genealogy, so German exiles appropriated local myths regarding the Mexican Revolution, the liberal and republican 'tradition of May [1810]' (*tradición de mayo*) in Argentina, or the theses of dissident Marxism in Bolivia.¹²

In the case of Mexico, the rise to power of Lázaro Cárdenas (1936–1940) made it possible to implement a number of the revolution's aims with regard to workers' rights, agrarian reform and nationalisation of Mexico's natural resources. In order to advance these reforms despite virulent right-wing opposition, Cárdenas resorted to a strategic alliance with Mexico's left-wing forces, as well as with the peasants' and workers' movement.¹³ This alliance also backed the president's decision, taken at the end of the Spanish Civil War, to give asylum to around 20,000 Spanish Republicans. A relationship of mutual support was established between Cárdenas and labour leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the leading voice of the country's anti-fascist campaign. This campaign had a transnational dimension, through the Confederation of Latin American Workers (*Confederación de Trabajadores de América Latina*; CTAL), headed by Lombardo who, despite his Marxism, was never affiliated with the Mexican Communist Party. He constantly exalted the progressive nature of the Mexican revolution, while defending the view that it had been a forerunner to the 'popular front', whose full realisation still depended upon a temporary alliance between the proletariat and the government, as well as with the peasantry and the middle classes.¹⁴ This kind of rhetoric explains the appeal in Mexico of the Comintern's strategy of establishing broad anti-fascist alliances, in force until August 1939, when the Hitler–Stalin Pact was signed. In Mexico, as elsewhere, communist political circles resorted

¹¹ Friedmann, *Alemanes antinazis*, 6–7, 151–9, 168–74.

¹² Whereas there is widespread evidence of how German exiles adopted themes from the Mexican Revolution (i.e. literary works by Renn, Seghers, Uhse and Regler) or the Argentinian *tradición de mayo* (i.e. DAD's references to South American nineteenth-century heroes), the influence exercised among European refugees by the Bolivian tradition of dissident Marxism remains to be ascertained. Influenced by Trotsky's idea of the permanent revolution, this tradition posited the revolutionary role of mining workers, as well as the character of the Andean peasant communities, as a native prototype of communism. See S. Sándor John, *Bolivia's Radical Tradition* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 4–10, 37–8.

¹³ Friedrich E. Schuler, *Mexico between Hitler and Roosevelt. Mexican Foreign Relations in the Age of Lázaro Cárdenas, 1934–1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 61.

¹⁴ Vicente Lombardo, 'El asilo de México para León Trotsky y la actitud del proletariado mexicano', *Futuro*, 11 (Jan. 1937), 9–11.

to a variety of ideological manoeuvres to adapt to changing Soviet politics, especially in relation to 'other' left-wing exiles in Mexico who criticised Stalinism, including Leon Trotsky (murdered in Mexico City in 1940), Victor Serge and Julián Gorkin – and, in the German case, Otto Rühle and Gustav Regler.¹⁵

Regardless of the struggles within the Mexican left-wing scene, whose complexity should not be underestimated, the fact remains that Mexican politics were undoubtedly entering a much more temperate phase. After Manuel Ávila Camacho's stint as president from 1940 to 1946, the emphasis of the anti-fascist campaign was no longer on the radical transformation of society. It focused instead on a strategic alliance with the United States, as well as on the maintenance of the status quo, albeit under the banner of national unity. However, Ávila Camacho did carry on Cárdenas' asylum policy, and thus around 100 German speaking communist exiles entered the country.¹⁶ Among them were writers, political activists and journalists (such as Anna Seghers, László Radványi, Egon Erwin Kisch, André Simone, Bodo Uhse, Bruno Frei and Ludwig Renn), functionaries of the Communist Party (Paul Merker and Alexander Abusch) and important figures in the fields of culture and art (Gertrude Duby and Paul Westheim). This happened thanks to the efforts of both Lombardo and the League for German Culture (*Liga Pro Cultura Alemana*), founded in Mexico City in 1938 as a sort of popular front for German exiles in Mexico, which united communists, social democrats and republicans.¹⁷ Although a crucial shift of power took place once the Liga was displaced by the communist-led *Bewegung Freies Deutschland* (1941–1946), German speaking exiles did manage to maintain their privileged relationship with the Mexican government. With 400 members in total, BFD received subsidies from the Soviet embassy and was 'apparently looked on benignly by the Americans'.¹⁸

It is worth noting that the foundation of BFD in January 1942 was preceded by the creation of the *Heinrich-Heine-Klub* in November 1941 which, presided over by the writer Anna Seghers, hosted concerts, literary events and conferences. The implicit celebration of the poet Heine (1797–1856), taking his Jewish background and radical political views into account, is symptomatic of the way in which the

¹⁵ The anti-Bolshevist Communist Otto Rühle gradually became estranged from all left-wing factions in Mexico and blamed the loss of his job on 'Stalinist intrigues'. However, Rühle's apparent failure to secure a position, in keeping with his lifelong experience, cannot be attributed to ideological strife alone. The integration of foreign professionals within Mexico was a complex process, as Leidenberger's research on former Bauhaus director Hannes Meyer shows. See Lizette Jacinto, 'Desde la otra orilla: Alice Rühle-Gerstel y Otto Rühle. La experiencia del exilio político de izquierda en México 1935–1943', *Historia Mexicana*, 64, 1 (2014), 159–236; Georg Leidenberger, "'Todo aquí es vulkanisch". El arquitecto Hannes Meyer en México, de 1938 a 1949', in Laura Rojas and Susan Deeds, eds., *México a la luz de sus revoluciones*, 2 vols. (Mexico: El Colegio de México, 2014), 499–539.

¹⁶ They were part of the approximately 3000 non-Spanish European refugees fleeing fascism who entered Mexico before 1943. Pohle, *Das mexikanische Exil*, 5, 69.

¹⁷ Brígida von Mentz, Ricardo Pérez Montfort and Verena Radkau, *Fascismo y antifascismo en América Latina y México. Apuntes históricos* (México, CIESAS: 1984), 49–50.

¹⁸ Ronald C. Newton, 'Indifferent Sanctuary: German speaking Refugees and Exiles in Argentina: 1933–1945', *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 24, 4 (1982), 410; Martin Hielscher, *Fluchttort Mexiko. Ein Asylland für die Literatur* (Hamburg, Luchterhand Literaturverlag: 1992), 33–4.

ideological battles waged by the German anti-fascists – in Mexico and elsewhere – were a matter of both politics and culture. The staging of plays by Bertolt Brecht and Georg Büchner, as well as the foundation of a periodical entitled *Free Germany* (*Freies Deutschland*) and a publishing house called The Free Book (*El Libro Libre*), were consequently seen as a crucial means of underpinning BFD's more general aim: the creation of an alliance of 'democratic' Germans actively committed to the eradication of Nazism.¹⁹ In order to achieve this objective, BFD encouraged the support of the Allies – and especially of the Soviet Union. It also sought backing for Ávila Camacho's foreign policy by claiming that 'Mexican concerns are our concerns', while making the Mexican public aware of the existence of anti-Nazi Germans.²⁰

Notwithstanding the suspicions created by its communist leadership, BFD gained – in a short period of time – a high degree of international visibility. Its clear desire to extend its influence throughout Latin America posed an implicit challenge to the well-established DAD in Argentina. This organisation had been founded in Buenos Aires in 1937 and was led by August Siemsen, who during the Weimar Republic had been a deputy in the Reichstag, representing a left-wing fraction of the SPD, the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands*; SAPD).²¹ It began as a committee to aid survivors of the International Brigades and other leftist exiles who were ineligible for assistance from Jewish charities and soon acquired a sharp political profile, defending the victims of fascism in both Germany and abroad – such as those at risk due to Hitler's intervention in the Spanish Civil War. As well as helping exiles meet their daily needs, DAD launched a campaign to heighten awareness of the atrocities committed by the Nazis in Europe and of the inroads made by Nazism in Argentina. From the start DAD had a heterogeneous membership along the lines of the 'popular front' strategy. Apart from Siemsen some of its most active members were the journalists Alfred Dang and Doris Dauber, the artist Clément Moreau (Carl Meffert) and other committed social democrats such as Heinrich Grönewald, Hans Lehmann and Oda Oldberg-Lerda. A monthly publication, also called *DAD*, was issued from 1939, with a print run of 4,000–5,000 towards the end of the war.²² The composition of DAD underwent a significant change when, in 1941, its communist section abandoned the organisation and founded its own newspaper, *Volksblatt* (1941–1943), whose most relevant contributors were Adolf Walter Freund, Erich Sieloff and Balder Olden.

In contrast to Mexico, the denazification (*Entnazifizierung*) of the local German colony in Argentina was a much more extensive process. By the late 1930s Argentina had a German speaking population of approximately 250,000 – while the equivalent

¹⁹ Wolfgang Kießling, *Alemania Libre in Mexiko* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag: 1974), vol. II, 58–66.

²⁰ Ludwig Renn, 'Tätigkeitsbericht [der Bewegung Freies Deutschland in Mexiko]' (8 May 1943), in *In Mexiko* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1979), 149–62.

²¹ Newton, 'Indifferent Sanctuary', 408; Friedmann, *Alemanes antinazis*, 32–4, 74–8.

²² In 1943 Siemsen calculated that DAD had 10,000 members, a number which Friedmann (*Alemanes antinazis*, 38–40, 45) deems too optimistic, although the loose constitution of DAD made it difficult to ascertain the true number of affiliates.

population in Mexico numbered around 7,000.²³ Most of these people had either supported the Third Reich or were, at the very least, not actively opposed to it, while their own 'superiority' was implicitly confirmed by Latin American societies' prejudices in favour of 'white' Europeans. Despite the fact that both countries had had local branches of the Nazi Party (NSDAP) since 1931, the collaboration between the local right-wing faction and Germany was only truly significant in the case of Argentina.²⁴ Taking this into account, the cultural activities undertaken by the 'German anti-Nazis' (*alemanes antinazis*) in Argentina acquired a more urgent and, indeed, a more controversial character than that of their Mexican counterparts. The forerunner of DAD, the Pestalozzi Society (*Pestalozzi Gesellschaft*) of Buenos Aires – which was founded in 1934 and ran a school free from Nazi ideology – organised conferences and talks. Guest speakers included Stefan Zweig, Emil Ludwig and Paul Zech. In 1938 some members of DAD founded a theatre troupe called *Truppe 38*. It performed plays by Tucholsky and Brecht, often in collaboration with *Verein Vorwärts*, paving the way of the creation, in 1940, of the Free German Theatre (*Freie Deutsche Bühne*). Both the *Freie Deutsche Bühne* and the 'aligned' *Deutsches Theater* of Buenos Aires claimed to provide 'true' German culture but, as Friedmann demonstrates, their repertoires were not radically different, since authors such as Goethe and Schiller were appropriated as 'national glories' by Nazis and anti-Nazis alike.²⁵

No description of DAD – and of BFD – would be complete without brief reference to their attitude to the Holocaust. In the periodical *Freies Deutschland* Merker insisted that the German people were collectively responsible for the atrocities committed against the Jews, and he was vocal in his support for compensation for Jewish survivors after the war as well as for the creation of a Jewish state. As Graf argues, BFD's location in Mexico afforded them relative freedom from Soviet dictates. This in turn, he contends, enabled BFD to challenge the standard communist interpretation of anti-Semitism as a tactic used to distract people from focusing on their true (capitalist) oppressors. Instead, BFD described it as a key feature of Nazism, although this is not to say that financial matters did not continue to colour interpretations of anti-Semitism.²⁶

DAD's position regarding the Holocaust developed along similar lines to their counterparts in Mexico: starting with the assertion that not only Jews but also the political opposition had been brutally persecuted by the Nazi regime, there was

²³ Friedmann, *Alemanes antinazis*, 24–6; Newton, 'Indifferent Sanctuary', 398, 404–5; Verena Radkau, 'Los nacionalsocialistas en México', in von Mentz et al., *Los empresarios alemanes*, 148–51.

²⁴ Newton, 'Indifferent Sanctuary', 398–400; David Rock, 'Argentina. 1930–1946' in Leslie Bethell, ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. VIII, 5.

²⁵ Friedmann, *Alemanes antinazis*, 55–7, 62–7; von zur Mühle, *Fluchtziel*, 142. Following the arrival of the anti-fascist exile in Argentina, Verein Vorwärts had recovered its political character, after decades of functioning as a recreation centre.

²⁶ Philip Graf, 'Ante el Holocausto: El exilio comunista germano-parlante en la Ciudad de México, 1941–1946', in Giovanni Di Stefano and Michaela Peters, eds., *México como punto de fuga real o imaginario: el exilio europeo en víspera de la Segunda Guerra Mundial* (Munich: Meidenbauer, 2011), 239–59; Ricardo Pérez Montfort, 'Notas en torno al exilio político alemán en México, 1939–1946', in von Mentz et al., *Fascismo y antifascismo*, 44–7.

a gradual acknowledgement that the crimes committed against the Jewish people were unparalleled. However, DAD's situation differed from BFD's in one crucial respect: the Jewish community in Argentina numbered 250,000, compared to just 20,000 in Mexico.²⁷ As a result, DAD was powerfully motivated to gain the support of this community, well-organised and well-represented – for example, by *Jüdische Wochenschau*, mouthpiece of the German speaking Jewish community since 1940. DAD's publications had often criticised the political indifference of the majority of the Jewish population in Argentina, urging it to set religious or national practices aside in favour of contributing to the global march towards socialism. In 1943, during the ensuing discussions about the extent of the Jewish contribution to the anti-fascist struggle, *Jüdische Wochenschau* reached a point of no-return: in view of the undeniable proof of crimes committed against the Jews, it argued, the latter were no longer bound to defend the German cause, let alone strive to distinguish good Germans from bad ones.²⁸

In a development that points to its ideological flexibility, anti-fascism became tied to a movement that sought to defend *argentinidad* – the essence of Argentinian identity – which went beyond narrow forms of nationalism, focusing instead on liberal and democratic values. It called for a much-needed revival of the *tradición de mayo* in order to rescue Argentinian democracy from the fascist threat. In doing so, anti-fascism was a direct response to the rise of a new nationalist discourse, a distinctively right-wing product committed to rooting out both liberalism and communism, but also to social reform, as later epitomised by president Juan Perón.²⁹ For example, the socialists sponsored the foundation of *Acción Argentina* in 1940, an alliance of civic forces (excluding the communists) in which the support for the Allies went hand-in-hand with the commitment to renew the core values of Argentinian politics.³⁰ In the case of the communists, who were 'liberal Marxists' according to Pasolini, the exaltation of Argentine's republican tradition coexisted with the appeals for a revolution based on the Soviet model.³¹ In this context, the German exiles jumped on the anti-fascist bandwagon, helping to denounce the activities of the 'fifth column' in Argentina,

²⁷ Newton, 'Indifferent Sanctuary', 398; Daniela Gleizer, *El exilio incómodo. México y los refugiados judíos, 1933–1945* (Mexico City: FCE, 2012), 41, 57. Between 1933 and 1945 Argentina received 45,000 Jewish refugees, Mexico only 1,850 to 2,250.

²⁸ Friedmann, *Alemanes antinazis*, 161–3; 'Alemanes anti-hitleristas y antisemitismo', *Hispania Nova*, 14 (2016), 101, 107–9.

²⁹ Rock, 'Argentina', 4.

³⁰ The socialists also promoted the Comisión Investigadora de Actividades Antiargentinas (1941–1942) in Congress, which exposed 'Nazi-fascist penetration' in the country. Both *Acción Argentina* and the Comisión established close links with *Das Andere Deutschland*. See Andrés Bisso, *Acción Argentina. Un antifascismo nacional en tiempos de guerra mundial* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2005), 82, 110–1; Andrés Bisso, 'Los socialistas argentinos y la apelación antifascista durante el "fraude tardío" (1938–1943)', in Hernán Camarero and Miguel Herrera, eds., *El partido socialista en Argentina: sociedad, política e ideas a través de un siglo* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2005), 321–41; Friedmann, *Alemanes antinazis*, 100–7.

³¹ Ricardo Pasolini, *Los marxistas liberales. Antifascismo y cultura comunista en la Argentina del siglo XX* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2013), 47–55, 93–4, 104–7.

whose aim was to destroy the 'ideas of 1810'.³² The poignant sketches of Moreau, who depicted Hitler disguised as an Argentinian 'cowboy' (*gaucho*) in 1938, eloquently illustrated the Creolisation (*criollización*) of the exiles' anti-fascist discourse.³³

The campaign to denounce the fascist inclinations of the regimes that followed the coup of 1930 (spanning the presidencies of José Félix Uriburu, Agustín P. Justo, Roberto M. Ortiz and Ramón S. Castillo) reached a peak in the movement against the rise of Perón – or 'Naziperonismo' – in the months preceding the elections of February 1946.³⁴ Despite the fact that the Second World War had already come to an end, Argentina was seen as a place in which the battle against fascism still had to be fought. Regardless of the demise of the Comintern (1919–1943), the popular front strategy was resurrected in a *Unión Democrática* which brought together a mixture of political forces, including socialists and communists. The US embassy was also drawn into the support of the *Unión*, especially by the publication of a *Blue Book* which uncovered alleged links between Perón and Nazism.³⁵

The Clash Between BFD and DAD: Montevideo versus Mexico City

It is remarkable that, despite the sharp asymmetry in terms of influence that the German community could wield with regard to national politics, BFD was nonetheless able to challenge DAD's influence among German speaking anti-fascist organisations in the Southern Cone of South America. The reasons are rooted in Mexico's advantageous geopolitical situation, as well as in the tactics followed by the two organisations. The year 1943, marking ten years since Hitler's rise to power, had a special significance, as many thought that the end of the war was finally in sight. The Congress of German Anti-Fascists of South America (*Congreso de los alemanes antifascistas de América del Sur*) organised by DAD, aimed to show that, despite all difficulties, South America did possess an active German anti-fascist movement, opposed both to the oppression exercised by the Axis and to the persecution of the Jewish people.³⁶ This initiative had been preceded by the foundation, at the end of 1942, of the Coordinating Committee of Democratic Germans (*Comisión*

³² R., 'A nuestros amigos argentinos', *Heute und Morgen*, 2, 14 (Nov. 1942), 25.

³³ Michael Nungesser, 'Im argentinischen Exil: Kampf gegen den Faschismus', in Clément Moreau and Carl Meffert, *Grafik für den Mitmenschen. Deutschland· Schweiz· Argentinien* (Berlin: Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst and Kunstamt Kreuzberg, 1978), 168, 185, 209; Jessica Zeller, 'Un ilustrador humanista y transcultural: el caso de Clément Moreau', *Iberoamericana. América Latina – España – Portugal*, 9, 33 (2009), 139–56.

³⁴ Andrés Bisso, *El antifascismo argentino* (Buenos Aires: Buenos Libros–CeDInCI, 2007), 38–48 and *idem*, *Acción Argentina*, 247–8.

³⁵ To complete the picture, a note on Argentinian neutrality during the Second World War is needed: despite the pro-fascist sympathies of local politicians and widespread tolerance of Nazi propaganda, the country's neutrality suited the financial and commercial interests of both Germany and Great Britain. Argentinian reluctance to join the US-sponsored Pan-American Alliance was partly in response to the Americans' refusal to cooperate in trade matters. See Rock, 'Argentina', 51; Luis Alberto Romero, *Breve historia contemporánea de la Argentina* (Mexico City: FCE, 2001), 45.

³⁶ 'Der Kongress in Montevideo', *DAD*, 6, 58 (Jan. 1943), 1.

Coordinadora de los Alemanes Democráticos), led by the writer Balder Olden, and with representatives from DAD and *Volksblatt*, as well as from several German–Argentinian associations. The *Comisión* was inspired by Siemsen's conception of the unity front, restricted to the left-wing opponents of National Socialism. Their task was not only to fight fascism but also to point to capitalism's contradictions and strive for a socialist future.

This Congress took place between 29 and 31 January in Montevideo, with forty participants, the majority hailing from Argentina and Uruguay. It received many messages of support from literary celebrities (Thomas Mann, Bertolt Brecht and Lion Feuchtwanger) as well as from across the left-wing political spectrum, including telegrams from German exiles in the Soviet Union and the United States.³⁷ It was inaugurated under the honorary presidency of Uruguay's chief of state, Alfredo Baldomir, alongside Winston Churchill, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin, while tributes were paid at the tomb of José Gervasio Artigas, one of the heroes of the emancipation of South America from Spanish rule. The most relevant outcome of the congress was the publication of a 'Political Manifesto of the German Anti-Fascists of South America', which contained a detailed description of those measures necessary to establish a socialist Germany after the war.³⁸ The communists prepared an alternative manifesto, expressing similar hopes regarding the self-liberation of the German people but without any plans for the post-war restructuring of Germany, still considered to be too premature.³⁹ However, the true split stemmed from divergent ideas as to how the anti-fascist *Einheitsfront* should be built: while DAD sought to restrict it to the socialist and democratic left-wing opposition, the communists wanted to build resistance along the lines of the popular front.⁴⁰ Yet the dissent underpinning the Montevideo congress was set aside, albeit only temporarily, with the creation of a Committee of Three (*Dreier-Ausschuss*), composed of Siemsen and Heinrich Grönewald from DAD and Erich Sieloff from the *Volksblatt*. It would serve as platform for the construction of a future Central Committee for South America, while each individual country was supposed to create its own 'coordinating commission' (*comisión coordinadora*), modelled on that of Buenos Aires. The definitive schism came later, when *Volksblatt* broke with DAD and aligned itself with BFD. The latter organisation announced, again in January 1943, the creation of an organisation committee which would lay the foundations of a Latin American Committee of Free Germans (*Lateinamerikanisches Komitee der Freien Deutschen*; LAK).

These disagreements between BFD and DAD concerning the unity front had a long history, going back to at least November 1941, when the first issue of the publication, *Freies Deutschland* of Mexico, urged Hitler's opponents to unite

³⁷ Pohle, *Das mexikanische Exil*, 255–6; Friedmann, *Alemanes antinazis*, 128–9.

³⁸ 'Manifiesto político de los alemanes antifascistas de Sudamérica', in DAD, *Informe del I. Congreso de los alemanes antifascistas de América del Sur en Montevideo*, 6, 69 (Feb. 1943), 3–7.

³⁹ 'Manifiesto de la minoría', in DAD, *Informe del I. Congreso*, 18–9.

⁴⁰ Friedmann, *Alemanes antinazis*, 130; Pohle, *Das mexikanische Exil*, 256.

forces.⁴¹ This was followed by the efforts of Abusch, Frei and Kisch – through correspondence – to determine the situation of German speaking exile communities in Latin America.⁴² In February 1942 *Freies Deutschland* published more concrete plans on how to construct a unity front in Latin America.⁴³ By June Merker had founded a section within BFD devoted to establishing links abroad which, having borne fruit in Central America, encountered greater resistance in South America where DAD was represented by fifteen affiliated bodies outside Argentina. However, as the creation of new, pro-communist groups in South America began to threaten DAD's predominance, Siemsen wrote an article in the June 1942 issue of *DAD* which served ultimately as a warning against the activities ongoing in Mexico, seen as wanting in honesty and fairness. In their attempt to win allies at any price, he argued, the communists seemed to forget that mere hatred toward Hitler did not offer a solid enough basis to construct a true anti-fascist front committed to a socialist post-war world.⁴⁴ In November 1942 DAD published an open letter which affirmed that the 'anti-Hitler coalition' did not signify unconditional cooperation with the authorities of any given country, implying that BFD's success in winning the allegiance of the Movement of Free Germans in Brazil (*Movimiento dos Alemães livres do Brasil*) had been followed by a declaration of loyalty to the government of the Brazilian military dictator, Getulio Vargas, whose support for the Allies could not erase his former admiration for Hitler and persecution of communists.⁴⁵

In contrast to DAD BFD pursued what Pohle calls a 'policy of alliances' (*Bündnispolitik*), in which class and party differences were intentionally blurred. This was complemented by the tactic of claiming full identification with the Allies without making any reference to the clash of interests between them.⁴⁶ Yet this strategy proved to be very effective as it aligned BFD with Mexican foreign policy while also lending credibility to the overall enterprise of building the LAK. In the latter case the organisation committee, announced in January 1943, became, shortly afterwards and almost unilaterally, the official executive committee of LAK under the presidency of Renn. In order to give LAK a more pluralist political façade, an honorary committee was created, which several moderate anti-fascists were invited to join, such as the writer Heinrich Mann and Hubertus Prinz zu Löwenstein, both exiled in the United

⁴¹ 'An die Leser!', *Freies Deutschland*, no. 1, 15 Nov. 1941, 31, in Kießling, *Alemania Libre*, vol. II, 13–9. On the tensions between Kießling's account, critical of Siemsen, and Pohle's, critical of the communists, see Anne Saint Saveur-Henn, 'El grupo del *Völkblatt* en Buenos Aires (1941–1943): la cuestión del frente unido en el exilio argentino y las relaciones con el movimiento de Alemania Libre en México', in Renata von Hanffstengel and Cecilia Tercero, eds., *México, el exilio bien temperado* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Interculturales Germano-Mexicanas – UNAM – Instituto Goethe – Secretaría de Cultura de Puebla, 1995), 141–60.

⁴² Kießling, *Alemania Libre*, vol. I, 150.

⁴³ 'Die Bewegung Freies Deutschland', *Freies Deutschland*, 1, 4 (15 Feb. 1942) in Kießling, *Alemania Libre*, vol. II, 23–7.

⁴⁴ *DAD*, 5, 51 (Jun. 1942), 1–3.

⁴⁵ *DAD*, 5, 56 (Nov. 1942), 21.

⁴⁶ Patrick von zur Mühlen, *Fluchtziel Lateinamerika. Die deutsche Emigration 1933–1945: politische Aktivitäten und soziokulturelle Integration* (Bonn, Verlag Neue Gesellschaft: 1988), 181–2.

States, and Karl Lustig von Prean, then in Brazil. A post within this honorary committee was offered to Siemsen, too, as well as LAK's official endorsement of the periodical *DAD*, but he ignored this attempt at rapprochement by BFD. In an article published in March 1943 Siemsen argued that, despite these measures, the LAK remained a politically 'one-sided' organisation. Nonetheless, he offered to expand the *Dreier Ausschuss* by including a fourth member to represent Mexico and Central America.⁴⁷ BFD proved equally unwilling to compromise and offered at most to establish the two organisations as equals, with each sending representatives to the other. When *DAD* complained about the immense distance that separated Mexico from South America, BFD countered with comments on the remoteness of Argentina, and its 'special' role during the war.⁴⁸

By April 1943 it had become clear that the Montevideo resolutions regarding the development of the *Einheitsfront* in South America could not be realised, obstructed by the followers of LAK in each country. This was especially the case in Argentina once the *Volksblatt* announced its adhesion to LAK, draining the *Dreier Ausschuss* of all future legitimacy. Siemsen's reaction was passionate. He argued that there were only two alternatives: the unity front led by *DAD*, in which honest collaboration did not conceal the ideological differences of its members, or the unity front led by BFD, a political group which camouflaged its communist loyalties, and which had no qualms in attacking dissident anti-fascists.⁴⁹ Shortly afterwards Siemsen wrote once more that BFD was unsuitable to lead a unity front because it was dominated by communists, yet he also affirmed, in an equally partial manner, that 'DAD is the unity front [*die Einheitsfront*]'.⁵⁰ According to one of his sharpest critics, the communist writer Olden, Siemsen's problem was that he would rather be 'the first in his town, than the second in Rome'.⁵¹ However, the schism between *DAD* and *Volksblatt* would not develop further due to the political repression that followed the June 1943 putsch in Argentina.⁵²

Acting as a sort of counter-weight to Montevideo, the BFD's first national congress took place in Mexico City on 8–9 May 1943. It allowed BFD to prevail over internal

⁴⁷ *DAD*, 6, 63 (Apr. 1943), 1.

⁴⁸ Pohle, *Das mexikanische Exil*, 262–7.

⁴⁹ *DAD* wrote in defence of the ex-communist Gustav Regler. See 'Deutsche Antifaschisten in Mexiko', *DAD*, 6, 65 (15 May 1943), 19; *idem*, *Das Ohr des Malchus* (Köln-Berlin: Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1958), 494–7.

⁵⁰ 'Das andere Deutschland ist die Einheitsfront', *DAD*, 6, 65 (May 1943), 10.

⁵¹ Olden to Lustig von Prean, n.d., Olden Collection, Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, cited by María Ximena Álvarez, '"In New York oder Hollywood oder Amerika wäre mir wahrscheinlich viel wohler": el escritor Balder Olden en su exilio bonaerense (1941–1943)', *Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos*, 25, 70 (Jan.–Jun. 2011), 224.

⁵² In September 1943 *Volksblatt* was prohibited and several of its members arrested, while *DAD* moved its headquarters temporarily to Montevideo at the beginning of 1944. The founders of *Volksblatt* were a German speaking group within the Argentinian Communist Party (*Partido Comunista de la Argentina*; PCA), although the extent of the latter's intervention in the conflict between BFD and *DAD* is still to be ascertained. In contrast, BFD decided not to join the Mexican Communist Party (*Partido Comunista Mexicano*; PCM). See Friedmann, *Alemanes antinazis*, 131–2; Pérez Montfort, 'Notas en torno al exilio', 49.

and external critics and to gain explicit recognition from the Mexican authorities as the leading voice of German anti-fascism in Mexico.⁵³ In turn, the government of Ávila Camacho used its links with BFD to highlight Mexico's engagement against fascism, as shown by the support given to the publication in April 1943 of *The Black Book of Nazi Terror in Europe: Testimony of writers and artists from 16 nations* (*El libro negro del terror nazi en Europa: testimonio de escritores y artistas de 16 naciones*).⁵⁴ Dealing openly with the horrors of war, including the persecution of Jewish people, it represented a major propaganda effort against Hitler and was censored in Argentina.⁵⁵ The BFD congress was attended by Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, a high official of the Ministry of the Interior (*Secretaría de Gobernación*), as well as by two literary celebrities close to the Communist Party, who held diplomatic posts in Mexico: Pablo Neruda of Chile and Jacques Roumain of Haiti. The honorary presidency of the congress, attended by eighty-eight members of BFD as well as fifty-one guests, was given to Ávila Camacho, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin, Chiang Kai-shek and Charles de Gaulle. On the 10 of May a number of the congress's participants visited the ruins of Teotihuacán, thus paying implicit homage to Mexico's pre-Hispanic past. However, the success of the BFD congress was moderate in comparison to that of Montevideo, as it had failed to win the sympathy of the German-Jewish communities and was only acknowledged politely but distantly by both the Western Allies and the Soviet Union.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, in June 1943 the construction of LAK took its final shape when Olden took up a post on its honorary committee, thus cementing the schism within the Argentinian – and Latin American – German left. BFD had won its race against DAD but, despite all the rhetoric of unity, the *Einheitsfront* remained very much a dream.

In his memoirs Abusch referred ironically to the fact that August Siemsen, having left Argentina for West Germany in 1952, became so disappointed with the politics there that he finally moved to East Berlin in 1954, 'thus correcting his former political mistakes'.⁵⁷ However, in 1952 several members of BFD were accused of taking part in a Zionist conspiracy, and their contributions in *Freies Deutschland* were brought up as evidence: in East Germany Abusch testified against Merker to save himself, whereas the latter went briefly to prison; in Prague, as part of the show trial held against Rudolf Slánský, Simone/Katz was executed.⁵⁸

⁵³ Pohle, *Das mexikanische Exil*, 275–7; Steffie Spira-Ruschin, *Tiab der Schaukelpferde. Aufzeichnungen im nachhinein* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1984), 229–31.

⁵⁴ Abusch recalled that the idea to publish such a book came from André Simone (a pseudonym of Otto Katz), who worked in Paris as lieutenant of Willi Münzenberg and had been the mastermind behind *The Brown Book of the Reichstag Fire and Hitler Terror* (1933). See Alexander Abusch, *Mit offenem Visier. Memoiren* (Berlin, Dietz Verlag: 1986), 71–2; Anson Rabinbach, 'Staging Antifascism: "The Brown Book of the Reichstag Fire and Hitler Terror"', *New German Critique*, 103 (2008), 103–7, 125.

⁵⁵ Álvarez, '"In New York . . ."', 219.

⁵⁶ Pohle, *Das mexikanische Exil*, 293–4, 296–7.

⁵⁷ Abusch, *Mit offenem Visier*, 77.

⁵⁸ Jeffrey Herf, 'East German Communists and the Jewish Question: The Case of Paul Merker', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29, 4 (1994), 634–9.

Anti-Fascism 200km from the Nearest Railway Station: Löhnberg in Bolivia

Having escaped from both racial and political persecution in Europe, Erhart Löhnberg believed that exile in as remote a corner of the world as Bolivia would mean nothing but peace and quiet.⁵⁹ What happened, then, between 1938, the date of his arrival, and 1945, when he wrote that Bolivians were equally prone to Nazism due to ‘their tolerance of Nazism and anti-Semitism, due to their egotism, their cowardice, their lack of the most primitive solidarity’?⁶⁰ Despite its geographical isolation, Bolivia’s internal development was indirectly moulded by the Second World War.⁶¹ In the 1940s Bolivian politics were marked by tension between the powerful mining companies that produced about half of the world’s tin and national revolutionaries, a new political class which, speaking on behalf of the impoverished majority and often in alliance with the army, sought to replace the traditional oligarchy. In addition, there were radical left-wing elements demanding extensive land reform and the nationalisation of the mines, roughly divided into the Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers’ Party (*Partido Obrero Revolucionario*; POR) and the Revolutionary Leftist Party (*Partido Izquierdista Revolucionario*; PIR), which was more akin to Soviet ‘Stalinism’.⁶² During the war the mining companies flourished. Tin was vital for warfare, and the obsession with an alleged Nazi influence in the country reached a peak, especially once the nationalist coup of December 1943 brought Major Gualberto Villarroel to power. According to the historian Whitehead, Bolivian nationalism drew its inspiration in part from Germany and Italy but mainly from hostility towards the mining companies that wanted to keep Bolivia tied to the Allied war effort. The fall of Villarroel in July 1946 was orchestrated by the mining barons with the help of the Americans, whose *Blue Book* also implicated Bolivia. The left- and right-wing opposition came together to form a *Frente Democrático Anti-Fascista*, which boycotted the elections and led to a revolt which ended with Villarroel hanged from a lamppost, apparently imitating Mussolini’s execution.⁶³

Despite its chronic political instability, Bolivia’s migration policy was remarkably liberal, making it one of the few countries that, from 1938 until 1942, still opened its doors to European refugees. Regardless of the incoherencies of its migration policy, which favoured agricultural settlers and was sporadically anti-Semitic, around 10,000 to 15,000 refugees from Germany – mostly from the Jewish middle classes – arrived in Bolivia during this period.⁶⁴ Unlike Argentina or Chile, Bolivia was not considered an attractive destination, but rather the last available option or even a place of transit

⁵⁹ ‘Bolivianer und Juden’, ED 204, vol. VI, LC, IfZ.

⁶⁰ Löhnberg to Manfred Hammerschlag, 27 Nov. 1945, vol. I/1, LC, IfZ.

⁶¹ Whitehead, ‘Bolivia’, 520–1.

⁶² John, *Bolivia’s Radical Tradition*, 8–10, 24–8.

⁶³ Whitehead, ‘Bolivia’, 534–5; John, *Bolivia’s Radical Tradition*, 84–5.

⁶⁴ Due to the lack of trustworthy statistics, the exact number of Jewish refugees in Bolivia remains unclear. See Armin Lehmann, ‘Deutschjüdisches Leben in der Emigration und im Exil in Bolivien. 1937–1945’, Master’s thesis, Freie Universität Berlin, 1996, 37–54; León E. Bieber, ‘La Sociedad de Protección a los Inmigrantes Israelitas: su aporte a la integración económica de los judíos en Bolivia’, *Latin American Research Review*, 34, 2 (1999), 152–78.

for exiles who had lost everything, knew no Spanish and had little idea of what awaited them in this landlocked country.⁶⁵ Erhart Löhnberg's correspondence offers us a privileged window onto this particular story. Löhnberg had fled Germany due to both his Jewish origin and political past – although he defined himself as socialist, he was attached to no party. During his student years he had joined the underground *Rote Studentengruppe*, of which Ludwig Renn was also an active member. Löhnberg studied Ethnology, Philosophy and Sociology, obtaining a doctoral degree. Realising in 1935 that the Gestapo had him in its sights, he left Germany for Switzerland in 1937, and Europe for Bolivia in 1939. He took a job as a physics teacher in a secondary school in the southern town of Tarija, located 250 kilometres from the nearest railway station.⁶⁶ In Tarija there were a handful of migrants from Greece, Turkey and Syria, plus one Englishman (a missionary), a few Italians (mostly priests), around fifty Jewish exiles and a dozen Germans, largely Nazi sympathisers.⁶⁷

Löhnberg's six-year stay in Tarija allowed him to view the dangers of fascism in a completely new light – one in which Germany played only a secondary role. A text entitled *Bolivians and Jews* (*Bolivianer und Juden*) offers a fascinating illustration of this disturbing discovery. Löhnberg wrote it with a fellow exile, Leo Deutsch, also of Jewish origin, to denounce the persecutions that both had suffered as teachers in the local *Colegio Nacional* 'San Luis', which eventually led them to resign their posts and move to the capital, La Paz.⁶⁸ In this text, written in the second half of 1944, the school features as a microcosm of local society, whose sympathies for Nazism were grounded in a traditional – and uncritical – admiration of German society, as well as in a long-established animosity towards the United States. Most of the students were influenced by a variety of prejudices against Jews who, they had been told, did not believe in God or go to church, who had allegedly murdered Christ, who had come to Bolivia only out of need, and so on.⁶⁹ As time passed Löhnberg gradually began to be treated less as a German and more as a Jew, having failed to convince his colleagues and acquaintances that German success was inseparable from political repression and the concentrations camps, which were no invention of the 'English and Jewish plutocracy'.⁷⁰ Between 1939 and 1941 Nazi propaganda was distributed in Tarija. Local authorities remained either indifferent to or tacitly complicit in its dissemination, until pressure from the US Embassy forced the Bolivian government to take action. Although there were relatively few Germans citizens in Bolivia (1,350

⁶⁵ Winfried Seelisch, 'Jüdische Emigration nach Bolivien Ende der 30er Jahre', in Achim Schrader and Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, eds., *Europäische Juden in Lateinamerika* (St. Ingbert: Werner J. Röhrig, 1989), 93.

⁶⁶ Löhnberg to Peter Bussemeyer, 26 Nov. 1939, ED 204, vol. I/1; Löhnberg to Waldemar Ossowski, 21 Feb. 1942, ED 204, vol. I/2, LC, IfZ.

⁶⁷ Löhnberg to Ernst Schumacher, 15 Mar. 1941, ED 204, vol. I/2, LC, IfZ.

⁶⁸ Löhnberg, 'Bolivianer und Juden', 2, 12–3. The persecution of Löhnberg and Deutsch had been denounced in *DAD*, 'Actividad nazi en Tarija', 6, 58 (Jan. 1943), 18.

⁶⁹ Löhnberg, 'Notas sobre el ambiente escolar', 27 Oct. 1943, ED 204, vol. I/2, LC, IfZ.

⁷⁰ Löhnberg, 'Bolivianer und Juden', 9.

in 1932) and only a small number of active Nazis, they exercised an influence well beyond their numbers.⁷¹

It was under these difficult conditions that Löhnberg, together with Wolfgang Hirsch-Weber, opened a branch of DAD in Tarija. They were soon caught up in the transnational networks of German anti-fascism and drawn into the power struggle between BFD and DAD. In September 1942 Löhnberg replied to a questionnaire sent by BFD inquiring into the activities of DAD in Bolivia. He did so cautiously and without compromising his unwavering loyalty to Siemsen, while giving his critical view on Bolivia as 'a feudal state of the Middle Ages'.⁷² This put him in contact with Enzo (Heinz) Arian who, based mainly in Oruro (located around 200 kilometres south of La Paz), promoted the interests of BFD in Bolivia. Arian was a charismatic figure and a gifted controversialist. Forced to leave Berlin due to his Jewish origins, Arian completed his degree in medicine in Turin, Italy, where he met his wife Georgina Levi, also Jewish and member of a family with a strong tradition of radicalism. Her uncle, for example, was the communist Mario Montagnana, founder of the *Alleanza Internazionale Giuseppe Garibaldi* in Mexico City, which often collaborated with BFD. Tellingly, the area of Arian's life that has been most researched to date is the exchange of love letters between him and his wife, an implicit reflection on European civilisation and the couple's Jewishness.⁷³

The German speaking exile organisations in Bolivia reached a level of fragmentation and intricacy unparalleled in other Latin America countries, reflecting the country's instability, along with the fact that migrants arrived in batches, thus preventing political organisations from becoming either homogeneous or stable.⁷⁴ The oldest organisation was the Friendship Club (*Club Freundschaft*) of La Paz, founded in 1938 and led by social democrats. DAD developed gradually and eventually had branches in Tarija, La Paz, Cochabamba and Oruro. A particularly controversial figure was that of Ernst Schumacher, who gained visibility as the editor of the weekly *Rundschau von Illimani*, and was commissioned by the Bolivian government to prevent Nazi ideology from infiltrating the country. Yet this led to abuses of power, the most famous being the case of Willi Karbaum, a fellow exile accused by Schumacher of being a Nazi sympathiser, apparently grounded in nothing more than intense personal dislike.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, Schumacher sponsored the creation, in 1942, of a non-partisan umbrella organisation for German exiles: the Union of Free Germans in Bolivia (*Vereinigung Freier Deutscher in Bolivien*; VFDB). However, it was soon to come under the influence of communists such as Paul Baender, who strove to align the organisation with the BFD in Mexico, a goal he finally achieved in November

⁷¹ von zur Mühlen, *Fluchtziel Lateinamerika*, 214.

⁷² Löhnberg to Arian, 11 Sep. 1942, ED 204, vol. I/1, LC, IfZ.

⁷³ Luisa Passerini, *Women and Men in Love. European Identities in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012); 279–315.

⁷⁴ von zur Mühlen, *Fluchtziel Lateinamerika*, 217–9, 238–9.

⁷⁵ Löhnberg reported to the American Embassy in Bolivia on Schumacher: 'Some observations about Mr. Ernst Schumacher, 28 Apr. 1943, ED 204, vol. I/2; Löhnberg to Norman C. Stines Jr., 12 May 1943 & 23 Aug. 1943, ED 204, vol. I/2, LC, IfZ.

1943, angering those whose objective was to build a 'coordinating commission' in accordance with the Montevideo resolutions.⁷⁶ In 1944 a new umbrella organisation came to being under Schumacher's influence: the Committee of German Democratic Organizations in Bolivia (*Landesauschuss Deutscher Demokratischer Organisationen in Bolivien*; LADDOB), which nevertheless failed to win the support of VFD or DAD representatives in Bolivia. The divisions between various factions within the German exile community continued to widen, showing that, even if a majority tended towards social democracy, they never managed to tip the balance completely in favour of DAD, sometimes perceived as being too leftist, or BFD, whose communist profile was mistrusted.⁷⁷

One of the main reasons for this divisiveness stemmed from what Löhnberg deemed a crucial question: who qualified not merely as 'non-Nazi' (*nichtnazistisch*), but as 'anti-fascist' (*antifaschistisch*)?⁷⁸ This discussion was not dissimilar to the one held by *Das Andere Deutschland* and *Jüdische Wochenschau*, which was spurred on by the former's assumption that it was not enough simply to reject Hitler; instead he must be actively opposed, thus leading to the development of a (left-wing) political consciousness. In particular, Löhnberg vented his anger against 'the petty bourgeoisie' (*das kleinbürgerliche Element*) which, having never held a political opinion in their lives, now used anti-fascist organisations self-servingly for the purposes of social entertainment or – even worse – as a means of guaranteeing their safe and cheap return to Germany, deliberately whitewashing any dubious political convictions they might hold.⁷⁹ Far more willing to compromise on the means employed, Arian argued that it was impossible to establish an anti-fascist organisation made up only of people capable of debating on Lenin, or of 'beautiful souls and poets'. In order to bring about the defeat of fascism, Arian insisted, one needed to work together with the petty bourgeoisie and with people like Schumacher. He also cited the case of the 'Klappers': the Jewish pedlars who had once been Eastern Europe's 'pettiest bourgeoisie' (*Kleinstbürger*), and who now sold their goods door-to-door across Bolivia. Quite unexpectedly, they had proven to be of great help to the cause, keeping the links between anti-fascist organisations alive by carrying news of their activities from city to city, and even to isolated mines.⁸⁰ As the relationship between BFD and DAD in Bolivia became increasingly tense, so, too, did the relationship between Löhnberg and Arian, partly because Siemsen decided to follow a hard line within DAD, forbidding any contact between the South American groups and the 'Mexiko Zentrale', as he mockingly dubbed the LAK. Löhnberg was even specifically

⁷⁶ von zur Mühlen, *Fluchtziel Lateinamerika*, 227–9; Wolfgang Kießling, *Der Fall Baender. Ein Politikrimi aus den 50er Jahren der DDR* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1991), 30–2.

⁷⁷ von zur Mühlen, *Fluchtziel Lateinamerika*, 230–9.

⁷⁸ Löhnberg, 'Bolivianer und Juden', 17.

⁷⁹ Löhnberg to Arian, 20 Feb. 1943, ED 204, vol. I/1, LC, IfZ.

⁸⁰ Arian to Löhnberg, 5 July 1943, ED 204, vol. I/1, LC, IfZ.

advised to sever all links with Arian – an intelligent man, he was told, but nevertheless a ‘compliant agent’ (*willfähiger Agent*) of the BFD’s machinations.⁸¹

The final rupture between Löhnberg and Arian took place in June 1944, after a particularly bitter exchange of letters in which Löhnberg accused the ‘*Mexikaner*’ – the German exiles in Mexico – and their ‘satellites’ (*Mexiko-Trabanten*) in South America of using ‘Nazi methods’ to destroy the anti-fascist unity that DAD had painstakingly established.⁸² Arian played down these accusations, attributing Löhnberg’s conspiracy theories to a sort of ‘jungle paranoia’, resulting from his isolation in the reactionary Bolivian countryside.⁸³ The disagreements centred on a choice of allies: while Arian questioned the socialists’ reticence in collaborating with the petty bourgeoisie, Löhnberg stressed the need to restrict opposition to socialist and democratic forces, in contrast to the communists’ broad alliances.⁸⁴ Similarly, in a previous discussion, Arian had suggested a cooperation with the PIR in order to encourage the movement and foster a genuinely pro-Allied stance in Bolivia. Löhnberg, however, had refused to consider this possibility, partly out of fear that the a link with the PIR might equally be exploited by BFD.⁸⁵ However, Löhnberg thought little of the PIR, which he described as being a case of ‘Bolivian Stalinism’, holding both the Trotskyite POR and the essayist and politician Tristán Marof in much higher regard.⁸⁶ Unwilling to cede any ground in this dialectical battle, which was peppered with citations from Shakespeare and Heine, Löhnberg concluded that Machiavellian communist methods might bring about another Germany in the future, but not necessarily a better one.

Conclusion

There are few better examples of the disappointment caused by the collapse of the dream of anti-fascist unity among German exiles in Latin America than the letter which Löhnberg wrote to Siemsen in October 1946 explaining his decision to leave DAD.⁸⁷ The decision came after two years working in the DAD branch of La Paz, where he moved in 1944 and would remain till 1952. His experiences there led him to conclude that the exile community was characterised not by camaraderie and closeness but by intrigues and conspiracies, including cases of staunch anti-Bolshevism and even anti-Semitism. As Löhnberg wrote, the fall of Hitler’s Nazi regime had a paradoxical effect: it made DAD – both the organisation and the publication – more attractive. However, the reasons behind this increase in popularity were highly dubious. For many, joining DAD was a way of proving that they were not Nazis.

⁸¹ Siemsen to Löhnberg, 24 Mar. 1943; Siemsen to Löhnberg and Hirsch-Weber, 30 Sept. 1943, ED 204, vol. II, LC, IfZ.

⁸² Löhnberg to Arian, 25 Mar. 1944, ED 204, vol. I/1, LC, IfZ.

⁸³ Arian to Löhnberg and Hirsch-Weber, 23 Apr. 1944, ED 204, vol. I/1, LC, IfZ.

⁸⁴ Löhnberg to Arian, 11 June 1944, ED 204, vol. I/1, LC, IfZ.

⁸⁵ Löhnberg to Siemsen, 7 Mar. 1943, ED 204, vol. II, LC, IfZ.

⁸⁶ Löhnberg to Walter Ossowski, 7 Oct. 1942, ED 204, vol. I/2; Löhnberg an Heinz Apfeldorf, 29 June 1947, ED 204, vol. II, LC, IfZ.

⁸⁷ Löhnberg to Siemsen, 16 Oct. 1946, ED 204, vol. VI, LC, IfZ.

This in turn might facilitate their return to Germany. Reading *DAD*, meanwhile, was seen as a means of acquiring the ‘right’ opinions. Löhnberg’s disillusionment was such that he even doubted that the activities of the branch of *DAD* in La Paz had ever converted anyone to the cause of anti-fascism.

Is it wise to take this bitterness and hurt at face value? Are they really the outcome of Löhnberg’s idealistic view of both human nature and the anti-fascist struggle? As Arian wittily observed, one must come to terms with the fact that Jesus Christ is the only ideal human we have ever had, but ‘he is long dead, and were he still alive, he would certainly not have migrated to Bolivia’.⁸⁸ In addition, it was downright unrealistic to think that Latin America would suddenly heal the divisions within the global left. Yet Löhnberg’s account, despite its compelling honesty, can hardly cast doubt on the success achieved by the transnational networks of German anti-fascist exiles in creating a continental debate on the goals and methods of anti-fascism. Despite the enormous physical distances involved, and due in no small part to correspondence and publications that could establish all manner of affinities (and disagreements), Mexico City could be present in Buenos Aires or La Paz in a way that was far from obvious or mundane. At the same time, in the same way that a common language and shared political characteristics were not automatically conducive to a feeling of brotherhood among the countries of Latin America, the anti-fascist organisations encountered great difficulties when trying to create a homogeneous outlook among exiles whose age, past, political beliefs and motivations were necessarily diverse. In addition, if German exiles failed to unite ‘as Germans’, we should not forget that Nazism had led to a radical redefinition of what it meant to be German – excluding, in the first instance, the possibility of being both German and Jewish.⁸⁹ Yet we must also emphasise that one of anti-fascism’s key characteristics – the creation of international solidarity – was, to a large extent, fulfilled. The very existence of publications like *DAD*, *BFD* or *El Libro Negro* are proof of this, as is the fact that the anti-fascist struggle brought German exiles into dialogue with local anti-fascist cultures in a variety of unprecedented and fruitful ways. What remains, however, is to ensure that these exiles are now accorded their rightful place in Latin American as well as European and transnational history.

⁸⁸ Arian to Löhnberg and Hirsch-Weber, 23 Apr. 1944, ED 204, vol. I/1, LC, IfZ.

⁸⁹ Leo Spitzer, ‘Back Through the Future: Nostalgic Memory and Critical Memory in a Refuge from Nazism’, in Mieke Bal, Jonathan V. Crewe and Leo Spitzer, eds., *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover: University of New England Press, 1999), 99–100.