

Argentina's German-Jews Confront Issue of Emigration Once More

Psychologists Deal with a New Identity Crisis

By ADAM J. SACKS

Whereas some of their academic friends of the same age and who are now out of work are leaving severely-troubled Argentina behind and Patricia Fränkel and Alfredo Schwarcz, an Argentinian husband-and-wife team of psychologists, were only on a tour with their Institute through German-speaking Europe when this writer caught up with them. Their Institute, called "Casa Puente," or "The Bridge," focuses on building bridges between people, generations and cultures. The wide spectrum of group activities it offers includes reflection groups, intergenerational gatherings, senior groups, as well as seminars about "Migration and Identity in a Globalized World." The workshops which fuse psychoanalysis with physically-focused therapy – Ms. Fränkel's specialty – include "Expression and Participation through Rhythmic Gymnastics," "Group Dancing from Around the World," "The Body and Knowledge of the Self," and "On the Search for my Place in the World." Establishing a foothold in Europe is part of the development of their Institute, but it is also a working through of the past and a coming to terms with the fractures of identity conditioned by the German-Jewish experience.

Professor Schwarcz claims that there is a strong crisis of identity altogether in Argentina today, and that unlike other Latin American countries, Argentina was always strongly tied to Europe, and to some extent

North America. It had never really defined its national interests – in a healthy sense – and lacked the patriotism commonly found elsewhere on the continent.

Through their work, this couple attempts to build a bridge between the identity crises faced by German-Jewish emigrants and those of other Argentine citizens, regardless of their background. Dr. Schwarcz, himself the son of German-Jewish emigrants, personifies the situation of a number of Argentine members of the second generation. His parents came from Vienna and Berlin, he grew up in Argentina, but his children are emigrating once again. His daughter has moved to Spain and his son is currently working in Germany with his tango trio. What was once a country to flee to has now become a land from which to escape. (*Aus dem einstigen "Rettungsland," ist ein Land der Auswanderung geworden.*)

In fact, many Argentine citizens are now attempting to go elsewhere if they can. Professor Schwarcz confronts this emigration crisis directly in his work. The reflection groups focus on how the after-effects of emigration can leave their traces on the fears and desires of several generations. For those who already have this experience as part of their family background, a clear psychological evaluation of the current situation is all the more complex.

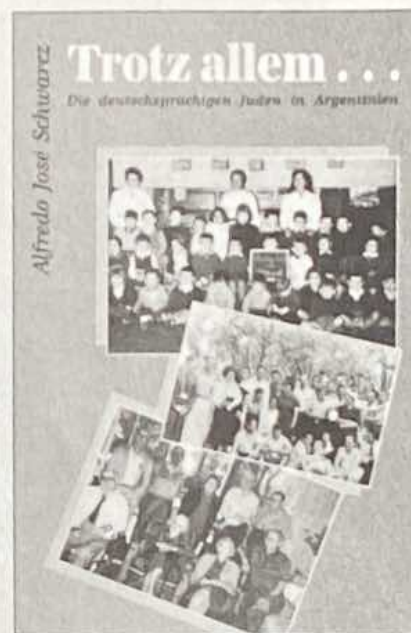
Dr. Schwarcz has documented the particular situation of German Jews in Argentina in his book *Trotz Allem: Die deutschsprachigen Juden in Argentinien (Despite It All*

The German-Speaking Jews in Argentina), which must be considered the definitive work on the subject. The primary source for the book was the fifteen years he spent working as a psychological counselor for the residents of the "Adolfo Hirsch" old-age home for German-speaking Jews. Daily, he was exposed to their memories of Europe.

No speedy integration of German Jews

Focusing on questions of identity and mentality as affected by trans-cultural migration, the book reveals the unique character of the Argentine experience. Dr. Schwarcz's account includes a fascinating psychological profile of his subject. For instance, he describes the unique German-Jewish *Wohnkultur* (household culture), and how it was carefully reproduced, the psychological resistance to understanding Yiddish, the attraction to classical music, and the traumas of emigré children.

Although they also wanted to strike roots and find a home for their families, no speedy integration took place in Argentina. Unlike the United States where German was considered the language of the enemy, and hence immigrants were under pressure to learn English, in Argentina speaking German was sometimes the best *Visitenkarte* one could have. There were troubled relations with the pre-existing Jewish community there, already the largest in Latin America. The



Alfredo J. Schwarcz (Hrsg.): "Trotz allem, Die deutschsprachigen Juden in Argentinien", aus dem Spanischen von Bernardo Schwarcz und Inge Schwarcz, Böhlau Verlag, 1995, ISBN: 3-205-98218-5.

native members of the community referred to the Russian Jews as "Russos," the Sephardim as "Turcos," and, pointedly, the German-speaking Jews as "Germans." During the postwar years, the emigrés also had to confront a dictatorship for a second time. Although not specifically anti-Semitic, the political climate did not encourage active engagement. Another disturbing factor was the emigrés' realization that some of them were living in close proximity to Nazi fugitives. Today, Dr. Schwarcz oversees connections between the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Jewish refugees and Nazis to create a bridge of understanding.