

Jewish German Immigrant Booksellers in Twentieth-Century Ecuador¹

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A SAFE HAVEN IN ECUADOR

The 1930s exodus of Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Austria to Central and South American countries has received less attention than that of refugees arriving in the United States, Palestine, and other European countries. Only a few historical studies have contributed to our knowledge about the three-to-four thousand Jews who immigrated to Ecuador. Beller (1969) provides a snapshot of the community. Kreuter (1997) focuses on the immigrants' professional and social acculturation, as well as on the organizations they created and their contributions to Ecuador. Kersfeld (2018) examines specific contributions Jewish immigrants made to science, culture, economy, and social life in Ecuador. The Jewish community contribution to Ecuador is also discussed by Grubel (2010), who focuses on industry, bookstores, and department stores. This experience is chronicled in Zelig's documentary (2011), which brings to life the stories of Ecuadorian Jews. The only study dedicated to the socioeconomic profile of the Jews in Quito is Darvish-Lecker and Don's (1990). This article is based on the above studies and 16 published memoirs of Jewish immigrants to Ecuador (see Sources).

Ecuador is located on northwestern South America and is bordered by the Pacific Ocean, Colombia, and Peru. The population in the 1920s numbered around 1.5 million (Naranjo Navas et al. 2019). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the country experienced several periods of political instability. During the World War II years, twelve different presidents held office in Ecuador. By the time refugees started to seek asylum there, Ecuador had established a liberal constitution (1936), guaranteeing freedom of worship and a secular education for all its inhabitants.

In 1938, *Philo Atlas: Handbuch für die jüdische Auswanderung* (Manual for the Jewish Emigration; Lowenthal and Oppenheimer 1938), was published to help German-speaking Jewish refugees understand the documentation and funds that were required to enter various countries and to describe the health, environmental, and economic conditions—including employment opportunities—that would await them. In Ecuador's case, newcomers had to invest in farms or industries.² Artisans and skilled workers with limited means were able to make a good living

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2. During the early years, Ecuador allowed the entry of European migrants to encourage the country's development. They were required to have skills and knowledge in agriculture, one of the bases of the country's economy. The authorities allowed the migrants to devote themselves to industrial and commercial activities only after 1938.

(Lowenthal and Oppenheimer 1938). According to the publication, only 250 Jews (0.009 percent of the total population) already lived in Ecuador, the lowest number for South America.³ European Jews were likely to have known little about the country.

Many refugees emigrating to South America hoped to be admitted into Argentina, which was considered more civilized and prosperous than other South American countries and whose Jewish community was well-established by then. However, Argentina had already closed its doors to Republicans escaping the Spanish Civil War and to Jews trying to leave Europe. Most Jewish refugees who went to Ecuador saw it as a country of transit; their goal was to reach the United States, Palestine, Argentina, or Brazil. (Weilbauer 1975; Kreuter 1997; Grubel Rosenthal 2010; Zelig 2011) The infrastructure and healthcare systems in Ecuador were not comparable to those in European countries (“Ecuador” 2008; Kreuter 1997). Jewish organizations such as the Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden (German Jewish Philanthropic Society), and HICEM (the emigration association of Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society and the Jewish Colonization Association, or HIAS-ICA), warned immigrants against moving there. Reports on the opportunities for Jewish settlement in Ecuador that appeared in Europe and the United States (Golodetz and Henriques 1936⁴) were not encouraging. Yellow fever, malaria, lack of electricity, inadequate communication systems, high illiteracy rates (approximately 40 percent)⁵, and political instability were just some of the problems they would face there (Mellibowski 1957; Jewish Telegraphic Agency 1935; 1936; *The Palestine Post* 1935b).

Despite these unfavorable conditions, Jewish refugees did settle in Ecuador. In 1939, under President Carlos A. Arroyo del Río, and later during José María Velasco Ibarra’s second presidency (1944–1947), Ecuador encouraged European immigration; it was one of the few South American countries that did not impose an immigration quota, though some consuls and state officials resisted Jewish immigration. In a report issued in 1941, for example, Julio Tobar Donoso, minister of external relations, asserted: “They should not allow the establishment of a greater number of Semites ... who are a racial and religious minority absolutely unassimilable” (Moscoso 2012).

Nevertheless, Ecuador remained open to Jewish immigrants. According to *The Jewish Daily Bulletin* published on July 19, 1935:

3. Followed by Bolivia with 350 Jews (0.01 percent of the total population) and the highest Argentina with 270,000 Jews (2.18 percent of the total population).

4. Alec Golodetz was an economist and Cyril Q. Henriques was an irrigation engineer hired to evaluate the possibility of establishing farms in Ecuador. After a 10-week stay in Ecuador in 1936, they wrote on the opportunities to establish farm settlements or engaging in light trade or crafts in the country.

5. According to a document from the census bureau from 1950 the illiteracy rate was of 36.1%.
https://www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec/documentos/web-inec/Bibliotecas/Libros/INEC_Historia_Censos.pdf, p.9.

The Ecuadorian government is setting aside for Jewish colonization seven tracts of land, mainly forest land, which can maintain 50,000 families. This land is being offered on a three- to five-year option. A condition of the government is that development of the land begin before the expiration of the options.

The new colonies must be built along cooperative lines and they must maintain an “open door” for non-Jews refugees as well. It is also stipulated that the colonies be so conducted as in no way to harm the economic position of the native population.

Similar notes appeared in other newspapers in the following months, informing readers that the Ecuadorian government was setting aside 1,250,000 acres of land for Jewish colonization (*The Sentinel* 1935a, 1935b; *The Palestine Post* 1935a; *New York Times* 1935; *Daily Herald* 1935; *B'nai B'rith Messenger* 1935). In 1939, when several South American countries refused to accept 165 Jewish refugees aboard the ship Koenigstein, Ecuador granted them entry permits.

These German and Austrian refugees came from socially emancipated environments, but when confronted with Nazi racial laws, most returned to their Jewish traditions. They were supported and funded by international organizations such as the Joint Distribution Committee and HICEM.⁶ Most built their homes in Quito or Guayaquil, Ecuador’s capital and second largest city, respectively, or in smaller cities such as Ambato, Baños, Cuenca, Riobamba, and Puyo.

Jewish immigrants were grateful to have the opportunity to live with dignity and pleased to find better than expected conditions. Carlos Liebmann noted:

When we entered Ecuador ... we were pleasantly surprised not to have to live in Indian huts as they tried to convince us in the Old World, but to find modern cities, trains, cinemas, newspapers, etc., things that bring with them civilization and modern culture. *Naturally, everything was still in a state of construction and development.* (Eisler and Liebmann 1956; emphasis added)

The refugees discovered a support network, created by the Ecuadorian consul in Austria (1929–1934), Julius Rosenstock,⁷ a Viennese Jew hired in 1914 to build the Sibambe–Cuenca railway,

6. HICEM was made of three resettlement organizations: Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), established in 1927 with the aim of helping European Jews to migrate with its headquarters in New York; Jewish Colonization Association based in Paris; and Emigdirect, a migration organization founded in 1921 based in Berlin.

7. Rosenstock returned to his native country where he even became the consul of Ecuador. With the rise of Nazism, he returned to Ecuador in 1934.

which would connect the coastline and the Andes. Because of his connections in government circles, he was able to convince the authorities to allow persecuted Jews into the country. In 1937, Rosenstock and twelve other newly arrived refugees founded the Asociación de Beneficencia Israelita (Israelite Benevolent Association), a community center in Quito to help immigrants. Its German-language bulletin (*Informaciones para los inmigrantes israelitas* (Information for Jewish Immigrants)), provided information about the Jewish community, Ecuador, and international affairs.⁸ The small Jewish community in Guayaquil founded the Sociedad de Beneficencia Israelita (Jewish Charitable Society) to help refugees get established.

Some Jews were able to fulfill the minimum governmental entry conditions, such as having 400 U.S. dollars (imposed on all immigrants in 1940),⁹ which would later be returned. This was to be used for agricultural work or to develop an industry approved by the Oficina Central de Inmigración (Central Immigration Office). Most of the refugees, however, were professionals or businessmen, who lied about their occupations in order to obtain visas to enter Ecuador. The Jewish Colonization Association and HICEM attempted to help immigrants by developing some sixty poultry farms in the Ambato region. The effort failed, however, because of the unsuitable climate and the refugees' inexperience. Others tried to survive by working in agriculture but having no training or experience, they too failed. To keep themselves from starving refugees moved to the cities. In response, the Ecuadorian government issued a decree in 1938 ordering the expulsion of all Jews who were engaged in commercial activities in competition with Ecuadorian people, instead of in agricultural pursuits (*The Sentinel* 1938a; *New York Times* 1938). The intervention of Rosenstock and Bertha Singerman prevented this from happening (*El Telégrafo* 1938; *The Sentinel* 1938b; *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* 1938).

Many Jewish refugees survived as *kuntenicks*,¹⁰ selling door to door on credit and later setting up small stores, some of which eventually became larger commercial enterprises (Kreuter 1997). Several founded factories and experimented with manufacturing furniture from balsa wood; some ventured into metallurgy, pharmaceuticals, and the hotel industry; others produced textiles, underwear, and shoes. One migrant even opened a matza factory! A few physicians were able to pursue medical careers (Beller 1969). A number of those who settled in Quito established prosperous businesses including Paco's stationery, Kywi's hardware, Arenas's bakery, and the bookshop SU Librería. Low salaries and a colonial economy stood in their way; still, the country ultimately benefited from the introduction of many new commercial enterprises (Organizaciones

8. *Informaciones para los inmigrantes israelitas* was published by Dr. Siegfried Schwind (defunct in 1972).

9. Reglamento para la aplicación de la ley de Extranjería, Extradición y Naturalización de 27 de noviembre de 1940, artículo 16, en Ministerio de Gobierno (1941: 34-78), cited in Bustamante et al. 2013, 13–16

10. *Kuntenicks* were peddlers who traveled through small towns and brought merchandise to their fixed clientele, mainly women who bought from them without their husbands' knowledge. They accepted payments in installments. In one place they were known as clappers, because they knocked on doors.

Israelitas en el Ecuador 1948; Moscoso 2012).¹¹

The education system in Ecuador was secularized and the number of readers expanded consistently since the Ecuadorian liberal revolution of 1895. Nevertheless, due to the high rate of illiteracy and limited literary production in Ecuador, the country lacked a publishing industry. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the main streets of Quito—the country’s cultural center since colonial times—were lined with stands that sold brochures, newspapers, and magazines. There were a few bookstores in Quito, such as *Librería Sucre*, established in 1907 by Bonifacio Muñoz. Having lived in Europe for over a decade and worked in various bookstores, Muñoz ventured into the city bringing in recent publications from European publishing houses, a novelty for the local intellectual world (Freire Rubio 1994). *Librería Indoamericana*, owned by Bonifacio’s brother, Leonardo, was established in 1933. Both brothers compiled catalogs of Ecuadorian authors to promote the few national writers. Carlos Weber, a new immigrant from Germany, established the *Librería Católica* (Catholic Bookstore), which specialized in missals, devotional books, religious prints, and works by Catholic authors.

FOUR JEWISH BOOKSELLERS IN ECUADOR

According to published memoirs, Jewish immigrants to Ecuador were mainly middle-class and well educated, and many had professional degrees. They left what had been, before Nazi persecution, comfortable lives in central Europe; they arrived in a country that was worlds apart from what they were accustomed to. Three notable German Jews were partly able to recreate their intellectual milieu in the unpromising soil of their new country by establishing bookstores and publishing houses. Carlos G. Liebmann and Simon Goldberg opened bookstores in Quito, while Bruno Moritz opened a bookstore in Guayaquil. Two of them became publishers. None of the four knew Spanish upon arrival, and only Liebmann and Goldberg had previous experience in the book trade.¹²

SIMON GOLDBERG

Respected by intellectuals of his period (Fischer 2011; Zapater 2015), Simon Goldberg was the first Jewish bookseller to arrive in Ecuador, in 1938. He had owned the *Goethe Buchhandlung Antiquariat u. Musikalien* (Goethe Antiquarian Bookstore and Music), located on *Friedrichstasse 195*, in Berlin, which he had opened in October 1913 (*Börsenverein der Deutschen Buchhändler* 1914; Fischer 2011; Goldberg 1913) and closed by 1931 (*Börsenverein der Deutschen Buchhändler* 1931). Once in Ecuador (probably in 1939), with money he had been able to get out of Germany, he opened the *Librería Internacional* (International Bookstore), which special-

11. “It is surprising to find the growing number of small and large companies founded by Jews in Quito in the 30’s and 40’s. If the German community before those years had already begun to manage trade and small and large businesses, that of the German Jews was an important qualitative and quantitative leap for the city” (Moscoso 2012).

12. In addition to these three booksellers, Agatha Narcisa Rodríguez Bustamante and Priscila Elizabeth Alvarado Cárdenas recovered, in their 2013 thesis, a Mr. Ucko, who sold books that he had brought from Europe (Rodríguez Bustamante and Alvarado Cárdenas 2013).

ized in incunabula and rare books. Like many experienced booksellers, he was careful to establish good relations with his customers, and like other German-speaking immigrants, learned to speak Spanish, though he had a heavy accent (Freire Rubio 1993). Goldberg's first store, located between Olmedo and Flores streets, contained niches and vaults, where he stored his valuable incunabula and medieval or early modern rare books he had managed to get out of Europe. According to one of his clients, Goldberg had a room full of publications on Sucre Street and the railroad. Whenever the client visited the bookstore, he knew that some material had been set aside for him (Perez Pimentel n.d.). Goldberg's customers were the intellectual Ecuadorian elite and Jewish immigrants (Freire Rubio 1994). After several years, he expanded his stock to include Latin American and Spanish titles, and his bookstore became the place to go for Quiteños (Quito residents) interested in European history. A frequent client was Father Aurelio Espinosa Pólit, a Jesuit priest, and co-founder of the Universidad Católica de Ecuador (Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador), and of the Aurelio Espinosa Pólit Museum and Library in Quito.

During the 1960s, due to mismanagement which bankrupted his business, Goldberg was jailed. Once he regained his freedom, he joined Liebmann at SU Librería.

CARLOS G. LIEBMANN

Karl Wilhelm Liebmann was born in Berlin on March 21, 1900, one of three children in an assimilated Jewish family. His father, Dr. Otto Liebmann, was a publisher of legal and political science books. His business was aryanized in 1933 by the legal publisher C. H. Beck, which issued the highly regarded *Deutsche Juristen-Zeitung*. Following in his father's footsteps, Karl opened his own publishing house Werk-Verlags in 1923, which was aryanized in January 1938 (Fischer 2011; Richter-Hallgarten 2013). That same year, he was sent to a concentration camp. Once released, he, his wife Hilde (born 1902) and their son Wolfgang (1930–2003) left Germany, first settling in France and from there traveling, in October 1938, to Ecuador, where they put down roots in Quito.¹³ There Liebmann changed his name to Carlos Guillermo and started a successful business (Freire Rubio 1985; Kersfeld 2018). According to the writer Maria-Luise Kreuter,

After having started by making stamps, posters and notebooks, [Liebmann] sold office supplies, stationery and other things. He bought books and maintained a library, The Victory Book Club, which started operating in 1945. Not only did he lend books, but he also sold them, especially books in German. (Kreuter 1997)

In 1942, Liebmann established his own publishing house, Casa Editora Liebmann, with the idea of continuing the tradition of publishing legal books. His first publication was *Inmigrantes en el Ecuador: Un estudio histórico* (Immigrants in Ecuador: A Historical Study) by the German Jewish immigrant Hans Heiman, who during his exile in Ecuador, taught classes at various educational institutions, including Quito's Universidad Central.

13. Liebmann's parents died in Berlin, while his two sisters perished in Auschwitz in 1942.

Later publications included books by the German immigrant lawyer Alfred Karger, which explained Ecuadorian law in straightforward Spanish terms for both native Ecuadorians and Liebmann’s fellow immigrants. Over time, Liebmann also published texts by Ecuadorian authors, which he exported to Europe and the United States. Finally, he also functioned as editor of the series *Breves ensayos de cultura general* (Short Essays on General Culture), whose first title *El arte de traducir* (The Art of Translation) was published in 1978.

Liebmann founded the SU Librería bookstore (YOUR Bookstore), located on Plaza de la Independencia, which primarily sold Spanish-language titles.¹⁴ It was a modern bookstore that allowed people to browse the books without intermediaries—a revolutionary concept at the time. The rise of literary activity in Ecuador made his bookstore a cultural center of Quito in the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁵

Luis Carrera, an Ecuadorian bookdealer, notes: “despite the strong character of Mr. Liebmann, I was always good with him... It was very difficult to work with him, he wanted to impose what he said even if he was not right. ... On the other hand, with the people of his community he was wonderful, they had a lot of consideration for him” (Cuvi 1996). Edgar Freire Rubio, another bookdealer who began his career working for Carrera, remembers Liebmann as a surly man who held a cigarette in his mouth that he never left behind¹⁶ but who was infinitely kind and generous. The Ecuadorian writer Francisco Proaño Arandí recalls that when he was a young student, penniless young people would sometimes steal books from SU Librería, and that Liebmann turned a blind eye to them.

As a prominent bookseller, Liebmann was influential in the 1955 founding of the Sociedad de Libreros (Booksellers Society, see Figure 1), precursor to today’s Cámara Ecuatoriana del Libro (Ecuadorian Book Chamber; see Harrison

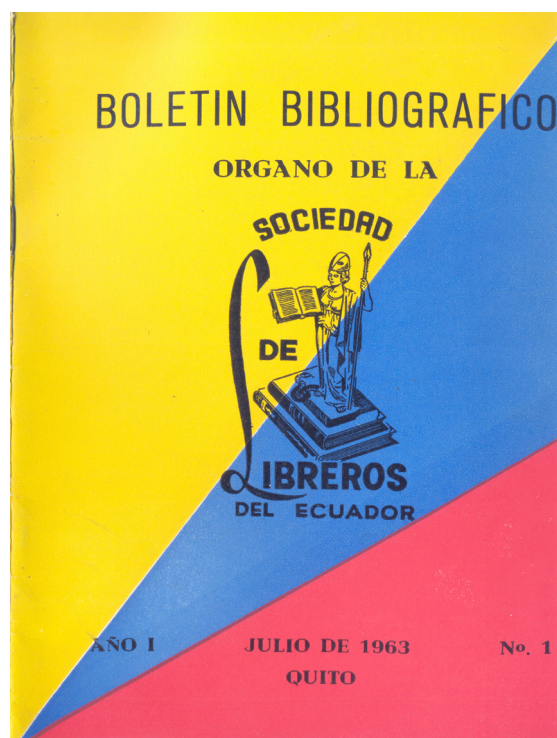


Fig. 1. The first issue of *Boletín Bibliográfico* (Bibliographical Bulletin, July 1963) of the Ecuadorian Booksellers Society, established by Carlo Liebmann

14. Liebmann acquired part of Goldberg’s collection as debt payment in the 1960s, when Goldberg was jailed for a period of time.

15. As a man of the world, Liebmann also possessed an important collection of art, especially of European impressionists, among them a Toulouse-Lautrec, as mentioned in Grosse-Luemern’s memoir and Freire Rubio’s interview.

16. Interview held with Edgar Freire Rubio. July 3, 2020

2004; Perez Pimentel n.d.; Rivas 2018). His business also served as a training ground for other booksellers, including Enrique Grosse-Luemern, who later opened his own LibriMundi bookstore (Freire Rubio 1993; Grosse-Luemern 1996; Grubel Rosenthal 2010; Perez Pimentel n.d.).

Liebmann was active in the wider Ecuadorian Jewish community, serving as president of Ecuador B'nai B'rith, and as editor of the *Informaciones para los inmigrantes israelitas* bulletin following the emigration of its first editor, Siegfried Schwind, to the United States.

The SU Librería premises collapsed in 1970 due to structural failures and Liebmann opened a new shop on García Moreno Street. Proaño Arandi mentions the collapse of the bookstore's roof in his short story "Caronte":¹⁷

It was a quiet day. I found myself, as always, in the bookstore on Chile Street, between Venezuela and García Moreno, absorbed in a recurring, now forgotten, exercise: the search, in the shop windows, for new and old titles. That bookstore no longer exists. Situated in the basement of the old and corroded Archbishop's Palace, it would disappear years later buried by a collapse (13–20)

Liebmann managed to rescue most of his books from the collapsed store thanks to the help of friends, but in the meantime his health was weakened (Grubel Rosenthal 2010; Grubel 2015). A few years later Liebmann decided to liquidate his business on García Moreno Street and sold the remaining books by the meter. Egdar Freire Rubio, who at that time worked for Carrera, the owner of CIMA Bookshop, remembers being sent to Liebmann's bookstore to buy what would be useful for their own store. By the time he had arrived at the SU Librería, it was too crowded to enter.

BRUNO MORITZ

Born in Berlin in 1900, Moritz worked as an insurance agent. He played chess well enough to become a German chess champion during the 1920s. After being forced to divorce his non-Jewish wife because of the Nuremberg racial laws,¹⁸ he married Lilly Alexander (née Cohn) in 1939, to be able to emigrate. The family left the country in 1938, ostensibly to take part in a chess tournament in London. Lacking the means and legal papers to settle in England, they obtained Ecuadorian visas, aided by Jewish charities (Fischer 2011), and arrived penniless in Guayaquil. Lilly started working at a laundry and providing food for immigrants, while Bruno sold books door-to-door. When Bruno's name was recognized as a German chess champion, the couple was promptly helped by members of the local chess community, Circulo de Ajedrez de Guayaquil. Within two or three years of their arrival, the Moritzes had the means to purchase the Librería

17. The story is included in Proaño Arandi Francisco's 1986 *Oposición a la magia* (Ser. Biblioteca de literatura ecuatoriana), Editorial El Conejo.

18. September 15, 1935.

Científica (Scientific Bookstore), the major bookstore in Guayaquil, at Calle Luque 231, though they had no previous experience selling books before arriving in Ecuador.

In the words of Lilly Moritz’s grandson, “[The bookstore] became an important institution for all immigrants (not just the German-speaking ones), as well as the local intellectuals, and the main book supplier for Guayaquil’s high schools and universities, of which the Universidad Católica was the most important one” (Alexander 2015).

Moritz opened a store branch in Quito next to the Royal Hotel, opposite the Bolívar Theater. In this enterprise, he was associated with a Czech Jewish immigrant named Osterreicher. Some of Moritz’s employees later opened bookstores themselves; Carlos Wong Flores, for example, opened Librería Universitaria in Quito, and Emma Chiriboga opened Librería Studium (Freire Rubio 1993; Jaramillo V. 2011)

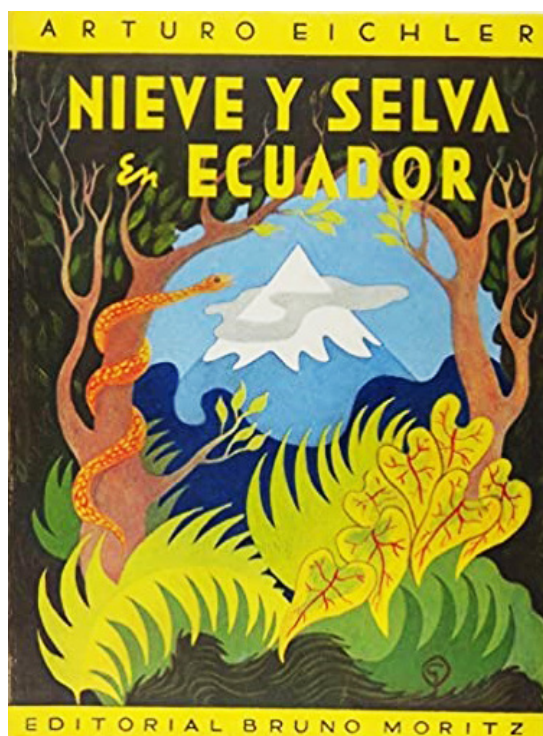


Fig. 2. Eichler, Arturo: *Nieve y Selva en Ecuador* [Ecuador: Snow Peaks and Jungles]. Quito: Editorial Bruno Moritz, 1952

At first, Moritz’s bookshop specialized in German-language literature. Over time, as the German-speaking community declined, he extended his Spanish holdings to sell medical textbooks to professionals, faculty, and students at the public and private universities in Guayaquil. He imported books from Spain, Mexico, and Argentina, and sold textbooks that were popular for many years in elementary and middle schools, and in higher education. Moritz even ventured into publishing, issuing Arturo Eichler’s *Nieve y selva en Ecuador* (Ecuador: Snow Peaks and Jungles) which appeared in 1952 under the imprint Editorial Bruno Moritz (Figure 2).¹⁹

Moritz became president of the Sociedad de Beneficencia Israelita (Israelite Welfare Society), founded in Guayaquil in 1940. He also continued his chess activities and contributed accounts of famous chess matches to the Quito Jewish community newspaper (Kreuter 1997). In 1940, with other Ecuadorian chess players, he founded the first chess club in the country, Círculo de Ajedrez

Guayaquil (Guayaquil Chess Center), and in 1947 he won the national chess championship. He represented the country in the sixteenth Chess Olympiad played in Tel Aviv in November 1964 (“Bruno Moritz - geboren 1900, Schicksal unbekannt” 2017).

19. Arturo Eichler was a German journalist, film producer, press photographer, and a mountaineer. He left Germany because of his anti-Nazi activities.

In December 1950, Lilly Alexander's son from her previous marriage, Werner Alexander, traveled with his wife from Israel to take over the business.²⁰ This allowed Moritz to return to Germany in 1956, where he divorced Lilly and remarried his first wife. The Alexanders returned to Israel in 1960 and sold their part of the business to Moritz, who returned to Guayaquil to resume management of the bookstore. About a decade later, the bookstore was sold to American immigrants who lived in Guayaquil. Their heirs sold the business to an Ecuadorian company run by the Bustos family, specializing in printing but without experience in bookselling.

EMMA ROSENBAUM

The fourth and final figure, Emma Rosenbaum, known as *Tante* (aunt) Emma, is the only woman among the four. Unfortunately, there is scant information about her. According to her former neighbor, Cati Holland,²¹ the place that “used to have that smell of old books” (Holland 2005) opened as a lending library in Guayaquil, with books she had brought from Germany, out of her small apartment on Rumichaca 601 in Guayaquil, a building she shared with other Jewish immigrants (Figure 3).

Unfortunately, nothing is known of the contents of the library, though it helped immigrants stay connected with their cultural roots at a time of distress. It is interesting to note that in some South American countries, such as Argentina and Brazil, Jews who emigrated from Germany or other European countries, understanding the importance of libraries in their cultural formation, organized lending libraries in their bookstores or by opening their own private collection. Borrowing books from libraries was an alternative to continue with a tradition they brought with them: reading (Falbel 2008; Münster 2011).

CONCLUSION

Ecuador offered a safe haven for Jewish refugees when most countries refused to accept them. Refugees were able to start a new life in Ecuador, although most eventually left for other destinations. Some tried their luck in different activities and produced all kinds of products until they found a secure basis for their livelihood. It was relatively easy for an immigrant to set up a bakery, a hardware shop, or a pharmaceutical lab, because those businesses were needed in Ecuador. Those who found a niche in the market with a product or service unknown or lacking



Fig 3. “If you want to spend some time with a good book, go to Emma Rosenbaum, Rumichaca 601.” *Informaciones: revista Israelita* [Guayaquil] advertisement; posted by Cati Holland (nee Cohn), <https://sites.google.com/site/jewsofecuador/family-recipes>, August 16, 2010

20. Lilly Alexander divorced her first husband, Gerhard, in the late 1930s because of his refusal to emigrate; he was murdered in Auschwitz in March 1943. The couple had sent their 11-year-old son to Palestine in 1934.

21. Interview held in February 2020.

were quite successful economically. It was much more difficult to establish publishing houses and bookstores, especially in view of the high level of illiteracy and the government's manifest lack of interest in education and culture.

Though an unpromising ground for the book trade, Ecuador allowed three German Jews to establish successful enterprises, which provided a cultural community for Ecuadorians in search of knowledge, social life, and entertainment. The twenty-year period between 1930 and 1950 saw the emergence of a progressive intelligentsia, including writers keen on establishing communication with other countries. Through their bookstores, these German Jews contributed to the expansion of knowledge of European and local writers, including immigrants who published accounts of their experiences in their adopted country.

According to Francisco Proaño Arandi,²² booksellers promoted good-quality books, and in so doing influenced the development of several generations of readers, especially among Quito's young intellectuals:

I can vouch from my own experience in the sixties and seventies. These [Jewish] bookstores, together with other national bookstores, became focal points for the dissemination of culture. There we began to read Dostoevsky, Kafka, Faulkner, Camus, Sartre and others, and at the same time Latin American and Spanish authors who were beginning to emerge, such as those who were part of the so-called Spanish-American "boom."

In those years, a real transformation in Ecuadorian literature took place. Young authors stopped writing regional or social novels of denunciation in the style of past decades, and assimilated new forms of writing, more in line with what was being done in the rest of the world. The influence of authors such as Juan Carlos Onetti, Faulkner, and those of the literary boom, was decisive. And there is no doubt that the books sold in places like SU Librería, Librería Internacional, Librería Científica, Librería Española and others, had a notable influence on the literary avant-garde movements of the time.

In the early twentieth century, there was a boom of bookstores in Ecuador in which the Jewish immigrants played a big role. These bookstores spread the works of Ecuadorian authors and had a clear presence of Latin American authors. But with the emigration of the majority of the Jewish community and the death of the original owners of the Jewish bookstores, their businesses disappeared. Carlos G. Liebmann died in 1985. His son Wolfgang, with whom Liebmann had a fraught relationship, had moved to Denver, Colorado, and had no interest in continuing his father's businesses (Grubel 2015). Moritz died in Guayaquil in 1966 and his bookstore was eventually sold to Ecuadorians.

22. Ecuadorian novelist, short story writer and essayist. Email exchange, July 2020.

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23. The full text for items 2, 3, 5, 9, 10, 11, 15, and 16 is available on the Recollections page of the Jews of Ecuador website, at <https://sites.google.com/site/jewsofecuador/home> (see also <https://www.jewsofecuador.com>).

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