

The Impact of the Soviet Repatriation Campaign on the Eastern European Émigré Community in Argentina (1955-1963)

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Abstract

In response to a strong anticommunist campaign in the Western World in the 1950s, the USSR started a counter-propaganda campaign directly aimed at Eastern European émigrés living abroad to persuade them to return to Soviet territories. This policy was implemented through the founding of the International Committee for the Return to the Motherland, established in 1955 in East Berlin. This paper intends to explore the Argentinean case in the context of the post-Stalinist Soviet Repatriation campaign, aided by the historical analysis of local official period documents (mainly diplomatic and intelligence reports) and oral history, to argue that the characteristics of Argentine society in the 1950s and 60s were largely responsible for the success of local agents of propaganda and recruiters. Nonetheless, the process of repatriation also affected the subjectivity of the repatriates and called into question their sense national identity.

Keywords: Argentina, Soviet propaganda, repatriation campaign, émigré organizations, national identity.

Introduction

This paper was generally inspired by the recent growing interest in the influence of the Cold War on Argentine culture and society (Franco 2012; Petra 2013; Jannello 2013/2014; Galván and Zourek 2016). These original broad inquiries led me to an important corpus of documents in the Argentine Foreign Office Archives (AMREC) that denounced the infiltration of communist propaganda into the country. The files present a register of a great number of individuals living as Soviet citizens in the former USSR and other Eastern European countries under the Soviet sphere of influence who claimed in the late 1950s and early 1960s to want to “return to their true homeland”, Argentina, from whence they had emigrated under false pretenses.

These findings were situated within the context of the post-Stalinist Soviet Repatriation Campaign, the USSR's new approach to resolving the problem of having a population displaced by war and the anticommunist pockets that these émigrés represented in Western countries. Although this Soviet policy was recently analyzed by other scholars, with the exception of the Canadian case study (Roberts and Cipko 2008), it was limited to certain émigré communities, particularly Latvians and Estonians (Mikkonen 2011, 2012, 2013; Zalkalns 2014). However, all of these studies thoroughly describe the specifics of the propaganda campaign and cover a wide range of techniques and strategies that were generally implemented in order to persuade the target population to return. Following these studies, this paper intends to contribute to the existing knowledge pertaining to this communist foreign propaganda campaign through an analysis of the paradigmatic Argentine case.

Due to its status as a recipient of multiple waves of European migration, by mid-century Argentina was an actual global portal and its society was composed of a variety of European ethnicities. Partly due to this, as I intend to prove, the Soviet campaign was a success in the South American country because its population was still somewhat attached to the soil of its ancestors. Nonetheless, the rapid effectiveness of this repatriation propaganda was soon counterbalanced by the numerous requests of individuals living in the USSR to be allowed to return to Argentina. These requests were based on the claim that they had always legally been Argentine citizens (although they had had to give up this status when they entered the USSR, as a mandatory prerequisite). Accordingly, not only did this process intensify the anticommunism of the Argentine authorities, but all the emotional appeals on the Soviet side that made these individuals feel part of the new nation that was being built also resulted in their reconsideration of their own national identities.

In all, this paper intends to investigate the singularities of this case and its global pertinence through an examination of Argentine Foreign Office documents (AMREC), Argentine provincial police reports from the intelligence division (DIPBA), and the intelligence reports of the Frondizi administration, in particular, that are found in the Center of National Studies (CEN) at the National Library of the Argentine Republic. These documents not only list all the Argentinean émigré organizations involved in disseminating Soviet propaganda and the local intelligence agents' investigations, but they also state the personal claims of the émigrés. In addition, this analysis is complemented by two oral interviews carried out with descendants of the mid-century repatriates.

The Post-Stalinist Soviet Repatriation Campaign

In 1955, the USSR initiated a repatriation campaign that was not only aimed primarily at the return of Soviet citizens who had immigrated to other countries, especially during the second wave of immigration, but was also meant to counteract the increasingly threatening anticommunism felt by Eastern European émigré communities abroad,

fuelled by the influence of American CIA (Mikkonen 2011, pp. 54-55).¹ This ideological side of the émigré issue put the Soviet repatriation campaign at the center of the cultural battlefield of the Cold War. For this reason, the strategies articulated by this policy towards the émigrés differed from those used during the Stalinist repatriation campaign. Actually, the post-Stalinist repatriation campaign was mainly based on major propagandistic efforts to improve the USSR's international image in general, but particularly among émigrés.

Generally, international Soviet propaganda took a turn after Stalin's death in 1953 and became more oriented towards the West (Rupprecht 2015; Gould-Davies 2003). In this context, a more sophisticated and restructured propaganda apparatus was implemented to resolve the émigré problem. In September 1955, a general amnesty to all Eastern European émigrés suspected of war crimes or collaboration with the Nazis was declared. Through this, the Soviet government intended to put on a forgiving and more humane face to those living abroad. This was emphasized by several propagandist techniques that appealed to the individual emotions of the émigrés. This new policy was soon materialized via the creation of the Soviet Committee on the Return to the Homeland (Komitet za vozvrashchenie na rodinu).²

After the United Nations opposed the forced return of individuals to the USSR (Mikkonen, 2011, pp. 48-49), the Soviet administration started investing in cultural and emotional approaches instead. Thus, according to the scarce literature on the subject, the Committee was in charge of publicizing the new amnesty laws, distributing printed propaganda, editing an international newspaper *called For the Return to the Motherland* that was printed for several regional markets published in Czech, Polish, Bulgarian, Rumanian, Latvian, etc., and radio broadcasting through a station of its own.³

In Argentina, the Soviet Committee regularly mailed its Russian-edited newspaper from East Berlin to Buenos Aires and this example was followed by the isomorphic repatriation

¹ By the end of the Second World War, the Soviet Union had initiated a global campaign to repatriate Soviet citizens that had been disseminated abroad during the first and second waves of migration (that were direct consequences of the Russian Revolution and the Second World War). As a result of this first Soviet Repatriation Campaign—and with the collaboration of the Western Allies and the United Nations—the majority of the displaced Soviet citizens were successfully forced to return home (Mikkonen 2013, p. 184; Judt 2005, pp. 30-35). Despite this apparent success, the USSR's obsession with controlling their émigrés in the West, while battling the CIA's ongoing ideological manipulation, prevailed after the change of policies that came with the end of the Stalin era. Thus, in 1955 the Soviet Union initiated a second repatriation campaign.

² The Committee was strategically located in East Berlin under the direction of Major General Nikolai F. Mikhailov, a former prisoner of war whose life story personified the Committee's aim as a multi-ethnic association of former prisoners of war and displaced persons—both of whom were victims of the war. The membership of the Repatriation Committee was made up of Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Georgians, Tartars, Uzbeks, Estonians, Lithuanians and Latvians; this meant that all the main nationalities targeted by the propaganda of this Second Campaign had their own representation in the Berlin main office (Mikkonen 2013, p. 186; Zalkalns 2014, pp. 84-96).

³ Through this modern medium, the Committee broadcast valuable pieces of information in various languages for émigrés living in the West, such as success stories of repatriation or clips of interviews with relatives of the émigrés living in the USSR (Mikkonen 2011, pp. 47-51).

committees founded in the “brotherly” republics of the “Iron Curtain.”⁴ Thus, the journal *Hlas Domova* (The Voice of the Fatherland) regularly arrived in Buenos Aires from Prague and the Polish repatriation newspaper *Ogniwo* was edited locally in Buenos Aires (AMREC, *Europa Oriental*, F48/72/1956).

In fact, despite the thorough information provided by the Argentine intelligence services acting on behalf of the Argentinean Foreign Office, according to narratives of Argentinean repatriates themselves, many of them were actually affected and ideologically turned by this sort of literature to which they had access via their ethnic clubs⁵ (AMREC, *Europa Oriental*, F48/72/1956). However, they were also the recipients of a more direct and personal approach: family letters. Around the world, the Soviet relatives of certain targeted individuals living abroad were coerced into writing letters to their spouses, children, and siblings in western countries in order to awaken their patriotic sentiments and positive familial emotions (Zalkalns 2014, p. 12).

Despite the Committee’s sophisticated and innovative approach to influencing the émigrés, it did not achieve the desired effect. In reality, by September 1955 only 250 individuals could be counted as returnees.⁶ By contrast, in 1957 the number of repatriates coming from Western Europe, the United States, and Canada had risen to 2200. The reason for this change may have had to do with an important shot of confidence from the 3500 repatriations achieved in 1956 in South America alone, particularly the Ukrainian community in Argentina (Zalkalns 2014, p. 103; Mikkonen 2011, p. 55).

By then, Latin America had already become one of the main cultural battlefields of the Cold War (Franco 2002; Jannello 2013/2014; Calandra and Franco 2012; Rupprecht 2015; Petra 2013; Alburquerque 2011; Pedemonte 2010). In Argentina in particular, cultural relations with the USSR flourished during the Khrushchev years (Rupprecht 2015). The Soviet Union had always granted it a privileged position. Not only was the Argentinean Communist Party the most loyal, but the country’s economic structure also allowed for an unprecedented commercial exchange to take place between both countries. With regard to culture, the USSR acknowledged Argentina’s capital city as an influential center of culture in the Latin American region. Because of this, the Soviets intended to establish a headquarters for propaganda in Buenos Aires, and the first step taken in this direction was to settle new Eastern European legations in the city from Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania (Zourek 2014, p. 21).

⁴ We believe that the repatriation committees established in other socialist Eastern European countries can be framed in terms of what Di Maggio and Powell called “mimetic institutional isomorphism,” defined as the process through which “organizations tend to model themselves after similar organizations in their field that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful”; plus, peripheral nations (as is the case of all Eastern European socialist countries) are usually more isomorphic (1983, p. 152).

⁵ We shall return to the topic of the émigrés’ associative life in the following section.

⁶ This failure influenced the evolution undergone by the original Committee in 1959, as it changed its main objective (repatriation itself) and its name to the less confrontational “Committee for the Return to the Homeland and Development of Cultural Relations with Compatriots.” This conciliatory trend was intensified in 1963 with the Committee’s next renaming to the “Soviet Committee on Cultural Relations with Compatriots Abroad” (Mikkonen 2013, p. 186).

In this context, the “local branch” of the Soviet apparatus employed several propagandist techniques in order to communicate an idealized and positive image of the USSR.⁷ This propaganda was spread with the aid of Argentinean agents responsible for the cultural transfers of various Soviet topics translated for Argentinean audiences.

Propaganda for Argentinean Émigrés

In relation to the question of repatriates in Argentina, in particular, besides the internationally distributed Committee newspaper, the dynamics of the émigrés’ social life played a key role in fortifying the cultural and emotional connections with the original Motherland. It was precisely in the daily local social life-club of the émigrés where their loyalty to their country of residence was questioned in the face of a renewed emotional connection to their country of origin.

Indeed, according to the documents consulted, the narratives of the Argentinean repatriates show tension between two different “nationalities”: that of their origins (Russian, Ukrainian, Czech, etc.) and that of their residence (Argentinean). All the recounted individual testimonies seem to subscribe to an undefined national identity, blurred between emotionally charged words like family, blood, tradition, legal citizenship, territory, ideology, property, history, daily routines and children.

The confusion that the experience of repatriation created in the subjectivities of émigrés was perhaps influenced by the fact that the campaign in Argentina actually affected the first wave of migrants and the Argentinean-born, first-wave descendants who, in many cases, were the products of interethnic marriages and therefore had undisputed Argentine identities. These issues that distinguish the Argentinean case had an impact on the role that the Committee assigned to the émigrés’ local associations that were in charge of the subtle construction of a banal form of nationalism.

Émigré clubs in Argentina always took care to integrate their members into the local society through mutual aid benefits, but they also maintained ties to the languages, histories, and traditions of the émigrés’ countries of origin. This also applied to traditional religious values, in some cases.⁸ Thus, a banal nationalism - defined as the subtle insinuation of nationhood into daily life (Billig 1995) - was introduced in reference to the “new” Soviet nation being inserted into the émigré communities in Argentina through several rituals and group celebrations, such as Christmas, and major Soviet historic events (like the “Great Patriotic War”), and the teaching of folk dances, the Russian language, and cuisine. In some clubs, they also used to gather to listen to the latest USSR news. For

⁷ The local Soviet agencies that intervened were defined by the Argentine intelligence reports: the Belinsky Club, the Cultural Center Maiakovsky, Cultural Center Ostrovsky, Cultural Center Pushkin, the Soviet consul in Buenos Aires Valerian Goncharov, some travel agencies, such as Eurotour, Americantour, Argenmundo, and Italmar, embassy publications, etc. On the other hand, the techniques involved were, among others, artistic exhibitions, conferences, scholarships offering funding for students to study at universities in the USSR, visits of artists, the publication of general magazines in Spanish, the broadcasting of radio programs in Spanish, and the exportation of literature and films (AMREC, Europa Oriental, F48/22, 72, AH 45; Archivo DIPBA, Mesa 7880, L135 Capital Federal; Biblioteca Nacional, CEN, Sección política internacional, Caja 5).

⁸ See, for example, Taló’s (2012) thesis on Lithuanian immigration to Argentina.

instance, according to the narrative of one interviewee, in the early fifties, her whole family used to gather in the Byelorussian, Russian and Ukrainian Club Belinsky in the city of San Martín, in the province of Buenos Aires, to follow the news of the preparations for the launch of Sputnik. Anna, the daughter of a Byelorussian father and an Argentinean mother, was then a child, and her impressions and recollections of Club Belinsky bring up very positive emotions (even today), linked to the memory of her deceased parents and long-lost friends (Interview with Anna: June 9, 2016).

Other cultural associations and clubs of the émigré communities, such as Club Máximo Gorki, the Byelorussian House, and the Cultural Ukrainian Society Ostrovsky, among others, also followed the same patterns (AMREC, Europa Oriental, F48/72/1956; AH/0022/13/1959; Archivo DIPBA, Mesa DE L50, San Martín and Mesa L136, Lanús). Hence, the rhetoric of nationhood, family, and Soviet culture were mixed together and regularly highlighted in the clubs' daily routines. According to many of the repatriates' narratives, together with this, two additional discursive elements came into play: communion through a distant territory of origin—even when many of the intended participants in these clubs (as the children of first-wave émigrés or the Argentinean spouses of the émigrés themselves) had never been to Europe—and politics (Interview with Anna: June 9, 2016; interview with Susana, quoted by Taló 2012; Archivo DIPBA, Mesa DE L50, San Martín and Mesa L136, Lanús; AMREC, Europa Oriental, F48/72/1956).

Through the officially sanctioned impulse to create a banal nationalism via these clubs that made the targeted individuals keen to actively participate in the defense of their “original Homeland,” not only was the émigrés' emotional connection to their country of residence (Argentina) being challenged, but also their fidelity to the various nationalities that were being delegitimized under the Communist regime: Slovak, Ukrainian, Byelorussian, etc.⁹ Argentinean émigré clubs did not exclude this ideological agenda when it came to the indoctrination of their members. For example, as Anna recalls, her father—as a working-class Argentinean citizen who came to the country from the former Byelorussia at a very young age—took advantage of every opportunity he had in social meetings in Club Belinsky to discuss politics. Thus, he developed a strong sense of commitment to the Soviet regime and to the USSR as a unified nation. When he finally decided to emigrate with his family to the USSR, he expected to be allowed to join the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). To his chagrin, this never happened.

The Argentinean state was also aware of this political indoctrination:

These clubs (Belinsky, Ostrovsky, Máximo Gorki, Taras Schvencvko, Maiakovsky) undertook an intense ideological activity. This was intended to exacerbate nationalist feelings and sow discord among the workers, opposing a supposedly ideal state and a high quality of life in the USSR to the sad Argentinean proletarian life of their members. As a result, thousands of Argentinean citizens were recruited [...] (AMREC,

⁹ Interestingly, the issue of the profound connection that the émigrés in Western countries felt in relation to their ethnic origins was also used by the CIA as a vital weapon to fuel anticommunism within the communities (Zalkalns 2014, p. 83; Mikkonen 2013, p. 187).

Europa Oriental, F48/72/1956)

The sudden attention of the Argentinean state to the local recruitment of the émigrés was drawn by the numerous claims of Argentinean citizens that came across the Argentinean Ambassador's desk in Moscow in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The claims made serious accusations with regard to the propagandist actions that were being undertaken in the émigré clubs and associations in order to persuade their members to come back to their Motherland, the USSR. Hence, holding on to the promise of a better life in the land of their ancestors, they boarded the ships destined for Odessa.

Naturally, the Argentinean state acknowledged the fact that this propaganda was a general response to the presence of anticommunist pockets within the émigré communities abroad (AMREC, Europa Oriental, AH/0021/Czechoslovakia/1954; AMREC, Europa Oriental, F48/72/1955; AMREC, Europa Oriental, F48/22/1955; AMREC). The anticommunism of émigrés was a major issue in most Western countries and Argentina was no exception. Thus, several Argentinean émigré anticommunist periodicals were published in the 1950s, 60s and 70s (such as: *Suvorovets*, a newspaper issued by General Boris Kholmston-Smyslovskii's Military-National Movement; *Viestnik: organ Russkoi natsional'noi mysli v Iuzhnoi Amerikie*, *La Voz de Rusia Libre*, and *Noticiero Anticomunista*, published by Carlos Palmeyro; *Frente Comun Contra El Comunismo*, *Russkoe slovo*, *Russkaia gazeta* and *Za pravdu, Slovenska Republika*), including brochures and books (for example, *Martirio de la Nación Eslovaca* and *Libro Blanco de los Eslovacos*, published in 1958 and in 1954 in Buenos Aires by the Slovak Committee for the Liberation in Argentina), and there was fervent activism within some of the émigré communities.¹⁰

Soviet Repatriates: A Problem for the Argentinean State

The success of the repatriation campaign in Argentina was globally notorious and put the country in the eye of the international press:

The first boatload of 780 men, women and children left Buenos Aires in March 1956 with brand new Soviet passports. They consisted mostly of Ukrainians, Byelorussians and Lithuanians. Western journalists closely followed their arrival to Odessa and onward journeys to destinations throughout the Soviet Union (Mikkonen 2013, pp. 193-194)

According to the Argentinean Foreign Office reports, not only did more than a hundred Argentinean citizens ask to return to the USSR in 1955 (AMREC, Europa Oriental, F48/72/1955), but by 1959, 1160 local citizens had requested repatriation (AMREC, Europa Oriental, F48/22/1959). The gravity of the situation even motivated the formal

¹⁰ One of the most fervently activist communities was the Slovaks. Their anticommunism caused the Czechoslovak government to formally request that the Slovak "refugees" be controlled and to ban the activities of the local branch of the Slovak Committee for Liberation. Ultimately, this last request was rejected by Argentine authorities during Perón's presidency (AMREC, Europa Oriental, AH/0021/Czechoslovakia/1955; Zourek 2014, pp. 51-53). Perón's connection to communist countries was somewhat ambiguous. Although his government was ideologically opposed to communism, he had signed a series of trade agreements with the USSR and other communist countries—Czechoslovakia among them—in order to counteract the US influence on Argentina's balance of trade (Miller 2009, pp. 151-152; Zourek 2014, pp. 45, 54).

request for information from other countries on how to deal with massive repatriations to the East because of the risk they represented to homeland security (AMREC, Europa Oriental, AH/45/1955).

The great expectations held by the returnees as their boat set sail notwithstanding; they were ultimately deeply disappointed immediately upon arrival in Soviet territory, where they were met by hard working conditions in far-flung places instead of the educational and political opportunities they were promised by the propaganda fed to them by their émigré clubs. Moreover, the economic and social realities of proletarian life were also much more challenging than those they had encountered in Argentina. In many cases, returnees even had to face language barriers and difficulties adapting socially. As one repatriate described in her denouncement to the Argentinean embassy:

Mrs. Teclé Zvarich came from Poland to Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1928. With her husband, they both worked in a factory and they did well enough to build their own house. They were regular members of the Maximo Gorki Club and used to share there all cultural and artistic activities with other émigrés. Once they arrived in Soviet territory—thanks to the management of the Soviet consulate in Argentina—they were given a certain amount of money for their immediate expenses. Now they share two rooms with seven other people. The husband works as a night-watcher and earns 300 rubles per month, just enough to buy food. (AMREC, Europa Oriental, AH/0060/25/Poland/1964).

Although Teclé Zvarich was Polish, she was affected by the Soviet propaganda through her involvement in the social life of the Soviet Club Máximo Gorki. This was the case for many Polish families in Argentina that migrated to USSR territories despite their Polish ancestry (other Polish families that were repatriated to the Soviet Union were the Zacharczyszyns, the Stacewiczs, the Ogordniks, the Nikitiuks, etc.). Why so many Polish descendants participated in the activities of Russian or Ukrainian clubs may be explained through their political affiliations that were presumably communist or left-wing. So, in a community environment that was deeply anticommunist,¹¹ they did not have many other options, especially when they already shared the same social spaces and settlement patterns with other Eastern Europeans in Argentina (Devoto 2003, p. 419).¹²

Narratives similar to this filled the archives of the Argentinean embassy in Moscow between 1957 and 1963.¹³ Despite their minor differences, all the stories of the returnees aligned with regard to the poor quality of life in the USSR and lack of social and economic opportunities, which together led to their requests to return to Argentina—their “true Motherland.” Accordingly, the Argentinean diplomats emphasized the national linkage of the repatriates to the South American country:

Today Mr. Carlos Norberto Stacewicz, born the 13th September, 1940 in Buenos Aires, Argentina came to the Argentinean embassy in the USSR. Both of his parents, Francisco

¹¹ Most of the pre-war Polish associations were anticommunist and opposed to the USSR (Devoto 2003, p. 413).

¹² There are even some regional studies that suggest the presence of elements of pan-Slavic identity in some groups of Eastern European émigrés in Argentina (Devoto 2003, p. 374).

¹³ Until 1963, the only active Argentinean Embassy in all of Eastern Europe was in Moscow.

Stacewicz and Gertrudis Gwichkowska, were Polish citizens. His sister, Nelly Núñez, née Gwichkowska, was born in Argentina where she married the Argentine Raúl Núñez. Together they have a little Argentinean 5 year old girl, Elisa Núñez. All the family live now in Minsk. (AMREC, Europa Oriental, AH/0060/25/Poland/1964)

This kind of account was very common in the repatriation files. Thus, the Argentinean authorities tried to compete with the national symbolism that had impregnated the émigrés' associative lives.

In fact, on a formal level and in the context of the numerous claims of repatriates asking for help to return to the country (many of them were even Argentinean-born), the Argentinean state had no other choice in these cases than to acknowledge the role of the actual infiltration of Soviet propagandists within the communities of Eastern European émigrés living in Argentina. For this reason, they reported several examples of the influence of Soviet propaganda in the individual decisions to migrate.

The family (Stacewicz) was influenced by the propaganda developed by the Cultural and Sports Center Pushkin in the Maturín Street in Buenos Aires, the Bielinski, in San Martín and the Mutual Aid Association of Loria Street in Buenos Aires. He (Carlos Stacewicz) also remembers the active intervention of the Soviet Consul, Mr. Goncharov in the decision of his father to move all the family to the USSR. (AMREC, Europa Oriental, AH/0060/25/Poland).

Because of this, in the context of President Arturo Frondizi's wider anticommunist policies (Zourek 2014, pp. 58-59), the Argentinean Foreign Office requested a reduction of diplomatic and administrative staff in the USSR's embassy and in the delegations of Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, and Hungary, in order to limit the entrance of foreign intelligence agents into the country (Biblioteca Nacional, CEN, Sección política internacional, Caja 5). Furthermore, the issuance of cultural visas was closely monitored and sometimes the Argentines strategized with granting permits for cultural visitors from the East. This was, for example, the case of the planned performance of the Prague Orchestra in the Colon Theatre in Buenos Aires in July 1959, which was cancelled before opening night in reprisal for the refusal of the Czechoslovak government to repatriate the Stoklasek family back to Argentina (AMREC, Europa Oriental, AH/0022/13/Czechoslovak/1959).

As stated above, besides these repercussions for the international relations of the states, the Argentine diplomatic files pay special attention to the suffering of their "fellow countrymen" in a "foreign land." Correspondingly, the repatriates' narratives insisted on their Argentine national identity, guaranteed by family ties and also by Argentinean law: "in 1928 our parents came to Argentina looking for a job... they settled in Mar de Ajó... according to the Argentinean laws our nationality is Argentinean" (AMREC, Europa Oriental, AH/0022/13/Czechoslovak/1959).

In relation to this emerges the question of which specific aspect of the communist propaganda was decisive in terms of breaking the émigrés' strong ties to Argentine society. According to the specialized literature, symbolic loyalties of émigrés towards one

specific nation are highly dynamic (Devoto 2003). Bearing this in mind, during the postwar period, while most of the older generations of Eastern Europeans in Argentina were predominantly anticommunist, many of the younger generations were successfully mobilized by nationalistic-like appeals embodied in the voices of familiar institutions - like their community clubs - that called for their help in building the “new Motherland” on the remnants of the former Austro-Hungarian, Prussian, and Russian empires.

Thus, this new national identity was caught up with values such as blood ties or family bonds.¹⁴ Accordingly, government reports on the XXI Congress of the CPSU in 1959 acknowledged that in the gathering “it was considered that South America was a continent populated by Europeans that still have a latent affection for their country of origin. For this reason the party was recommended to channel its actions through the émigré associations” (AMREC, Europa Oriental, AH/0022/Czechoslovak/1959).

In correlation to this mobilization based on the emotionally strong pairing of nationality and family, during President Arturo Frondizi’s administration, the Argentine government decided to take a similar path, resorting to an equally emotionally charged patriotic rhetoric through which it intended to depoliticize the repatriates’ situation: “above any juridical or political considerations must prevail the humanitarian resolution of this conflict” (AMREC, Europa Oriental, AH/0022/13/Czechoslovak/1959). For this reason, Argentine authorities made several efforts to subsidize and assist in the return of the repatriates to the South American country; however, most of these efforts turned out to be fruitless in the end. Only after the dissolution of the USSR could some of the repatriates’ children return to Argentina in the 1990s. Despite their emotional ties to the country, they again experienced a sense of uprootedness. These were the cases, for example, of Anna and Susana (Interview with Anna: June 9, 2016; Interview with Susanna, quoted in Taló 2012). Both of them were Argentinean-born descendants of Eastern Europeans (Anna belonged to the Byelorussian community and Susana to the Lithuanian one) that came to the country during the first wave of migration.

Their families were dissuaded from migrating in the mid-1950s and none of them requested to return to Argentina, in spite of the difficulties that they faced in Europe. The girls grew up as Soviet citizens and received a solid education in the USSR, but after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, due to pressing economic circumstances, they eventually made their way back to their country of birth - Argentina - with their respective children. Yet again, they were repatriated and had to start over from scratch. Now they have both settled in Argentina and recovered their Argentine citizenship, but they do not feel particularly attached to any nation.

Notwithstanding the attention paid by local authorities to repatriates, their perspective seems to ignore the fact that many of the migrants based their decision to leave exclusively on their ideology. This was the case, for example, of Anna’s father, whose main purpose behind migrating to the USSR was to enter and be promoted in the CPSU. There

¹⁴ In this regard, Mrs. Stoklasek, for example, argued in her claim that “after WWII our parents came back to Czechoslovakia to fulfill my father’s father’s last will. Besides, they wanted to show us, their children, their Motherland” (AMREC, Europa Oriental, AH/0022/13/ Czechoslovak/ 1959).

was also the highly publicized case of Anita Lewczuk, a young Argentinean girl (with a Polish father) who was recruited by senior Argentinean members of the Belinsky Club to join the ranks of the “Peace activists” (Archivo DIPBA, Mesa DE, Legajo 50, San Martín). Moreover, the mobilizing effects of ideology and political indoctrination were highly effective weapons used to convince individuals to resettle on Soviet soil.

Conclusion

Evidently, the repatriations to the USSR from Argentina—based on calls to aid the ancestral homeland—were a success in the short term. Although the émigrés had been very well integrated into Argentine society, their main and regular spaces of sociability were still linked to their countries of origin. For this reason, émigré clubs, mutual aid societies, and associations played a crucial role in mobilizing Argentine citizens on behalf of a nation located in their parents’ places of birth. Besides banal associations with family values, the appeal to defend and work for a nation that was still being built on the rubble of the old countries (countries with traditionally volatile frontiers) sought not only to undermine the Argentine identity of these émigrés, but also—as a response to strong anticommunist sentiment within the Eastern European émigrés living in the West—to politically indoctrinate and recruit them.

Shortly after the South American repatriates’ arrival in the USSR, many of them found their expectations were crushed by the hardships of Soviet life and began a very long and often fruitless process of sending claims to the Argentine embassy in Moscow for permission to return to their “true Motherland.” This issue had a negative impact on the diplomatic relations between Argentina and the Eastern Bloc and was also responsible for the rise in anticommunism among the Argentine authorities in the context of an already escalating anticommunist campaign launched during Frondizi’s administration.

In addition, this campaign also undermined the sense of belonging of the repatriates, whose personal and social dimensions of national identity were deeply and permanently altered. This erosion of their national identities scarred these families for generations.

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