The Identity Evolution of Three Waves of Belarusian Immigration to Argentina

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Abstract

It is believed, the descendants of coastal nations only took part in overseas migrations. Yet I’d like to reveal the case of Belarus – a landlocked Eastern-European nation, whose descendants actively immigrated to Argentina in the late XIX – middle XX cc. Belarusian immigration to Argentina was preceded by the immigration of Belarusian Jews, who constituted substantial part of our urban population until the World War II and often paved the way for subsequent Belarusian emigrations – sometimes they even played the role of mediators.

The first wave of Belarusian immigration (1880s – 1915) comprised mostly of peasants with very mixed combination of ethnic, local and state identities. Attributed by the Argentinean authorities just as “Russians”, due to the fact, they were subjects of the Russian Empire, they lost soon their national traditions and instead of direct integration to the Argentinean society were absorbed by stronger Russian and Ukrainian diaspora.

The second, most numerous wave of interwar period, was solely from the Western Belarus, which after partition of Belarusian lands between the Poles and Soviets remained on the Polish side. These immigrants had stronger identity and were more organized. Yet being displeased with the Polish rule, they left, they demonstrated much affection to the USSR and became deeply engaged in communist pro-Soviet activities in Argentina.

The third wave of late 1940s consisted of former DPs of the World War II with the strongest Belarusian national identity and clearly anti-Soviet position that sometimes caused clashes with the earlier Belarusian immigrants. They were the most educated and organized and tried to create more positive image of Belarusians in Argentina. But in late 1950s most of them left to North America because of economic reasons.