Civilization, Modernity and Migration in Argentina; the Formation of a White Nation

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Abstract

By the mid nineteenth century, Argentina had lifted its regulation on immigration to welcome Europeans mostly Italians and Spaniards to settle. Argentina believed that European immigrants would bring civilization and modernization that would somehow progress the country. The state used this wave of migration to establish the formation of a white nation and a European model of national identity. Many Argentine intellectual científico leaders such as Domingo F. Sarmiento believed that true civilization can only be accomplished with European cultural integration. This led to the thousands of European immigrants to be the tool of civilizing the barbarism of Argentine culture. In this paper, I argue that Argentina embraced European migration to form a white nation of modernity and civilization. Throughout this process, histories, languages, and memories of Indigenous and Afro-Argentine cultures were erased because it was deemed to be inferior. Furthermore, modernity became the model of true civilization in Argentina that imposed the belief that European culture is the only pathway to progress. In addition, this paper seeks to address the forgotten ethnocide committed on Indigenous people throughout this process of transformation of whiteness. Today Argentina’s heritage is considered the Europe of Latin America which only represents the descents of European immigrants. The state continues to deny any association to its Indigenous or Black ancestry because of its representation to backwardness. This research will consist at analyzing documents on immigration policies, newspapers, popular culture media, testimonies, memoirs, academic journals, and selected books that address race, civilization, and migration in Argentina’s state formation of whiteness. This paper hopes to contribute on the forgotten histories of Indigenous and Afro-Argentine people who were replaced by the large wave of European migration, cultures, languages, and a new identity of whiteness.