

Return to the “Motherland”? Cold War propaganda and the repatriation of Argentine citizens living in the former USSR

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Addressing the concept of Motherland in the Cold War context, particularly in reference to descendants of diaspora communities, gives rise to an important number of questions. Which is the true Motherland? The country where an individual was born or the one where their parents and grandparents came from? The one that gave refuge, the one chosen, or the homeland from where they were forced to leave but where all the emotional roots still remain? All these issues were taken into account by the soviet foreign propaganda repatriation campaign in Argentina in the 1950s.

The purpose of this campaign –which developed also in other countries in the same period– was to address Eastern European *émigrés* living in Argentina and persuade them to “returning to their Motherland”. In this context, propaganda techniques were implemented by various agents, such as USSR diplomats and Soviet foreign press agencies, official visitors and cultural representatives from the USSR. But the ones that had deeper connections within each *émigré* community (cultural associations, sports clubs, political associations) were the most effective ones in manipulating the *émigrés* into going back to Eastern Europe.

Most of the targeted individuals arrived finally in Ukraine, convinced that they were going to enjoy a better life quality, but soon enough they ended up enduring the hardships of the Soviet working class ranks life. Thus, by the end of the decade the Argentinean embassy in Moscow started loading up with repatriation requests of Argentinean citizens trying to come back to their “true Motherland”. Most of these petitions were presented by people of Polish, Czech, Russian and Ukrainian origins, who had emigrated to Argentina in the forties because of the war and were targeted by the communist repatriation campaign. Indeed, the purpose of this propaganda was to convince *émigrés* to come back to the main now Communist European countries. But many of these once *émigrés* had already had Argentinean descendants and emigrated with them being minors so, almost ten years later, this progeny made one of the strongest arguments to petition for the repatriation back to Argentina.

Notwithstanding the individual fate of these twice to be repatriated people, their personal stories became a diplomatic scandal and, therefore, the relations between Argentina and the communist countries were inevitably resented. Furthermore, these repatriation cases served –in the context of the Alianza para el Progreso and the Cuban Revolution– as an excuse to initiate an intense anticommunist counterpropaganda campaign directed by the Argentinean state.

In all, the relevance and the cultural as well as political repercussions of these petitions of repatriation inspire this work. Thus, on the basis of the Argentinean Foreign Office files, press releases of the 1950s and interviews with the descendants of some of the petitioners, I intend to put in perspective the issue of the Motherland in the Cold War context and address some of the main questions and consequences aroused by these cases.