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Thesis prospectus

Introduction

“Argentines aren’t nationalistic,” my Social and Political History of Argentina teacher informed me. “If you ask an Argentine where he’s from he’ll tell you he’s Italian, or Spanish, or German, but not Argentine,” she told me while the rest of the class of Argentines nodded in agreement. This assertion surprised me. Outside of Argentina, I had often heard the stereotype that Argentines are intensely prideful and patriotic. But now my professor was telling me that most citizens would prefer to reject their nationality in favor of their original ancestry. The country’s political and economic problems caused many people to want to distance themselves from the chaos, she said. I started to wonder what this meant about the different levels of assimilation of cultural groups in the country.

One of the reasons why I was attracted to Argentina as a study abroad location in the first place was because I viewed it as unique compared to other South American countries. The indigenous traditions and colonial influences I had seen in Ecuador and Peru created cultures starkly different from Argentina, with its 20th century attempts to copy European culture. In addition, Argentina’s history of relaxed immigration policies created a diverse country of Spanish, Italian, German, South African, Jewish, Arab, Chinese, and Japanese communities. The United States was formed in a similar way, but these days most people would consider themselves American first, or perhaps some form of hyphenated (-American) identity. Most people living in the US do not perform the rejection of

Americanism that Argentinians apparently do about their nationality. Argentina is known for diversity of cultural backgrounds and for its large immigrant population, but have all these people from different backgrounds really been actively refusing to assimilate and claim Argentina as home?

The present-day culture of Argentina has obvious evidence of outside influence, more than I have seen in any other South American country. Perhaps the Korean neighborhoods, Italian slang, and Arab food apparent today reflect immigrants' past refusal to submit to what would be considered traditional Argentine culture. Over time, these migrant groups have created, changed, and at times existed completely outside of the dominant culture, integrating and refusing to integrate to different extents. This is the concept I would like to study.

Research Question

I am still working on coming up with the best way to frame the trends and ideas I would like to study. I am fascinated by the different influences on Argentinian culture. Over the course of history immigrants have helped define the country's identity. The founding fathers sought out Europeans to develop the country as a copy of Europe, and many of the cities, with their mix of European architecture styles, were envisioned in the same way. These days, some aspects of other cultures have been completely integrated into the mainstream- Italian words used as slang in Buenos Aires, for example. On the other hand some groups, like most of the Asian immigrant populations, still stand on the outside. I want to study how these different migrant influences have interacted and how they have come to rest in modern day Argentina.

The research question I am currently working with is: To what extent have immigrants to Argentina assimilated into the prevailing culture versus continuing to pursue their own cultural traditions? Has their level of assimilation changed over time and across cultural groups? I am expecting this question to change and focus during the next few weeks of research.

This is an important topic to pursue because it will add to the understanding of the cultural and ethnic makeup of Argentina and provide a broader view of the cultural subtleties of the country. It will investigate and recognize the different roles diversity plays in societies and honor the immigrant communities. It also contributes to the broad question of the impact immigrants have once they arrive and establish themselves in a new country. Finally, immigration is an interesting lens through which to look at the history of Argentina and of the world.

Hypothesis

From my studies of Argentinian history and my knowledge of modern day trends, my hypothesis is as follows: I predict that immigrants to Argentina a hundred years ago assimilated into the country to a large extent and served to define the culture and identity of the country, while newer groups are forming their own communities inside the country and not assimilating as much. I also predict that assimilation varies widely across cultural groups. I think early immigrants like the Italians were accepted more and allowed to help determine the culture of the country. Furthermore, the Italian and Spanish languages were not different enough as to cause a barrier in their assimilation. However, I believe more recent immigrants from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East have not assimilated to the same

degree. This could be due to greater cultural or lingual differences, or because the current trend in our globalized world is to celebrate differences instead of diminish them.

This hypothesis could be important to scholars working in this area because it could reveal a trend in cultural assimilation in Argentina. It might also be exemplary of worldwide trends in assimilation of immigrants. Immigration is a major topic of study in the world today, especially due to crisis in the Middle East. More research on the impacts migrant communities have once they are in their new countries is beneficial in numerous ways. This research could also be helpful to scholars because it will delve into some communities that have not been studied in much depth before. For example, the Italian immigrants to Argentina have been widely documented, but the Chinese immigrants are not the topic of much research.

Methodology:

I plan to answer this question by performing an analysis of measured levels of assimilation of immigrant groups during and after waves of immigration into Argentina. Mary Waters and Tomás Jimenez state that measurable aspects of assimilation are socioeconomic status, spatial concentration, language attainment, and intermarriage. So one way to research my question would be to find data in these four categories for immigrant populations in Argentina. Another element I could look at is names. Scholars have noted that giving children names from their home country/culture in the place of local names shows a lesser degree of assimilation. Finally, inspired by the anecdote that started this paper, I could look at how Argentinians self identify, whether that is based on their nationality of origin or their current citizenship.

Another aspect of assimilation is how migrant communities have integrated their own cultures into the dominant cultural landscape of Argentina. I find this just as if not more interesting than how they have hidden their distinctive qualities. However, cultural merges might be harder to study empirically. There are many examples of how foreign languages, culinary traditions, and hobbies have been brought into Argentina culture, but I am not sure how to determine what those examples mean for the cultures and communities.

Overall, my research will come from historical texts and data sets, other investigations of Argentinian immigrant communities, and my personal observations of cultural trends. Obviously my current methodology is very incomplete, but I will figure out more details as I go further into my research.

Research Agenda

I plan to write three chapters that are divided into subsections. I am thinking that the first chapter will be about European immigration in the 19th century, the second about another wave of immigration at the end of the 19th beginning of the 20th centuries, and the third chapter about immigration over the past 50 years or so. Within these chapters I would like to create sections to focus on specific groups of immigrants, maybe grouping together immigrants from a specific country, religion, or continent to study. I will try to choose the cultural groups who seem to have the most representative experiences from each time period.

Ideally I would like to follow the deadlines Dr. Mendoza lists in his guide for INST 421. Following these deadlines, I would turn in my literature review at the beginning of

October, content section 1 at the beginning of November, and content section 2 at the beginning of December. I am planning to travel over winter break, so it would be great to get as much work done as possible before break. I also expect that my schedule next semester will be less relaxed than my schedule this semester is. I anticipate that the most difficult part of the process for me will be compiling data and building my argument; generally once I have my ideas organized I can write them out fairly efficiently. Therefore, I plan to do a lot of research over the next month or so to prepare for the writing stage.

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