Construction of Otherness: Links Between Immigration and Crime During the *Cambiemos* Administration (Argentina, 2015–2019)

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Abstract

In December 2015, the political coalition *Cambiemos* won the national elections in Argentina, taking the candidate Mauricio Macri to the presidency for a period of four years. One of the recurring topics within public opinion during that time was the explicit and public reference to an alleged link between immigration and crime by administration officials of various kinds. Against this background, I propose to specifically address the ways in which the links between immigration and crime were defined in the political discourses implemented during the *Cambiemos* administration. The article presents different core categories, reconstructed through discourse analysis: (1) 'we need to know who is who'; (2) distinction in the types of immigration that arrive in Argentina; (3) tighter controls on the conditions of entry into the country; and (4) crime and migration. In broader terms, and as the argumentative plotline, each of these core categories relates to the *Cambiemos* initiatives to manage ethnic and cultural diversity: identify, select, control and criminalise.

Introduction

On 10 December 2015, *Cambiemos* won the national election in Argentina, taking the candidate Mauricio Macri to the presidency for a period of four years. *Cambiemos* was a political coalition created between the parties *Coalición Cívica ARI*, *Propuesta Republicana* and *Unión Cívica Radical*. The coalition also included other political forces.[1] Unlike the Kirchner governments, between 2003 and 2015, which were framed within a neo-development program, the administration resulted in a return to neoliberalism. Although, as Leandro Bona (2019) pointed out, it presented novelties regarding the preceding neoliberal administrations, such as those of the twentieth century, thus, expressing a neoliberalism comprised of social protection and infrastructure projects.

Following Bona (2019), we can highlight different features that enable us to characterise the *Cambiemos* administration. First, there was the configuration of a new power block, hegemonised by transnational banks, foreign capital and the financial sector. Second, above the objective of growth and economic stabilisation, the priority of this block was on the redistribution of income from the subaltern classes to these specific sectors of the ruling classes, thus, promoting a new distribution table related to those groups. Third, this administration articulated a claim of diverse demands; some of them focused on the middle and upper sectors, while others took note of the real needs of the popular sectors. Fourth, within the framework of international relations, and unlike the main opposition party (*Frente para la Victoria*), which claimed a certain priority in the South American continent, *Cambiemos* connected with the classic liberal discourse of 'opening up to the world' (Bona 2019: 44) by improving

relations with the United States. Lastly, it is worth highlighting the relevance of the profile of officials in the new structure of the government apparatus, defined by Bona (2019: 44) as 'CEOcracy' or 'Government of CEOs'. In the same sense, Mariana Heredia (2022) highlighted the participation of figures outside the parties and the state administration (personalities from non-government organisations, social movements, sports, science, the media, religion, business and culture) in the *Cambiemos* administration.

One of the topics that recurred within public opinion and the political-electoral arena during Macri's *Cambiemos* alliance administration was an alleged link between immigration and crime, referred to by its leaders. Such speeches legitimised and supported changes implemented in the migratory policy, some of which affected higher levels of punitiveness towards the migrant population. By punitiveness, I understand, following Máximo Sozzo (2016, 2017), the level of pain or suffering produced by the penal system. The highest point of this process was the implementation of the *Decree of Necessity and Urgency No. 70/2017* (Decree 70/2017)[2] in January 2017, from which the national government formalised changes in *Migration Law No. 25,871*.[3]

Against this background, of the set of aspects linked to the criminal question, I focus here on its subjective dimension (Aliverti et al. 2021): the construction of otherness from discourse, notions and ideas associated with presumed threats and dangers. In this article, I explore the ways of defining the links between immigration and crime in the political discourse implemented during the *Cambiemos* administration. Such analysis is a significant contribution to the research on crimmigration as a framework that allows us to study both the increased merger of crime control and immigration control (van der Woude, Barker and van der Leun 2017) and different dimensions related to mechanisms or technologies of immigration border control (Koulish and van der Woude 2020) by addressing the following questions: What local peculiarities can we identify in that discourse? What antecedents can be reconstructed, some more historical and others more recent, of such ways of defining the links between immigration and crime? Answering these questions can be an important way to problematise, from the Global South, the embeddedness of migratory control regimes and the forms of knowledge on which they are based. At the same time, this is an invitation to carry out comparative research that takes into account both local particularities and similarities and differences between different jurisdictions.

Methodology

I use grounded theory to analyse the political discourse during the *Cambiemos* administration around the immigration–crime association. I take up both its pioneering development in the 1960s (Glaser and Strauss 2008) and its more recent elaboration by Strauss and Corbin (2002).

Regarding the data, I worked with speeches delivered publicly (whether in press conferences, official acts or presentations of measures and implemented policies) by Macri and officials who held hierarchical positions in different ministries, secretaries and agencies at the national level that were released by the media. By way of illustration, it is significant to highlight spokespersons such as Rogelio Frigerio, Patricia Bullrich and Horacio García, who held hierarchical positions in the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Security and National Directorate for Migration, respectively. Together with the perspectives of national and local officials, I also incorporate speeches by Miguel Ángel Pichetto, who was the head of the block of senators in *Frente para la Victoria* during the *Cambiemos* administration, but who later became Macri's vice presidential candidate in the 2019 presidential elections.

Prior to the analysis, I systematised such discourses in a grid built from the consultation of digitalised news items published in the *Clarín* and *La Nacion* newspapers.[4] I analysed 27 news items in *Clarín* and 26 in *La Nacion* between 2015 and 2019. In accordance with my interests and research objectives, I selected the discourse from officials in which I could identify a reference, whether more or less explicit, to the immigration–crime association, the statistics from which crime is measured and the work carried out by the police in the detention of migrants. For the specific search criteria, I adopted the use of keywords, such as 'immigration', 'crime', 'immigration and crime', 'border controls', 'immigration and insecurity', 'detention', 'security' and 'crime statistics'.

The aforementioned grid included—among its headings—different dimensions that, by identifying and providing key information about the news items, generated a first familiarisation with the empirical domain. These dimensions were title, date, spokesperson/s, URL and keywords. With the support of ATLAS.ti software, I later analysed the speeches using the procedures provided by grounded theory, taking into account the activities of conceptualisation, classification and categorisation of texts involved in this research strategy. In doing so, I relied on the constant comparative method and different types of coding. Regarding the former, Glaser and Strauss (2008) defined it as an approach to the analysis of qualitative data that leans on the combination of coding and analytic procedures for the generation of theory from data systematically obtained

in social sciences research. Some of the different phases or stages of the constant comparative method involves comparing incidents applicable to each category, integrating categories with their properties while limiting the number of categories.

In the first phase, I compared the information obtained by giving a common label—a conceptual code/category—to a set of incidents (i.e., fragments of data derived from the selected and systematised articles) that shared an idea. According to Glaser and Strauss (2008), these categories can be of two kinds: those constructed by the researcher and those abstracted from the language of the research situation, which the authors defined as 'labels'.[5] The next phase focused on the intense analysis carried out around a category in terms of its properties: by 'property', I mean a conceptual aspect of a category that made it possible to provide it with greater specificity. As Glaser and Strauss (2008) points out, the constant comparative method generates not only categories but also the possible relationships between them. The third phase focused on the delimitation of the theory, aimed at reductions (the possibility of formulating the theory with a small set of high-level categories) and generalisations (the scope of applicability of the theory to a wide range of subjects and situations).

In one of the later elaborations of grounded theory, Corbin and Strauss (2002) referred to different types of coding, particularly open coding (the active and systematic search for conceptual categories and their properties), axial coding (intense analysis made around a category, in terms of its properties and the relationships with other categories) and selective coding (the deliberate and systematic search for core categories, around which others can be grouped and integrated). My use of the procedures provided by grounded theory focused on more than the generation of the theory itself, but rather the development of categories as a possible way to approach the links between immigration and crime. In this sense, the article presents different categories, reconstructed through discourse analysis: (1) 'we need to know who is who'; (2) distinction in the types of immigration that arrive in Argentina; (3) tighter controls on the conditions of entry into the country; and (4) crime and migration. Likewise, to provide those with greater specificity, I expose their different subcategories and properties. The description of 'background' and 'proximate' causes, among them, the centrality of the topic of the identification of 'suspects', the implementation of Decree 70/2017, and indicators of selective punitiveness, will allow the reader to better understand the ways of defining the nexus between immigration and crime in the political discourse implemented during Macri's presidency. In broader terms, and as the argumentative plotline of the article, we can think that each of these core categories relates to the articulating axes of the *Cambiemos* initiatives to manage ethnic and cultural diversity: identify, select, control and criminalise.

1. 'We Need to Know Who is Who'

The first articulating axis relates to a longstanding imperative from the state perspective: the need to identify the 'suspects'. We can identify different references to the treatment of this police task by academics. The investigations by Mercedes García Ferrari (2009, 2010) in Argentina and by Cristian Palacios Laval (2017) in Chile are illustrative. On a contemporary level, Ana Aliverti (2021) described initiatives by the British police (in collaboration with immigration enforcement) to identify and, at the same time, fix individual identities, making them legible. She explained the various ways in which police and immigration officers put their abilities to decipher identities into play.

With respect to the discourse analysed, I built the label (or in vivo code) 'we need to know who is who' from narratives that accompanied the implementation of different immigration control measures. In his first press conference of 2017, Macri referred to the need to limit the arrival in Argentina of immigrants who had a criminal record in their country of origin (Clarín 2017a). On other occasions, Frigerio, who was at that time the Minster of the Interior, focused on specific initiatives, such as the presentation of the Advance Passenger Information (API) system and the requirement that foreigners who wanted to settle in Argentina had to present a certificate showing that they had no criminal record in the last 10 years (Clarín 2019a; Ortelli 2017). A third set of expressions labelled in this way were different excerpts from interviews with Pichetto (especially around the date that he accompanied Macri in the electoral formula) (Schmidt 2019).

We can highlight different properties or attributes to give this label a greater specification and significance. First, the necessity to 'act preventively' to avoid 'that crime still chooses Argentina as a place to come to commit offends' (Clarín 2017a).[6] Second, the age-long state imperative to identify the 'suspects' resonates with the implementation of the API system as an initiative obliging airlines to provide accurate information on the criminal records of those travellers who want to enter Argentina in order to 'prevent the entry of criminals' (Ortelli 2017). Third, another property of the label points to the necessity to establish international mechanisms of exchange and cooperation around the databases of travellers, above all, to be able to know who enters the country and whether they have a criminal record. This is illustrated by expressions such as 'it is necessary to deepen the exchange of intelligence with Latin American countries, to know who is who when they enter Argentina' (La Nacion 2017a) or 'we want to have a database to be able to analyse who is arriving, especially with those countries whose volume of migration is important' (Clarín 2017a). This perspective is not limited exclusively to Buenos Aires, but it is also possible to identify this demand from officials of the Chubut Province, located in the south of Argentina:

> If they arrived in the country through a legal or illegal border crossing, what are their purposes, if they have a record in their country or in Argentina, if they have open cases. We have to enter into information cooperation agreements between the inhabitants of our country and foreigners.[7] (Costa 2019)

Within the group of migrants who intend to enter the country, there are differences between those who will be welcome and those who will not. This aspect places us in the theoretical field of another of the resulting categories.

2. Distinction in the Types of Immigrants That Arrive in Argentina

The history of selectivity regarding desired or unwanted immigration parallels the history of Argentina as a nation-state. When the political elites in the nineteenth century implemented strategies to 'populate the desert' (Germani 1987) and racially modify the composition of the population, there was no shortage of discussions about what type of immigration to encourage and from where. Although Anglo-Saxon immigration was considered preferential, the migrants who arrived, in the context of mass immigration,[8] between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were mainly Italians and Spaniards. As Luis García Fanlo (2010: 17) pointed out:

> the immigrants were not the expected Anglo-Saxons but Spaniards, Italians from the south, Russians, Poles, Slavs, considered inferior races, that is, not carriers of progress and civilization; and, at the same time, they introduced into the country ideologies foreign to the national being, contesting the capitalist social order; they were not industrious docile and liberal masses, but revolutionary anarchists.

In this selection between desired and unwanted immigration, ascribed race played a central role, associating certain races with social problems such as crime.[9] What are the continuities of these constructions about the 'other'? Although there are numerous analyses that account for the ways of the criminalisation of these migrations,[10] some statements by *Cambiemos* officials highlight them, considering the European migrations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as part of the Argentine identity. In this sense, the reference to a 'better' past established a counterpoint between those who came to forge the country and those who come, in the present day, to commit crimes: Diego Santilli, from the Ministry of Justice and Security of the City of Buenos Aires, affirmed 'Argentina is a country of immigrants, a country that welcomed millions of people to forge a future, but those who come to commit crimes are not welcome' (La Nacion 2019b). In a similar way, Macri stated, 'we want people who come with the vocation to work, like our grandparents when they came to this country, and to protect ourselves against others who have other types of intentions that complicate our existence for all of us' (Lara 2018).

In other expressions analysed, the reference to race and the problems inaugurated by the 'inferior races' (explicit in the visions of the political and intellectual elites of the early twentieth century) is displaced by a more abstract and general distinction: between a favourable type of immigration for the development of the country and another that, on the contrary, comes to break 'the pact of coexistence' (La Nacion 2018).

A third property of the category, with more limited and specific features, points to the distinction between those who come to study or work and those who come to commit crimes. In this regard, some phrases such as 'we are not talking about foreigners who come to work but about those who commit crimes' (Ortelli 2018a) or 'poor little immigrants. Yes, poor people who come to work, brother! And not those who come to commit crimes' (Ortelli 2018b) are illustrative. On other occasions, I was able to identify an opposition expressed in terms of good men and criminals. Or, in an analogous way, between 'people of good will' and 'criminals', when pointing out that 'what the President wants is to go towards a path in which people of good will can enter and stay and not criminals' (Bravo 2016).

Finally, I included within this category those expressions that point to broader issues not specifically associated with alleged criminal actions, such as 'violent actions', 'conflicts' and 'unhealthy interests in the country' (Rosemberg 2018). The discourse that accompanied different measures to tighten and promote changes in immigration and border controls, with a view to determining what type of immigration the newcomer belonged to, was the empirical basis of the category that follows, related—within the initiatives to manage ethnic and cultural diversity—to the axis of control.

3. Tighter Controls on the Conditions of Entry into the Country

In *Policing the Borders Within*, Aliverti (2021) pointed out, following Katja Franko (2019), that the proliferation of technologies of identification is a testament to the centrality of the human body for penal power and contemporary governance, which attempts to establish new forms of identity for the purpose of control. These technologies are located at the centre of the tension between a state that must claim its sovereignty (over a certain territory) in an increasingly globalised world of mobile

and flexible migratory flows (Aliverti 2021). The speeches analysed made explicit mention of the need to identify (and therefore, control) those who arrived in the country. In this sense, continuing our analytical itinerary through political speeches, we can highlight different properties that give clarity and specificity to the 'tighter controls on the conditions of entry into the country' category, namely: technological control, human control and entry, permanence and the possible expulsion from the country of people who arrived in Argentina.

Regarding the first, I highlight those initiatives aimed at modifying border crossings (particularly in Paso de los Libres, La Quiaca, Aguas Blancas, Salvador Mazza and Puerto Iguazú, among others) and implementing adequate technologies for this purpose. Patricia Bullrich, from the Ministry of Security, repeatedly accompanied these initiatives with expressions such as the one that follows:

> At the borders, we are better; we have a long way to go. We are going to implement a technology system that allows us more controls, we are going to reinforce with more gendarmes, we have a few more prefects, and we are in the middle of making a decision to purchase the appropriate technology. (La Nacion 2016)

These statements related to heightening controls were accompanied by photos of inspections carried out on bus passengers from bordering countries, where different state actors such as federal security forces and officials from the National Directorate for Migration were present and as an indicator that 'something is being done' (by way of illustration, see, e.g., La Nacion 2017d). Conversely, and despite the fact that we can identify these control mechanisms as restrictive with respect to migratory flows, Claudio Avruj (Secretary of Human Rights) expressed and translated them into subtler control strategies:

> It is nothing more than respect for the rule of law. It is not about persecuting migrants. The nationality of the offender is not part of the debate. Controlling the entry and residence of immigrants is also part of human rights. (Clarín 2017b)

Appropriating, in turn, the terminology proposed by Eduardo Domenech (2013), we can identify these control mechanisms as 'controls with human face' strategies, that is, the use of human rights discourse to legitimise migration controls.

A third property that makes it possible to more fully characterise and define the category of 'tighter controls on the conditions of entry into the country' is related to the imposition of conditions of entry, permanence and expulsion from the country to those foreigners who have committed crimes. In this regard, we can illustratively refer to phrases such as 'in Argentina, criminals must be prohibited from entering, and foreigners who commit crimes must be expelled' (Clarín 2017c) or 'we want to prevent criminals from entering and speed up the procedures to expel them' (La Nacion 2017c). These points constitute, as I will show in the following section, substantive aspects of Decree 70/2017.

4. Crime and Migration

As Dario Melossi (2000) pointed out, the knowledge produced about the criminal spans different discursive forms, contributing to the creation of descriptive portraits and representations. I built the 'crime and migration' category primarily from the discourse that framed the enactment of Decree 70/2017[11] and, to a lesser extent, which is linked to other initiatives such as the creation of the National Boundary Commission[12] and the aforementioned system of API, both from 2017. Finally, interviews with Pichetto and Bullrich, published in *La Nacion* and *Clarín*, respectively, also operated as relevant inputs for the construction of this category.

Different researchers have referred to the ways in which Decree 70/2017 contributed to the process of the criminalisation of migrations (Abiuso, Kleidermacher and Lanzetta 2021; Canelo, Gavazzo and Nejamkis 2018; Galoppo 2017; Monclús Masó 2017; Penchaszadeh and García 2018; Tedesco, Kleidermacher and Grazziotin Noschang 2019; Zayat 2017). From the voice of its supporters, including officials from different parts of the *Cambiemos* administration and also opposition leaders,[13] the decree was presented as part of a policy to fight 'international organised crime' and 'narco-criminality', as can be observed in its own text. In *Crime, Punishment and Migration*, Melossi (2015) argued that the processes of the criminalisation of migrants depend to a large extent on the situation they find in the countries where they are received; hence, the centrality of the receiving society and the ways in which it represents the 'others'. Appropriating the terminology proposed by Garland (2013) and understanding the background causes as social, cultural, political and economic processes that shape the construction of otherness in a given social order, the ways of defining the links between immigration and crime have different antecedents in Argentina, some more historical, and others more recent. Regarding the recent antecedents, Néstor Cohen (2005: 143) affirmed that, throughout the 1990s, 'officials from the national government, security forces, the trade union sphere and other public spheres appealed to the qualifier "illegal" when they referred to foreigners residing in our country', highlighting such a condition as a cause of insecurity. Similarly, Sergio Caggiano (2005) indicated that during that same decade, it became common to hear discriminatory expressions towards Bolivian migrants (as well as from other bordering countries) by high-ranking

officials and representatives of local institutions. Caggiano (2005) identified three moments in which discriminatory acts and manifestations intensified: the detection and rise of cholera cases, the growth of the unemployment rate due to 'illegal immigration', and the interconnected discourse on 'urban insecurity' and the 'foreignisation of crime' in Buenos Aires.

In her analysis of the Argentine Federal Police, Mariana Galvani (2007) referred to the construction of immigrants as the cause of social problems, such as unemployment and crime. In this sense, the label of 'illegal immigrants' as a way of designating people from Bolivia, Peru and Paraguay operated, during the 10 years of Carlos Menem's administration, as a discrediting classification (Galvani 2007). Eduardo Domenech and María José Magliano (2008) highlighted two perspectives present in the discourse and policies of exclusion/inclusion developed by the Argentine state regarding immigration: one that conceives immigration as a 'contribution' and another that, on the contrary, associates it with a 'problem' or 'threat'. They pointed out that, in the 1990s, high public officials attributed unemployment, cholera and insecurity to Latin American immigrants—that is, the construction of bordering immigrants as a threat to work, health and security.

In another of his texts, Domenech (2011) explored the interplay between a rhetoric of exclusion (typical of the 1990s) and a rhetoric of inclusion (related to *Migration Law No. 25,871*) in public discourse on immigration. As an illustration of the first, we can highlight the speeches of officials of the Government of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (including Macri himself) about the problems of 'uncontrolled immigration' in central parks, particularly the *Parque Indoamericano* (Canelo 2015). In this sense, in some political discourse of the *Cambiemos* administration, immigrants were also associated with social problems, above all, crime, and the different criminal activities attributed to 'immigrants' illustrate in greater detail the immigration–crime nexus.

First, drug trafficking occupied an almost stellar role. In fact, the set of initiatives aimed at intensifying migratory controls at the borders was a 'priority issue in the fight against drug trafficking' (Dinatale 2016; see also La Nacion 2016). The following excerpt exemplifies this point of view, which links border control with crime prevention: 'our problem with the border is not the people, we do not have a problem with immigration, we have a problem with drug trafficking and with smuggling' (La Nacion 2017e). On other occasions, the emphasis was on the 'express deportations' that Decree 70/2017 enabled as part of the repertoire of measures to combat drug-related crime:

> It is very important to fight a crime like drug trafficking. And in that reality, we have to find all the ways to avoid it. In the crime of 'narco-criminality', all avenues are important. The way to quickly expel foreigners who enter and who commit drug-related offenses is the same as quickly imprisoning Argentines who do so. (La Nacion 2017e)

By delving even deeper, it is possible to identify different characteristics attributed to drug trafficking: their geolocation, associated nationalities and risk profiles. Regarding the first, some of the expressions analysed spatially located the immigration–crime nexus in the so-called '*villas miseria*',[14] situated in the suburbs and in the peripheries of Greater Buenos Aires. The following textual excerpt is an example of this point of view, expressed by Pichetto:

> There is an aberrant image of a country that none of us here have to love. In 'villa' 11-14, the other day, there were two queues … One queue handled Paraguayan drug trafficking … And [the] other, boys from outside the country, who have also come to this generous country [and] sold cocaine. There were two queues. A drone took all this, and then the Gendarmerie entered. The truth is everything would have to be blown up, and everything would fly into the air. (Clarín 2019b)

Regarding the nationalities associated with the crime, Paraguayans, Bolivians and Peruvians became the 'usual suspects', who arrived in Argentina and ended up 'killing for drug control' (Diagonales 2017). Even though on a smaller scale within the analysed corpus, some discourse also associated drug trafficking with citizens of the Dominican Republic and Venezuela, migrations that have increased in recent years. The criminal figure of drug trafficking was also present in expressions focused on specific measures, such as the implementation of the API system. In this regard, Horacio García, who at that time was serving as National Director for Migration, argued that it would contribute to security because, by having various data on each passenger, it would be possible to 'cross information and draw risk profiles, which have to do with crimes such as drug trafficking and human trafficking' (La Nacion 2017b).

Another subcategory of 'crime and migration' points to criminal activities that are defined as broad, with unspecific labels, such as 'international crime', 'international organised crime', 'organised crime' and 'transnational crimes'. In other expressions consulted and analysed, I was able to identify brief references to other crimes (attempted robbery and armed robbery) and the allusion to '*motochorros*' of different nationalities, especially linked to those practices carried out—among others, by the police—to facilitate expulsions from the country. A *motochorro* is a criminal who makes use of a motorcycle to commit a robbery; it is a neologism created from the words '*chorro*' (thief) and '*moto*' (motorcycle).

To illustrate those chronicles, I mention the case of Jair Stevens Jurado, a Colombian whose deportation involved a dispute between different officials (Macri and Santilli) and the Justice of the City of Buenos Aires:

> The case of the Judge who once again released '*motochorros*' with a criminal record and a ban on entering the country is outrageous. The Security Forces are doing their job on the street, but with Justice like this, there are no police that can reach it.

> Our Police are giving a thorough fight against the '*motochorros*'. The Judge's decision to release them does not help in this battle. Like all 'porteños',[15] I am very indignant because it is essential that Justice accompany us. (Carelli Lynch 2019)

The news item analysed also highlighted that after snatching a cell phone in the Caballito neighbourhood, the Colombian fled at full speed on his motorcycle, but after a chase, agents of the Buenos Aires City Police detained him (Carelli Lynch 2019). This type of chronicle invites us to reflect on the ways in which the political discourse—reviewed up to here—connect with the practices carried out by the police, in this particular case, by the Buenos Aires City Police—in brief, the ways in which politics and the police are related to each other. Another of the journalistic notes focused on similar facts from the case of a Uruguayan *motochorro*:

> The 'motochorro' of Uruguayan nationality had a long history of armed robbery; the City Police arrested him and put him at the disposal of Justice. They gave him house arrest until the National Directorate of Migration did the paperwork to send him to his country. (La Nacion 2019a)

As we chronologically approached the end of the *Cambiemos* administration, there was a strong predominance of news focused on possible expulsions of migrants from different regions of the world. These were occasionally accompanied by testimonies from officials who highlighted the need for the legal framework to be more expeditious to 'kick them out quickly' (Perfil 2018) and pointed to those statistics that registered the increase in expulsions between 2015 and 2018 as 'a very important step in the fight against criminals' (Migraciones 2019). In fact, the analysed political discourse mentioned—with some frequency—percentages related to the prison population to support and confirm the presumed association between immigration and criminality. In this sense, I move to 'statistics', the last subcategory of 'crime and migration'.

I was able to identify different statistics (the increase in the number of people of foreign nationality in the custody of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Argentina (FPS), whose percentages pointed, in particular, to those crimes related to narco-criminality)[16] as a way of giving support from political rhetoric to the links between immigration and crime. From the set of speeches, spokespersons for the Ministry of Security emphasised that 'of the 3,172 prisoners for conflicts with the Narcotics Law, 1,069 [are] of foreign nationality, that is to say, that with respect to this crime, the proportion is "1 to 3" ' (Ibáñez 2017). Bullrich, who was serving as the Minister of Security at the time, referred to the 'alarming' situation that the statistical panorama aroused as follows: 'the increase in crime in the hands of foreigners is significant, reaching 20% of people who are detained, sentenced or prosecuted' (Todo Noticias 2019). These expressions are illustrative of the use of criminal and penal statistics to support the nexus between crime and migration. However, as it turned out, debates around this data were fraught with tensions and discrepancies. Even among officials and those who shared a more or less similar opinion, there was no consensus regarding the quantification of the incidence of migration in crime. Even within the corpus of systematised news itself, the figures were denied based on the reference to data provided by the National System of Statistics on the Execution of Penalties (by its acronym, SNEEP). From the scientific-academic field, Monclús Masó (2017: 3) synthesised the same aspect, stating:

> if we look at the evolution of the data on foreigners detained in all the prisons in our country, we can conclude that there has been no increase in the percentage of migrants in prison since it has remained at 6% since 2005. We can sustain the same regarding foreign prisoners in federal prisons, which constitute 21% of those detained for a decade.

On other occasions, the expressions did not refer explicitly to any figure but rather presented the statistical scenery in a more abstract way. Geographically, shifting our gaze outside Buenos Aires, Federico Massoni affirmed, 'we find that a high percentage of the crimes that are being committed in Chubut are carried out by foreigners from Bolivia, Paraguay, Chile, Peru, who are joined by Dominicans and Venezuelans related to drug trafficking crimes' (Costa 2019).

The use of official crime statistics as professional knowledge called to confirm the presumed causal nexus between immigration and crime is not a new phenomenon. On the contrary, we observe the persistence of a certain attribution: different authors (e.g., Daniel 2011; Olaeta 2018; Sozzo 2011) have addressed the ways in which criminologists, police officers and political actors read such statistics, towards the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as a way of sustaining that association.

The centrality attributed to narco-criminality[17] can be more fully understood by considering the proximate causes (Garland 2013)—state and legal processes that determine penal law and direct the deployment of the power to punish. In this sense, we

should frame the discourse about the links between immigration and crime within the perspective of the crimmigration process as an interrelation between migration controls and the penal system.[18] This is particularly relevant when we consider the ways in which border governance instruments operate through the confinement or expulsion of foreigners (Brandariz, Dufraix and Quinteros 2018). Thus, following Koulish and van der Woude (2020), we can incorporate a discursive and socio-legal dimension in the analysis of immigration border control.

Moreover, it is possible to better understand the political discourse around the correlations between immigration and crime if we contextualise them within the legislative prominence that drug trafficking had in the period analysed. Due to the centrality attributed to the infractions of narcotics law (*Law 23,737*), what Olaeta (2020) referred to as 'selective punitiveness', there was an increase in crime records, convictions and incarceration rates. It is also significant to underline the weight of politics within this selectivity:

> It is important to highlight that during the last two years of the period that we are analyzing here, the criminal policy established by the government of Mauricio Macri focused fundamentally, and explicitly, on what has been called the 'war against drug trafficking'. Thus, they have placed drug trafficking within the group of threats to national security. (Ciafardini and Olaeta 2020: 52-53)

Additionally, in their investigation of punitiveness based on the registry of state agencies, Ciafardini and Olaeta (2020) affirmed that, in the administration that began in 2015, the penal system began to become more punitive, both in the discourse and practices of the penal system. They also attributed 2016 as a 'year in which criminal policy had an important punitive turn' (Ciafardini and Olaeta 2020: 21). It is no coincidence, in this regard, that Koulish and van der Woude (2020) mentioned a tie between neoliberalism, crimmigration and the punitive turn.

Conclusion

This article has analysed the links between immigration and crime in the political discourse implemented during the *Cambiemos* administration from 2015 to 2019. The theoretical-methodological strategy selected to address this discourse was grounded theory. I presented the following different categories, reconstructed through discourse analysis: (1) 'we need to know who is who'; (2) distinction in the types of immigrants that arrive in Argentina; (3) tighter controls on the conditions of entry into the country; and (4) crime and migration. Giving an account of this discourse—raw material for the elaboration of the categories presented—can contribute to understanding the ways in which, from a country located within the Global South, the officials of the *Cambiemos* administration have conceived, imagined and shaped the borders in an increasingly globalised world. Borders are not only territorial but also symbolic and make it possible to identify and decipher (as well as select) favourable identities for a country (and for a government), and control and criminalise those other 'unwanted guests'.

To study and theorise immigration border control from a Southern perspective involves various challenges. By incorporating a discursive dimension from the framework of crimmigration, I was able to identify particularities and antecedents of the case study linked to the history of Argentina itself as a country of immigration. The contribution and challenge to which the article opens are to theorise and produce empirical research from within the Global South to counteract the centrality attributed from various fields of study to the Global North.

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[1] I mention them below: *Partido Conservador Popular*, *Partido Demócrata Progresista*, *Partido FE*, *Unión del Centro Democrático* and *Confianza Pública*.

[2] In Spanish, *Decreto de Necesidad y Urgencia 70/2017* (also known as *DNU 70/2017*). The main points of the decree (addressed within the literature on the subject) can serve to illustrate the ways in which these changes affected higher levels of punitiveness with respect to the migrant population. Available at: http://servicios.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/270000-274999/271245/norma.htm

[3] Historically, Argentina has been a country strongly linked to various dynamics and migratory flows. One of them had its genesis above all from the second half of the nineteenth century, and was later promoted by political elites' leaders, with the aim of attracting European immigration to bring progress and modernise the country, substantially modifying the composition of the resident population. Given the intensity and volume of this immigration and the role it played in the modernisation of the social structure, different authors have defined this

dynamic as a 'mass immigration' (Germani 1966), whose main protagonists were Italians and Spaniards and, to a lesser extent, the Poles, Russians, French and Germans.

Starting in 1960, the numbers of migrants of European origin decreased; at the same time, they began a sustained increase in those from neighbouring countries. According to the different censuses, in 1991 the numbers of bordering and non-bordering migrants were equated. In 2001, border migrants came to represent 60% of migrants, and in 2010, 69%. According to the latest census, out of a total of 1,805,957 foreigners (4.5% of the total population), 1,245,054 were of bordering origin.

Regarding the incidence of migrants in crime, in different expressions officials (echoing the text of Decree 70/2017) alluded to the increased number of foreign nationals in the custody of the FPS, particularly when it was pointed out that foreigners in federal prisons increased to constitute 21% of the total prison population by 2016. On other occasions, they emphasised that the percentage of foreign prisoners rose for those federal cases, such as smuggling or human trafficking, and was close to 33% convictions related to narco-criminality crimes. These figures were denied, from different areas (e.g., the media and academia), illustrating that it was information out of context. I will return to this point later in the article.

[4] As of 28 March 2023, both newspapers, together with *Infobae*, were among the 20 most visited web pages in Argentina. See https://www.similarweb.com/es/top-websites/argentina/

[5] More recently, Strauss and Corbin (2002) referred to them as 'in vivo codes': categories taken or derived directly from the language used by the subjects studied.

[6] From now on, all English translations of quoted textual references are of my own.

[7] Expression made specifically within the framework of *Provincial Decree No. 136/2019*.

[8] For further details of this migratory dynamic and its influence on Argentine society, see Germani (1966).

[9] For example, different criminologists, such as Cornelio Moyano Gacitúa (1905) and Eusebio Gómez (1907, 1912), highlighted the greater propensity of the Latin races to commit blood crimes.

[10] I refer, in this regard, to the works of Beatriz Ruibal (1993), Lila Caimari (2004), Ricardo Salvatore (2006), Máximo Sozzo (2011) and Eugenia Scarzanella (2015), among others.

[11] It is important to note that changes in immigration policy passed through a government's decree, and not through a law of congress, which may suggest the authoritarian and undemocratic character of the measure. This constitutes, without a doubt, one of the most discussed points of the decree.

[12] I consider important to point out the objective of its creation, especially highlighting the intersection between border controls and crime prevention, to 'increase border integration, facilitate the transit of people, streamline international trade and prevent complex transnational crimes such as drug trafficking, human trafficking and smuggling' (*National Boundary Commission: Decree 68/2017*). Full text available at: https://www.boletinoficial.gob.ar/detalleAviso/primera/158309/20170126

[13] Among them, Pichetto (*Peronismo Federal*) and Sergio Massa (*Frente Renovador*).

[14] '*Villas miseria*', '*villas de emergencia*' or simply '*villas*', is the name given in Argentina to informal settlements characterised by a dense proliferation of precarious housing located on land that was not originally owned by its occupants. They are informal urbanisations (or self-urbanisations) resulting from occupations of vacant urban land (Atributos Urbanos n.d.).

[15] The word '*porteños*' designates the residents of the Buenos Aires.

[16] To expand on this point, the text of Decree 70/2017 indicates that the percentage of foreigners in custody of the FPS for drug-related crimes was around 33%.

[17] As a way of illustrating this centrality, see Clarín (2017d).

[18] On that intersection, we can identify different works proliferated over the last few years (among others, Aas 2011; Chacón 2012; García Hernández 2015; Guia, van der Woude and van der Leun 2013; Spena 2017; Stumpf 2015; van der Woude, van der Leun and Nijland 2014). Another unavoidable reference is the special issue of the *European Journal of Criminology* dedicated to crimmigration in Europe (January 2017), whose guest editors were Maartje van der Woude, Vanessa Barker and Joanne van der Leun.

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