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The Power to Define a People: Race and Immigration in Argentine National Identity

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Honors Thesis

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Abstract

Argentina is known as a “country of immigrants” yet simultaneously grapples with entrenched xenophobia. My research untangles this apparent contradiction by revealing how both facets of national identity are rooted in racialized colonial ideology. Following independence in 1816, Argentine elites used immigration policies to justify the exploitation of Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities and subsequent European repopulation. Elites converted non-Europeans into cultural “foreigners” by erasing them from the country’s national identity, and I use foreign policy frameworks to demonstrate how leaders have consistently wielded immigration as a political tool to further their own objectives. I argue that the lack of political representation has allowed colonial-era prejudices to remain largely unquestioned. Using a foundation of critical race and postcolonial theory, my thesis incorporates 18 months of historical research and interviews with some of the most influential stakeholders in Argentine immigration to tell a story about the power to define a country’s peoples.

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Introduction

Our current global era is defined by rising nationalism and closing borders, forcing us to reexamine how we relate to each other across the world. A country's acceptance or expulsion of foreigners is among the most telling indicators of its national identity, revealing which backgrounds are prioritized and who has the power to establish an immigration hierarchy. However, I've found that the buzzword status of "immigration" weakens and simplifies its significance. Open and progressive policies that prioritize human rights seem antithetical to restrictive and conservative laws that emphasize national security and criminal threats, leaving little space for a more nuanced understanding of immigration that examines how each approach uses immigrants to achieve political objectives. The former paradigm tends to portray immigrants as "useful" while the latter often characterizes them as "dangerous," yet I believe that both assumptions are detrimental if they're shaped by racialized prejudices. It's necessary to move beyond this binary in order to understand the roots of xenophobia in our globalized society, and so I investigate how both approaches have been integrated simultaneously into Argentine foreign policy considerations.

Argentina is a fascinating case for analysis as European descendants shaped both the country's identity and constitution, portraying Argentina as a "country of immigrants" with the maxim that "Argentines came from boats." In order to imagine and construct their ideal nation, elites used immigration policies to recast Indigenous and Afro-descendant¹ communities in the territory as the "other" while embracing European immigrants as founding citizens. As noted by

¹ The term "Black" includes Black Argentines of African descent and Black Africans living in Argentina and is frequently used in contemporary U.S. scholarship on race in Latin America (Edwards 2018). However, the Spanish translation has a pejorative connotation in much of the region and Argentine scholar Dr. Anny Ocoró Loango (2015, 152) writes that, in everyday language, the word "negro" is associated with a condition of poverty and marginality. I therefore follow growing Latin American convention to additionally use "Afro-descendant" (Wade 2009) and "Afro-Argentine" (Anderson and Gomes 2021) throughout the paper.

Gabriela Liguori,² the Director of the Argentine Commission for Refugees and Migrants (CAREF), “colonizers were the first immigrants,” and established a political and economic hegemony of white elites that has carried colonial-era racial prejudices into the present; white Argentines still set the immigration agenda today. In this sense, immigration policies are not static responses to isolated circumstances, but rather “civilizing instruments” (Villavicencio 2008, 86) that function as part of a larger scheme of demographic control. We can therefore gain broader insight into the origins of xenophobia in political discourse by analyzing the practical and ideological factors shaping leaders’ immigration decisions. Argentine leaders constructed the nation by cultivating the notion of foreign, and so I analyze immigration policy as a tool of foreign policy. I use hard and soft power considerations to examine the wider spectrum of political motivations that shape elites’ behavior, as well as to blur the earlier distinctions between a human rights or national security response to immigration. The following investigation is deeply linked to conceptions of identity and race, as “the politics of immigration is often so intense because it involves either open or hidden fears about ethnic change” (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2014, 347).

My work contributes to the field of international studies by (1) demonstrating the common roots of both human rights and national security paradigms of Argentine immigration policy from the 19th to 21st century; (2) revealing the connection between social hegemonies and racialized colonial-era ideologies; and (3) elevating contemporary proposals from immigrant advocacy groups. The use of a national security discourse to restrict immigration is perhaps the most blatant example of power when it comes to immigration policies. Dr. Verónica Jaramillo,³ a researcher at the Gino Germani Institute at the University of Buenos Aires who specializes in international migration,

² All quotes from Gabriela Liguori came from an interview conducted over Zoom on February 24th, 2021 unless otherwise cited.

³ All quotes from Dr. Verónica Jaramillo came from an interview conducted over Zoom on November 25th, 2020 unless otherwise cited.

expanded this conception by observing that “human rights are also a tool of power.” Jaramillo’s claim underscores the connection between policies that expand and those that inhibit immigrants’ rights. In my analysis, I show how both are enacted in order to solidify the power of Argentine elites. Starting with the racialized prejudices of the colonial period, I trace the shifting objectives of elites from the 19th century into the present. Changing circumstances favor either a national security or human rights-based response, yet the emphasis on a white and homogenous population permeates throughout the immigration paradigm. By situating immigration in a larger picture of colonial influence, I ask: how might immigration policies provide insights for combating xenophobia in postcolonial countries?

I base these findings on a year-and-a-half of historical research and interviews with some of the most influential stakeholders in Argentine immigration. The foundation of this project is based on predominantly Spanish archival resources and secondary sources on immigration laws and nation-building efforts. I supplemented this broad source material with thirteen sixty-to-ninety minute in-depth and semi structured Spanish interviews.⁴ I spoke with Argentine academics, policymakers, and civil society leaders across social sectors who have focused their careers on immigration.⁵ For example, I interviewed experts such as Dr. Adriana Alfonso,⁶ a principal implementer of the 2002 Mercosur Residence Agreement; Alfredo Mariano López Rita,⁷ Director of the Argentine National Immigration Department; Gabriela Liguori, Director of the Argentine Commission for Refugees and Immigrants; and Natividad Obeso,⁸ founder of the Association of

⁴ Each participant signed an informed consent form describing the purpose, procedures, benefits, risks, discomforts, and precautions of my research. Each interview was recorded on Zoom and then personally transcribed.

⁵ While interviewees will be introduced throughout the text, readers can consult the Interview Appendix for a full list of interviews and a brief description of each interviewee’s background.

⁶ All quotes from Dr. Alfonso came from an interview conducted over Zoom on September 29th, 2020.

⁷ All quotes from Alfredo Mariano López Rita came from an interview conducted over Zoom on February 11th, 2021.

⁸ All quotes from Natividad Obeso came from an interview conducted over Zoom on August 20th, 2020.

United Women, Migrants, and Refugees in Argentina (AMUMRA). I personally translated both the interview quotes and Spanish sources referenced throughout the text.

“The Power to Define a People” is not the project I initially imagined. In May of 2019, I received the Paul Gerdes scholarship to fund a month of research in Argentina the following summer. While the situation changed dramatically, the research I present in this thesis germinated from that initial proposal. Upon arriving to Argentina in March the following year, I submitted my research plan to the Macalester College Study Away Institutional Review Board (SAIRB) and described the following goal: “I will use in-depth, semi structured face-to-face interviews in conjunction with participant observation ethnographic research, depending on how the coronavirus situation develops.” I left the country on one of the last commercial flights to the United States only five days after submitting that proposal. However, the ideas that brought me to Argentina also kept me connected when I was forced to leave.

Our 21st century tools both enhanced and weakened my original research design. Zoom and WhatsApp allowed me to maintain my scheduled interviews from over 5,000 miles away and broaden the regional scope of interviewees I connected with. However, my initial goal of an ethnographic-based analysis could not be achieved across the spatial barrier. While I attempted to remedy this challenging reality with follow-up conversations that strengthened my relationship with participants, I acknowledge that my adapted approach couldn’t encompass the insights gained from in-person observation and discussion. The resulting project therefore relies equally on archival and interview-based research, blending the two so that the former best describes the “what” while the latter provides more information about the “why.”

While the intersection of race, national identity and immigration is insufficiently studied, these subjects are more deeply connected through colonialism’s influence in Latin America. In my first chapter, I outline the scholarship that provides the foundation for this project and situate it

within the context of Argentine immigration history. Primary scholars such as Benedict Anderson, Ernesto Laclau and Walter Dignolo provide the theoretical backbone as their combined approach articulates how colonialism influenced prevailing conceptions of the nation and the foreign in postcolonial countries. I therefore use the term “nation-building” to refer to this process, recognizing that nation-building also requires the state apparatus as building state and nation go hand in hand.

Chapter Two goes beyond most state-centric academic accounts to examine Argentina’s history during the colonial era. In doing so, I highlight the experiences of non-white and non-European Argentines whose existence has been minimized throughout history. Chapter Three offers a sweeping history of Argentine immigration through the lens of foreign policy, demonstrating how both the expansion of immigrants’ rights and the criminalization of their identities are specialized tools of foreign policy power. I examine such policies from the position of the elites, proposing questions such as, ‘How did the conception of immigrants transition from civilizing influences to societal burdens? And what does that tell us about the motivations behind such policies in general?’ I encapsulate my research in tabular form in order to summarize periods and highlight trends, and I refer back to the table while explaining the longer story of immigration rights and restrictions. At this point, I reflect on the contemporary relationship between Afro-descendant and Indigenous immigrants and Afro-Argentines and Indigenous Argentines, highlighting how immigrants grapple with intersectional identities using their own words. After shifting focus from those who create immigration policies to those most affected, Chapter Four analyzes civil society’s role in influencing policy. I end by synthesizing the lessons from the complex relationship between immigration, race and national identity. I put these conclusions in dialogue with ideas from civil society leaders to elevate broader proposals for addressing xenophobia in Argentina and across the world.

Chapter 1: Race, National Identity, and Immigration in Latin America

Immigration is traditionally examined from a domestic policy perspective, yet my project adds depth by drawing upon an array of international relations theoretical foundations. I locate this work amongst well-researched fields, straddling intellectual arguments on race, national identity, and immigration. The following chapter will trace out the primary insights in each distinctive body of literature, exposing contradictions and gaps across fields and proposing a common thread that weaves them together.

Race theory in Latin America centers on *mestizaje*—broadly defined as interracial mixing—which has been imbued with different meaning by scholars across fields and cultures. It has been described on one hand as “progress towards modernity” (Wade 2017, 626), “the basis on which many people founded their optimism about the future of Latin America” (Beane, 1978, 200), including the hope for “the reign of democracies (Muñoz Rojas 2011, 245), and “a way to dismantle hierarchies of race and create national unity” in the early 20th century (Wade 2017, 625). Argentine anthropologist Salvador Canals Frau (1949, 184) investigated this process in the early 1900s, concluding that the mixture of races was beneficial for society by creating a new and more stable identity. Nestor Canclini (1990, 21) adds that this identity is mixed in the cultural sense as well as biological, for it combined European and Indigenous habits and belief structures. Yet Canclini (1990, 25) acknowledges that “there is resistance to accepting these forms of hybridization because they generate insecurity in cultures and conspire against their ethnocentric self-esteem,” thus voicing the concerns of a more critical body of scholarship that portrays *mestizaje* as a “trope for the nation” (Martinez-Echazabal 1998, 33) that “permit[s] the operation of racism and the persistence of racial hierarchy” (Wade 2017, 626).

Contradictory interpretations reflect the tensions within *mestizaje*, for its very prevalence in Latin America arises from Spanish and Portuguese colonization whose interracial mixing was the result “not of tolerance but of sexual violence during conquest and colonization” (Martínez 2007, 132). Critical scholars argue that the positive perceptions of *mestizaje* emerge from subliminal associations of superiority and modernity with European blood. If interracial mixing with Europeans made the *mestizo* descendants more united and advanced, it simultaneously relegated Afro-descendant and Indigenous Latin Americans to the margins of cultural history (Stutzman 1981; Wade 2004). Furthermore, the appreciation for *mestizaje* was not accidental but a conscious effort on behalf of Europeans to “ensure their place as paternal ancestors of the nation” (Wade 2017, 629) and this process was therefore “guided by the dictates of power” (Martinez-Echazabal 1998, 37). In this fashion, the glorification of *mestizaje* serves as the “terrain on which racial hierarchy is enacted” (Wade 2017, 626), for Khamla Martínez (2007, 129) argues that “the question of race is suppressed in order to put forth an image of racial and national unity.”

Martínez’s argument demonstrates the consequences of *mestizaje* in Latin America, acknowledging that the perceived advancement of *mestizos* often came at the expense of Afro-descendant and Indigenous identities. In Zapata Olivella’s play *¡Levántate mulato!* (1990) he portrays his intersectional identity as a Colombian with Indigenous, European, and African ancestry who experienced great othering due to the “European mirror” that affected his upbringing (Martínez 2007, 131). His autobiographical work describes “a struggle that afflicts all colonial subjects,” for they are “forced to look to the colonial power to define himself within this image, an image that never accurately or faithfully portrays the Other” (Martínez 2007, 129). Pablo Yankelevich (2009, 15) directly connects colonialism and racism in Latin America, writing how racist positions gained strength in Latin America by associating whiteness with Europeanness and superiority while simultaneously marginalizing African and Asian immigrants. Argentine political scientist Dr. Anny

Ocoró Loango (2015, 139) contextualizes this dynamic by noting that, in countries like Argentina, the “promotion mechanism of *mestizaje* was immigration.”

Peter Schmidt and Markus Quandt strengthen the tentative bridge between the scholarship on race in Latin America and the body of scholarship on immigration and foreign policy. Schmidt and Quandt (2018, 355) argue that national identity reflects both the relation of individuals to their state and to the “other.” Most importantly, they specify that minorities are othered as well as immigrants, and find that national conceptions of the “other” are strong predictors of anti-immigrant attitudes (Schmidt and Quandt 2018, 358). David Fitzgerald and David Scott-Martin’s *Culling the Masses* specifies these aspects of national identity and the ways in which they led to racialized immigration policies, primarily arguing that liberalism, democracy, and populism promoted racist immigration policies across the Americas (2014, 2). Fitzgerald and Scott-Martin’s claim evolves from their belief that the working-class population generally supports ethnic restrictions to immigration, as they argue that “any political system providing institutional avenues for demands from below is more likely to promote restrictive policies” (2014, 18). Political philosopher Charles Mills’ ideas on the *racial contract* can be applied to demonstrate how a country’s desire for modernity and liberalism can strengthen the exclusion of non-whites, “for the same developments of modernity that brought liberalism into existence also brought race into existence as a set of restrictions and entitlements governing the application of those norms” (Mills 2008, 1394). While located in different disciplines, these thinkers agree that notions of identity shape immigration policies.

Other academic approaches invert the aforementioned causation by revealing how immigration policies can influence identity. Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin (2014, 16) additionally observed that “Latin American governments wanted to whiten populations” and used immigration policies as a tool to achieve this aim by implementing policies that sought to strengthen a desired

national identity. David Campbell (1961, 11) takes this a step farther in his book, *Writing Security*, by arguing that “nationalism is a construct of the state in pursuit of its legitimacy.” Encompassing insights from key scholars such as Benedict Anderson and Charles Tilly, Campbell claims that “all states are marked by an inherent tension between the various domains that need to be aligned for an ‘imagined political community’ to come into being” (1961, 11). This culminates in Campbell’s central belief that using foreign policy to respond to perceived danger is a condition of a state’s existence and identity (1961, 12) and that security is “first and foremost a performative discourse constitutive of political order” (1961, 253). By tracing the connection between subjectivity and security, Campbell’s theory can be applied to reveal how policies link immigration and security to construct an ideal nation. Combining both causal theories allows us to understand the vicious cycle between policymakers’ biased conceptions, legitimized policies, societal acceptance of prejudice, and the continuation of biased policies.

By contrast, Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin minimize the correlation between identity and policy by applying Max Weber’s concept of “elective affinity.” This rather ambiguous term explores how two distinctive and independent elements can mutually influence one another (Thomas 1985, 41). By referencing this dualist theory, Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin (2014, 7) optimistically claim that the connection between discriminatory immigration policies and national identity is nondeterministic and feasibly broken. In fact, they argue that the racial selection of immigrants in Latin America ended by the 1970s due to countries’ acquiescence to and desire for acceptance within the international order (2014, 335). Their claim implies that soft power incentives outweighed the hard power security framework explained by Campbell.

Latin American postcolonial theory counters this more optimistic claim by demonstrating the pervasive and insidious grip of colonialism. Walter Mignolo’s theory of the “logic of coloniality” (2007, 36) describes a regional phenomenon in which colonialism shape-shifted throughout Latin

American history, maintaining new footholds even after independence and continuing to exert influence today. The belief in the superiority of European values caused the newly independent creole⁹ elites to implement the same exclusionary structures instead of fully decolonizing by empowering their diverse population. Mignolo writes that, “Power changed hands, in that the *criollos* became the elite that controlled the economy and state, but the logic of coloniality stayed the same” and this provides a vital clue in understanding the remnants of colonialism (2007, 108). In order to subconsciously justify this seemingly incongruous preference, “The white *criollos* lived a fantasy of being European” in a “present without a past,” and to create this vision they “turned their backs on the indigenous and blacks” in their country (2007, 91). By deliberately denying the existence of these populations, Latin American elites cemented these colonial systems of oppression into the construction of the nation-state, thus grounding conceptions of race and national policies on a colonial imaginary of immigration (2007, 109).

Theory on hegemony from Argentine social philosopher Ernesto Laclau and Belgium political theorist Chantal Mouffe bolsters Mignolo’s analysis by explaining how elites were able to maintain this power. Laclau and Mouffe (1985, x) argues that social hegemonies arise during periods of disorder, in which “a particular social force assumes the representation of a totality that is radically incommensurable with it.” In order for this group to dominate political space, they rely on persuasion as much or more than coercion, since a hegemonic policy is always one which “tries to present particular interests as necessary to carry out a wider social aim” (Worsham 1999, 22). Laclau and Mouffe (1985, xi) refer to this process as political articulation, explaining that “politico-hegemonic articulations retroactively create the interests they claim to represent.” In this process, political leaders create cleavages between societal groups using social divisions that are determined

⁹ Creole (English) or criollo (Spanish) refers to Latin Americans of solely or mostly Spanish descent.

by the ruling class's subjective interests and thereby represent the "limit of all objectivity" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 122). At the same time, such divisions allow for the unity of groups that might otherwise be opposed. Drawing on Georges Sorel's conception of utopia and myth, Laclau (2010, 104) argues that the hegemonic class uses myths to unify the citizens' collective will. This myth is capable of binding together heterogeneous positions (Retamozo 2015, 181) and therefore solidifies both the hegemony's power and their intended national identity.

However, governing elites must also contend with international affairs and their motivations are therefore shaped by global power balances. Argentine political scientist Carlos Escudé's theoretical framework provides greater insight to Latin American foreign policy decisions. He created the concept of "peripheral realism" to explain the foreign policy calculations made by "peripheral" nations engaging with the international community. Peripheral nations are those who do not exert influential control in the international system, and he uses the UN Security Council permanent member status to categorize these distinctions. Escudé's theory explains how peripheral states' circumstances are shaped by the hierarchies within global governance. These states can either choose to follow or rebel against the rules set by the central powers, but their options are highly constrained by these permanent members in either scenario. Due to the United States' historical global leadership role, Escudé (1995, 231) argues that it is the "single most important external determinant of foreign policy in the Latin American region." His normative conclusion is that peripheral nations should prioritize bandwagoning central powers' initiatives over seeking autonomy in order to preserve citizens' wellbeing (Tickner 2003, 333). Escudé's analysis allows us to place Argentine immigration policy decisions in a broader international context, and sheds light on how soft and hard power considerations reflecting a country's peripheral position shape the nexus of national identity and immigration policy.

David Fitzgerald and David Cook-Martin complicate this understanding by isolating the factors that encourage peripheral states to defy the peripheral realist prescription of bandwagoning, particularly in regard to immigration policy. They focus on how various countries' immigration policies can influence each other, claiming that such policies are often created in a retroactive response to other countries' treatment of their citizens. The key dynamic involves a "politics of humiliation" affecting a country whose citizens are willfully excluded as immigrants, often negatively impacting the excluded country's collective reputation or sense of pride (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2014, 27). Countries may respond to the blow to their international reputation in several ways: (1) they can use hard power to enact similarly harsh policies for nationals of the offending country as a form of revenge for their injured reputation; or (2) they can use soft power tactics to implement more open policies that grant them a sense of moral superiority.

The aforementioned approaches emphasize the power of national identity and converge around the construction of the nation. Benedict Anderson provides an integral understanding with his discussion of imagining the nation. His theory on nationalism therefore plays a foundational role in this project, for he argues that "nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time" (1991, 3). Anderson defines the nation as an "imagined political community" that is both "limited," as it is defined by outside borders, and "sovereign," as it demands political autonomy on the global stage (1991, 7). In this sense, Laclau and Mouffe's hegemony theory suggests the means used by elites to get to Benedict Anderson's end, as the hegemonic myth provides a large population with both a common narrative and identity.¹⁰

¹⁰ While it goes beyond the scope of this paper, Perna Singh and Matthias vom Hau's scholarship (2016) on assimilationist states explores how the state used the distribution of public goods to reinforce the national political community. They write, "When states sought to nation-build through assimilation, they tended to ignore demographic diversity and sometimes even actively discouraged or prohibited the institutionalization of ethnic differences" (Singh and Matthias vom Hau 2016, 1308).

How can these varied approaches bring greater insights to Argentine immigration policy? While the connections between them are evident, the existing literature doesn't highlight these associations. The failure to draw out these connections is due to the lack of a synthesized narrative that encapsulates every step in the process of postcolonial immigration history. The scholarly debate centers on the relationship between the essence of the nation and the reality of the state. While such elements often appear synonymous, Spanish colonialists inserted a hierarchy in Latin America which cleaved them apart. Over years of physical and ideological conquest, colonialism inoculated the ruling state with ideas of colonists' superiority by interlinking race with the ideals of its former colonizers, such as modernity and progress. This linkage encouraged the physical immigration of people who would increase the population stock that exemplified this ideal: white Europeans. Even after Latin American countries won independence, they were ruled by European heirs of both blood and creed.

These heirs reshaped the state's reality following the colonial hierarchy. The non-white communities who'd been living in Argentine territory failed to embody the nation's new essence, according to Argentine elites. Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities were deemed inferior to European foreigners who embodied the idealized national citizen. Immigration therefore played an essential role in sustaining colonial ideology in a postcolonial environment. Understanding such policies from this postcolonial perspective allows us to untangle the apparent contradictions between open and closed, pro-human rights and pro-national security, and progressive and hawkish policies. Immigration in Latin America cannot be fully understood without linking conceptions of *mestizaje* and colonialism and identity, and this thesis seeks to explain the particular contradictions in Argentina's immigration history by pulling together the strengths of each body of literature. The next section will illustrate the interlinking of these factors by examining Argentina's colonial past.

Chapter 2: Truly a Country of Immigrants?

Nation-Building

In many accounts, Argentine history starts with the 1853 constitution—a document that strengthened Argentina’s identity as a “country of immigrants.” But who was there before immigrants arrived, and why were their identities excluded from this narrative? The white European enclave in South America did not spring into existence by accident; it was the result of a concentrated political effort. An analysis into the nation-building strategies of the Argentine elite over a century reveals deeply hateful behavior towards local populations. Colonialism’s practical and ideological consequences created a narrative of European superiority that led the Argentine elite to oppress local, non-European populations. The following section explores how colonists and their descendants interacted with Afro-descendant and Indigenous populations, focusing on the practices of exploitation and erasure. I detail the two multifaceted national identity campaigns launched by Argentine elites. While the first sought to physically and symbolically erase non-white populations, the second focused on smoothing over any lingering cultural divisions by using folklore to create a prosthetic “shared” national culture.

The territory of Argentina was under Colonial Spanish rule for nearly twice as long as it’s been the modern Argentine Republic, and the former period shaped the identity of the latter. The “country of immigrants” maxim negates the existence of both those native to the region and those who arrived during the vast colonial period: primarily Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. In classic colonizer fashion, Spanish conquistadors decimated Indigenous communities through exploitative labor practices, transmitted diseases, and repression when their brutal treatment was met with resistance. In the late 17th century, many Indigenous communities

revolted against colonial exploitation and were violently repressed (Instituto Étnico Nacional 1950, 20), reinforcing the expectation of Indigenous subjugation.

As a result of their own harsh methods and disease, the Spanish colonists needed more labor to work in their colonies and began importing slaves in the 16th century (INADI, 10).¹¹ European colonizers granted the first permit for the importation of enslaved Africans into Río de Plata, the river between Argentina and Uruguay, in 1534 (Andrews 1989). Río de Plata soon became a principal South American port for enslaved Africans who were purchased by European colonizers. Argentine political scientist Dr. Anny Ocoró Loango (2010) notes that the illegal slave trade flourished alongside the legal trade, making it difficult to establish the exact numbers of African women and men who were forced into Argentina. However, incomplete statistical records share a partial glimpse: of the 12,778 slaves registered as admitted to Buenos Aires from Brazil between 1606 and 1625, only 288 were given under royal permission; 11,262 were brought by smugglers and sold by the city and 1228 more were brought by ships who lacked permission (Studer 1958, 102). Colonists exploited generations of Afro-descendants for the next two centuries of colonization, requiring them to play an essential role in the workforce, armed forces, and nearly every element of colonial life. Andrews notes that “if every slave worker in Buenos Aires in 1800 had suddenly disappeared, all economic activity would have stopped in a matter of hours (Andrews 1989, 31). While Spain pledged to abolish slavery in Argentina by 1820, the importance of slave labor incentivized the clandestine slave trade to continue until the end of the 19th century (Morrone 1995).

Despite the oppressive treatment during colonialism, the Indigenous and Afro-descendant population persisted. In 1778, the first population report found that “negros, mulatos, pardos and

¹¹ Report co-authored by the Argentine National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism (INADI) and Ministry of Justice and Human Rights.

zambos”¹² represented 37% of Argentina’s total inhabitants (INADI, 15) and up to 60% in certain provinces (Loango 2010, 47). A report co-authored by the Argentine National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism (INADI) and Ministry of Justice and Human Rights reminds its audience that immigration from Africa has been a constant during and after European colonization (INADI, 48). A report from the National Ethnic Institute notes that, following colonization, the population was “no longer pure Indigenous, as before, but white, black, and mestizo, whose descendants are most of the current inhabitants” (INADI, 20). The ambiguity of these categories marginalized Argentina’s non-white descendants, making them invisible by failing to distinguish between them—a trend which would only strengthen in decades to come. This marginalization sets the stage for Argentine nation-building.

Argentina gained independence from Spain in 1816 and yet leaders continued the colonial legacy by controlling Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities. The postcolonial power vacuum that followed created a system of relative lawlessness for forty years. The country was split between two factions with different visions of Argentine governance: Unitarians, advocating for a centralized government, and Federalists, fighting for provincial autonomy. Juan Manuel de Rosas, the son of wealthy Spanish immigrants, was the leading army officer at the time and launched a military campaign through Indigenous areas to capture their land and expand his territory. Rosas divided the conquered Indigenous populations into three groups: friends, allies, and enemies. "Friends" were allowed to settle within the territories of the Buenos Aires province and on Rosas's farm, yet remained under his rule. "Allies" were granted more independence and were allowed to retain their own territories. Rosas purportedly treated these groups well, providing them with cattle

¹² Four terms used by Spanish colonists to refer to different non-white groups’ racial background—all involve African or Indigenous descent.

and other goods. The "Enemies" group included those who refused to negotiate, and Rosas destroyed their settlements without mercy (Galasso 2011).

Rosas employed similar manipulative tactics with enslaved Africans who were forced to fight in Argentina's constant conflicts as appealing to these groups was part of his plan for centralizing Federalists' political control. Military leaders "rescued" many enslaved Africans from work on plantations by buying them and incorporating them into the military in the early 1800s, with the understanding that they would fight in exchange for freedom (INADI, 21). The Afro-descendant population was therefore an essential part of military operations, making up roughly one fifth of the armed forces against English invasions in 1806 and 1807 (INADI, 24). Rosas continued this practice and maintained the illusion of imminent freedom by promoting Afro-descendant populations and bestowing honors. These actions were contradicted by his simultaneous decisions to reinstate slave trafficking and postpone their liberation. While enslaved Africans were initially promised freedom after five years, their military terms were eventually lengthened to a minimum of eleven years (INADI, 21). Even this promise fell flat for most Afro-descendant individuals, as those who survived were immediately integrated into military ranks for the conflict in Brazil from 1825-1828 and then Paraguay from 1865-1870 (INADI, 23). Throughout this period, Afro-descendant communities were also embroiled in the fight between battling Federalists and Unitarians. Hollow promises and symbolic commendations didn't change the reality that Afro-descendant labor was still being exploited by European descendants. By using Afro-descendants to achieve their political objectives, Argentine elites echoed colonial practices.

In addition to the political battles over state control, this period saw fights over Argentina's national identity. While Manuel de Rosas's hawkish period of law and order established a skeleton of the Argentine state, a group of young political thinkers loosely aligned with Unitarians imbued it with its heart and soul. The work of Estéban Echeverría, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, Juan

Bautista Alberdi, and Bartolomé Mitre was so influential in this process that they became known as the “Generation of 1837” and their names grace history books as the country’s most prominent foreign policy thinkers and presidents. They all had strong ties to Europe: either the children of Europeans, frequent European travelers, or admiring authors of Enlightenment ideals. Their work revolved around the goal of transforming Argentina into an independent European enclave. They looked to the French concept of “Jacobin” or civic nationalism in drafting their own Argentine Civil Code (Cruset 2013). Legal historian Phanor Eder claimed that “much of the civil code is taken directly or indirectly from French sources” while Dr. C. O. Bunge—who wrote extensively on the formation of Argentine law—noted that antecedent Indigenous law “has had practically no influence on posteriority” or subsequent law (Eder 1915, 100-101).

These four men had the ambitious idea to reshape the country around imported values instead of creating a constitution that reflected the country’s demographics. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento exposed the motivation behind this reasoning in an 1848 journal entry, asking “what is [to be] done with such blacks, hated by the white race?” (Ghosh 2013). Sarmiento’s sentiment was more politely expressed in Alberdi’s seminal work *Bases and Starting Points for the Political Organization of the Argentine Republic*. “By which means shall we succeed in elevating the actual capacity of our peoples to the height of their written constitutions and their proclaimed principles?” (1852, XVII). By imposing his own European principles onto the Argentine population, Alberdi insinuated that citizens must adapt to fit his vision. The Generation of 1837’s ideas provided the ideological foundation for Argentine law, ensuring that their Eurocentric intentions would outlive them.

The Postcolonial Constitution and Immigration

The 1853 Constitution finally stabilized politics and society, formally created the Argentine state, and codified the Generation of 1837's European ideals. The constitution was a partial compromise between Unitarians and Federalists, granting broad state power with a centralized executive government that served as a blueprint for the future. Argentine professor Susana Villavicencio (2008, 86) refers to this new political model as the "founding elite's national project" as it reflected elites' ideals of progress instead of the country's reality. Constitutional delegate Delfín Huergo made the same observation when noting that "constitutions are sometimes the result and many other times the cause of the moral order of Nations" but that "among us, the Constitution will be the cause... the instrument which tempers our habits and which educates our Peoples" (Miller 1997, 1515).

Immigration was an essential component of this new vision of civilization and temperance, evidenced by its role in the constitution. The preamble codified a vision of favoring immigration with the line "secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves, to our posterity, and to all men of the world who wish to dwell on Argentinean soil" Article 20 notably qualifies this principle by stating that "the Federal Government shall encourage European immigration." However, Article 25 adds nuance to immigration preferences by declaring that "the government will not be able to levy any tax on the entry into Argentine territory of foreigners who bring the purpose of working the land, improving industries, and introducing and teaching science and the arts" (Lvovich 2009, 24). This stipulation demonstrates the need to attract immigrants who were both white *and* useful and was originally considered synonymous with Article 20 as Europe was seen as the cradle of modernity and progress with citizens who could bring the needed skills and abilities (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2014, 307). In addition to bringing tangible benefits, the ruling elite presumed Europeans to

be “amenable to state control” (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2014, 309). Taken together, the constitution displays the founding elites’ desire to re-populate the country with the most sophisticated, rule-abiding and hardworking *white* citizens they could find. Their perspectives were steeped in the ideology of colonialism, resulting in the initial interchangeability between Article 20 and 25.

Argentina still possessed a vibrant non-European population at this time, despite the intentions outlined in the constitution. While many had been killed during their forced military service, the Afro-descendant community flourished in the years following the constitution. In many provinces, Afro-Argentine men could vote and were elected for local offices (INADI, 27). At the end of the 18th century, Afro-Argentine communities made up over 50% of the population in five provinces (Cottrol 2007, 144) and Afro-Argentines made up an estimated 30% of the Buenos Aires population in the early 19th century (Cottrol 2007, 143). While there were still higher quantities of descendants from Africa than Europe in several municipalities thirty-four years after the founding constitution, the identity of the latter was emphasized while the former minimized (Otero 1999). Afro-descendants did not fit in the national identity advanced by the governing elites.

In order to address this central paradox, Argentine leaders commenced a violent attack on non-European bodies. Upon gaining the presidency in 1868, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento furthered his “Generation’s” goals of creating a racially pure Argentine society. He imposed racial segregation in major cities, denying necessary infrastructure and social services. Sarmiento’s policies made Afro-descendant communities particularly vulnerable to the 1871 yellow fever epidemic (Andrews 1989, 5; Edwards 2002, 50). Freda Montaña,¹³ the African-Ecuadorian cultural ambassador and President of the Association of Ecuadorians in Argentina, shared with me that death rates were so high in Argentina that Afro-descendants’ bodies were thrown into the ocean.

¹³ All quotes from Freda Montaña came from an interview conducted over Zoom on August 24th, 2020.

Sarmiento also mandated military service as punishment for petty crimes and disproportionately targeted Afro-Argentines so that “virtually every black man who reached adulthood in 19th century Buenos Aires” was drafted (Andrews 1989, 115). By 1887, the Afro-Argentine population in Buenos Aires had dropped to 2% (1989, 4).

Repopulation efforts were reinforced in the decades that followed. In 1876, the country’s first immigration law was enacted and maintained clear connections to colonial practices. Most obviously, it was titled “Law No. 817 of Immigration and Colonization” although it’s commonly referred to as the Avellaneda Law since it was enacted during President Avellaneda’s administration (Hines 2010, 479). The Avellaneda Law was passed in order to “protect and promote European immigration,” for it established immigration agencies throughout Europe and subsidized travel costs (Benitez 2004, 22). These efforts worked, as Argentine immigration numbers were second only to the United States. While this is certainly telling, Gino Germani (1966, 166) offers an even more salient observation about this trend: the six and a half million foreigners who arrived between 1856 and 1930 outnumbered the local population nearly six to one, and settled immigrants made up 30% of the total population. While this is the side of Argentine nation-building that the elite wanted the world to see, it was accompanied by a darker history. As European immigrants were welcomed to the nascent state, the existing non-European populations were simultaneously shunned. The country’s emerging national identity imagined “a civilized, white Argentina free from the presence of native peoples” (Brudney 2019, 125), yet the Argentine population was “composed of Indians, African slaves, Gauchos and descendants of Spaniards” (Schwartz 2009, 153).

President Avellaneda therefore sought to further eradicate undesirable elements of the population alongside repopulation efforts and launched the “the Desert Conquest” in 1878. With a mandate to attack Indigenous Pampas villages, the campaign’s goal was to “rout out and overcome all the Indians simultaneously” (Bustos-Videla 1964, 44). Five divisions set out to systematically

drive out the Indigenous population under this law, and the First Division alone was responsible for conquering 14,000 Indigenous Argentines and capturing 86,400,000 acres of land for the Argentine state (1964, 46). In less than a decade, the Argentine military killed at least two thirds of the Indigenous population (Brudney 2019, 126). General Julio Argentino Roca led this effort, and his pride is evident from his proclamations that “not a single Indian crosses the Pampas where many tribes used to live” (Delrio et al. 2010, 140). The conquest earned General Roca both the presidency and eternal recognition in the country’s national memory; Alfredo Mariano López Rita, the current director of Argentina’s National Immigration Department, claims that “The modern Argentine state was born with Roca.”

Argentine leaders justified their brutal actions by dehumanizing non-Europeans. Edward Brudney (2019, 130) found examples of this belief in the journals of Argentine historians who followed the conquest, writing that Indigenous peoples were “consistently portrayed as less than human.” Even the archbishop of Buenos Aires was “unwilling or unable to consider indigenous populations as autonomous and actualized persons” and “denied their humanity” (2019, 129). This primary evidence reveals the strength of the dehumanizing narrative and its role in convincing Argentines that Indigenous peoples were inferior and sub-human. By degrading their humanity, this narrative led to the claim that Indigenous peoples should be excluded from the national consciousness moving forward. As Brudney (2019, 139) writes, the “physical and discursive violence combined to create a situation in which Argentina’s national origin story did not simply marginalize the Other but sought to actively erase them.” Brudney (130) adds that, “In the decades after the Conquista, the erasure of indigenous peoples became an unquestioned reality in Argentina’s official history.” The ‘barbaric’ label wasn’t solely reserved for Indigenous communities, however, as Argentine leaders also “transformed Black sectors into a recurring symbol of assumed savageness and barbarity” (Andrews 1989, 120). The INADI report highlights this argument, claiming that the

“increasingly racist state” considered “the African as barbaric and backward” (27). Juan Bautista Alberdi encapsulates the overarching perspective with his claim that “In America, everyone who is not Latin or Saxon, that is, European, is a barbarian” (Gobat 2013, 1351).

The dehumanizing campaign can be visually identified through 19th century art, much of which depicts the dichotomy between the “civilized” and the “barbaric”—the title of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s foundational book on Argentine nation-building. In 1892, acclaimed Argentine painter Ángel Della Valle created a dramatic piece titled *La vuelta del malón* (The return of the Indian raid). It depicts a triumphant group of Indigenous horseback riders charging through a stormy countryside. One leader appears to have kidnapped a pale, half-naked white woman who lies draped across his horse while another clutches an elaborate briefcase. Della Valle clearly implies that the group is returning victorious after robbing a wealthy white community. Images such as these strengthened the aforementioned “barbaric” label, particularly in contrast with depictions of “civilized” forces. The 1896 painting by Juan Manuel Blanes titled *Conquista del Desierto* (The Desert Conquest) exemplifies the latter. While we know that the Desert Conquest was a brutal military campaign that killed at least two-thirds of the Indigenous population, the image shows a group of well-dressed, disciplined and organized soldiers sitting atop horses in formation. The salience of this narrative in Argentina’s national identity is evident by the fact that this painting graced the Argentine 100 pesos note for over 20 years.¹⁴ The juxtaposition between these images demonstrates how the country internalized and accepted General Roca’s justification for violence, immortalizing the Desert Conquest as a civilized and celebrated mission. These two paintings are mere snapshots of a multifaceted effort to justify the exploitation of “barbaric” populations.

After excluding non-Europeans from the national narrative, elites relegated surviving Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities to the margins of society. In 1900, Senator Cabral made his

¹⁴ This bill was the 2nd series of the 100 pesos note and was in circulation from 1997-2018.

intentions clear by arguing, “We should take people to mix the Indigenous people and bring to an end the primitive race . . . what we want is to suppress savage peoples from one generation to the next” (Delrio et al. 2010, 144). Argentine leaders enacted this goal by forcing Indigenous men into military service, reviving colonial practices (2010, 141). Many women and children were summoned to serve as domestic help in Buenos Aires (2010, 145) and still more were relocated to concentration camps with the purported intention of preparing them for civilization (2010, 142). The underlying intention appeared to be family separation and the subsequent dissolution of Indigenous communities.

Perhaps the most blatant example of cultural marginalization occurred in the national censuses. With only a few exceptions, the population’s ethnicity was literally removed from the census from 1830-2010 (INADI, 16). The state-sponsored process of statistical omission played a monumental role in “the construction of a discourse of the disappearance of African descendants from Argentine society” (INADI, 16). George Andrews (1989, 131) contextualizes this omission in the broader campaign launched by the Generation of 1837, writing that the non-white population was “serenely erased from the records by the persons in charge of conducting the censuses and by statisticians, by authors and historians who cultivated the myth of a white Argentina.” The Board of Directors for the 1895 National Census justified their decision in part by claiming that the Afro-Argentine population was proportionally negligible (Loango 2010, 59). However, Anny Ocoró Loango (2010, 59) challenges their argument by revealing that the Afro-descendant population in Buenos Aires in 1887 was no smaller than European immigrant populations who were included in the census. Scholars Sing and vom Hau (2016, 1310) contextualize Argentina’s policy in a larger trend of ethnic assimilation, noting that “states that pursue an assimilationist nation-building model, by deliberately eschewing all ethnic distinctions in state institutions such as the census...are therefore likely to minimize ethnic diversity.”

Physical and legal minimization of non-European identities was enacted alongside cultural minimization that sought to homogenize the population stock (Edwards 2002, 52). Fluctuating racial classifications encouraged Afro-Argentines to pass as white, as evidenced by the increased popularity of the term “*trigueño*” following independence from Spain. The term meant “wheat-colored” and identified both light-skinned Afro-descendants and dark-skinned whites (Edwards 2002, 52). Edwards (2002, 52) notes that this category “helped to categorize social mobility,” further adding that “Afro-Argentines used the term *trigueño* in order to leave behind or reject their African ancestry.” In 1905, Argentine author Juan Jose Soiza Reilly pronounced, “the African tree is producing white flowers” in order to explain the phenomenon of Afro-descendant assimilation into dominant white culture (Edwards 2002, 54). The social and economic benefits of conforming to the Generation of 1837’s ideal identity encouraged indirect marginalization of those who failed, or chose not to, comply.

The end result of these violent and rhetorical campaigns was to transform the non-European population into “foreigners.” The multifaceted process of eradicating Afro-descendant and Indigenous bodies and marginalizing the survivors relegated these populations to Argentina’s past. When it was no longer politically feasible to physically remove everyone who didn’t fit in Argentine elites’ imagined European enclave, these leaders simply negated their existence culturally, socially, and statistically. David Fitzgerald encapsulates the flip side of this approach when he writes that “the concern driving nationality and immigration laws was to make nationals of newcomers” and therefore “shape nationality around them” (2014, 308). Fitzgerald’s observation demonstrates both the subjective power of immigration policies and their disregard for reality. The context also shows how such policies were just one of many tools used by Western-aspiring rulers.

At first, the Constitution’s racialized vision appeared to be fulfilled, as Europeans made up the initial wave of immigration to the newly independent country. By the 1930’s, 53.6% of the total

immigrant populations were Italians, while 29.5% were Spaniards (Alsina 1910, 22). The demographic transition seemed to facilitate the progress envisioned by the Constitutional framers, as the country entered the international market by providing an increasing number of raw exports and establishing itself as “Great Britain’s partner” (Cruset 2013, 1). With one of the top ten highest per capita incomes in the world by 1913, Argentina had become “the envy of Latin America” (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2014, 302). This period provided the foundation for Argentina’s European influence and turn away from South America. Dr. Leiza Brumat,¹⁵ a senior researcher at the Migration Policy Center, further explained the shift towards Europe when telling me that citizens of the country didn’t identify as South Americans, instead feeling as though “we were here [in the continent], but just by accident.”

Solidification of Elite Control

Argentina’s economic success strengthened the control of the emerging elite. Dr. Eduardo Domenech,¹⁶ a sociology professor at the University of Córdoba whose research focuses on the socio-historical production of border control policies in South America, highlighted capitalism’s role in his field of study. Dr. Domenech claims that “the state started to monopolize the movement of people in the 19th century with the explosion of the capitalist market,” while Constanzo and Merajver (2007, 2) clarify that the state was made up of an oligarchy of European descendants. While power changed hands between leaders from 1880-1910,¹⁷ they were all from the same “oligarchic hegemony” and each one furthered the “liberal program they had inherited” while

¹⁵ All quotes from Dr. Leiza Brumat came from an interview conducted over Zoom on May 15th, 2020.

¹⁶ All quotes from Dr. Eduardo Domenech came from an interview conducted over Zoom on February 12th, 2021.

¹⁷ Julio Roca (1880-1886 and 1898- 1904), Juárez Celman (overthrown by the 1890 coup), Carlos Pellegrini (1890-1892), Luis Sáenz Peña (1892-1895), José Uriburu (1895-1898), Manuel Quintana (1904-1906), and José Figueroa Alcorta (1906-1910).

“keeping their gaze fixed in Europe as a source of inspiration and yearning.” Villavicencio (2008, 83) claims that this dynamic emerged because the government was rooted in colonialism and continued to prioritize colonial identities.

The oligarchy’s power emanated from their control of land, as Alfredo Mariano López Rita claims that land is the “origin of power and privilege” in Argentina. After the Desert Conquest, the ruling elites kept the majority of conquered land for themselves instead of redistributing it amongst citizens (Alvaredo 2007, 17; López Rita Interview 2021; Ceriani Cernadas Interview 2020). Wealthy landowners cultivated the wide swaths of fertile land and their agricultural exports propelled the Argentine economy throughout the early 20th century (Mundlack et al. 1989, 12). Between 1900 and 1930, Argentina’s economy had a growth rate of 1.8%—topping that of the United States, Australia, Brazil, and Canada (1989, 9). The success of the agricultural sector further augmented the country’s income inequality; while there’s a lack of precise data on this period, Facundo Alvaredo (2007, 18) argues that the top 1% in 1900 possessed 28.84% of the country’s wealth.

In order to secure their wealth, economic elites were incentivized to maintain strong political control. Felipe Monestier (2019, 177) notes that the “economic elite used formal and informal mechanisms to tip the electoral field in their favor and safeguard their interests.” In the early 20th century, agricultural producers made sure that “all competition against them, either through imports or through production in Buenos Aires, was systematically blocked” (Alvaredo 2007, 18). Dr. Pablo Ceriani Cernadas,¹⁸ the Coordinator of the Migration and Asylum Research and Advocacy Program at National University of Lanús, traced a connection from the land centralization in the 1800s and finance centralization in the 2000s during our interview. His observation supports Dr. Jaramillo’s claim that the same white, elite families who ruled in the late 1800s have been able to maintain power in Argentina. In essence, the same group controlled a majority of the country’s wealth and

¹⁸ All quotes from Dr. Pablo Ceriani Cernadas came from an interview conducted over Zoom on June 24th, 2020.

power for centuries, only changing tactics in the process of maintaining their position. As noted by Dr. Pablo Ceriani Cernadas, “there’s a clear economic interest; those who govern and those with economic power continue to be an established sector in society.”

The capitalist boom focused elites’ attention on immigration as they saw the movement of labor as tied to their own economic interests. David Fitzgerald and David Cook-Martin (2014, 313) observe that “the oligarchy was the only group represented at the immigration policy table” before WWI and Eduardo Domenech explained how their attention to immigration continued. Dr. Domenech argued that capitalism requires a flow of productive immigrants, implying that economic elites seek control over the type and quantity of labor that they consider most conducive to their own profits. Dr. Domenech used the metaphor of a hydro powered dam: “Elites recognize that immigrants will flow like water in a global economy and decide how to use this flow for their own power.”

Politicians and the wealthy business class worked together to advance racialized immigration standards. In our conversation, Dr. Ceriani Cernadas expressed that “racism and all of its manifestations hides a clear purpose: the goal of preserving a development model of economic growth in an unequal country which benefits a very clear elite.” Even when Argentine politicians did not enact specific racial exclusion policies, Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin reveal how state officials discouraged businesses from recruiting workers of certain origins, thereby creating a “hidden dampening mechanism” which repressed non-European immigration (2014, 310). For example, the Director of the National Immigration Department in the 1880s highlighted the unsuitability of Chinese immigrants in his annual reports and informational pamphlets to businesses, limiting migration without ever resorting to legal exclusion (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2014, 309). Early examples of the exclusionary private-public relationship set the stage for a national homogeneity campaign led by both parties.

Redefining a Cohesive National Identity

The wave of immigrants in the early 20th century prompted another attempt at creating a cohesive and homogenous national identity. The country was divided between European immigrants, *criollos*, and native-born Argentines, and many intellectuals embarked on a campaign to identify and promote a “public conception of the Argentine nationality” (Chamosa 2010, 64). A group of intellectuals known as the “Generation of the Centenary” gained prominence at this time and focused on “how to integrate European immigrants and *criollos* into a single nation” (2010, 40). The prevailing conception at the time was that Argentina was united “not by common culture, but by their mutual respect and subordination to the Constitution” (2010, 40). This conceptualization marked the prioritization of French ideology over the Latin American model of *mestizaje*, which centers on the role of *mestizo criollos* in Argentine history. However, the Centenary writers believed that legal citizenship was an insufficient unifying force and wanted to establish a common sense of cultural nationalism. Amongst them, there were conflicting opinions: did Argentine identity come from Spanish Catholics, as argued by Leopoldo Lugones, or mixing with Indigenous peoples, according to Ricardo Rojas? The solution was to forge an identity which would minimize the ethnic differences, thereby permanently encapsulating desired immigrants in Argentine identity.

The Generation of the Centenary’s campaign exemplifies Laclau and Mouffe’s conception of the hegemonic myth as they advocated for the “formation of a more homogenous Argentine consciousness” (Rojas 1909, 225). Oscar Chamosa’s analysis of “the rise of folklore” (2010) documents the creation of this myth. Folklore emerged as a result of the movement for cultural nationalism, the work of media producers and artists, and regional economic elites who used folklore to “defend their economic and political interests.” Their interests were intertwined with the Argentine sugar industry, for it had risen to become the 4th largest sugarcane producer in the

Western hemisphere yet relied heavily on both Argentine government support and the national market (Juarez-Dappe 2010). Chamosa (2010, 79) notes that most of the sugar businessmen were descendants of the “Spanish colonial elite” and “for political purposes, needed their workers to be considered as white as the commodity they produced.” In the 1930s, sugar mills came under attack for exploiting Indigenous peoples in their plantations, and so they “made a concerted effort to portray their workers as ‘white’ — that is, *criollos* with a high degree of Spanish industry” (2010, 65). Sugar barons also believed that portraying their product as a white-produced good would increase its perceived value and allow them to sell it at higher rates. They anticipated that this strategy would differentiate themselves from other top sugar producers at the time who primarily relied on Indigenous or *mestizo* labor, evident by industry representative Melitón Camaño’s fiery retort: “You cannot compare Java, a country of negroes, with Tucumán, a country of whites!” (2010, 79). Camaño’s statement reveals the complex conception of race in Argentina and the way in which it was manipulated to serve political ends. Chamosa notes the hypocritical nature of Camaño’s claim, as most workers were non-white *criollos*. In order to address this hypocrisy, sugar barons—most of whom were descendants of the Spanish colonial elite—used the conception of folklore to appropriate *criollo* traditions by emphasizing their Spanish and Catholic origin.

By celebrating and romanticizing certain traditions such as ballads, dances, and legends, the elites coalesced Argentine culture around a rural identity that began with Spain, portraying it as “the cradle of *criollo* culture and the spiritual anchor of Argentine civilization” (Chamosa 2010, 82). The Generation of the Centenary institutionalized their specific narrative in formal education, with mandatory folklore lessons and permanent inclusion in textbooks (2010, 187). Their version of elite-sponsored academic folklore was “oblivious to the *mestizo* and indigenous character of the rural *criollo*” (2010, 189) yet allowed sugar businessmen to “portray themselves as sharing the same culture as their employees,” thus folding *criollo* traditions into their conception of white Argentine identity

and lessening any contradictions within that portrayal. While Chamosa notes that *public* folklore had a more pluralistic approach, the Indigenous gaucho and Andean *criollos* were romanticized while remaining subordinate to their Spanish leaders (2010, 165).¹⁹ The folklore campaign sought national unity through “a process of cultural standardization” rather than “an acknowledgement of the diversity of cultures making up the nation’s social base” (Villavicencio 2008, 86).

The repercussions of the nation-building period cannot be overstated. Both wealthy Argentine businesspeople and politicians were incentivized to advance a homogenous and white national identity. The need for *two* distinctive campaigns to achieve their vision alludes to the sheer magnitude of such a task and the need to adapt to new contingencies. However, the class of elites quickly saw that embracing this approach appeared to bring economic and cultural benefits, thereby solidifying racialized and assimilationist tactics for future generations. In doing so, the nation-building process crystallized power in the hands of an elite that cared deeply about immigration—but for reasons that were generally far from altruistic. The importance of immigration grew as the country entered the global market and international stage. Not only were immigration policies seen as mechanisms for bolstering the economy, but they also became employed to manage the population and curry favor with global partners. In short, immigration policy became intertwined with foreign policy. The following chapter analyzes the diplomatic and security-based utility of immigration laws for Argentine rulers, exploring the motivations behind these leaders’ practices and the threads running between them.

¹⁹ Chamosa cites the plots of films such as *Pampa bárbara*, *Su mejor alumno*, *Oro en el mano*, and *Centauros del pasado*.

Chapter 3: Immigration Policies from Above

In order to understand the international impetus behind immigration laws, I examine them using foreign policy frameworks. Two battling policy frames have dominated immigration discourse in Argentina, which I refer to as the human rights paradigm and the national security paradigm. The former is most often employed when leaders wish to improve their international reputation and focus on fortifying diplomatic alliances by using soft power. The national security paradigm oftentimes utilizes a hard power strategy that is employed in times of economic or societal unrest when elites wish to restore domestic control. Dr. Domenech provided helpful clarification in our interview, noting that “national security” can encompass an immense range of government protocols that don’t *always* involve hard power—for example, improving a country’s military. Hard power policies are specifically used within the national security framework when leaders criminalize immigrants by portraying them as threats. Alfredo Mariano López Rita emphasizes the interconnected nature of policies that criminalize and expand immigration. He describes how policymakers “harmonize the variables” by seeking “a balance between guaranteeing basic rights while also guarding the state’s strategic objectives.” His approach reveals another nuanced motivation for political leaders while simultaneously exposing the common roots of a human rights and national security response.

Juan Bautista Alberdi shaped both the 1853 constitution and Argentine foreign policy, so an overview of his theoretical approach is essential for interpreting immigration through international frameworks. A son of Spanish merchants, Alberdi coined the famous maxim “to govern is to populate” and was a principal proponent of the constitution’s fairly open immigration policies. His ultimate aim was achieving a modern and civilized society, which he believed could be engineered through selective immigration policies (Schwartz 2009, 163). To Alberdi, the creation of a civilized Argentine nation was an essential step in countering U.S. Manifest Destiny that viewed South

Americans as culturally inferior (Gobat 2013, 1352). He considered U.S. imperialism and intervention an immediate threat and believed that reinforcing the country's European characteristics was necessary to bolster Argentine defense. While *alberdianismo* played a fundamental role in the country's foundation, its prominence ebbed and flowed in future administrations as Argentine rulers oscillated between alliance with and opposition to the United States. Regardless, Alfredo Mariano López Rita expressed the underlying influence of Alberdi with his acknowledgement that "he was an absolute genius." Alberdi's impact is evident through the longevity of tactics that use immigration to advance foreign policy objectives through both hard and soft power.

Soft and hard power approaches to immigration have brought distinctive advantages for governments throughout Argentine history. Argentina more frequently utilizes soft power when seeking international influence or respect. Instead of using blatant force, soft power influences others by using non-coercive methods such as diplomacy, positive attraction, and messages of symbolic and cultural significance to gain authority. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe reference this tactic when referring to "persuasion" and Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin add that soft power is gained when countries use immigration policies to make them appear "more modern and civilized" (2014, 21). Alfredo Mariano López Rita revealed the prevalence and success of this strategy today when claiming that "Argentina is very strong when it comes to human rights and has a powerful global reputation." Global prestige was also a clear goal for the oligarchical class that ruled Argentina during the formation of its national identity, as it used purportedly progressive immigration policies to cultivate international recognition of its intended identity.

On the other hand, hard power is a forceful exhibition of control that aligns with Laclau and Mouffe's conception that coercion is one side of hegemony. Though immigration policies were only rarely used this way in Argentina, they fit into the category of hard power politics when they are

highly restrictive and respond to real or perceived threats to national security (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2014, 20). Following Escudé's analysis, hard power is less common than soft power in the Argentine case due to the country's contemporary status as a peripheral global power. However, Escudé's theory provides different insights when properly contextualized. In the early 1900s, Argentina was far more of a central power than peripheral: it had one of the top ten national incomes worldwide, twice as high as that of Italy and five times as high as neighboring Brazil and was a key player in the global economy (Glaeser 2009). In short, its status granted the Foreign Affairs Minister the broad discretion to make forceful policies without fear of imminent retribution from a larger power. The following section will explore how shifting political circumstances from the 1900s to early 2000s shaped the usage of immigration policies.

Table 1: Summary of Immigration Policies 1853-2019

Period and trend	Presidents*	Summary of immigration policies	Policy mechanism	Regime objectives
Influx of Europeans 1853-1902	Bartolomé Mitre, Marcos Paz, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, Nicolás Avellaneda, Julio Argentino Roca, Miguel Celman, Carlos Pellegrini, Luis Sáenz Peña, José Evaristo Urriburu, Julio Argentino Roca	Encouraged immigration by codifying rights for foreigners and restricting the state's ability to limit future immigration, prioritized European immigrants under the Avellaneda Law	Constitutional amendments, legislation	Populate the country with "civilized," "hard-working" and "obedient" European immigrants
Criminalization of immigrants 1902-1946	Manuel Quintana, José Figueroa Alcorta, Roque Saenz Peña, Victorino de la Plaza, Hipólito Yrigoyen, Marcelo Torcuato de Alvear, Hipólito Yrigoyen, José Evaristo Urriburu, Agustín P. Justo, Roberto Ortiz, Ramón Castillo, <i>Arturo Ramson, Pedro Ramírez, Edelmiro Farrell</i>	Restricted immigration based on political ideology (for example, anarchy), restricted immigrants without documented capital or skills	Public safety legislation and administrative regulations	Constrain threatening ideologies and protect economy from insolvent outsiders
Influx of Europeans 1946-1955	Juan Domingo Perón	Encouraged the arrival of high quantities of immigrants who were predominantly European	Diplomatic agreements with Europe, 5-year executive plan	Bolster labor force to improve economic and military industrialization, recruit culturally assimilable immigrants from "Mediterranean" background, counter U.S. imperialism
Criminalization of immigrants 1955-1973	<i>Eduardo Lonardi, Pedro Aramburu, Arturo Frondizi, José María Guido, Arturo Illia, Juan Onganía, Roberto Levingston, Military Junta, Alejandro Lanusse, Héctor Cámpora, Raúl Lastiri</i>	Heightened control over immigrants from communist countries while facilitating the immigration of specific groups—such as South Koreans	Executive decrees	Constrain threatening ideologies, gain diplomatic support for the Falkland/Malvinas territorial dispute
Influx of immigrants fleeing dictatorships 1973-1976	<i>Juan Domingo Perón, Isabel Perón</i>	Granted amnesty to migrants fleeing military dictatorships	Executive decrees	Set the Perón administration apart from military dictatorships
Criminalization of immigrants (and most of the population) 1976-1983	Military junta led by Jorge Videla, <i>Roberto Viola, Horacio Liendo, Leopoldo Galtieri, Reynaldo Bignone</i>	Replaced the Avellaneda Law by the Videla Law, restricting the rights of undocumented immigrants and increasing the government's ability to	Legislation	Constrain internal threats and control population

		detain and deport immigrants		
Influx of regional immigration 1983-2002	Raúl Alfonsín, Carlos Menem, Fernando de la Rúa, <i>Adolfo Rodríguez Saá, Eduardo Duhalde*</i>	Regularized undocumented immigrants who'd arrived during military dictatorships and increased legal access for asylum seekers, restricted work visas to those with documented capital and skills	Executive decrees	Improve Argentina's international reputation, strengthen regional partnerships, displace blame for economic crisis on an external scapegoat
Expansion of immigrant rights 2002-2015	Néstor Kirchner, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner	Facilitated regional immigration with the Mercosur Residence Agreement and granted extensive rights to all immigrants with Law 25.871, regularized the legal asylum process with the creation of a National Refugee Commission in 2006	Regional agreements, legislation	Strengthen regional partnerships, gain international prestige for human rights policies, increase the labor force
Criminalization of immigrants 2015-2019	Mauricio Macri	Increased the government's ability to detain and deport immigrants	Executive decree	Displace blame for economic crisis on an external scapegoat

*All presidents who governed for over a week are listed, those who governed for less than two years are italicized

The following chapter will elaborate the chronology and categories in Table 1. At first glance, the most salient patterns to observe are the pendulating shifts from the criminalization to incentivization of immigrants and the surprisingly few examples of immigration legislation. Alfredo Mariano López Rita highlighted that Argentine governments have only passed three immigration laws while Dr. Pablo Ceriani Cernadas further argues that first truly democratic immigration law in Argentine history was passed in 2003. Dr. Ceriani Cernadas's claim builds upon Julia Albarracín's observation in 2004 that the Argentine Congress was "unable to pass comprehensive immigration legislation" before Law 25.871 (Albarracín 2004, 3). She hypothesizes that this was due to an existing "informal arrangement between the Executive branch and Congress that controversial immigration

decisions are to be made by Executive decree.” Albarracín’s analysis demonstrates that, throughout six distinctive administrations, an underlying agreement gave the President the power to control immigration policy—and therefore shape the national identity—instead of allowing the Congressional representatives to make policies. Dr. Ceriani Cernadas draws broader implications from this phenomenon, explaining that the two immigration laws before 2004 weren’t fully democratic because they were either imposed by a dictator or before women had the right to vote. The paucity of democratic influence on immigration policies connects back to the hegemonic influence of the Argentine elite and underscores their level of discretion in crafting policies that benefited their own interests. In order to better understand their interests, I now turn to a detailed analysis of the foreign and domestic context shaping their political circumstances. Since Chapter Two summarized the first immigration period from 1853-1902, I begin this chapter by examining the criminalization of immigrants that immediately followed.

Criminalization of Immigrants and Threatening Ideologies 1902-1946

The foreign policy framework helps explain the hard power immigration policies of the early 1900s. The influx of European immigrants instigated a rise in class conflict, including anarchist sentiment, in Argentina. This political situation stemmed from a disconnect between the expectations of the Argentine elite and the European immigrants. As we saw in the previous chapter, the political elites sought European immigration in order to “whiten” the population and legitimize their own power as European descendants. Dr. Pablo Ceriani Cernadas explained how the centralization of wealth had calamitous effects on these efforts, noting that “the best land was concentrated in the hands of the elite” and so the incoming immigrants weren’t able to gain access. The new immigrants clashed with native Argentines who were also struggling for land acquisition

rights in the pampa, eventually forcing the disgruntled newcomers to settle in the emerging city of Buenos Aires and take factory jobs. These workers collaborated with Argentine dissidents, fomenting anarchist beliefs and creating revolts around labor conditions (Constanzo and Merajver 2007, 3). Strikes intensified in the early 1900s, forcing Argentine legislators to reevaluate their policies.

Politicians created the Residency Act of 1902 and the Social Defense Act of 1910 in response to the rising threat of anarchy (Lvovich 2009, 32). Senator Miguel Cane, the Argentine consul in Spain in 1889, proposed both acts and advocated for a new law “that might establish a difference among the types of immigrants arriving in Argentina, since there lay the roots of social conflict” (Costanzo and Merajver 2007, 3). Alfredo Mariano López Rita explained that these public safety laws didn’t apply to all immigrants who arrived in the country but instead were part of a “summary administrative measure to expel unionized migrants and those who were part of direct-action organizations [against the government].” The Residency Act achieved its objective, expelling over five hundred Spanish, Italian, and even Argentine anarchists in the first week (Costanzo and Merajver 2007, 4). Isaac Oved (1976, 123), a historian on the Argentine labor movement, wrote that the formulation of this law was “very vague and left a wide field of action in the hands of the president.” The clash between politicians and anarchists disrupted the previously intertwined conception of “useful” white European immigrants and unveiled elites’ strategy of reclassifying internal threats as foreign problems.

The economic hardships of the early 1900s further changed the tides of immigration, as policymakers were more controlling about the types of immigrants they would permit. The Great Depression in the 1930s resulted in more restrictive immigration policies across the world (Koser 2010, 13) and Argentina was not immune to this phenomenon (Albarracín 2004). President Alvear responded to earlier economic downturns in 1923 by modifying the immigration law of 1876 to

exclusively authorize foreigners who would be “useful” to the country (Lvovich 2009, 35). Argentine economist and historian Mario Rapaport (2000, 271) highlights the salience of a series of restrictive immigration decrees that followed. These decrees adjusted the expectations for immigrants, withdrawing visas for those who didn’t have guaranteed work or family connections. These rules were framed as protecting Argentine workers and the national economy, yet Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin (2014, 316) note that the elites’ motivations at the time were still focused on identifying particular ideologies of immigrants that might destabilize the social order. While a 1934 decree expanded legal migration categories to authorize temporary visas for agricultural workers from neighboring countries, it didn’t grant permanent residence and so these workers were valued as laborers, not welcomed as citizens, throughout the 30s (Villar 1984, 456).

Influx of European Immigrants Under Peronism 1946-1954, 1974-1975

When it came to immigration, famed Argentine leader Juan Perón was caught between entrenched ideas of European superiority and soft power strategy. He used immigration policies to advance Argentina’s position on the global stage and returned to the more open immigration policies of the past in hopes of modernizing the country (Devoto 1999, 48). He directly included this priority into his five-year plan, calling for the incorporation of 4,000,000 foreigners before 1952 in order to repopulate the labor force and stabilize the economy following the war (Albarracin 2004, 65). As shown in Table 1, in many ways this plan marked a return to the earlier conflation of “useful” and European identities, for it proposed “selective immigration” for those that were “culturally assimilable and physically sound, rationally distributed, and economically useful,” later summarized as “skilled and healthy immigrants from Spain and Italy” (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2014, 318).

Perón was concerned with the demographic breakdown of the new influx of immigrants and toyed with eugenicist proposals that had been gaining popularity. In the early 1900s, Congress recommended “support for research in this country on the various aspects of problems such as immigration and race... and the corresponding creation of scientific bodies charged with pursuing investigations on biological inheritance and human heredity” (Vallejo 2018, 4). The Argentine Eugenics Society underwent several names but was formally created in 1945 (Miranda 2013). In 1947, Perón created the National Ethnic Institution (IEN), which was tasked with understanding the “human type” of immigrants in Argentina and led by Santiago Peralta (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2014, 320). Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin (2014, 322) observed that “the framing of IEN’s mission and its reports between 1948 and 1955 reflect a deeply eugenicist conception of the social world.” Peralta was a staunch conservative nationalist and anti-Semite who believed that the “white race” was preferable to other races, once again making the argument that this group was highly assimilable (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2014, 321). The IEN’s final conclusions were aligned with his own, for they determined that the administration should target migrants who were “Roman Catholic, literate, and endowed with the skills needed in the Argentine labor market” (2014, 321).

However, IEN’s recommendations fell flat as the Argentine government had begun to face humiliating backlash over their early support for Nazi Germany and leaked reports of Peralta’s overt racism. Perón therefore chose to retract his plan of racial selectivity due to diplomatic concerns: as Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin (2014, 322) put it, “Argentina had to have a seat at the table to avoid being served on the menu.” While Perón discarded overtly racist policies, he still found ways to enact his racial preferences through more subtle means. The immigration bureaucracy granted discretion to consular officers who excluded immigrants based on “ideological affiliations” or country of residence, leading to one of the intended results of the IEN: the acceptance of Spanish and Italian immigrants over Jews from any country of origin (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2014,

324). While the Argentine government “rhetorically affirmed their commitment to helping the Jewish refugee problem” at international forums, they also implied that these immigrants might be “unassimilable” and therefore less welcome in Argentina (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2014, 317). Internally, Jewish immigration was more actively “discouraged” as Catholicism had maintained a strong role in national identity since colonization (Albarracin 2004, 76). Anti-Semitism took root in Argentine society, exacerbated by rumors of “Jewish Bolshevism” that threatened the deeply entrenched Catholicism and anti-communism of the Argentine elite (Deutsch 1986, 117). The prominent newspaper *La Nación* mirrored this mentality in 1946, arguing that it was necessary to preserve the “Ethnic, spiritual and social physiognomy of Argentina” (Lvovich 2009, 48). The elites’ approach to Jewish immigration revealed the growing consensus that “European” was not a homogenous category and that additional stipulations were necessary in order to protect elites’ own ideologies and identities.

Juan Perón’s shifting and often covert immigration strategy can be explained through a soft power lens, as the external emphasis on open and race-neutral policies was part of a broader method to distinguish Argentina from the U.S. and Latin American dictatorships. The United States was not a welcome face in Latin America throughout the ‘30s and ‘40s due to its heavy-handed military and economic policies in the region (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2014, 29). Latin American leaders were aware that the United States actively discussed limiting South American immigration with exclusive U.S. national immigration quotas (2014, 64). Perón took an economically confrontational stance, seeking to counter U.S. liberal capitalism with a regional movement of state-driven growth (Dorn 2002, 1). Perón used immigration as an additional tool in achieving a similar end, promoting race-neutral policies to gain moral authority over the United States’ racist quota system (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2014, 29) in a move that echoed Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin’s “politics of humiliation.” During the second short Perón administration, Juan and his wife Isabel granted

amnesty to immigrants fleeing dictatorships in neighboring countries. These soft power considerations led to an explicit reversal of blatantly racialized immigration laws under Perón's administration, as he recognized that these national policies had global repercussions. However, these policies didn't actually translate to race-neutral practices, as the Perón government instead found ways to present an egalitarian and humanitarian foreign policy platform that was strategically implemented in accordance with his conception of valued immigrants.

Although Peron didn't exert traditional force in his foreign policy approach, he was still influenced by hard power considerations and strategies. While Argentina remained neutral during World War I, military leaders saw the necessity of strengthening their defense capabilities in the face of future global conflicts. Bolstering the military connected to immigration in that the need for "strong industrial development" was seen as an issue of national security (Devoto 2001, 294). Fernando Devoto (2001, 294) explains how the military elite aligned with Peronism to advocate for a "industrial-military policy" that required an influx of competent immigrants. The pressure from the military adds another insight into Perón's emphasis on immigration in his five-year plan and emphasizes how his administration used immigration to advance broader national objectives.

Criminalization of Immigrants Under Military Rule 1955-1973, 1976-1983

The 1955 coup that seized power after Perón and the military Junta in 1976 were both catalyzed by economic elites. Famous Argentine industrialist Torcuato Di Tella (1971, 323) explained that this wealthy minority held considerable political power and was therefore able to use military intervention when their interests weren't protected. Previously, "the economic elite had been able to use their business organizations to ensure their political influence" but when this wasn't sufficient, "they promoted authoritarian regimes or very limited democracies" (Monestier 2019, 176).

During the authoritarian period, they “influenced these governments through their business organizations, technicians in government, or using their resources to buy favorable government decisions” (2019, 178). Di Tella (1971, 323) warned that the tight association between economic control and political domination would continue to cause military coups in the future, which proved to be correct.

The authoritarian governments during this era used hard power immigration policies as another mechanism of control, primarily to counter communism. Restrictions predominantly targeted other Latin Americans who had fomented leftist social movements across the region in the 1950s (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2014, 325). As shown in Table 1, the communist threat was treated similarly to the previous rise of anarchism as both were seen as external ideological dangers (Albarracin 2004, 75). Yet the country was still trying to attract immigrants and opted for policies that would restrict immigrants from communist countries around the world. For example, Decree 2457 of 1963 granted only 3-month visas for these immigrants and required them to report to local police (Albarracin 2004, 76). Four years later, in the “Repression of Clandestine Immigration” act of 1967, even legal migrants deemed threats to public order were subject to deportation by the Onganía administration (Albarracín 2003, 7). Six years later, worker and student-led riots spiked military President Onganía’s preoccupation with communism. He passed further decrees that targeted immigrants by allowing the Executive Branch to deport any foreigners who engaged in “activities that affect social peace, national security or public order” (Albarracin 2004, 279). President Onganía’s hard power tactics were deemed necessary to quell uprisings that threatened the economic order and subsequently the control of economic elites.

The military regime also recognized that it needed international support to legitimize its nationalist agenda and used soft power tactics alongside the hawkish and isolationist policies. Argentina was embroiled in a long-standing territorial dispute with Chile over the Falkland/Malvinas

Islands in the Beagle Channel. Their dispute was submitted to the UN's International Court of Justice for deliberation and then the United Kingdom for arbitration in 1971 (Garrett 1985, 90). Argentina had little support from its neighbors or former European allies on this issue yet forged a mutually beneficial diplomatic relationship with South Korea due to their similar anti-Communist ideologies and matching needs (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2014, 327). Starting in 1965, Argentina took steps to facilitate South Korean immigration in a quid pro quo agreement, gaining a much-needed international ally by providing the growing South Korean population with land. Authorities issued visas to South Korean families as part of a plan to "colonize the interior with Korean immigrants" (2014, 303). These immigration flows grew during the UK's deliberation process in the late 1970s, yet the diplomatic mission ultimately proved to be unsuccessful as Chile was granted sovereignty over the islands. Despite the end result, this immigration practice highlighted the nuances of Argentine elites' broader desire for a homogenous population. Policymakers had seen how prioritizing whiteness wasn't always sufficient in achieving a citizenry amenable to their control, and therefore additionally sought out immigrant groups who were ideologically aligned with their anti-communist beliefs.

The benevolent treatment of anti-communist immigrants was notable in comparison to the harsh treatment received by those deemed a threat. The National Reorganization Process of 1976 established a military junta and heightened the previous demographic control tactics (Albarracín 2003, 7). The junta tightened the controls on immigration processes to closely manage the population, using Executive powers to deport troublemakers and providing selective incentives to primarily European immigrant groups (Albarracín 2003, 8). The 1981 Videla Law embodied these restrictions. Its stated purpose was to promote immigration of those "whose cultural characteristics allow for adequate integration into Argentine society." The Videla Law eroded due process for immigrants, allowing immigration officials to detain them or deny them benefits without necessary

notice and investigate violations without reasonable cause (Hines 2010, 481). Immigration was no longer available for “all men of the world who wish to dwell on Argentinean soil” as promised in the Constitution, but instead for those who the military junta hoped would assimilate.

Influx of Regional Immigration Under Democracy 1983-2002

Soft power became increasingly important in 1983 as democratically elected presidents sought to mend Argentina’s international reputation. As seen in Table 1, these leaders began to rhetorically emphasize regional partnerships as a way to rebuild their international credibility, starting with President Alfonsín. In his first year, President Alfonsín passed Decree 780/84 which legalized many irregular migrants who’d been living in the country without documentation, allowing all foreigners to apply for residency (Albarracín 2004, 280). He also created the Committee on Refugee Eligibility in 1985, which allowed asylum seekers to receive temporary legal documentation immediately after applying for asylum (DEMIG 2015). Alfonsín’s foreign policy was shaped by *alberdianismo* and he saw these strategic partnerships as necessary for bolstering a defense against President Reagan’s neoliberal politics (Russell 2010, 270). While Alfonsín’s successor, President Menem, switched tactics to align with the United States, he still favored regional cooperation as the method to strengthen Latin American collective power. President Carlos Menem appealed to his southern allies in 1989, declaring that “we are on the right track and the time has come to say ‘yes’ to Argentina, ‘yes’ to the people, and ‘yes’ to Latin America” (Ares 1990).

Neoliberal policies that strengthened the power of economic elites accompanied the return to democracy. Jaramillo and Rabasa explain how the historically powerful economic elites aligned with transnational corporations in order to maximize their benefits from the neoliberal model (2019). Mariano Félix (2016, 358) further argues that neoliberalism allowed greater concentrations of

capital and control, leading to Dr. Eduardo Domenech's claim that the influence of transnational businesses allowed connected economic elites far greater power over the rest of society. The neoliberal incentives for economic elites might explain why President Menem "abandoned his Peronist rhetoric of economic development based on industrialization and stimulation of the domestic market and adopted a radical program of neoliberal reforms" (Monestier 2019, 178). The neoliberal economic model was supported by "both the International Monetary Fund and the Argentine elite" (Cooney 2007, 9) and underscores the ongoing influence of economic elites over state policies—including immigration.

Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson's concept of "captured democracy" untangles the tension between hegemony and democracy. They find that "democratic political institutions emerge and survive for extended periods of time, but they are often captured by the elite, which is able to impose its favorite economic institutions (or at the very least, they are able to have a disproportionate effect on the choice of economic institutions)" (2008, 283). Their theory deepens our understanding of Argentina's political history by highlighting how a purportedly representative democracy and an influential economic elite can coexist, solidifying the traditional hierarchy that prioritizes elites' preferences.

The idea of captured democracy becomes more evident when analyzing Argentina's current political structure. Dr. Verónica Jaramillo set a sharp contrast when noting that, to this day, Argentina is the only country in Latin America that does not have a parliamentary quota requirement for Afro-descendant or Indigenous representatives. While quota laws aren't entirely representative of a government's genuine diversity, the Argentine case reveals the utter lack of egalitarian measures—even those which are purely symbolic. It therefore becomes nearly impossible to break the crystallized hegemony, leading to Dr. Verónica Jaramillo's observation that "Congress is totally homogenous" as "nearly everyone is white and rich." Her analysis suggests that political and

economic elites are not concentrated in one political party but maintain influence across the political spectrum. María Esperanza Casullo (2015) explains how land-owning elites have indirectly ensured their interests through military intervention or “outsourcing’ electoral power to neoliberal Peronist candidates.” Despite democratization, economic elites have maintained substantial political influence.

When crises occur, democratic elites also resort to hard security practices that vilify identities and ideologies that threaten their control. When elite-led market reforms sent the Argentine economy into a nosedive, politicians once again sought an external scapegoat. The hyperinflation of the 1980s created a dire economic and social situation and President Alfonsín responded with hard power tactics, as seen in Table 1. Alfonsín started by limiting immigration with Decree 1434 in 1987: restricting work visas to those with Argentine relatives, desirable skills, or documented investment capital (Albarracin 2004, 80). The Decree also stated that the National Immigration Department could make adjustments to the Decree’s provisions to adapt to changing circumstances. The Department swiftly capitalized on this opportunity by passing a resolution which removed European immigrants from the rigid requirements (Albarracin 2004, 81). However, Dr. Ceriani Cernadas indicated that the validity of such strategies decreased as the economic crisis wore on and Argentine citizens recognized that immigrants could not be blamed for the extent of their financial problems. Elites were forced to change their stance.

Immigration as a Human Right 2002-2015

The shifting political climate of the early 2000s incentivized open immigration policies. Verónica Jaramillo notes that the so-called “Pink Tide” brought three quarters of South America’s population under left-wing rule (Encarnación 2018). President Kirchner was part of this leftist wave

and followed tenets of *alberdianismo* by using immigration as a foreign policy tactic to strengthen relationships with regional allies. His policies were also a response to other countries' immigration restrictions²⁰—for example, Argentina was removed from the U.S. Visa Waiver Program in 2002 (Jachimowicz 2003). Dr. Ceriani Cernadas highlighted how international decisions shaped Kirchner's stance on immigration: not only were his citizens being penalized by central powers, but their negative experiences with deportation and restricted visa access revealed the harsh effects of such policies. Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin's analysis of the "politics of humiliation" further elucidates President Kirchner's response. The treatment of Argentines abroad likely encouraged Kirchner to overcome the bandwagoning logic of peripheral realism and defy the restrictive trend of immigration laws from Europe and the United States, instead adopting a more open and human rights-based approach. In this sense, President Kirchner pragmatically used immigration policies to gain soft power by asserting Argentina's moral superiority and align with the growing Latin American bloc.

Building political forces culminated in several laws that epitomized the human rights immigration paradigm, as shown in Table 1. The 2002 Mercosur Residence Agreement regularized immigration for all Mercosur member countries²¹ with the addition of Bolivia and Chile. Dr. Adriana Alfonso, the Argentine representative of the National Immigration Department at the time (who first proposed the Residence Agreement) explained that the incentives for this agreement were primarily practical, as Mercosur countries acknowledged the increased flows of irregular Latin American migrants in their territories. The treaty laid the groundwork for strong regional immigration policies by enabling citizens of one Member State to reside and work in another for a period of two years, as long as they can prove their citizenship and a clean criminal record (Arcarazo

²⁰ The economic crises of the 1990s led to an increase in Argentine emigration, and 255,000 people left the country from 2001-2003—nearly six times the total number of emigrants from 1993-2000 (Jachimowicz 2003). They primarily settled in Spain, Italy, and the United States.

²¹ Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

and Freier 2015, 17). However, Dr. Alfonso told me that the restrictive Videla Law still governed immigration policy at this time, forcing the Argentine government to constantly reassess temporary visas and protocols. Dr. Alfonso, Dr. Brumat, and Director López Rita agreed that regularizing the status of migrants was the best solution to this reality.

The following year, President Kirchner passed Migration Law 25.87. He announced that "the right to migrate is essential and inalienable to all persons and the Republic of Argentina shall guarantee it based on principles of equality and universality" (Hines 2010, 488). Its provisions called for universal access to education and health care as well as free legal representation and regulatory measures limiting immigration detention. Law 25.87 was lauded internationally for guaranteeing human rights for immigrants and was characterized by many as a nearly "open-door" policy which encouraged people to cross borders (World Policy 2018). The shift of rhetoric is particularly telling, for the 2003 text uses the word "irregular" to describe non-citizens, instead of "illegal" as was used in past policies, both in Argentina and internationally (Hines 2010, 490). Not only that, but the law went beyond the legal process to address social and cultural efforts which must be made in order to facilitate the inclusion of immigrants into Argentine society. Senator Ruben Giustiniani declared that the law "goes in a real direction of social progress, based on integration and not exclusion, multilateralism in the region and not unilateralism, tolerance and not xenophobia" and claimed that "the current immigration law is based on a new focus that enriches democracy" (Hines 2010, 485). David Baluarte suggests that the Kirchner administration went to such great steps to ensure the cultural assimilation of immigrants because they saw doing so as the means to achieve a stronger Argentina, noting that "the first clear and overarching concern was with the development of the nation" and that "incorporating labor migrants" was "for the benefit of the republic" (Baluarte 2019, 306). Baluarte's observation once again reveals how underlying motivations for a larger labor base, in addition to a decreased administrative burden, shaped these policies instead of pure altruism.

Though often justified as supporting national development, the populist and democratic rhetoric from Presidents Néstor and Cristina Kirchner threatened the economic elite's hegemony over immigration. The Kirchner administrations, under Néstor and his wife Cristina, instilled this group with "fear and rejection" about their future political control (Monestier 2019, 182). Their fear was partially founded, as Kirchnerism embraced a neo-developmental economic initiative in response to the perceived failures of neoliberalism. The neo-developmental approach increased state intervention in the market and imposed export taxes, raising the hackles of the elite (2019, 183). While most conventional wisdom portrays this as the antithesis of neoliberalism, Féliz (2016, 71) argues that it was actually a maneuver "to take advantage of the neoliberal legacy and to surpass its limitations," thereby preserving the dominance of the capitalist classes. The economic elites recognized the critical economic fallout from the 1990s and sought to preserve their transnational interests while containing the economic crisis. In this way, the neo-developmental project "grew as the dialectical supersession of the neoliberal one," becoming the "necessary alternative for dominant classes to regain their debilitated hegemony over society" (Féliz 2015, 72). While the economic interests of the wealthy elite were still largely intact, the populist rhetoric presented a threat to their authority. The Kirchner administrations made it clear that the economic elites' traditional methods of putting indirect pressure on candidates of all parties were falling short, and that more drastic measures were needed to respond to populism. Once again, Table 1 depicts a shift back to the criminalization of immigrants as elites employed dependable tactics to minimize threats.

Criminalization of Immigrants Under Democracy 2015-2019

Throughout the administrations of Presidents Néstor and Cristina Kirchner, the wealthy and conservative elite mobilized political forces in order to protect their interests. Their growing

discontent culminated with the election of Mauricio Macri. Of the newly formed, right-wing “Cambiamos” party, Macri won the presidency in 2015 and revealed the entrenched power of the aforementioned economic elite. Macri is the son of a wealthy Italian businessman and grew up in an upper-class suburb of Buenos Aires. Yet his Peronist opponent Daniel Scioli was cut from the same cloth: the son of a major TV network owner. While these elites had formerly influenced politics by indirect influence, *Cambiamos* gave them their own party, as evidenced by the fact that nearly one in three cabinet members had formerly been private sector CEOs (Monestier 2019, 186).

As expected, the Macri administration’s immigration policies blatantly reflect the interests of the wealthy class. In 2017, President Macri passed the hawkish Decree of Necessity and Urgency (“DNU”) 70/2017 which directly countered the 2003 immigration law. Macri’s order immediately incited international concern, as the UN Committee on Migrant Workers (Grainger 2019) and U.N. Committee Against Torture (Pellettieri 2017) requested that the administration repeal the decree. As shown in Table 1, the DNU harkened back to past strategies of criminalization: as opposed to increasing incentives for immigration, the proposal aimed to accelerate deportations (Baluarte 2019, 327). Instead of limiting time immigrants spend detained, the Decree funded a new detention center. A year after it was passed, residency control operations²² increased by 270% from 2014 (Jaramillo et al. 2020, 75). President Macri justified his executive decree during a news conference by equating immigrants with violence and danger, stating that “we cannot continue to allow criminals to keep choosing Argentina as a place to commit offenses” (Romero and Politi, 2017). The DNU once again promotes a system which “relies on the broad discretion of immigration officials” (Baluarte 2019, 327) and illustrates the norm identified by Ceriani Cernadas and Albarracín in which immigration laws are largely determined by executive power. Immigrants could be deported for a wide range of minor crimes, including “resisting authority” (Jaramillo et al. 2020, 79). Despite Macri’s rhetoric

²² Deportation operations from the National Department of Immigration.

about decreasing overall immigration, the decree actually increased irregular migration and the vulnerability of migrant groups (Jaramillo et al. 2020, 86).

Judging from the Macri administration's rhetoric, the 2017 DNU targeted a specific subset of the immigrant population in a manner that harkened back to the 19th and 20th century. Poorer Latin Americans were typecast as the principal criminal threat to the nation, as evidenced by the Security Minister's justification that "Many Paraguayan, Bolivian, and Peruvian citizens act as investors, mules, or drivers, or as part of a [supply] chain in the world of drug trafficking" (Achtenberg 2017). However, the administration's discrimination was not solely limited to South American immigrants. Eduardo Domenech found that President Macri "created specific practices to limit Afro-immigrant populations" such as "rejecting them at the border." Taken together, the criminalization of undesirable immigrants during the Macri administration draws striking parallels to hard power tactics used during the turn of the 20th century and military junta.

Examining the practical effects of Macri's immigration policies unveils his primary intentions of using immigrants to advance political priorities. While the 2017 DNU ostensibly claimed to resolve problems of irregular immigration or organized crime, several Argentine scholars show how it failed to do so by denying the possibility of access to justice in order to effectively corroborate criminal events in question (Piñero et al. 2017, 146). Dr. Jaramillo, Dr. Gil-Araujo and Dr. Rosas (2020, 81) wrote that, in many cases, the deported individuals had already served the sentence for their crime by the time they were deported and had therefore paid their debt to the Argentine justice system. The decree's primary achievement was to rhetorically associate poor Latin American immigrants with criminal threats that warranted a national security response. In our conversation, Leiza Brumat explained that Macri sought to better distribute immigrants throughout the country instead of concentrating in Buenos Aires. Eduardo Domenech expressed a similar belief, adding that

Macri sought to relocate incoming immigrants to underdeveloped parts of the country that needed a larger workforce.

In addition to the decree, Dr. Verónica Jaramillo discussed practical details implemented by Macri's administration that restricted immigrants' access to justice. The government switched to an online immigration documentation system²³ called *Módulo de Radicación a Distancia de Extranjeros* (RaDEx) which required a high level of technological prowess and internet connectivity. It also required substantial financial security as applicants needed an Argentine credit card or a bank deposit in either the Argentine National Bank or Buenos Aires Bank (Chiavetta and Liguori 2020, 77). Not only that, but the rates associated with the registration quintupled between 2014 and 2018 (Chiavetta and Liguori 2020,11). These requirements were a subtle yet significant method of selectivity as they weeded out predominantly poorer immigrants without access to computers or smartphones and Argentine bank accounts by building their program to best serve migrants with greater material resources. The results of this online system speak for themselves: 2019 marked the lowest number of successful immigration filings in over a decade. A report from the Observatory on Migration and Asylum in Argentina argues that these practices turned the immigration regularization process into an obstacle course which unofficially selects between “good” and “bad” immigrants, actually promoting irregular migration by making the legal process inaccessible. They argue that this damages society as a whole, only benefiting a select few (Chiavetta and Liguori 2020, 35).

Examining the immigrants who benefited during the Macri administration further illustrates the duality of foreign policy approaches. Argentina is one of the few countries that allows Venezuelan migrants without passports (O'Boyle 2020) and both Dr. Eduardo Domenech and Dr. Verónica Jaramillo highlighted the Venezuela refugee crisis during our interviews. Dr. Jaramillo told

²³ This system is the way for foreigners to receive temporary or permanent residence and a National Identification Number (DNI), the main identity document for both citizens and foreigners residing in Argentina.

me that lawmakers immediately mobilized to support and regularize their immigration. Dr. Domenech provided insights on the administration's political calculus, claiming that President Macri welcomed the opportunity to denounce the socialist situation in Venezuela and improve his reputation in comparison to Nicolás Maduro. According to Dr. Domenech, this is a clear example of soft power.

Once again, foreign policy frameworks help explain Macri's broader immigration strategy. While his administration gained soft power by granting protective status to some, we can also see that he made hard power decisions when the national incentives outweighed the risks of foreign displeasure. Dr. Adriana Alfonso claims that Macri used inflated statistics and dramatized rhetoric to portray immigration as an urgent security issue. She argues that Macri's decree was actually motivated by electoral incentives, as he wanted to strengthen support in his wealthy base and ensure their loyalty in the next election. Since the majority of immigrants are lower class, wealthier classes don't have as much sympathy and are more receptive to restrictive immigration policies that prioritize their own security. While hard power immigration policy is less common in Argentina, Carlos Escudé's concept of peripheral realism also helps explain the emergence of Macri's hawkish immigration policy. Dr. Brumat made this connection when highlighting the extreme coincidence between President Trump's restrictive Muslim ban and Macri's DNU, enacted three days later. While Macri already displayed the impetus for the emergency decree, it appears that President Trump's restrictive hard power tactic granted Macri the freedom to pursue a similar policy.

All of the Argentine hard power examples occurred during periods of internal economic instability which threatened the ruling hegemony. In these situations, immigrants provided Argentine leaders with an easy target. The validity of the immigrant threat itself is outweighed by the ruling party's decision to criminalize immigrant behavior, for as Leiza Brumat notes, "the worse the economy, the more migrants are accused of bringing problems to the country." Brumat's view is

supported by a report commissioned by the National University of Córdoba, which describes how Argentina's government and media utilize migrants as scapegoats to justify inequalities and deterioration of quality of life under the neoliberal economic project (Piñero 2017, 150). Hard power approaches therefore project internal threats onto immigrants, and this strategy boils down to Verónica Jaramillo's observation that "it's easier to dislike immigrants if they're criminalized."

The criminalization of immigrants can be further understood when within Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical framework. Hard power process is a key element of the "hegemonic myth," for it allows the ruling class to project their own legitimacy by distancing national identity from the threat at hand. In our discussion, Verónica Jaramillo identified this myth as "we have very little and have to protect it from those who are trying to take it." The "foreigner" is constructed as the parasite who siphons resources away from deserving citizens, and the historic erasure of Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities marginalizes them within the same framework of non-belonging. Elites use political articulation to spread this belief, conflating their interests with those of the entire country. Their posture has been used throughout history, from the Generation of 1837's rejection of the country's demographics to President Menem's claim that "In Argentina, blacks do not exist, that is a Brazilian problem" (Cottrol 2007, 140). Elites sustain their power by unifying the population around this internalized myth, as reinforced by Campbell's claim that security policies ultimately aim to produce the imagined national identity in relation to the foreign.

Conclusion

Elites employ both the national security and human rights paradigm to further their interests, and the decision to use hard or soft power depends on foreign policy strategy. The analysis above shows the blurring of the distinctions between both approaches, harkening back to Verónica

Jaramillo's observation about the political power human rights discourses. The passage of the restrictive 2017 DNU exposes this reality. The DNU had to be approved by the Bicameral Commission, which heard arguments on its illegality from civil society members for over eight hours (Jaramillo et al. 2020). The *Kirchnerista* politicians could have blocked it, but they did not. Dr. Jaramillo assumes that they'd made a deal with conservative politicians that outweighed their party's commitment to advancing "immigration as a human right." While the human rights paradigm was politically advantageous in the early 2000s, the foreign policy climate had dramatically changed fifteen years later. The Kirchners themselves recognized this shift, evident by the statement in 2014 from Cristina Kirchner's Secretary of National Security that the country was "infected with foreign delinquents" (La Nación 2014). As for the actual content of such laws, Dr. Jaramillo remarks that "immigrants were small change" to politicians.

While soft power motivations often led to more progressive rhetoric, they did not necessarily translate into less racist immigration policies. When policymakers recognized the soft power losses of enacting policies with overt discrimination, they "created secret policies of restriction or adopted criteria that were ethnically neutral on their face" (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2014, 30). In Argentina, this often manifested as bureaucratic irregularities: unofficially relaxing or tightening enforcements for certain groups or framing racist policies as positive preferences which are more palatable to the international audience. The foreign policy motive therefore adds insight to the contradiction between open immigration policies and latent xenophobia; Argentina has historically expressed a clear preference for white Europeans, and yet this priority was mostly suppressed in formal policies as Argentina attempted to assert itself on the global stage. As anti-racist immigration rhetoric became an international yardstick for civilization and modernity, Argentine leaders sought to gain the soft power advantages of compliance while also maintaining the European identity they'd worked so hard to cultivate. Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin (2014, 30) stress the intentionality of such

arrangements dating back to independence, observing that “elites descended from Spaniards invoked anti-racism even as they continued to systematically deny substantive rights of citizenship to their own Indigenous and Afro-origin populations.”

Interlude: Who is the Foreigner Today?

Afro-Argentines and Indigenous Argentines have distinctive experiences, as do Afro-descendant and Indigenous immigrants, and there is danger in homogenizing identities or minimizing differences (Anderson 1991, Bhabha 2006, Spivak 2016). My conversations with Argentine civil society leaders, activists, and academics underscored how discrimination towards immigrants is intertwined with race and so I share their understanding, in their own words. Pablo Ceriani Cernadas identifies a thread linking these backgrounds by observing that “there is discrimination today against those suspected of being immigrants,” and this suspicion stems from “longstanding racism.” Peter Schmidt and Markus Quandt’s research (2018) on nationalism underscores this connection by emphasizing how nation-building rhetoric can exclude both immigrants and minorities. Dr. Ceriani Cernadas claims that discrimination towards Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations still exists in part because “they were never included in the plans of the oligarchical founding elites.” Dr. Ceriani Cernadas believes that, subconsciously, these communities are seen as “a return to those ‘savages’ who were not part of the political and economic nation-building project.” Gabriela Liguori, the Director of the Argentine Commission for Refugees and Immigrants, told me that “having Indigenous characteristics is still connected to “foreign-ness” (*extranjeridad*) in many parts of the country” as it is “seen as something that doesn’t belong in the social imaginary.” Examining the intersectionality of these identities exposes the insidious nature of the belief in European superiority, revealing how non-Europeans were willfully excluded from the

homogenous national narrative to the point where their identity became *equated* with that of “immigrant.” Dr. Sandra Gil-Araujo²⁴ is a founding member of the Migrant Researchers Interdisciplinary Group and has contributed to immigration research projects in Buenos Aires and Spain and contextualizes this dynamic with her observation that the national population is “foreigner-ized” (*extranjerizada*) in society so that an Indigenous person from Salta, Argentina might be stereotyped as Bolivian while Afro-Argentines are assumed to be from Senegal.

Racist assumptions lead to contemporary violence and exploitation, just as they did in the colonial and postcolonial era. Dr. Ceriani Cernadas observes that Indigenous communities are still victims of “physical, symbolic and structural discrimination,” which relegates them to the lowest socioeconomic position. Dr. Ceriani Cernadas added that such discrimination is also projected on Bolivian and Peruvian immigrants and can be found in political speeches from politicians across the political spectrum, in media and culture, and the discriminatory practices of different sectors. According to Dr. Ceriani Cernadas, underlying racism also manifests as police violence against both Indigenous communities in Northern Argentina²⁵ and Senegalese populations in Buenos Aires.²⁶ Ceriani Cernadas described this as “constant yet latent xenophobia” which re-emerges when non-white populations become more visible in Argentine society. Dr. Verónica Jaramillo explained that “the Senegalese population is hyper-visible” as the majority doesn’t have work permits, forcing them to make a living by selling goods in public areas. The Senegalese population is criminalized and racially profiled by police in a manner considered disproportionate to their “crime of selling t-shirts.”

²⁴ All quotes from Dr. Sandra Gil-Araujo came from an interview conducted over Zoom on November 30th, 2020.

²⁵ The Center for Legal and Social Studies has documented numerous instances of police violence towards Indigenous communities. See: CELS. 2020 “Chaco: Violencia Policial y Discriminación Contra Comunidades Indígenas.” *Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales*.

²⁶ Police violence against Senegalese immigrants has been well documented. See: Daniel Gutman “Senegalese Immigrants Face Police Brutality in Argentina.” *Senegalese Immigrants Face Police Brutality in Argentina: Inter Press Service*.

I spoke with numerous immigrants of color in order to better understand the intersectionality of these identities and our conversations further exposed the intertwined levels of discrimination. Natividad Obeso shared with me that she believes skin color is the principal factor of discrimination. In her words, “We have never had the right to our own voice because we are the Black ones, the short ones, *los cabecitas negras*, and we cannot reach those zones of influence.” The pejorative term “*cabecitas negras*” directly translates to “little Black heads” and Dr. Anny Ocoró Loango (2015, 153) describes how it is used in Argentina to describe the “other” who may not have phenotypic African characteristics yet is racially classified as inferior. Loango explains that the term was frequently used in the 1990s to refer to immigrants from bordering countries such as Peru, Bolivia and Paraguay, inserting them into “existing racial hierarchies” and ensuring their “subordinate place in society.” Natividad Obeso’s own experience underscores the power of this deeply disrespectful social categorization, as she believes that the color of her skin denotes her as an “other” in Argentina regardless of her economic status. She explained further examples of this dynamic, citing the poor but welcomed Europeans in the 19th century and the well-off Afro-descendant students who come to pursue their master’s degree today yet still face discrimination. Freda Montañó also supports this claim. When she and her fellow Ecuadorian artists arrived in Argentina, they remember those around them asking, “Who are those strange Black people?” when broadly referring to her and other Afro-descendant immigrants. Other Argentine activists and people of color describe how structural racism creates prejudices that limit their economic opportunities (Peuschovich 2020, Pitchon 2018).

Do white immigrants face the same level of ostracization? Dr. Gil Araujo and Dr. Jaramillo shared their personal experiences as white immigrants from Spain and Colombia, while Gabriela Liguori added her perspective as a child of immigrants. Dr. Gil Araujo confided that she has always been accepted as “Argentine.” She has done significant research on the experience of children of

Peruvian immigrants in Argentine schools, finding that their family's immigrant identity is nearly always at the forefront of their own—they are almost always referred to as “children of Peruvians” instead of “Argentines.” Yet Dr. Gil Araujo herself told me that she has never felt this level of suspicion. Dr. Jaramillo echoed Dr. Gil Araujo's observation, noting that she constantly witnesses differential treatment that she and her Afro-Colombian friends receive in Buenos Aires. Gabriela Liguori is the child of Italian immigrants yet acknowledged, “Never in my life have I been treated like a foreigner.” Their individual acceptance of white immigrants exists in the aggregate as well.

The acceptance of Venezuelan refugees can further be understood under previous frameworks of cultural assimilability, as immigrant populations which appeal to Argentina's imagined community are still welcomed. Dr. Jaramillo noted that Venezuelans are not only escaping socialism but are also predominantly white and educated in comparison to earlier mentioned neighboring countries. Their identity therefore bolsters the elites' vision of an ideologically and culturally homogenous society, whereas non-white immigrants from other aforementioned South American countries threaten this cohesion. While the economic crisis encouraged all regional countries to take in Venezuelan migrants, Jaramillo pointed to Bolivian or Senegalese populations who'd been in Argentina for years without receiving such support. According to her, broader factors of national identity influenced the Macri administration's decision to pursue a soft power response.

Given the government's exclusion and oppression of non-white identities, where do Indigenous and Afro-descendant immigrants find space to advance their interests? The following chapter builds upon Chapter 3 by analyzing the grassroots, bottom-up power of civil society in shifting immigration policies and putting under-represented voices on the national agenda. Instead of operating with tactics of hard power and threat-assessments, civil society leaders employ targeted coalition-building and moral arguments. Yet despite the different elements, both the governmental and civil society sphere fall into similar hierarchies that concentrate resources and power in the

hands of a close network that is well-connected and predominantly white. This hierarchy has had great success in expanding rights for all immigrants, yet the underlying tensions to such success highlight the ongoing exclusion of Afro-descendant and Indigenous identities.

Chapter 4: Immigration Policy from Below

Through navigating international pressures, Argentine elites have dictated the first one hundred and fifty years of immigration policy. What comes next? This section lays out the factors which point to a growing fragmentation of elite control: (1) the rise in civil society organizations focused on immigration; (2) growing discussion of immigrant voting rights; and (3) emerging solidarity networks. By re-examining the last fifty years of Argentine history through another lens, we gain an overarching understanding of the catalyzing factors influencing contemporary immigration policies. In this period, civil society actors have marshalled resources and collective power in order to expand rights for immigrants and have successfully influenced ruling elites. Yet in many cases, institutionalized civil society organizations mirror the social hierarchies laid out in previous chapters, once again underscoring the salience of systemic forms of exclusion and belonging. Civil society has the potential to include underrepresented identities, yet the market of funding and influence pervades this sphere as well—inserting a hierarchy that still prioritizes white and culturally homogenous voices. However, the relentless work of non-white migrants themselves is changing Argentina’s narrative as a European enclave and showing that community organizing can counter entrenched hegemonies. I spoke with leaders at both institutional human rights organizations and migrant-led community coalitions to better understand this dynamic. Natividad Obeso, a Peruvian immigrant who founded and directs the Association of United Women, Migrants, and Refugees in Argentina (AMUMRA) acknowledges that “the [immigration] system can change

the conception of ‘human beings.’” Obeso believes that the Argentine government is more accustomed to making decisions from above than from below, yet her own experience shows that future political organizing can change laws and norms. The experiences of Obeso and her colleagues emphasize the necessity of pursuing structural changes to greatly expand political access for historically marginalized communities.

Argentine civil society originated during the Spanish colonial period but solidified around human rights concerns in response to the military junta’s repression in the 1970s. Between the 16th and 19th centuries, non-governmental organizations were intertwined with the Catholic Church (Jacobs and Maldonado 2005, 151). Following the end of formal colonialism, these “elite civil society organizations” were predominantly governed by upper-class women (2005, 151). Such patterns lasted over a century and lay the groundwork for contemporary civil society. New networks emerged in the 20th century in order to raise awareness of the brutal disappearances of the Dirty War (2005, 158). Victoria Darraidou,²⁷ the Coordinator of the Citizen Security and Police Violence team at the Center of Legal and Social Studies (CELS) explained how CELS formed in response to violence in 1979. Dr. Domenech adds that CELS quickly became the most influential non-governmental organization in Argentine politics. The junta’s dissolution in 1983 catalyzed the formation of more human rights organizations focused on protecting the fledgling democracy and elevating the voice of Argentines in their national government. In 1989, Edward Cleary (1997, 63) documented 24 new organizations and the National Center of Community Organizations found that this number steadily grew to 796 in 2005 (Jacobs and Maldonado 2005, 161). Democratically elected presidents recognized the electoral necessity of collaborating with civil society and these organizations therefore wielded substantial influence.

²⁷ All quotes from Victoria Darraidou came from an interview conducted over Zoom on June 24th, 2020.

Immigrant rights maintained a strong position on the agenda of the growing human rights apparatus. Arcarazo and Freier (2015, 11) observe that “immigration reform had long been a priority issue” for human rights organizations, and the existence of numerous specialized immigrant rights organizations reinforces this claim. Gabriela Liguori described how the Argentine Commission for Refugees and Migrants (CAREF) formed in 1973 to assist Chilean refugees. While their work was stalled during the military junta, they revived their mission in the 1980s and continue as a national leader for immigration reform, along with several other broader human rights organizations. Darraidou told me that CELS initially conducted human rights research but began “incorporating immigrants’ rights into the broader human rights debate” in the ‘90s, as evidenced by the inclusion of discrimination against immigrants in their 1995 annual human rights report (Hines 2010, 483). Raísa Ortiz Cetra,²⁸ member of the International Team at CELS, explained that CELS also partnered with the University of Buenos Aires to create a legal clinic for undocumented immigrants whose rights were still governed by the Videla Law.

The institutionalization of prominent human rights organizations has also created a hierarchy of power. Much like politicians, nonprofits vie for influence in order to enact their envisioned change. These organizations also seek money, access to lawmakers, and the ability to shape national policy. Jamie Jacobs and Martín Maldonado found that the internal organization of influential Argentine NGOs was often “personalistic and hierarchical” as their members usually belong to the middle or upper classes, or were academics (2005, 149). Jacobs and Maldonado (2005, 149, 153-154, 163) also describe how these organizations are “concerned with professionalization, quality service and management” likely due to their belief that “economic rationality is a key condition for survival.” These organizations thrived in this institutional role and “were recognized as significant social and political actors,” at times even serving as state partners. They frequently acted as an

²⁸ All quotes with Raísa Ortiz Cetra came from an interview conducted over Zoom on June 24th, 2020.

intermediary for protesters, “translating their anger and grievance into formal complaints” to the Argentine government. Simultaneously, Argentina’s ongoing economic crisis puts these organizations in competition over scarce financial resources, strengthening the hierarchy within civil society. Jacobs and Maldonado (2005, 149) additionally note that there’s a “historic lack of horizontal connections between human rights organizations and other social institutions such as unions, clubs and grassroots and neighborhood organizations.” A deeper analysis exposes the duality of such organizations. On the one hand, their power has allowed them to pass substantive protections for vulnerable populations. On the other, they’ve served as gatekeepers and may unintentionally be limiting the very voices they wish to serve.

My own interviews and investigation reveal a close relationship between influential nonprofits and the Argentine government. Alfredo Mariano López Rita shared with me that a relatively small group of immigration experts and policymakers have “worked on similar issues for years.” Both Liguori and López Rita acknowledged that the National Immigration Department and CAREF don’t always have intersecting agendas yet emphasized their mutual desire for open dialogue and respect. Eduardo Domenech discussed this association at a more macro level by explaining how immigration “experts” frequently transitioned from government to civil society organizations to international forums. A current look at these organizations’ leadership structure reveals a racial hierarchy in addition to the class hierarchy noted by Jacobs and Maldonado, as the directors of the most prominent organizations are white, as well as nearly everyone in their posted staff profiles.²⁹ The largely homogenous and interconnected group of experts has worked together to expand the

²⁹ Gabriela Liguori is the president of CAREF, Flavio Lauria is the Executive Secretary of the Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerants, and Horacio Verbitsky is the president of CELS. Several government branches that deal with race and immigration have white leaders as well: Victoria Donda is the president of National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism and Alfredo Manuel López Rita is the director of the National Immigration Department.

rights for immigrants in the 21st century, yet their association may have unintentionally excluded immigrants from the decision making process.

Despite the prevalence of Argentine human rights NGOs, several migrants found that their needs weren't being met and started their own community organizations. Natividad Obeso; Freda Montañó; and Doria Encalada, the Peruvian director of the Organized Migrants Front, are all prominent migrant organizers who each settled in Argentina in the early 1990s.³⁰ While they arrived after nearly ten years of Argentine democracy, their status as immigrants was still determined by the dictatorship-era Videla Law. Natividad Obeso had been a successful businesswoman in Peru yet confided that she faced immediate discrimination and mistreatment in Argentina. Freda Montañó and Doria Encalada described similar cases of xenophobia and difficulty in entering the labor market. Natividad Obeso expressed contempt towards the powerful human rights organizations who professed to help those in her situation, querying "How can they claim to empower immigrants when they don't listen to our voices or understand our fight?" These migrants felt marginalized by the state and society and had to advocate for their rights. According to Obeso, "We fought alone in Argentina's worst moments; no one helped us or gave us money."

In contrast, CAREF Director Gabriela Liguori emphasizes how collective effort led to the repeal of the Videla Law. Liguori claimed that organizations such as CAREF who worked directly with migrants were the "driving force behind the 2003 law." Institutional organizations such as CELS and CAREF had a historical working association yet collaborated with churches, unions, academics, and migrant coalitions around the shared goal of displacing the Videla Law with a human-rights based approach. These organizations formally coalesced around this goal in 1996 with the "Table for Organizations in Defense of Migrants' Rights" (Hines 2010, 484; Liguori Interview 2021). The "Table" network analyzed the law according to human rights standards and proposed

³⁰ All quotes from Doria Encalada came from an interview conducted over Zoom on September 1st, 2020.

new legislation. Liguori noted that immigrant coalitions were quite incipient in the '90s and therefore weren't part of the "Table." She remarks that "looking for ways to organize for their own rights wasn't sensible" due to the lack of cohesion yet highlighted the essential role that immigrants still played in the passage of the new law. Liguori credited many female immigrants with sharing their experiences in Congress and pressuring lawmakers to consider the policies proposed by the "Table."

Natividad Obeso qualifies Liguori's claim by describing how migrants banded together to achieve their own immediate needs. When their children weren't able to enter Argentine universities, Obeso led a campaign to change admittance standards at schools in Buenos Aires and won. When Afro-Ecuadorian artists faced discrimination, Freda Montaña told me that they bought a house and turned it into an "Afro-Latin American" museum "in order to recover [their] stories and share [their] history." Encalada shared with me how immigrants from different backgrounds created forums where they could discuss their needs and build political momentum. Obeso believes that their organizing efforts laid the foundation for the 2003 legislation which finally repealed the Videla Law, claiming that "migrants created this policy from the bottom: from a place of unknown and from our own needs." Obeso was one of the lobbyists mentioned by Liguori who spoke with legislators for hours; sharing their own experiences, emphasizing the constitution's preamble, and invoking the national sentiment that "we are all children of immigrants." Liguori herself acknowledges that the presence of female immigrants' voices "changed the political climate" and had an enormous influence on lawmakers' decisions.

The targeted strength of civil society achieved monumental change, culminating in the internationally lauded 2003 Law 25.871. The inclusion of community members led to a focus on not only the legal process, but also the human experience of Argentina's immigration policies, as the rhetoric of human rights framed the policies as being centered on the needs of the migrants instead of the state. Diego Arcarazo and Luisa Freier (2015, 11) identified Nestor Kirchner's precarious

political situation in 2003 after winning only 22% of the vote as a key factor that evidenced he was “in need of political allies.” They suggest that this led Kirchner to “seek the support of civil society” by “embarking on a human rights discourse.” The mobilization of the non-governmental sector allowed them to influence the political agenda when they shared a common goal.

We can see that the existence of race and class-based hierarchies doesn't minimize the work of individuals and organizations who are dedicated to advancing rights for immigrants in the country. Even if foreign policymakers manipulated purportedly race-neutral policies at their inception, these laws “eventually promoted the formal and often substantive elimination of ethnic discrimination in immigration policy” through the formation of organizations and institutions tasked with protecting immigrants (Fitzgerald 2014, 30). Dr. Jaramillo echoes this point when acknowledging the duality of human rights ideology: it grants soft power to politicians while also creating institutions filled with hard-working activists who put pressure on the same political elites. CELS and CAREF are respected organizations, and Dr. Domenech believes that they “earned their legitimacy due to their work in the ‘90s” and therefore hold “political capital.” Gabriela Liguori emphasized how CAREF “always tried to boost and support these community organizing efforts” and “open channels of communication so that immigrants’ voices could be included.” Going forward, she describes her vision for CAREF’s future work to focus on “being of service of those in need” and “looking for ways to construct more inclusive and fair societies.” She acknowledges that every organization focused on immigrant rights has a slightly different agenda yet underscored the power of their collective efforts. Putting Liguori’s perspective in dialogue with conversations from migrant community organizers acknowledges both shared successes and the systemic obstacles limiting access. The rising quantity and platform of community organizations such as AMUMRA offer hope for a continued focus on the lived experience of migrants.

Many Argentines working on immigration issues echo this optimism. Liguori underscored that, just twenty-five years ago, unregularized immigrants were dying without medical treatment while their children couldn't go to school. She added that the rigid restrictions of the Videla Law forced unregularized immigrants into informal, dangerous, and low-paid work which impoverished entire communities. Dr. Ceriani Cernadas added that, since the 2003 law, complaints of discrimination in the medical and education system have substantially decreased while due process for immigrants has improved. At the same time, Liguori described how the number of identity-based immigrant community coalitions such as AMUMRA and AERA has multiplied, leading to Montaña's personal observation that many immigrants feel "greater empowerment due to solidarity and organizing." Liguori observes that community organizations have done an excellent job articulating their particular needs to a wider audience while Alfredo Mariano López Rita emphasized the specificity of their demands. For example, there are now organizations advocating for the rights of female migrants, Peruvian migrants, Ecuadorian migrants, and more that can make requests based on their particular needs. Yet as Liguori cautioned, "Argentina's recent history shows you can't take anything for granted" and all members of civil society have to keep up the pressure.

Certain policymakers, such as Dr. Adriana Alfonso, are trying to reinvigorate the Constitution's commitment to ensuring rights for "all who wish to dwell on Argentine soil"—particularly in the case of voting. While voting rights for immigrants are not specified in the Constitution nor allowed for national elections, individual provinces can establish their own policies. For example, the 1966 Constitution of Buenos Aires grants suffrage to regularized foreign residents who've received their National Identification Number (DNI). Voting rights vary across provinces, with several allowing immigrants to vote in municipal elections up to the governorship while one doesn't let immigrants vote at all. Dr. Adriana Alfonso described the inefficiency and antiquatedness of the voting system, arguing that there are "large gaps in policy" and a "lack of intention" that

makes it extremely difficult for eligible immigrants to participate. For example, separate rules in most provinces require foreigners to vote in separate locations or at different times than the rest of the population. Most immigrants must also wait two years before they're able to vote, yet Dr. Alfonso claims that this information isn't well known. She therefore believes that making the voting process more accessible is a pragmatic step towards granting immigrants more autonomy in the decisions that affect their lives. The example of voting access is yet another which shows the gulf between rhetorical commitments to immigrants' rights and the practical actualization of such rights.

Expanding voting access for those outside of Sarmiento and Alberdi's imagined national identity might disrupt the homogeneity of Argentina's political structures. While the lack of a diversity quota law fails to encourage non-white participation in Congress, Dr. Verónica Jaramillo describes how unofficial exclusion extends beyond elected office. During her time working in a government ministry, she was part of several initiatives to advance women's rights. Her colleagues organized advisory councils made up solely of white, upper class women without batting an eye—forcing Jaramillo to exasperatedly question, “Can't you find one woman of color in Argentina?” In her opinion, people in positions of power are currently incapable of recognizing and focusing on the lack of diversity. Dr. Alfonso and Jaramillo's observations underscore the work that must still be done to make both congress and civil society more inclusive of non-white voices.

The distribution of power in Argentine civil society suggests its role in reinforcing Argentina's “imagined community.” Widening our temporal focus does reveal how much civil society has achieved in the past twenty-five years as non-governmental organizations and coalitions have the power to counter both state-sponsored policies and narratives. Despite this, we've seen how Argentina's civil society apparatus has largely reproduced hegemonic expectations. The nonprofit charity system is yet another with roots in the colonial era and is therefore shaped by prejudiced assumptions about belonging and deservingness. The underlying tensions between

organizations such as CELS, CAREF, and AMUMRA cannot be ascribed to diverging interests of individual staffers but to the difficulty in dismantling colonial-era beliefs. While the majority of contemporary immigrants are coming from other Latin American countries, the organizations tasked with advancing their rights are led by white Argentines. An acknowledgment of hierarchical power does not minimize the work of individuals such as Gabriela Liguori or Alfredo Mariano López Rita who exemplify this ideal. Instead, it exposes how Argentine society subconsciously prioritizes their identities. The issue of political exclusion appears to be structural, not individual, and might be addressed with government reform. I therefore conclude this thesis by amplifying policies that build upon the successes of civil society and increase marginalized voices' access to political power.

Conclusion

Natividad Obeso and Gabriela Liguori agree that non-European identities have been politically marginalized since before the formation of the Argentine state. My analysis explores how colonialism's physical and ideological takeover shaped the Generation of 1837's nation-building campaign, in turn causing colonial principles to manifest in contemporary immigration policies. Examining one-hundred-and-fifty years of such policies allows us to assemble a complex list of purposes for enacting immigration policies. The Perón administration used them to bolster the labor force and assert moral superiority while the military junta used them to expel communist agitators and gain international allies. President Alfonsín used them to shore up regional power and displace blame for an economic crisis, the Kirchners used them to gain international prestige, and Macri used them to appeal to his political base and discredit socialist governments. Across regimes, they were used to boost industrialization and propel Argentina's economic growth and across regimes, leaders prioritized the immigrant demographic they believed could best serve their objectives. The constant

in this story is the subordination of immigrants, best evidenced by the way that their voices are marginalized even in national discussions regarding immigrants' rights. While immigrants' legal rights have expanded in the past twenty years, the sudden return to criminalization tactics under the Macri administration reiterates that advances in human rights will only be temporary until immigrants can advocate for themselves and permanently place their needs on the national agenda.

The Argentine case study reinforces a broader scholarly conversation on the coloniality of power and notions of foreignness. We can see how nation-building efforts sought to coalesce a diverse population around a homogenous imagined identity (Anderson 1991), the composition of which was determined by European descendants of colonialism, as explained by Mignolo's "logic of coloniality" (2007, 36). The "glorification of *mestizaje*" created a hierarchy which permanently situated even partial European descendants at the top and cast non-European Argentines and immigrants at the bottom (Wade 2017, 626). As Argentina entered the global political economy, the strict European-centric nation-building formula of Sarmiento and Alberdi yielded to more nuanced policy considerations as powerful elites sought to minimize complex threats. Their foreign threat assessments reflect Carlos Escudé's analysis on peripheral realism, and soft power strategies occasionally opened up the ethnic hierarchy by accepting South Korean or Venezuelan immigrants—assuming their ideological identities reinforced, in Laclau and Mouffe's terms, the Argentine hegemonic myth.

Scholarly work on cultural assimilation versus multiculturalism adds a deeper understanding to the conflict between national identity and immigration, thereby suggesting a future direction of inquiry and action. Singh and vom Hau (2016, 1312) differentiate between "weak" and "powerful" assimilationist states. They write that the former grant greater opportunities for identity-based mobilization of minority groups and higher levels of diversity while the latter are more likely to coalesce a diverse population "into a homogeneous core identity" which leads to less national

diversity. Their analysis accentuates the importance of examining the relationship between national identity campaigns, such as those launched by the Generation of 1837, and political diversity.

Kymlicka (2016, 71) describes the need for achieving greater diversity, noting that efforts towards empowering a diverse form of national multiculturalism tend to benefit both historic minorities and immigrant groups. While my research identifies the assimilationist desires of the Argentine elite, Kymlicka's and Singh and vom Hau's analysis on multiculturalism and cultural assimilation goes beyond my current scope and could be referenced when considering future proposals.

Not only does the Argentine case study deepen our understanding of theoretical frameworks, such as Laclau and Mouffe's hegemony theory and Mignolo's conception of the coloniality of power, but such theoretical frameworks can in turn offer insights for combating xenophobia. I identified specific ideas by engaging in dialogue with immigrants themselves, as any future reform must center around their voices. In our conversation, Natividad Obeso shared the need for intentional research on the lived experiences of immigrants. She expressed frustration at the lack of available information on immigrants' backgrounds—such as country of residence, age, and current location—arguing that it reflects a lack of interest from academics and policymakers alike. Her criticism harkens back to the incomplete records of enslaved Africans and the statistical omission of Afro-Argentines and Indigenous Argentines, implying how accurate data can counter a whitewashed national identity. To respond to Obeso's proposition, governments could sponsor qualitative and quantitative investigations into the experiences and sheer numbers of Afro-Argentines and Indigenous Argentines throughout history. Analyses from Kymlicka (2016), Quandt and Schmidt (2018), and Singh and vom Hau (2016) outline how such research could create more inclusive national environments for both born citizens and foreign residents who embody marginalized identities.

Dr. Adriana Alfonso and Dr. Verónica Jaramillo emphasized that research should take place alongside widespread campaigns for political inclusivity. State governments could ensure political representation of groups that were subjugated during colonialism through quota laws, as mentioned previously by Dr. Jaramillo. To encourage greater inclusivity, legislators can expand and standardize voting laws for immigrants, as mentioned by Dr. Alfonso. Victoria Darraidou, Coordinator of the Citizen Security and Police Violence team at CELS, additionally expressed the need for greater legal support to Indigenous victims of police violence—both Indigenous Argentines from Northern Argentina and Indigenous Bolivian immigrants who face similar stigmas. International civil society organizations can elevate local campaigns by putting pressure on their own governments to condemn racially exclusionary laws and practices, bolstering a sense of solidarity across borders. Above all, these policies should seek to shift the national narrative by including the voices of those who have been institutionally excluded from Argentina’s national myths, while remaining cognizant of the differences between these marginalized backgrounds.

Academia also has a role to play in uncovering and dismantling xenophobia. Following Natividad Obeso’s lead, I invite further research on the continuities between the treatment of non-colonial populations and the criminalization of immigrant groups beyond the Argentine case, both expanded to Latin America and other formerly colonized nations. Doing so may strengthen and refine the association between colonialism and xenophobia, exposing additional strategies for achieving pluralistic societies. My research on Argentina has raised questions such as, “How do elite hegemonies prolong or exacerbate colonial-era prejudices? How do foreign policy considerations influence racialized national policies in central and peripheral countries? How has civil society served as a bridge between the state and those outside of the state’s imagined national identity?”, inquiries that could each be taken up with comparative case studies. Following Eduardo Domenech’s vein of inquiry, I invite academics to add to the discussion of “open borders” and the autonomy of

immigrants, particularly within the lens of immigrants' historical role as political pawns for the governing elite. The confluence of academic, practical, and political attention to the racialized treatment of immigrants may be capable of overcoming long held judgements and legitimizing new approaches.

The interwoven narrative of government protocols and individual experiences implies that the source of prejudice isn't legal foreignness, but cultural "other-ness" that reconstructed Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations as outsiders during the Spanish colonial era. Argentina's relationship with colonialism and race echoes other experiences felt around the world, and its history reveals how immigration policies are tools of power in constructing an overarching cultural myth. As the celebrated Argentine Jorge Luis Borges noted, "History is mere history. Myths are what matter: They determine the type of history a country is bound to create and repeat" (quoted in Orzoff 2009, Krebs 2002). Analyzing how immigration policies have reinforced exclusionary myths allows us to create new narratives with under-represented actors. Jaramillo encapsulates this potential by observing that previous policies have been "constructed from places of power" while acknowledging that "hopefully we can construct them from places of oppression"—meaning that historically oppressed and marginalized communities can gain the tools to shape future policies. Grassroots community organizers and migrant leaders such as Doria Encalada, Freda Montaña and Natividad Obeso are already working towards this goal by building coalitions that give agency to Afro-descendant and Indigenous immigrants. While such a large-scale shift in national identity may appear improbable, history provides a playbook. Examining the narrative control of actors in the Generation of 1837 to the Generation of the Centenary suggests how excluded groups might harness this power as well. Understanding the historical interplay between immigration, national identity and race empowers us to reject our own assumptions about "useful" and "dangerous" immigrants, allowing space for immigrants to define their needs and identities themselves.

Interview Appendix

Name	Interview Date	Field*	Description
Dr. Pablo Ceriani Cernadas	6/24/2020	Academia/research	Coordinator of the Migration & Asylum Research and Advocacy Program at National University of Lanús's Institute for Justice and Human Rights and the Director of the Specialization on Migration, Asylum and Human Rights. Former Vice-Chairperson of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Their Families.
Dr. Eduardo Domenech	02/12/2021	Academia/research	Sociology and Political Science Professor at the Universidad de Córdoba and researcher with Argentina's National Scientific and Technical Research Council whose work focuses on the socio-historical production of migrant "illegality" and the transformation of migration and border control policies and practices in South America.
Dr. Leiza Brumat	5/15/2020	Academia/research	Senior researcher at the Migration Policy Center whose research focuses on the free movement of persons, migration policies, migration policymaking.
Dr. Sandra Gil Araujo	11/30/2020	Academia/research	Senior researcher at the Gino Germani Research Institute at the University of Buenos Aires and extensive author on European immigration in Latin America. Founder of the Migrant Researcher Interdisciplinary Group.
Dr. Verónica Jaramillo	11/25/2020	Academia/research	Researcher at the Gino Germani Research Institute at the University of Buenos Aires and project coordinator at the National University of Lanús's Institute for Justice and Human Rights.
Natividad Obeso	08/20/2020	Civil society	Peruvian founder and director of the Argentine Association of United Women, Migrants and Refugees (AMUMRA).
Freda Montaña	08/24/2020	Civil society	Ecuadorian cultural ambassador of African-Ecuadorian culture and Presidenta de the Association of Ecuadorians in Argentina (AERA)

Victoria Darraidou	06/25/2020	Civil society	Coordinator of the Citizen Security and Police Violence team at the Center of Legal and Social Studies (CELS).
Raísa Ortiz Cetra	06/25/2020	Civil society	Member of the International Team at the Center of Legal and Social Studies (CELS)
Gabriela Liguori	02/24/2021	Civil society	Director of the Argentine Commission for Refugees and Migrants (CAREF)
Doria Encalada	09/01/2020	Civil Society	Director of the Organized Migrants Front and member of the Trinational Collective of Women in Chaco
Dr. Adriana Alfonso	08/29/2020	Policy	Former coordinator of the Ministry of Justice's Program for the Promotion and Strengthening of the Rights of Refugees, Migrants and Stateless Persons (PROMIRA) and principal advisor for the 2002 MERCOSUR Residence Agreement
Alfredo Mariano López Rita	02/11/2021	Policy	Director of Argentina's National Immigration Department

*I highlight primary fields to make general comparisons, yet this doesn't imply a lack of crossover between them both. Many interviewees encompassed multiple fields.

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