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Geopolitical Borders and Argentina's 'White Nation'

“Argentina’s Trump-Like Immigration Order Rattles South America” (Politi, Romero). Dating back to the 1800’s Argentina has implemented policies and pushed the idea of creating a ‘white’ Argentina in hopes of building the country in the image of other powerful nations. This idea has prevailed through many forms of Argentinian government, including dictatorships and democracy with very little change. These policies and racist rhetoric make immigration for non-white migrants extremely difficult and dangerous and promote racism institutionally as well as among citizens. “Migration, Race and Nationhood in Argentina” by Tanja Bastia and Matthias vom Hau discusses these policies and their effects upon immigrants to illustrate the power of geopolitical borders to establish institutional and citizen-level racism.

Bastia and vom Hau begin to discuss the trend of Argentina’s immigration policies through discussion of the end goal. For instance, “Race and a pursuit of ‘whiteness’ have been critical to Argentinian nation formation for the last 150 years. In other words, migration policies and discourses were used in different ways to achieve the same end the construction of Argentina as a white nation of European descendants” (Bastia, vom Hau 476). The policies that Bastia and vom Hau delve into are all centered around the goal of creating a “white nation” in Argentina. Sociologically, whites are considered the dominant race due to their control over power and resources throughout history, especially Anglo-Saxon Europeans. Additionally, countries with a majority white population have typically been the colonizers and world powers for periods of time, including Great Britain and the United States. For this reason, Argentina seeks to emulate

these countries in hopes that as a result, they will become a more powerful country. To build this predominantly “white nation of European descendants” the immigration policies encourage white immigrants however, they also attempt to discourage and foil immigrants that are from neighboring countries or not white. Consequently, racism is promoted both institutionally with restrictive immigration policies as well as on the citizen level with the racist messages politicians put out regarding immigrants.

In the country’s endeavor to emulate Europe and America, Argentina focuses on the ‘reputation’ of different races that is rooted in racism. To demonstrate, “white’ Anglo-Saxon immigrants from Northern Europe... {are} associated with hard work and respect for authority” while “indigenous people and the gauchos” are considered the “lower races” (Bastia, vom Hau 478). Capitalism is the current dominant economic system, especially in Europe and America, and as a result, its dominant values of hard work, respect for authority, and profit have become dominant values around the world. Therefore, to emulate them, Argentina gives credence to the stereotypical reputations of different races that they believe they can use to their advantage. For example, white people are associated with “hard work” and “respect for authority” which suits Argentina’s goals to build their country. However, indigenous peoples and gauchos’ stereotype as a “lower race” does not, explaining Argentina’s attempts at keeping them out of the country and promoting anti-immigrant rhetoric. Despite explaining the actions, these stereotypes do not excuse the racist discrimination enacted against immigrants and indigenous peoples.

The analysis of borders done by Ulf Hannerz in his article “Borders” reflects the actions of Argentina. Hannerz describes borders as being “not natural, they become what people make of them. Some make more of borders, others less. One draws attention to difference and discontinuity, at least sometimes or for some purposes” (Hannerz 541). In this instance,

Argentina is sharply defining its borders with the purpose of building a 'white nation'. This is achieved by tailoring their immigration policies and stances on people of color to classify the "difference and discontinuity" between who is desirable—white Europeans—and everyone else. *Border Politics: Social Movements, Collective Identities, and Globalization* by Jennifer Bickham Mendez and Nancy Naples expand upon Hannerz's ideas regarding borders. They explain Hannerz's idea of "difference and discontinuity" as a part of a border's function "to draw the distinction between citizen and alien" (Mendez, Naples 4). Hannerz's idea of "difference and discontinuity" divides "citizen" from "alien". Mendez and Naples word choice in this description is also important, "citizen" is associated with belonging to a country and community while to be "alien" is to be different or other. The policies enacted in Argentina characterize indigenous peoples and non-Europeans as 'alien', 'undesirable', and discontinuous to the Argentinian population. Both texts emphasize the divisive function that borders can play in categorizing certain groups of people.

The ability of the state to determine who is considered desirable and who is not desirable reasserts their power over their country and those attempting to enter it. *Border Politics: Social Movements, Collective Identities, and Globalization* describes this power as "geopolitical borders symbolize and structure the security and sovereignty of the nation-state. (Mendez, Naples 4). By reinforcing their geopolitical borders by clearly defining them they also re-establish their sovereignty over their country. In addition, by maintaining and enforcing these boundaries they secure their power by keeping those they do not want out or making their lives more difficult while simultaneously making 'desirable' immigrants lives easier. This results in white immigrants feeling more loyalty to Argentina and people of color much less, so they are more likely to leave if life gets too difficult.

Mendez and Bickham's idea of borders creating the "distinction between citizen and alien" is seen in the discriminating policies put forth by the Argentinian government. These laws are described as, "more restrictive forms of migration control. State authorities became increasingly selective as to the kinds of European they would like to attract and sought to prevent immigrants with undesirable characteristics from entering the country" (Bastia, vom Hau 480). This excerpt delineates desirable "citizens" as Europeans and "aliens" as other immigrants, creating a separation that leads to different treatment. "Citizens" are "attract{ed}" to Argentina while others are "prevent{ed}" from immigrating there. The preventative measure taken by Argentina to make it more difficult for non-Europeans included, "a number of requirements for new arrivals, including that of having a passport with photo, a health certificate and a clean police record" (Bastia, vom Hau 480). The extra requirements are inherently discriminatory towards migrants of lower economic classes because each of these prerequisites requires money and access to obtain. For someone moving to a new country to make a better life for themselves because of a lack of opportunity in their own country, the requirements are often unattainable. In contrast, for Europeans, these documents are typically easier to obtain. The differences in access are intentional deterrents. Moreover, if an "undesirable" immigrant were to get access to these documents they also provide new methods of rejecting someone based on a small factor. To illustrate, a person may be from a neighboring country trying to move to Argentina with all their documents but because they have a criminal record or a health condition they may be denied. The increased restrictions in immigrant policies fortify institutional racism within Argentina through the unequal burden placed on migrants that are people of color.

Once again Hannerz's analysis of borders can be used to investigate Argentina's immigration laws. Hannerz describes the geopolitical border Argentina reinforces using

“Culture/culture border notions” that are then used as a “tool of exclusion and demonization, a substitute for racism, or at least a clumsy administrative idiom used by state apparatuses to identify target minority populations for special measures. (Hannerz 542). In this case, Argentina’s government has deemed people of color as politically and economically undesirable for the capitalist ‘white nation’ they are attempting to build. For this reason, the immigration laws turn the Argentinian borders into a “tool of exclusion” for ‘undesirable’ immigrants. These policies “target minority populations for special measures” just as Hannerz describes with extra requirements to enter the country and become a citizen. To make these policies, the Argentinian government uses the assumed vast cultural differences between white Europeans and other non-white immigrants such as differences in values that the racial stereotypes insist exist. These stereotypes “demonize” immigrants because they are then blamed for all the country’s problems because of the poor qualities the stereotypes suggest that they have.

In accordance with using racist stereotypes in immigration policy, these prejudices are also projected onto citizens in the form of thinly veiled anti-immigrant messages about national cohesion. To demonstrate, many politicians have “employed alarmist rhetoric about the ‘invasions’ Argentina was subjected to by the ‘massive’ inflow of migrants from neighboring countries” and “blamed {them} for increasing social and economic problems, such as crime and unemployment” (Bastia, vom Hau 484). These messages serve multiple purposes for the government. First, if the people believe the idea that immigrants are responsible for “increasing social and economic problems” then they will go along with the immigrant policies put forth and not question them. Additionally, by believing in these ideas they will act be more likely to act in a discriminatory manner towards the ‘undesirable’ immigrants making it more difficult for them to remain in the country and thrive. Coupled together, these actions will

prevent more people from arriving and staying, thus creating a more 'white nation'.

Nevertheless, these messages are damaging to both citizens and immigrants because they reinforce racism on all levels of society. To have racism prevail creates issues in everyday life as immigrants try to navigate society by finding a job and making a life for themselves in Argentina. Furthermore, it creates problems on a larger scale such as racial tension and increased inefficiency in multiple job sectors due to labor shortages. This "alarmist rhetoric" creates problems as it tries to blame societal and economic problems on immigrants.

The consequences of Argentina's anti-immigrant propaganda are seen within the film *Bolivia* directed by Israel Adrián Caetano. The film centers around a Bolivian man named Freddy that has illegally immigrated to Argentina because he is unable to acquire the necessary legal documents because he is a poor man from a neighboring country. Thus, he is considered an unappealing addition to Argentina by both the government and the people. Once he is able to get a job in a diner, he is discriminated against by his boss and customers based on his race. For example, one customer calls him racist slurs and is angry that the boss gave an immigrant a job instead of himself. In addition, Freddy is financially exploited by his boss because as an undocumented immigrant he is extremely vulnerable and has no legal protection. Freddy's experiences though fictional, represent the daily lives of many immigrants living in Argentina that are routinely exploited and treated as inferior.

The Argentinian immigration policies and rhetoric focus on divisiveness and negative ideas, conversely, studies show that immigration is a positive influence on countries. For instance, in "Immigration Policy in Argentina" the author Blanca Sánchez-Alonso discusses multiple advantages and positive services that immigrants provide a country. For example, Argentina has "a constant fear of labour shortage in agriculture and in the export sector"

(Sánchez-Alonso 615). Immigrants can easily fill these jobs, reducing these shortages. Moreover, having an adequate labor force improves the efficiency of these sectors which means more money is being made and products are of higher quality and are more available. Sánchez-Alonso's assertions are supported by Bastia and vom Hau. They state immigrants are a "crucial element of development" (Bastia, vom Hau 487). Development in this instance includes economic and social growth. Immigrants are vital to filling labor shortages, but the increased diversity is also helpful in promoting racial equality. Argentinians are exposed to a variety of cultures, languages, and ideas by immigrants that they might not have otherwise, allowing them to broaden their knowledge. Instead of causing problems, immigration provides numerous benefits to a country.

"Migration, Race and Nationhood in Argentina" by Tanja Bastia and Matthias vom Hau discusses the power of geopolitical borders to establish institutional and citizen-level racism within Argentina when analyzed through the lens of other texts. Argentina's policies divide immigrants into two categories based on race with the goal of attracting 'desirable' white Europeans to build a prosperous 'white nation'. Hannerz, Mendez, and Naples each offer explanations regarding the way in which borders can be used as political devices to create distinctions between people based on perceived differences, including in the case of Argentina. The immigration policies use increased restrictions to reinforce the physical border for political ends, additionally, anti-immigrant rhetoric is presented to citizens to instill racist attitudes. These actions strengthen both institutional and everyday racism on the microlevel. The combination creates obstacles for immigrants at all levels making their lives much more difficult. Unfortunately, these restrictive immigration laws are not unique to Argentina, many countries

use the power of their borders to reach their political goals at the detriment of thousands.

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