https://doi.org/10.21670/ref.2414150

Articles

An awful other: social imaginaries about the Venezuelan immigrant in the audiences of Chilean online press

Un otro horroroso: imaginarios sociales sobre el inmigrante venezolano en las audiencias de la prensa online chilena

Jose Navarro-Conticello[a]* https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2395-4873

[a] Universidad de Talca, Talca, Chile, e-mail: jonavarro@utalca.cl

Abstract

The objective of the study is to analyze the discourse of the audiences of Chilean online newspaper Emol on Venezuelan immigration to identify the social imaginaries of the Venezuelan immigrant that this speech reproduces and to interpret them critically within the sociohistorical processes of formation of otherness and coloniality in Chile. A qualitative content analysis assisted by Atlas.ti was applied to the readers' comments in all journalistic articles on Venezuelan immigrants published in Emol from December 30, 2021 to December 30, 2022 ($n = 1796$). A total of 34 imaginaries were identified, which mostly project a negative vision of the Venezuelan immigrant. The male or generic Venezuelan immigrant is perceived mainly as an agent favored by the local power, awful or despicable, criminal, who must be expelled. The female Venezuelan immigrant is characterized as voluptuous, beautiful and selfish.

Keywords: social imaginaries, alterity, Chile, Venezuelan migration, online press.

Received on February 7, 2023.

Accepted on June 13, 2024.

Published on August 30, 2024.

* Corresponding author: Jose Navarro-Conticello. E-mail: jonavarro@utalca.cl

ORIGINAL ARTICLE LANGUAGE: SPANISH.

Resumen

El objetivo del estudio es analizar el discurso de las audiencias del diario *online* chileno Emol sobre la inmigración venezolana para identificar los imaginarios sociales del y de la inmigrante de origen venezolano que este discurso reproduce e interpretarlos críticamente en el marco de los procesos sociohistóricos de formación de alteridad y de colonialidad en Chile. A través de Atlas.ti se aplicó un análisis de contenido cualitativo a los comentarios de lectores y lectoras en todos los artículos periodísticos sobre inmigrantes de origen venezolano publicados en Emol del 30 de diciembre de 2021 al 30 de diciembre de 2022 ($n = 1\,796$). Se identificaron 34 imaginarios que proyectan una visión negativa de la y del inmigrante de origen venezolano. El inmigrante venezolano es percibido como un

CITATION: Navarro-Conticello, J. (2024). An awful other: social imaginaries about the Venezuelan immigrant in the audiences of Chilean online press. *Estudios Fronterizos*, *25*, Article e150. https://doi.org/10.21670/ref.2414150

agente favorecido por el poder, horroroso o despreciable, criminal, que debe ser expulsado. La inmigrante venezolana es caracterizada como voluptuosa, bella e interesada.

Palabras clave: imaginarios sociales, alteridad, Chile, migración venezolana, prensa *online*.

Introduction[1]

This study analyzes the social imaginaries about Venezuelan immigrants that underlie the readers' comments on the main Chilean online media in the light of the processes of construction of otherness that take place within the framework of coloniality in a period of Chilean history characterized by a massive immigration flow, mostly from Venezuela. The aim is to contribute to the growing literature on the treatment of immigration in the media in Chile, investigating two under-explored aspects: the imaginaries about immigrants of Venezuelan origin and the participation of audiences in their reproduction.

This paper is divided into four sections. In this introductory section the state of the art regarding the topic studied is defined and the theoretical-conceptual framework used to interpret the results is made explicit. The second section shows a description of the method used. Next, the results of the analysis are shown. Finally, the conclusions of the study are presented.

The figure of the immigrant can be approached as a discursive object (Baretta, 2019), a complex topic that, as Simmel (2012) pointed out about foreignness, denotes at the same time interiority and exteriority, closeness and distance, and whose definition has historically been the subject of disputes in terms of meaning. Who are the immigrants, what are their characteristics, and how much do they differ from the *ethos* around which the native inhabitants of the destination country congregate; these are recurring questions, the answer to which shapes attitudes toward immigration and affects the lives of those who immigrate.

According to Todorov, "discourses are events, drivers of history, and not only its representations" (Todorov, 2005, p. 15). The narratives that circulate in society about minority human groups contribute to shaping attitudes toward members of these communities, and the discursive operations of inclusion and exclusion that separate them from us at the level of discourse can lead to acts of racism and discrimination (Wodak, 2011).

The pair selfhood/otherness reduces and simplifies the metaphysical void or, in Derridean terms, the lack that crosses the subject in its condition of incomplete existence, besieged by an absence prior to any will. This unrepresentable and unreconstructable loss is born from recognizing that "*the characteristic of a culture is not to be identical with itself* [...] not to be able to identify itself, to say 'me' or 'us', not to be able to take the form of the subject except in non-identity with itself" (Derrida, 1992, p. 17).[2] Thus, the self/

[1] The term *immigrant* is used instead of *migrant* or *migrant person*, because of its suitability for interpreting the persistence of nationalist and xenophobic discourses. The word *immigrant* remains present in much of the state and media discursive apparatus, and therefore constitutes a productive axis for analyzing how contact with foreign otherness is signified around it from within the borders of the nation.

[2] In all textual quotations, the italics are to be found in the original version of the quoted text.

other dichotomy draws an imaginary line that allows the affirmation of a group identity while depositing in the other the attributes of the immoral, the deviant and the abject (Girard, 1986).

In Latin America, such differentiations take place within the framework of coloniality, a matrix of exclusion, domination and exploitation of differentiation implanted by colonialism and deepened after the establishment of the independent republics where the imaginary of "us" is associated with everything that refers to the ideal of whiteness, and that of the others is embodied by people, traditions, practices and institutions perceived as belonging to Indigenousness and Blackness (Segato, 2007).

Quijano (2014) considers that the colonial regime in the Americas was ideologically organized around the notion of race as a justification for the subjugation of Native Americans by Europeans. While colonialism traditionally produced 'ethnicities' and 'nationalities' and 'ethnicism' has been one of its salient elements at all times, with the arrival of Europeans in America, for the first time discrimination was not based on the sociocultural valuation of each group's activities but on biological distinctions, giving rise to the modern idea of race.

Segato states that this classification initially served colonialism to organize and legitimize dispossession to the extent that the "formation of a positive racial capital for the white and a negative racial capital for the non-white is what allows the latter to be evicted from the hegemonic space" (Segato, 2007, p. 24). Later, since the nineteenth century, postcolonial Latin American nation-states deepened and complexified this matrix of oppression, mainly through the actions of their "Creole, mestizo and confused elites", as the author calls them (Segato, 2007, p. 21) using Mignolo's (2000) interpretation of the impact of the appearance of the idea of the "Western hemisphere" on the fluctuating self-perception of these national elites as one of the types of "double consciousness" (Du Bois, 2007) generated by colonial difference.

For Mignolo (2000), the advent of the category "Western Hemisphere" and the integration of the Americas into the West allowed the Creole elites—generally born of the intermarriage of Europeans, Blacks and indigenous peoples, but at the same time responsible for the organization of national states around the differentiation of what was considered non-white and non-European—to cling to an identity that, although changing and contradictory, allowed them to steer the destinies of their nations.

In this regard, the organization of Latin American societies around postcolonial nation-states made use of various resources to homogenize cultural diversity, suffocate identitarian tensions within their territories, and ensure the subjugation of subaltern groups and subjects. One of them is crossbreeding, which allowed the cancellation of non-white memories through the dissolution of their concrete stories of subjection in the supposedly aseptic hybridity of the melting pot (Segato, 2010). Another is the construction of otherness, through which those who bear on their bodies the marks associated with non-whiteness are systematically instituted as "others" for a national "us" structured around the ideal of whiteness (Segato, 2002, 2007).

One of the characteristics of this phenomenon is its historicity: starting from the same colonial and racial matrix, each Latin American state has constructed its own otherness over time (Ruiz-Tagle & Aguilera, 2021; Segato, 2002, 2007). It should also be considered in this regard that, according to Segato (2007), the construction of

otherness does not only involve the action of the elites, which in the case study could be understood as represented in the discourse of the media, but also the participation of other actors in society, such as, in the case study, the audiences, who imprint their own voices in the social process of discursive production on immigration in Chile.

Following Livingstone (2004) and McQuail (2010), this article will understand audiences as individuals who receive, interpret and respond to the messages emitted by a specific medium of communication or broadcaster. They are not passive receivers but rather actively participate in the construction of meaning, filtering and reinterpreting the content, influenced by their sociocultural and personal context.

The discursive construction of otherness also requires the intervention of social imaginaries, matrices or meta-codes (Pintos, 2005) that enable the members of a society to signify their environment based on shared schemas, which generate those "forms and modes that serve as realities" (Pintos, 2004, p. 24).

According to Castoriadis, social imaginaries are created by each society while demarcating and instituting the frameworks within which the perceptions, attitudes and actions of its members take place, giving rise to certain ways "of living, looking and acting" (Castoriadis, 2013, p. 249). They ensure that "the total world given to that society is grasped practically, affectively, and mentally in a certain way that an articulated meaning is imposed on it" and that "correlative distinctions are established as to what has value and what has no value [...], what is to be done and what is not to be done" (Castoriadis, 2013, p. 234). These are "conditions of what is representable and what is feasible" (Castoriadis, 2013, p. 567), and from them, "individuals are formed as social individuals, with the capacity to participate in social doing and representing/saying" (Castoriadis, 2013, p. 566).

In similar terms, Pintos considers that "social imaginaries"—in plural, because in each society many of them coexist—"are being"—as they are constantly being updated—"socially constructed schemas that guide our perception, allow our explanation, make possible our intervention in what is considered as reality in different social systems" (Pintos, 2014, p. 7).

For social imaginaries to circulate or, in Silva's terms (2006, 2012), to become contagious, they require instances of mediation. One of them operates around media systems, understood as the set of media that coexist in each society (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). The media build events by framing, that is, by selecting and making certain aspects of a phenomenon prominent and excluding others (Entman, 1993).

The press has historically been a privileged actor in reproducing social imaginaries. The legitimacy of its discourse has allowed it to structure the plurality—often contradictory—of voices present within each territory (Anderson, 1991) and to mobilize visions of the nation and its others (Rubilar Luengo, 2015). Even today, with media systems composed of diverse actors (Curran et al., 2022), the press—including its online versions, which are still structured around genres, professional standards and organizational patterns of the pre-digital era—is decisive in the definition of the agenda and remains longer than the new media at the center of the public conversation (Langer & Gruber, 2021).

On the other hand, audiences play an active role in the online press, reproducing meanings and establishing what is relevant and what is opaque about the reported phenomena, just as the media do (Singer, 2014). Nonetheless, unlike journalistic practice, which is governed by a series of formal and implicit statutes that tend to guarantee a certain control over the content of media discourse, audience participation is often poorly or not at all regulated, which can lead to the emergence of uncivil discourse.

One of the modes of audience participation in online media is the publication of opinions in the comments sections located at the end of the news. These spaces are not exempt from several problematic aspects from the point of view of transparency and democratization. For example, they do not usually offer a great plurality of perspectives since, in general, they reflect the tendency of people who inform themselves through media whose editorial lines coincide with their opinions (Van der Meer et al., 2020). Likewise, elements can be found that cloud the conversation, such as trolls, both paid and spontaneous (Cheng et al., 2017; Eberwein, 2020; Mihaylov et al., 2018) and hate speech (Erjavec & Kovačič, 2012; Hughey & Daniels, 2013), although the definition of the latter is unclear (Reiners & Schemer, 2020).

Notwithstanding, a series of characteristics justify the study of these virtual spaces as scenarios where an important part of the public debate on otherness occurs. First, the frequent appearance of radicalized discourses in online comments makes them ideal resources for tracking the extreme representations of otherness that circulate socially. This becomes particularly interesting in the context of resurgent nationalisms (Brubaker, 2017) and hostility toward immigration (Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2018). Comment sections in online media have been studied by a significant number of researchers seeking to determine how nationalist and anti-immigrant narratives operate in them (Domínguez Romero, 2023; Hughey, 2012; Lee & Jo, 2024; Magano & D'Oliveira, 2023; Okten, 2022; Vuković Stamatović, 2022).

Specifically concerning racism, while this is not a new problem in the press, the virtuality of comment sections and their relative anonymity enables the expression of racial fantasies that remain off-limits in face-to-face environments, where interaction is more regulated (Hughey & Daniels, 2013). The covert racism that characterized the othering discourse prior to the rise of virtuality seems to have been replaced in these online spaces by a new standard according to which racist narratives no longer require masking, and the explicit claiming of racism is tolerated as a common practice (Eschmann, 2023; Ortiz, 2021).

Concerning the above, Giorgi accounts for the emergence of "*hate* as a key political affect of the present [...] that finds in the technological territory the conditions both technological and political to articulate itself" (Giorgi, 2018, p. 56). According to this perspective, hatred as affect and the particular forms assumed by discourse in virtual environments combine to give rise to new forms of enunciation. The emergence of these narratives accounts for the existence of forces that dispute and stress the democratic space, fracture the intercultural debate, and explain the emergence of violent and reactionary political processes.

Beyond the intrinsic characteristics of these spaces, one of the reasons that justify the study of online forums is the evidence of a bidirectional relation between virtual othering discourse and the episodes of racism and discrimination in real life. On the one hand, those who comment on the news are usually individuals with a vocation to participate in and influence the social discourse in different ways, so their opinions have a high possibility of influencing other people (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2017;

Valenzuela et al., 2012). Thus, virtual discourse about immigrants can anticipate the direction and tone of future debate on that topic in other forums. On the other hand, it has been shown that there is a statistically significant increase in online racism in the days immediately following racialized episodes that take place in real life (Eschmann et al., 2023).

As Martín-Barbero (1991) points out, media discourse cannot be addressed without considering its instances of circulation and interpretation. Knowledge of readers' comments and their relation to the context in which they emerge allows an approach to discourse from the point of view of social semiosis, understood by Verón (1993) as the signifying dimension of all social phenomena. According to this author, the notion of discourse cannot be approached without considering its contexts of production, circulation and recognition. First, because "all production of meaning is necessarily social: a signifying process cannot be satisfactorily described or explained without explaining its productive social conditions"; second, because "every social phenomenon is, in one of its constitutive dimensions, a process of production of meaning, regardless of the level of analysis" (Verón, 1993, p. 125).

Ultimately, unraveling the links between social context and discourse would make it possible to "make visible the social invisibility" hidden behind the naturalization of discourse about what is perceived as real (Pintos de Cea-Naharro, 1995, p. 106).

Chile has recently experienced an unprecedented increase in the foreign population. In 2002, it was home to 184 464 immigrants, mostly from Argentina (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 2003), a border country with which it shares a history of mobilities and whose population is generally racialized in positive terms, associated with whiteness and Europeanness in the place of destination (Baeza R. & Silva G., 2009; Thayer C. et al., 2013).

Two decades later, immigration has not only grown 804%, to 1 482 390 people but also comes mostly from Venezuela (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 2022b), a nation that, despite sharing a tradition of displacement with Chile—including the political exile caused by the civil-military dictatorship between 1973 and 1990 and the economic emigration of Chilean men and women during the same period (Rojas Mira, 2019)—is usually perceived by Chilean society as exotic, associated with non-whiteness and negative prejudices and stereotypes (Bahar et al., 2020).

Chile is the fourth most important destination of the Venezuelan exodus, totaling 7 131 435 people (Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela, 2022). The Venezuelan community in Chile comprises more than 440 000 people, representing 30% of the total immigrants. It is the largest foreign group at the national level and in half of the 16 regions into which the Chilean territory is politically divided (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 2022a).

Venezuelan immigration represents an unprecedented challenge for Chilean society, not only because of its recent and massive nature but also because of the historical and cultural characteristics of the destination country.

A great deal of the literature on the relation between cultural diversity and attitudes toward otherness suggests that in culturally diverse environments—such as those resulting from mass immigration—people tend to express more negative reactions toward those who belong to groups different from their own (Delhey & Newton, 2005; Laurence & Bentley, 2018; Putnam, 2007). Although such prejudices tend to decrease when individuals come into contact (Laurence, 2014; Pettigrew et al., 2010; Stolle et al., 2008), the recent nature of Venezuelan immigration in Chile, the limited

familiarity with receiving large immigration flows, and the strong individualistic features of Chilean culture—characterized by Klein (2007) as a full-scale laboratory of neoliberalism—would operate against the emergence of instances of bonding with immigrants and an eventual decrease in negative attitudes regarding immigration.

Indeed, Chile is a structurally racialized and unequal society (Bonhomme, 2023; Bonhomme & Alfaro, 2022; Bonhomme & Alfaro Muirhead, 2022), with significant levels of racism and xenophobia (Centro Nacional de Estudios Migratorios, 2019; Instituto Nacional de Derechos Humanos, 2017), something manifested even in the discourse of its authorities and public officials (Cociña Cholaki, 2020).

The idea of race is a persistent and significant aspect throughout Chilean history. Since the original organization of the national State, the attention to the mechanisms of construction of otherness has been addressed especially to what could be understood in schematic terms as internal non-whiteness, that is, to the non-whiteness embodied in people, practices and institutions historically present in the national territory. In the words of Correa Téllez:

> In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in a context of social crisis coupled with the public visibility of middle or popular social sectors, the constitution of a new "us" was sought in a version of national identity that would discursively incorporate them to the "other" in the figure of the "Chilean race" that would come to consolidate the myth of the homogeneity of the nation. (Correa Téllez, 2016, p. 43)

In that context, as indicated by Vetö (2014) and Subercaseaux (2007), a combination of political needs, social conditions, the rise of hygienist ideas and eugenics created the conditions for the idea of a homogeneous and aseptic race in which, almost magically, the Indigenous component is perfectly diluted within the European component, implicitly ensuring the negation of the conflict between the two and the subordination of the former to the latter. This idea prevailed during the first half of the twentieth century

> in fields as diverse as education, the fight against alcoholism, the promotion of sports, reflections on law and crime, the idea that a criminal could be driven by biological factors (according to the ideas of Lombroso), public hygiene in the form of eugenics, and racial hygiene. Several of the most pressing problems of the time (venereal diseases, infant mortality, alcoholism) were conceived as problems of race. In literature, the Creole sensibility sought to create literary types constructed based on ethnic and geographic determinism (Mariano Latorre) or to transform poetry into "a hymn to the race" (as Samuel Lillo did). The idea of the preservation and improvement of the race is implicitly or explicitly present in all these aspects, whether at the level of discourse, symbolic construction, or policy. This struggle and the fight against the factors that threatened it were the way to contribute to the nation's destiny. From this perspective, race and nation are essentially the same (Subercaseaux, 2007, p. 37).

In Chile, othering has historically focused on subjugating or making invisible the numerous members or descendants of the native population and their significance and influence in the local culture (Aravena & Baeza, 2017; Nahuelpan Moreno & Antimil Caniupán, 2019; Richards & Gardner, 2013; Waldman Mitnick, 2004), as well as

denying phenomena such as Afro-Chileanness (Báez Lazcano, 2018). Expanding on this approach, it may be possible to affirm, as proposed by Aravena Reyes and Baeza (2013) and Aravena Reyes and Silva Rivas (2009), that otherness in Chilean society has traditionally been embodied by a triad composed of the figure of women, that of immigrants of Peruvian origin, and that of people of Mapuche descent, or a dyad composed of the latter two.

Nevertheless, the massive immigration that Chile has received in the last twenty years seems to be altering this configuration. The focus of the construction of otherness in 21st-century Chile is shifting toward the non-white elements that arrive from outside the state borders in the form of immigration flows from the Caribbean and marked, racially, by African descent (Tijoux, 2014). Thus, the most evident recipient of the processes of otherization seems to be the external non-white, namely, the non-whiteness that enters the national territory from beyond the borders of the nation-state, especially embodied in the figure of the racialized immigrant.

The current moment in the historical construction of the other in Chilean society is no longer so much about the identification and characterization of the "internal enemies"—which would symbolize "the remoteness of the near"—but about the representations of immigrants, which would mean "the closeness of the distant" (Simmel, 2012, p. 21). Immigrants are the distant that becomes close because they burst into the daily life of the Chilean native population—the actions of both are mutually conditioned—but it is precisely in this coincidence that the elements that define them perceptually or imaginatively as belonging to another place are revealed (Sabido Ramos, 2012).

The above does not detract from the fact that immigration and the figure of the foreigner have been the repository of othering imaginaries in several periods of Chilean history (Baeza R. & Silva G., 2009). Nonetheless, just as the country had never before received an immigration flow quantitatively comparable to the current one, neither in terms of social imagery had the foreign population aroused a debate comparable to the one currently seen.

The Chilean media system is strongly concentrated in the distribution of ownership of the press media—90% of which are controlled by the El Mercurio SAP and COPESA groups (Mönckeberg, 2009)—and in the influence this duopoly has in setting the news agenda (Gronemeyer & Porath, 2014). The flagship newspaper of the first conglomerate, El Mercurio SAP, is *El Mercurio*, the most influential newspaper in Chile. Traditionally associated with the political right, it tends to negatively represent communities such as indigenous peoples (Hudson & Dusaillant, 2018; Rodríguez-Pastene et al., 2020) and racialized immigrants (Póo F., 2009; Valenzuela-Vergara, 2019). The online version of El Mercurio, Emol (acronym of *El Mercurio Online*) is the most consulted online source and one of Chile's 15 most trusted news brands (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2021).[3]

There is a growing interest in Chilean international migration studies in the media discourse on immigration, although the available literature on the subject is still in its infancy.

Significant research has been carried out by Póo F. (2009), who analyzes imaginaries of Peruvian immigration in the Chilean press and finds othering tendencies in them

[3] Emol's URL is https://www.emol.com/

that oscillate between paternalistic compassion and criminalization; or Liberona Concha (2015), who finds a similar thematization—between stigmatization and the call to welcome immigration in an orderly manner—for the case of Bolivian immigration. In general, the results of these studies focused on the representation of traditional immigration from neighboring countries with an extended history of human mobility to Chile, reconstruct discourses that, although othering insofar as they consistently demarcate the difference between 'them' and 'us', lack the aggressiveness and racialization that can be seen in the representation of later immigration flows.

After 2017, studies began to focus largely on the media representation of the new immigrant contingents that arrived in the country from the middle of the second decade of the 21st century, especially Colombians and Haitians, whose prominent characteristic from the racial point of view is the strong Black component. Among others, Stang and Solano Cohen (2017) find a strong racial component in the thematization of Colombian immigration in Chilean television narrative. In this narrative, Colombian immigration is clearly referenced in the non-white, while Chileanness is associated with a whiteness that is threatened by the invasion of the former. Likewise, Bonhomme and Alfaro Muirhead (2022) studied the representation of Haitian and Colombian immigration in Chilean television and found a series of traits that link these groups to an essentially savage or violent culture.

Other research, such as that of Dammert and Erlandsen (2020), Ivanova and Jocelin-Almendras (2021) and Stefoni and Brito (2019)—although it does not focus specifically on an immigrant community—points out the racialization and criminalization of immigration in the Chilean media, and even the formation of a hegemonic discourse in the same regard, based on the overlapping of media and political discourses.

Bonhomme and Alfaro (2022) is the only study found that specifically analyzes readers' comments on digital platforms (about Haitian immigrants during the COVID-19 pandemic). The authors found in this type of discourse two forms of online racism—cultural and aggressive—through which the idea of the racial superiority of the population of Chilean origin to this immigrant community is constructed. They also identify representations that characterize the members of that community as disgusting and carriers of diseases. This hygienist conception of immigration has been found in different countries and eras (Kraut, 2010). Nevertheless, Bonhomme and Alfaro's research suggests that in Chile, the pandemic created the conditions for a particular development of these narratives within the framework of a colonial narrative that historically tended to make people of African descent invisible in Chile.

In this way, immigrants have been configured as a new other in Chilean society in the 21st century. Nonetheless, at least two aspects require further research. On the one hand, there is a lack of studies that analyze the media representation of the Venezuelan community, the largest immigrant group in Chile. On the other hand, there is little research on the participation of audiences in this semantization, a subject on which only one study, the aforementioned by Bonhomme and Alfaro (2022), was found.

Based on identifying these deficiencies, the present study—undertaken as part of a Fondecyt Research Initiation project on social imaginaries of the immigrant in the discourses of the online press and its audiences, for which the author is the main researcher—poses the following research questions. First, What is, in the context of the media, the participation of audiences in the production of discourses on recent immigration, especially that of Venezuelan origin? Second, How do social imaginaries operate in these discourses as forms of symbolic construction of immigrant otherness?

Finally, How are these discursive phenomena inscribed in the framework of formation processes of otherness and coloniality as they currently occur and have historically occurred in Chilean society?

Taking these questions as a starting point, this paper aims to analyze the content of Emol's readers' comments on Venezuelan immigration, to identify the social imaginaries about Venezuelan immigrants that this discourse reproduces, and to interpret them critically within the framework of the sociohistorical processes of the formation of otherness and in the context of coloniality in Chile.

Method

A qualitative content analysis was applied (Krippendorff, 2004), a technique that allows the heuristic and contextualized interpretation of the content of a discursive corpus with an interpretative framework defined by theory and previous evidence (in this case, constituted by the combination of the conception of discourse as a production of social reality, the theory of social imaginaries, and the sociohistorical processes of the construction of otherness and coloniality in Chile).

The corpus was selected using non-probabilistic and intentional sampling. First, all Emol newspaper articles published between December 30, 2021, and December 30, 2022 (to meet the criterion of the current relevance of the analyzed phenomenon), whose content explicitly referenced Venezuelan immigrants in Chile (to ensure its thematic relevance), were identified. For the latter, Emol's own search engine was used, and different variants of the demonym 'Venezuelan' were entered (singular, plural, masculine and feminine, in Spanish). Those results containing any of them but not referring to Venezuelan immigration in Chile were discarded. Seven articles with these characteristics were found (Guerra, 2002a, 2002b; Lagos B., 2022; Muñoz, 2022; Ramírez, 2021; Riquelme, 2022a, 2022b).

Subsequently, all the readers' comments (n = 1 796) published in these articles were processed, which formed the corpus to be analyzed. As Saldaña and Rosenberg (2020) point out, the comments sections in Emol News have become a channel for the unfiltered expression of readers' opinions. Although this organization claims to have personnel in charge of moderating violent, offensive, or inappropriate comments, this rarely occurs, making such sections an area of special interest to analyze in all their crudeness the discourses circulating in society on sensitive issues such as immigration.

Once the corpus had been selected, the qualitative content analysis was carried out. Atlas.ti software was used to assign a series of *ad hoc* codes to the significant discourse units—sentences or paragraphs—based on their content, according to the categories and subcategories of analysis defined from the theoretical-conceptual framework and the research questions and objectives. *In vivo* coding was applied, consisting of the instantaneous creation of codes as the information available from the textual selection of discourse fragments was analyzed.

For the selection and classification of these discourse units, the first category of analysis was the *imaginary of the immigrants from Venezuela*, choosing those textual fragments that showed the presence of certain culturally situated matrices or metacodes that enable the members of Chilean society to signify, endorse and relate to the figure of the immigrant from Venezuela, based on the definition of social imaginary

explained in the introductory section (Castoriadis, 2013; Pintos, 2004, 2005, 2014). In this way, 33 codes were obtained, each corresponding to a type of imaginary.

Afterward, the codes/imaginaries obtained as a result of this first classification were grouped into four subcategories of analysis: two of them according to the type of relation configured for the subject of these imaginaries (descriptive, when they are fundamentally described; or performative, when they are essentially called to action); and two more, for the gender of these subjects (imaginaries of the Venezuelan male immigrant, when the generic masculine is used in Spanish, or imaginaries of the Venezuelan female immigrant, when the feminine gender is specifically alluded to).

For this last classification, conceptualizing social imaginaries according to Castoriadis (2013) and Pintos (2004, 2005, 2014) as devices with descriptive and performative aspects were considered. Consequently, the following were identified: *a*) *descriptive imaginaries*, that is, those present in discourse units that contain to a greater extent a characterization of the immigrant of Venezuelan origin; and *b*) *performative imaginaries*, namely, those that underlie discourse units that mainly communicate a call to action or intervention in that subject.

Likewise, to address an analytical intention to account for the specific ways in which the discourses referred to the figure of the Venezuelan immigrant according to his or her gender, a distinction was made between: *a*) the *imaginaries of the Venezuelan male immigrant*—which appear in discourse units that use the generic masculine—; and *b*) the *imaginaries of the Venezuelan female immigrant*—which appear in discourse units that use the feminine.

Once the content of the discourse units and the types of imaginaries they reproduce were organized, they were interpreted within the framework of the construction processes of otherness and coloniality in Chile. The results of this analysis are presented in the following section.

Results

Table 1 shows the social imaginaries about immigrants of Venezuelan origin present in the comments of Emol audiences, ordered according to frequency of appearance and classified according to gender (generic masculine or feminine) and content (descriptive or performative). A total of 33 social imaginaries associated with 445 discourse units were identified. Most of them ($n = 23$) appear in discourse units that use generic masculine linguistic forms, while the rest ($n = 10$) are present in comments that refer specifically to women. Most ($n = 28$) are descriptive; the rest ($n = 5$) are performative.

The social imaginaries about Venezuelan immigrants underlying the discourse of Emol's audiences are mostly configured around a state-centric vision, according to which the stability and security of Chile would be threatened by the actions of internal powers that, *per se* or in alliance with external factors, would benefit the Venezuelan immigrant, considered as a destabilizing agent.

Table 1. Social imaginaries about Venezuelan immigrants in comments by Emol readers

Imaginary (the male/female Venezuelan immigrant...)	Gender	Content	*f*
is favored by the Chilean left or right wing	Generic male	Descriptive	113
is hideous or despicable	Generic male	Descriptive	50
should be expelled	Generic male	Performative	47
is or could be a criminal	Generic male	Descriptive	45
is favored by the Chilean justice system	Generic male	Descriptive	45
is voluptuous	Feminine	Descriptive	38
is or could be a drug trafficker	Generic male	Descriptive	33
is or could be a Chavista infiltrator	Generic male	Descriptive	30
is or could be part of an armed guerrilla group	Generic male	Descriptive	26
is from the Caribbean	Generic male	Descriptive	23
is favored by progressive discourses	Generic male	Descriptive	21
is beautiful	Feminine	Descriptive	19
is similar to the Colombian immigrant	Generic male	Descriptive	17
is or could be "illegal"	Generic male	Descriptive	14
is or could be bad for Chile	Generic male	Descriptive	13
is self-serving	Feminine	Descriptive	13
is similar to the Colombian immigrant	Feminine	Descriptive	12
is favored by the Jesuits	Generic male	Descriptive	9
is ugly or unpleasant	Feminine	Descriptive	8
is likable or helpful to men	Feminine	Descriptive	8
is from the Caribbean	Feminine	Descriptive	8
is favored by the United Nations	Generic male	Descriptive	8
should be imprisoned	Generic male	Performative	8
is of inferior racial stock, or is worsening the Chilean racial stock	Generic male	Descriptive	7
should be persecuted	Generic male	Performative	7
is invasive	Generic male	Descriptive	7
must be killed or eliminated	Generic male	Performative	6
is artificial or wears too much make-up	Feminine	Descriptive	6
is hot or sexy	Feminine	Descriptive	6
is a whore	Feminine	Descriptive	5
does not contribute to Chile	Generic male	Descriptive	5
we have to be hard on them	Generic male	Performative	5
is a murderer of Chileans	Generic male	Descriptive	4

Source: created by the author

In this semantic articulation, the most frequent imaginary is descriptive and is organized around the idea of the Venezuelan as an immigrant favored by the Chilean left or right wings. Similarly, there are also descriptive imaginaries that construct them as actors favored by the Chilean justice system, the Jesuits, or the United Nations, in which a conspiratorial ideology is manifested that points to a supposed programmatic agenda of the left in favor of Venezuelan immigration to Chile. When referring to

justice, these imaginaries are directed to the idea of due process. Likewise, it can be understood that the Jesuits are targeted because they constitute a sector of the Catholic Church linked to progressive positions, expressed in migratory matters through the Jesuit Migrant Service, an institution with high media and social exposure. The reference to the United Nations also has an interpretation linked to local politics since the former leftist president Michelle Bachelet served as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights between 2018 and 2022.

As can be seen in the following comments, beyond nuances in identifying the sector supposedly responsible for their arrival in the country, the decidedly negative evaluation of Venezuelan immigrants remains unalterable in these imaginaries.

> Ask SEBASTIÁN PIÑERA why he called Venezuelans on the border with Venezuela on February 22, 2019, in Cúcuta. He'll tell you that he wanted cheap labor for his business friends but that he didn't know that 250 thousand Venezuelan criminals were coming. Let SEBASTIÁN PIÑERA stop the wave of migrants we have now, all because of this old shit.[4] (Reader's comment in Guerra, 2022a)

> At last, I see that both TV and some newspapers like Emol are informing us of the nationality of the criminals and *narcos*. I think that with everything that has happened in recent months, they're losing their unfounded fear of saying where they are from, and they're also calling them criminals, not "people", as they constantly insisted on doing. The left is already losing little by little its power over the media; even the morning shows have removed several of their "presenters" who lean toward violence and ideologies that we already know who they belong to. (Reader's comment in Guerra, 2022a)

> I remember that judge in San Antonio who let the detainees go free with weapons and ammunition in their car. According to that parasite, the Carabineros "did not have authorization to inspect the car". Maybe the same thing will happen now, since at the end of 2021, they detained some *venecos* (Venezuelans) in an apartment in E. Central after a drone detected that inside the apartment, they were bagging cocaine. The judge said there were no grounds for detention as the drone surveillance had not been authorized. (Reader's comment in Guerra, 2022a)

> These ANTI-CHILEAN foreigners were BROUGHT by the PRIESTS of San Ignacio, Jesuit Communist TRAITORS Pedophiles, and protected by Goal 10: Reduction of Inequalities between Countries using Migration of the 2030 Agenda of the Communists of the UN: a 2030 agenda that will be incorporated for the Third time into the Constitution of the TRAITORS of the UDI, EVÓPOLI, and RN. (Reader's comment in Guerra, 2022a)

[4] When transcribing the comments, spelling errors were corrected to ensure their comprehension, but their content was not altered. The use of capital letters was also maintained.

> Chile's rulers are subjecting us to the UN's 2030 agenda. As a result of these agreements, Chile surrendered to the migration policy imposed by the UN and opened the door to drug trafficking and immigrant crime that has been entering Chile since 2012. Will Boric do something? I hardly think so because of his liberal thinking in favor of human rights only for criminals, but NOT for the victims who suffer daily from burglary, robbery with violence, destruction, drug trafficking, mercenaries, and so forth. (Reader's comment in Guerra, 2022a)

Another descriptive imaginary that acts in the same way as the previous ones attributes to Venezuelan immigrants the supposed favor of the progressive discourses on immigration that circulate in Chilean society. In this case, the audiences appeal to irony to highlight the idea that Venezuelan immigrants would contradict those discourses with their behavior, thus validating the existing negative prejudices about them. For example, in comments published in a news item about a Venezuelan immigrant allegedly linked to crimes in Chile, audiences characterize him as they believe progressive discourses would: a "cultural contribution", "social fighter and entrepreneur" who "will receive all the recognition of the government" or "pluricultural and plenipotentiary ambassador of the Chavista-Madurist Bolivarian People's Republic" (readers' comments in Guerra, 2022a).

The state-centric conception is reinforced by a series of imaginaries that are organized around the opposition between sameness-otherness or them-us (where the 'us' may appear explicitly or tacitly) and the construction of the Venezuelan immigrant as a hideous and despicable figure who invades Chile, altering peace and security.

One of them—the second most frequent among all the imaginaries identified—is descriptive and consists of the characterization of immigrants as hideous or despicable, either because of their appearance, customs, behavior or for more diffuse reasons. It is noted that they believe that "they are going to save the world with *tequeños* (a typical Venezuelan snack) and their Neanderthal faces" (reader's comment in Ramírez, 2021), "nothing good can come from the Caribbean, Venezuelans are nefarious" (reader's comment in Lagos B., 2022), "*Venecos*, human degradation at its maximum, how I detest them" (reader's comment in Guerra, 2022a), or the following.

> I have worked with Venezuelans, and these *venecos* are a serious thing. You need to have enormous patience; they are servile, big-headed, complain to the Labor Inspectorate about anything, and so on. One often wonders if Chile is so shitty for them, then why and what they come for. (Reader's comment in Lagos B., 2022)

> These people are so trashy that the USA specifically prohibited the entry of Venezuelans into their country. The USA did not prohibit the entry of Haitians, Cubans or Colombians, it only BANNED the entry of VENEZUELAN TRASH!!! (Reader's comment in Guerra, 2022a)

If the second most frequent imaginary contributes to othering the figure of the Venezuelan immigrant by characterizing them negatively in tacit or explicit opposition to the Chilean 'us', the one that follows in the number of appearances in the discourse of Emol's audiences operates in the same manner, although in this case from a performative point of view, projecting the idea that it is necessary to take action and objectively separate them from the national territory. According to this imaginary,

Venezuelan immigrants must be expelled from Chile, but, in addition, sometimes this must be accompanied by an additional quota of suffering, as when it is stated about a Venezuelan soccer player of a Chilean club that "they should have let her go back to her country, a boat without oars would have been good enough" (reader's comment in Lagos B., 2022).

It would probably be a mistake to interpret these imaginaries in terms of concrete calls to action. The imaginary/discursive and the pragmatic/factual are interconnected but differentiated domains; what happens in one cannot be directly transposed to the other. Instead, as Giorgi points out,

> this discharge of fantasies is sustained rather by the reactive enjoyment that produces it. And that enjoyment in insult and violence against racialized others indicates one of the keys of what is conjured in this violent return of racism: that which marks a limiting moment of a certain idea of the democratic and of its capacity to resolve the conflicts generated by a neoliberal ordering of the social. (Giorgi, 2018, p. 59)

Likewise, in some cases, the idea of the need to expel the foreign element is represented hygienically, reinforcing the classification of Venezuelan immigrants in terms of waste, garbage, or filth, as in the following examples: "When are the 'cleaning' flights coming? That is, repatriation flights! There are too many illegals, too much fried street food, and too many trinket sellers making a mess of everything. That doesn't add up" (reader's comment in Guerra, 2022b); "*venecos* also shout that they 'demand respect'. So much garbage in Chile cries out for a new hygiene" (reader's comment in Guerra, 2022a).

It is difficult to analyze the emergence of these imaginaries of cleanliness applied to the racialized immigrant element without considering the importance, as highlighted by Vetö (2014) and Subercaseaux (2007), for hygienist ideas of the eugenic discourse and the idea of a homogeneous and aseptic race as pillars of the configuration of the Chilean national identity between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Furthermore, it becomes clear—with the figure of the "cleansing flights", which refers to the so-called "death flights" used to disappear people during the Chilean, Argentine and Uruguayan civil-military dictatorships, but also with the questioning of the principle of "respect" for the other—that what is under debate is the dismantling of the democratic order—. Back to Giorgi:

> This idea of democracy against which these statements are combined is inseparable from what appears here as a common enemy: human rights. As if the movement and the very sign of human rights indicated [...] a democratic pact that these comments systematically want to undo. It is the democratic conscience that emerges as a counterpart to state terrorism that is disputed here. (Giorgi, 2018, p. 59)

Within the same group are those descriptive imaginaries that criminalize Venezuelan immigrants, associating them with criminality, drug trafficking or irregular migration, which is mostly called "illegal". For example, some of the discourse units analyzed point out: "THE IMPORTATION OF *VENECOS* HAS ONLY BROUGHT FILTH AND MOTORCYCLES WITH THIEVES EVERYWHERE"; "there go the *venekos* [*sic*], as if they were in their own house, assaulting, extorting, charging for protection, kidnappings are coming later, this country has regressed at least 20 years with the wave of

migration" (readers' comments in Guerra, 2022a); "an individual of Venezuelan nationality who is in our country irregularly... An illegal criminal, like the 2 million illegals who saturate the country with their fried street food and zero contribution" (reader's comment in Guerra, 2022b). Other examples of the presence of this imaginary are presented below.

> One more day of crime and drugs, we see on TV and news reports neighborhoods and communities that were once places of rest invaded by crime. What is the common denominator? VENEZUELANS. Please stop the entry of migrants and expel the irregulars and those who commit crimes so everything can return to normal. (Reader's comment in Guerra, 2022a)

> Venezuelans, Colombians and Dominicans, highly dangerous criminals who enter our country with total indifference and under the complacent gaze of our authorities. The current laws do not work to attack these criminals; a radical change is urgently needed; enough of so many benefits and kid gloves for these criminals. (Reader's comment in Guerra, 2022a)

On the other hand, two descriptive imaginaries can be observed, contributing to subtracting specificity from Venezuelan immigration, diluting it within broader groups imagined as other for the Chilean national identity. One of them characterizes Venezuelan immigrants as Caribbean; the other considers them as similar or undifferentiated with respect to Colombian immigrants. The latter can be seen in the previous quote, where, in addition, Dominicans, perhaps also considered Caribbean, are included in the same group; or also in the following comment, where an original ethnic group is included as an object of the construction of otherness: "Venezuelans, Colombians and Mapuches, the worst of the human race infecting Chile" (reader's comment in Guerra, 2022a). In both cases, the connotation of this classification is, once again, decidedly negative, as is also verified in the following example.

> For those who say that Caribbean immigration contributes to our country, it would be good for them to explain the exact contribution of these individuals to our welfare and development. Let them put an end once and for all to the good-natured and condescending postures toward this kind of immigrants. If for every three one bad one enters, the tap must be definitively turned off. (Reader's comment in Guerra, 2022a)

Regarding certain national ideologies, another group of imaginaries contributes to characterize the Venezuelan immigrant as an infiltrator of the Chavista regime; a member of an armed guerrilla group that seeks to sow chaos in Chilean territory; bad for Chile; of a bad race, or responsible for worsening the Chilean race; an invader; someone who does not contribute to Chile; a murderer of Chileans. Here are some examples: "Why do they illegally bring weapons of war into Chile? Obviously, to make war, weapons are used to kill; if they bring them to Chile, it is to kill Chileans. Communism does not change; 50 years ago, they did exactly the same"; "When is a *Venezuelan/Narcolombian* not involved in drugs? That race is bad" (reader's comments in Guerra, 2022a); "From my point of view, they should all go! They don't contribute, and now they only cause trouble!" (reader's comment in Lagos B., 2022).

Of particular interest among these imaginaries is the one that refers to the Venezuelan immigrant as a member of a bad race or responsible for worsening the Chilean race.

As noted above, the idea of a Chilean race is an elaboration that began to take shape between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in response to the need to homogenize the national identity around the idea of whiteness, silencing Indigenous identities under that fiction and thus excluding them from the stories about the nation. Today, the danger of internal heterogeneity having been diluted, the idea is once again gaining strength in the face of the invasion of an external enemy that would endanger the homogeneity of the Chilean race.

As a corollary to the above, a series of performative imaginaries draw a profile of the Venezuelan immigrant as someone who should be imprisoned, persecuted, killed or eliminated, or given a hard time: "How many there will be like this murderous trafficker. They should make a special jail for this marvel of immigrants, and hopefully they will kill each other in there"; "all the homes of Venezuelans and Colombians should be raided, to give us a little peace and to send a signal to those twisted people, that should be now"; "HEY, WHAT'S GOING ON? SOLDIERS, MAKE IT QUICK AND THROW ALL THESE SHITS OUT. IF NOT, THEN WE, THE CIVILIANS, WILL BE THE ONES TO DO THE *STRIKING*"; "No, no planes, a death march to Colchane or throw them in sealed trucks and gas them, that is the best solution"; "We have to give these *venecos* a hard time" (readers' comments in Guerra, 2022a). Again, as the previous examples show, fantasies of eliminating 'the others' appear.

On the other hand, the imaginaries about Venezuelan female immigrants are entirely descriptive and are mostly based on their physical appearance. In this regard, the most frequent is to define them based on the voluptuousness of their bodies, hypersexualized, often in comparison with Chilean women, who, when they appear explicitly in this imaginary, do so as their opposite: less attractive, but perhaps also less available for use as objects of consumption.

In turn, the voluptuous is, in most cases, expressed through references to the size of the Venezuelan woman's buttocks, which, to the extent that it deviates from the normal, enters the realm of the monstrous. The segmentation of the body, in the manner of an animal carcass, favors its dehumanization and its availability for male consumption or pleasure. Some examples of the presence of this imaginary in the comments analyzed are as follows: "Venezuelan women's buttocks wreak havoc"; "it is simply the attraction for the flesh, wherever it is. Not only on the grill"; "find yourself a Venezuelan hottie now! Don't waste time with our own sluts, ugly bitches! If you don't get many neurons, at least you'll get a good 'A-hole', otherwise you'll get neither 'A-hole' nor neurons"; "Compare the BUTT of a VENEZUELAN or COLOMBIAN with that of a CHILEAN, and you'll understand the result of this research" (readers' comments in Ramírez, 2021).

The second most frequently recorded imaginary is more subtle. Nonetheless, it is also based on a valuation of the bodily attributes of the Venezuelan female immigrant, who is in this case characterized as beautiful: "It is clear that Chilean men prefer Venezuelan women; they are much more beautiful than Chilean women"; "Venezuelan women are pretty, I do not know any ugly Venezuelan woman"; "aesthetically, Venezuelan women, together with Colombian women, are unbeatable" (readers' comments in Ramírez, 2021).

Within this same group, two imaginaries portray the Venezuelan female immigrant in clearly negative terms: one of them defines her as ugly or unpleasant, the other as artificial or wearing too much make-up. In contrast to the previously mentioned imaginary, these are based on the idea that Venezuelan female immigrants have a naturally

unsightly appearance, which they strive to conceal artificially without achieving their purpose. Moreover, the conception of ugliness appears explicitly associated with characteristics such as non-white raciality. Again, in some cases, there is a comparison with the Chilean woman, who, in contrast, is described as closer to the ideal of whiteness and its associated values, such as delicacy and refinement.

The following discourse units show some examples of the presence of these imaginaries in the discourse of Emol's audiences: "I HAVE NEVER SEEN A HOT VENEZUELAN. THEY ARE ALL UGLY, DEFORMED, UNPLEASANT, STINKING, AND HOLLOW; I HAVE EVEN SEEN NICE PERUVIAN AND BOLIVIAN WOMEN, BUT THOSE FAT CHAVISTA WOMEN.... NAAAAH, I'LL PASS"; "A pretty and natural Venezuelan is really rare! Almost all of them are dumpy, dark, and wearing more makeup than a circus clown! Screaming bitches! I wouldn't change my beautiful, more slender, whiter, and more delicate Chilean girls!"; "BIG PLASTIC ASSES, DEFORMED, HUGE AND STINKY, BYE-BYEEEEE" (readers' comments in Ramírez, 2021). Another example is given below.

> As for me, to find a graceful Venezuelan woman who is not the stereotypical screaming bitch, not very feminine, with coarse and marked mulatto features, a poorly proportioned body structure, more groomed than a racehorse, ughhh... The Chilean women, by faaaar, are more slender, white, feminine, educated and have nice hair... by far, my beautiful Chilean women! The best of Latin America. (Reader's comment in Ramirez, 2021)

The third most frequent imaginary concerning Venezuelan female immigrants characterizes them as self-serving, seeking to marry Chilean men so that they can bring more immigrants of the same nationality to Chile, for money or to achieve greater stability in their immigration status. Underlying this imaginary, again, is the idea that Chile is a country coveted by Venezuelan immigrants, who would come to enjoy its supposed advantages.

This can be seen in the following examples: "Venezuelan women who will soon bring their 'cousin' and 'nephews' to you, hehehehe"; "What can a Venezuelan woman and a Haitian man offer you in Chile? Or is it simply a convenience to regularize their papers? Everyone out for himself, but evidently they take great risks"; "Venezuelan women only looking for money. Open your eyes"; "residency, yes, by 'link with Chile man.' But looking for that, they get pregnant. The child is then registered with Chilean nationality, and then they ask for residency by link with a Chilean (the child). It is textbook stuff and highly recommended in foreigners' forums" (readers' comments in Ramírez, 2021). The same can be seen in the following comment, where, in addition, the epithets "Dantean", "banana eaters" and "cavemen" associate once again the figure of the Venezuelan female and male immigrants with the characters of the hideous and the completely other.

> You don't know what a mess those 543 got themselves into. In a few years or so, we will see those same 543 asking for a divorce or bringing their "supposed cousins" and "supposed brothers and sisters" from Venezuela, hahahaha. Unfortunately, three relatives in my family made that mistake; believe me, it is a dreadful mess. Chilean men and women are nothing compared to these banana-eating cavemen. (Reader's comment in Ramírez, 2021)

Two other imaginaries that appear relatively frequently represent Venezuelan female immigrants as similar or undifferentiated to Colombian female immigrants, and as of Caribbean origin, which, as pointed out with respect to Venezuelan immigrants, contributes to detracting from their specificity and, therefore, depersonalizing them.

Finally, three imaginaries have been found that communicate an idea once again centered on male pleasure and the use of the female body for its realization. One of them represents the Venezuelan female immigrant as friendly or helpful to men; the second, as hot or sensual; the third, as a prostitute. Some examples of their presence in the comments analyzed are below: "They contribute zero. I have coworkers who use whores, and they tell me that Chilean whores have been replaced by Colombian and Venezuelan ones, and that the *cafés con piernas* (cafés with scantily-clad waitresses to attract male customers) are full of these foreign whores"; "That's why the brothels are full of Venezuelan women (I have been told)"; "Venezuelan women take care of their man like a king, Chilean women are waiting for the moment to demand alimony and go with the next gullible man, just ask Fariña"; "Chilean men married to Venezuelan women? What a woman, what a body, what a female. And hotter than Satan's furnace. There is no possible comparison with the ugly, prudish, hypocritical, prim, shy, reserved Chilean women" (readers' comments in Ramírez, 2021).

As can be seen in these quotations, once again, a comparison is made between Venezuelan and Chilean women, where, although the former is more appreciated, it is to the extent that she is perceived as a more easily moldable and exploitable resource for the consumption of Chilean men. This can also be seen in the following example.

> Good for Chilean men! Venezuelan and Colombian women are some of the most attractive, feminine and helpful women. They are more traditional and conservative regarding relationships between men and women. They don't have that feminist nonsense. And not to mention the passion they [express] in intimate moments. If you have to define the perfect woman, they are Venezuelan and Colombian. Congratulations to all those Chileans who married all those great women. (Reader's comment in Ramírez, 2021)

As can be seen in the last examples, the wording implies a dehumanization of the Venezuelan immigrant woman, characterized in terms of an animal or a thing. This characterization reflects imaginaries through which the Venezuelan woman is inserted in a certain genealogy of a biological and cultural type, a genealogical line imagined as radically different from her own. Such difference, in turn, finds a unique form of possible coexistence in the subordination of the inhuman to the human. In other words, according to Giorgi, what prevails here is

> the racialization of bodies and identities, that is, the transcription of class, gender, and sexual antagonisms (antagonisms of what we call "social constructions", genderor class) into immediately biopolitical distinctions, which transcend biological and racial inheritance through the "nature" that demarcates the very limits of the human. (Giorgi, 2018, p. 58)

Conclusions

The main contribution of this study is the identification and analysis of specific ways in which the figure of the Venezuelan immigrant is perceived and semantized in a specific type of discourse: the readers' comments of Chile's main online news media. In this regard, it has been possible to prove that social imaginaries through which the immigrant of Venezuelan origin is semantically constructed as the otherness of the national underlie the comments published under Emol's news articles, appealing to socio-historically constructed representations of the nation, its us and its others.

Such figures are generally anchored in coloniality, an architecture common to the formation of all Latin American states. Based on this meta-schema, anything that departs from the Eurocentric ideal of whiteness is systematically instituted as an other and excluded from the narratives that support national identity. This pattern, however, is not repeated identically in every context. At different historical moments, each state gives rise to national formations of otherness, situated ways of othering those who escape white or European categories. Consequently, the content of the imaginaries identified in the comments of Emol's audiences about Venezuelan residents in Chile has specificities given by the particular forms that coloniality has assumed and continues to assume in this country.

In their descriptive aspect, the social imaginaries analyzed mostly represent Venezuelan immigrants as favored by power, invaders and disruptors of the order and peace that would have characterized Chile prior to their arrival, in an eminently state-centric reading that speaks of the persistence of nationalism and closed conceptions of the national. Furthermore, it associates the appearance, customs, culture and other features of the identity of these immigrants with concepts of hideousness and despicability, that is to say, irreconcilably alien. The latter is constituted as such to the extent that it moves away from the ideal of whiteness through explicit or implicit references to race. On the other hand, the performative face of such imaginaries complements and reinforces the above, constituting a call to action or, more concretely, to persecution, removal from the national territory, and, ultimately, the elimination of those who are semantically instituted as non-white others.

On the other hand, there is a differential symbolic construction of the Venezuelan female immigrant, defined based on a conception where it is no longer only the nation that is in the vertebral axis, but more specifically, the Chilean man as a patriarchal institution, core of meaning and action, moral judge, and center of pleasure. Nationalism and patriarchalism congregate in this social imaginary, which oscillates between decidedly negative representations and others that communicate the idea that if the Venezuelan woman is good, she is only so insofar as she is more available than the Chilean woman for the immediate satisfaction of male pleasure. The Venezuelan female immigrant is thus portrayed as an instrument that substitutes for those aspects in which the Chilean woman does not lend herself to exploitation.

The content of the imaginaries broken down in this study reflects the current state assumed by the sociohistorical processes of construction of otherness in Chile in the context of Venezuelan immigration that is perceived as a threat to the ideology around which the characteristics of the national have traditionally been deployed. Accordingly, the analysis helps reconstruct, from the imaginaries that construct the figure of the Venezuelan immigrant in Chile as an other, the identifications of the Chilean national identity around values that act as opposites or obverses of that otherness.

Thus, it is possible to interpret that if the immigrant of Venezuelan origin is imagined as favored by power, associated with criminality, abjection and voluptuousness, Chilean society imagines itself as unprotected by its institutions, respectful of the law, honorable and austere, something that can be appreciated more clearly in those discourse units in which the self-perception emerges explicitly.

Likewise, in an overarching manner, the imaginaries analyzed are constructed around the idea of race as an element from which the human is differentiated from the inhuman. This dichotomy is part of a long history of racism in Chile, where the idea of the Chilean race subsumes the multiple indigenous identities and corporealities. A good part of the national identity is founded in the fiction of Chilean racial exceptionalism. This national identity is currently perceived as threatened by the massive arrival of racialized immigrants. In the context of this perceptual meta-schema, the Chilean race is endangered by the invasion of an inhuman and hideous otherness, which legitimizes the persecution and even the elimination of that other.

Between both reductionisms, an urgent issue emerges, raised by Latin American decolonial theory: the problem of incorporating into the public debate those who are excluded from this debate: the non-white subjects and collectives themselves who, from both inside and outside the nation, strive to impose their own discourses and are systematically occluded by the logic of coloniality. The problem becomes more urgent with the advance of reactionary political movements, which take advantage of and encourage this type of narrative to reach power, straining democratic coexistence and fracturing the possibility of intercultural dialogue.

From the point of view of studies on immigration in Chile, the research results are part of a recent line of investigations that address the media representation of the most recent immigration flows that have arrived in the country, such as the Colombian, the Haitian and the Venezuelan. Although the latter had remained underexplored until now, the findings of the study are largely complementary to those obtained in the case of the Haitian and Colombian communities in a degree of hostility that contrasts with the more subtly othering and to some extent paternalistic discourses with which the journalistic discourse characterized the traditional immigration from Bolivia or Peru. Likewise, the study helps to identify a series of gender imaginaries that provide some clarification on how female immigration is represented in these environments, something that was also underrepresented in the available literature.

From the point of view of journalistic discourse studies, the results coincide with the literature that considers the comments sections of online news as a space of interest for analyzing the circulation of otherness and hate speeches in society. This is a virtual arena where that which is probably not acceptable in other contexts surfaces in

all its crudeness, giving rise to discourses loaded with racism and xenophobia. It is a problematic site from the point of view of the ideals of transparency and democratization that rule public debate, but unavoidable if one wishes to reach a certain degree of understanding about the advance of hate speech, racism and xenophobia.

Regarding the limitations of the study, first of all, it should be mentioned that it is one of the first works to analyze the representations of immigration in the discourse of the audiences and also one of the first to investigate the imaginaries of Venezuelan immigration in the Chilean press, which implies a lack of background information that affects the product of this research. Hence, beyond its analytical intention and the will to deepen the contextualization of the phenomenon that characterizes this article, it is valid to consider it an exploratory study, a preliminary approach that future studies should complement.

Another limitation is the small size of the corpus. Although *El Mercurio* is the most important newspaper in Chile, and its digital edition, Emol, is the most consulted online source in the country, a comparative study with comments from audiences of other Chilean online media could provide nuances beyond this research's scope. Something similar occurs with respect to the immigrant community; although the analysis of the imaginaries of Venezuelans is justified because they are the largest immigrant nationality in number, the study could be enriched if it included other nationalities stigmatized in Chile, such as Colombians or Haitians, or others, such as Argentines, who have traditionally been the repository of positive imaginaries, associated with aspects such as whiteness and Europeanness.

Finally, and regarding the possible projections of the study, it would be desirable to consider not only the audiences' discourse but also their interaction with the media's discourse, something also beyond this article's scope. Considering the violence and crudeness of the comments analyzed in this research, it could be hypothesized that there is a collaborative relation according to which the media demarcates the frame, directing the focus of attention toward immigrants, and the audiences take charge of negatively characterizing this segment of the population. In other words, constrained by the professional requirements of neutrality in the treatment of information and therefore unable to characterize the figure of the immigrant in an openly negative tone, the media leaves this more controversial task to the audiences and takes advantage of the freedoms granted by the comments sections.

Nevertheless, this is a merely heuristic proto-hypothesis, which should be reformulated and, in any case, tested in future research. Therefore, it would be desirable to explore how both discourses complement, dialogue and collaborate or, on the contrary, oppose each other in the reproduction of certain social imaginaries about immigrants.

Finally, there is a lack of studies on the media representation of a type of borderline and traditional immigration that, unlike Peruvian or Bolivian immigration, is racialized in positive terms, that is, associated with whiteness or Europeanness. Research on these characteristics could shed light on the contrasting ways in which immigrants are imagined and represented in terms of their adaptation to the racial stereotypes on which the coloniality of power is based in Latin America and in Chile particularly.

Acknowledgments

This article is part of the Fondecyt Research Initiation Project No. 11230990, entitled "Media, framing and construction of otherness in the Chile of mass immigration: social imaginaries about the immigrant in the discourses of the online press and its audiences", for which the author is the main researcher. The author thanks the Chilean Agencia Nacional de Investigación y Desarrollo (ANID) for supporting and funding this project.

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Jose Navarro-Conticello
Argentine. PhD in human sciences from the Universidad de Talca, Chile. Researcher at the Universidad de Talca, Chile, member of the Study Group on Borders and Regions (Gefre) of the Universidad de Buenos Aires. Research lines: social imaginaries, otherness, media, migration and borders. Recent publication: Rivero, P. J. & Navarro-Conticello, J. (2020). Migraciones y movilidades de argentinos: revisión crítica de un campo de estudios en desarrollo, 1960-2020. *Revista Páginas*, *13*(31). https://doi.org/10.35305/rp.v13i31.474