The securitization process in the Paraná Tri-Border Area

El proceso de securitización en la Triple Frontera del Paraná

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Abstract

This article aims to reconstruct the transformations of the securitization process in the Paraná Tri-Border Area from the late 1970s to 2023. Based on critical security studies and with the use of the securitization category, a historical journey is carried out to show the construction of the Argentine border security policy from the return of democracy to the security practice of closing borders due to the pandemic. By adopting an ethnographic perspective, findings from three fieldwork stays, documentary analysis of Argentine and regional border regulations, and media news tracking are incorporated to show that the process of border securitization has been transforming and reconfiguring according to the historical moment because the fear of threats changes over the decades.

Keywords: securitization, border control, Paraná Tri-Border Area, border closures, state.

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo reconstruir las transformaciones del proceso de securitización en la región de la Triple Frontera del Paraná desde fines de la década de 1970 hasta 2023. A partir de los estudios críticos de la seguridad y con el uso de la categoría de securitización se lleva a cabo un recorrido histórico para mostrar la construcción de la política argentina de seguridad fronteriza desde el retorno de la democracia hasta la práctica securitaria del cierre de fronteras debido a la pandemia. Mediante la adopción de una perspectiva etnográfica se incorporan hallazgos de tres estancias de trabajo de campo, el análisis documental de la normativa fronteriza argentina y regional, y el rastreo de noticias de medios de comunicación para mostrar que el proceso de securitización

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de las fronteras se ha ido transformando y reconfigurando según el momento histórico debido a que el miedo por las amenazas cambia a lo largo de las décadas.

Palabras clave: securitización, control fronterizo, Triple Frontera del Paraná, cierre de fronteras, estado.

Introduction

In the province of Misiones, one of the twenty-three provinces of Argentina, slightly more than three quarters of its borders are international. The so-called Paraná Tri-Border Area lies in the extreme northwest of its territory, where the Argentine city of Puerto Iguazú to the southeast, the Brazilian city of Foz do Iguaçu to the northeast, and the Paraguayan cities of Ciudad del Este and Presidente Franco to the west of the region converge. The Iguazú-Foz do Iguaçu border crossing is near the Tancredo Neves International Bridge, which crosses the Iguazú River and joins Argentina and Brazil. On the Argentine side are the National Directorate of Migration, the General Directorate of Customs, the National Agri-Food Health and Quality Service and the Argentine National Gendarmerie. On the other hand, a couple of kilometers from the bridge, the Puerto Iguazú-Puerto Tres Fronteras river crossing that connects Argentina with Paraguay is located in Puerto Iguazú. The same institutions mentioned above are located there, except for the Argentine National Gendarmerie, replaced by the Argentine Naval Prefecture.

The Paraná Tri-Border Are has been linked to a wide range of activities such as terrorism, smuggling, human trafficking, money laundering and irregular migration. The causes attributed to all these *illicit* activities are communities from various countries (especially those of Syrian-Lebanese origin), the connection of highly frequented routes and the supposedly scarce control at border crossings, among others. In addition to the fact that three national states converge there, there is also the image of the border regions themselves. Borders can be, as Das and Poole (2008) point out, a type of margin depicted as chaotic, dangerous and disorderly, where uncertainty reigns and where the national state "is constantly redefining its ways of governing and legislating" (p. 24). The continuous representation of the State's vision of geographic borders as the beginning or end of the national territory in relation to others also reinforces political, economic and symbolic limits. Through the intensification of border control, nation states combat the *discomfort produced by threats* with an extensive mobilization of security professionals and practices.

When the World Health Organization defined the coronavirus outbreak as a pandemic in March 2020, the Argentine government, in line with most countries, decided to carry out an exceptional measure with a magnitude never reached before. This measure consisted of closing the land borders to stop mobility and crossings between countries, which meant trying to prevent an unknown virus from crossing the border. The author of this article conceives the closing of borders as a security practice that is part of a historical process of securitization of borders taking place in the afore-

mentioned region. Robert Castel's (2013) concern for the differential novelty of the comparison between current insecurity and previous forms offers an interpretative key to inquire into the specific practice of border closure through a historical reconstruction to understand the particularities of a larger scale process. This author states that a genealogy, or what is also called a problematization, introduces "a *critical* reading of contemporary social reality: the social world is not something simply given, its articulations are not obvious, they are rooted in power relations sometimes deeply rooted in history" (Castel, 2013, p. 98, italics added).[1]

Thus, this paper aims to reconstruct the securitization process on the Argentine side of the Paraná Tri-Border from the late 1970s to 2023. The argument is that the securitization process of the Paraná Tri-Border has undergone significant transformations over the last five decades according to the prevailing local, regional and global context, based on new connections between threats produced not by substitution but by accumulation. This is a security-based process that presents the region as an insecure and chaotic place. This process is analyzed through a historical overview of the socio-political changes in the border security policy in Argentina, from the last military dictatorship to the closing of borders due to the coronavirus pandemic. How have security threats been generated in the region? How has the Argentine securitization process been carried out on the Paraná Tri-Border? What are the particularities of border closure as a practice that are also part of a broader process? The next section presents some theoretical and methodological aspects considered for the analysis being developed. The subsequent section traces a historical journey around the construction of Argentine border policy in the 20th century through two sections: one referring to the last civic-military-ecclesiastical dictatorship from 1976 to 1983, and one that begins with the restoration of democracy and the integrationist processes. The section that follows reconstructs and analyzes the transformations of the securitization process in the Paraná Tri-Border. In the penultimate section, the closing of borders as a practice that is part of the securitization process is problematized. Finally, the conclusions wrap up the arguments that have been developed and propose a reflection to continue the discussions on border control.

Securitization as a response to fear: theoretical and methodological aspects

From the work of Wæver (1995) and Buzan (1997), some authors have employed the category of securitization for their work on the Paraná Tri-Border from the field of international relations (De Castro, 2020; De Souza, 2017; Lammerhirt, 2018; Purmann, 2020; Thomazoni, 2018). Wæver and Buzan are the referents of the so-called Copenhagen School, focused on the discursive dimension and speech acts of topics such as international security, strategic studies and peace research. In this paper, instead,

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[1] Robert Castel takes Michel Foucault's modes of knowledge construction to speak of genealogy and problematization.

contributions from authors such as Bigo (2002, 2008), Balzacq (2008), Neal (2009), Salter and Piché (2011), Menjívar (2014) and Skleparis (2016) are considered, most of whom are part of the critical studies of security, grouped in the aforementioned School of Paris. It is presently referred to as the PARIS approach—an acronym for Political Anthropological Research for International Sociology—and can be rendered as political-anthropological research for international sociology, which draws on the localisms and essentialisms of *schools* in security studies (Bigo & McCluskey, 2018). While Copenhagen and the Aberystwyth[2] School have overlaps with developments in political theory, the PARIS approach positions itself in disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and law by investigating policing as a structuring practice, the politicization of social insecurities and the structuring of internal security fields (C. A. S. E. Collective, 2006).

The securitization category refers to the set of security discourses and practices deployed in response to issues constructed as dangerous and threatening to a given social groupage. As Pereira and Domenech (2021) point out, with a specific focus on the securitization of migration, the PARIS approach:

> Does not rule out the importance of speech acts and the role of political professionals in migration securitization, the emphasis shifts to the study of the practices produced by security professionals, police, border control agents and the military, as well as the technologies of control and surveillance. Within this framework, some perspectives incorporate Bourdieusian (field and *habitus*) and Foucauldian (governmentality) theoretical elements to understand the processes of securitization. (Pereira & Domenech, 2021, pp. 287-288)

The creation of practices that are part of the processes of securitization is based on fear and on the uneasiness of a social group about something or someone. The construction of fear, as Reguillo establishes, is conceived as "an individually experienced, socially constructed and culturally shared experience" (Reguillo, 2000, p. 66). In line with this notion, Didier Bigo (2002) proposes the expression *governmentality of discomfort*, which draws on some of Foucault's contributions,[3] understood as the government used by institutions and their professionals to reaffirm themselves as those capable of providing security and protection. Andrew Neal (2009) takes up the notion of *governmentality of discomfort* to show that, although there is a whole scenario of political theater of securitization, it is necessary to resort to the norm-exception

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[2] This Welsh school does not show a clear division with the Copenhagen school (Wæver, 2004), and has Ken Booth and Richard Wyn Jones as its main referents. In addition to peace research in its political agenda, it takes as its object of analysis the "real threats" in an emancipatory format, which distinguishes it from those expressed by the state.

[3] The notion of governmentality is provided by Michel Foucault in his book *Security, Territory, Population*, and refers to the

> set of institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific—although very complex—form of power that has as its main target the population, as a major form of knowledge the political economy, and as an essential technical instrument the security apparatuses. (Foucault, 2006, p. 136)

dialectic and concern oneself with that continuous process of normalization of the practices of professionals.

Discourses and practices sustain the exercise of government over populations through fear and unrest in a field of power disputes that are part of a broad securitization process. Border regions are continuously securitized because, as Agnew explains, there is a *territorial trap* that reinforces the idea of spatiality of power by fulfilling three geographical assumptions: the representation of territorial state power through sovereignty; the domestic and the foreign seen as separate matters with their own rules; and the forced coincidence between state limits and society limits, where society is contained in the state territory (Agnew, 2009, p. 22). Power at national borders is executed through many security apparatuses that respond to the supposed threats to national order and territory.

The following lines analyze the process of securitization of the Argentine side of the Paraná Tri-Border Area through a historical review of the construction of the border security policy that culminated in the practice of border closure due to the coronavirus pandemic. Fieldwork material was used for this paper, which consisted of three sojourns that began with the progressive openings of border checkpoints due to the border closure between November 2021 and August 2022. The first trip took place on the Argentine side. It coincided with when, in early November 2021, after eighteen months of closure, all non-resident foreigners were authorized to enter the national territory after the Iguazú-Foz do Iguaçu border crossing had been operating for more than a month as a pilot test for the opening of the national borders. The second stay was between March and April 2022, and what the Argentine government called "normalization of the borders" took place, which referred to a simplification of the procedures to enter the territory due to the elimination of the sanitary category of *safe corridor*. The third and last stay was in August 2022. It took place both in the region of the Paraná Tri-Border and in the Bernardo de Irigoyen-Dionisio Cerqueira land crossing (Argentine and Brazilian cities, respectively), which is characterized by being a dry border not bounded by rivers.

From a socio-anthropological position, ethnography is conceived as a method, a perspective, and a type of text (Guber, 2001). The fieldwork consisted of non-directive interviews with people working in state institutions, as well as informal talks with some of them and also with people living in the region. On the other hand, it was nourished by participant observations that consisted of sojourns that allowed the examination of the dynamics occurring in the observation sites that are part of ongoing research. Part of a broader documentary analysis of laws, decrees, resolutions, provisions and regulations of the Argentine State referring to the construction of the Argentine border security policy from the late 1970s to 2023 was used, including binational and regional agreements and treaties. Finally, the analysis was complemented by tracking news from local and national media that contributed to the systematization of a corpus of information on border closures.

Production of borders and accumulation of threats: the construction of the Paraná Tri-Border

National order and foreign enemy

Decree 15385/1944, which constituted the *security zones* (Zonas de seguridad, 1944), and law number 18575, which established "the provisions tending to promote the sustained growth of the space adjacent to the international limit of the Republic" (Zonas y áreas de frontera, 1970), were legislative precedents sanctioned in other *de facto* governments that were continued in the border policy of the last civic-military-ecclesiastical dictatorship in Argentina. Between 1976 and 1983, the guidelines of that policy were the principles of defense of the homeland and the care of the nation in border areas. At that time, a repressive and collaborationist transnational matrix had been set up through Operation Condor, which was a "scaffolding with historical evolution that facilitated the extraterritorial activities of the national security dictatorships of the Southern Cone" (Slatman, 2016, p. 454). However, the existence of more consolidated dictatorships, such as those in Brazil and Paraguay, the disputes with Chile, and the continued construction of the Argentine national State, gave added importance to border regions during this period.

The territorial policy of the military governments was based on border disputes and continuous border redefinitions supported by arguments that revolved around the mutilation of the national soil and the diversion of national sentiment (Salamanca, 2014). The 1978 Fiscal Lands Law laid down the rules to regulate the demarcation, registration, adjudication, use and cession of fiscal lands in border areas. In addition, it proposed the elaboration of programs aimed at the habilitation of public lands "in areas selected according to their conditions for use and occupation, considering the existing infrastructure" (Tierras fiscales, 1978), and thus promote development and settlement policies in border areas. Toward 1980, under the military government of Jorge Rafael Videla, law number 22.352 was passed, which created the border centers and defined them as complexes comprising demarcated areas close to an authorized international crossing point and "national organizations whose mission is to control the transit of people, transport and merchandise, to and from the country" (Centros de Frontera, 1980), with the obligation that a member of the armed forces be in charge of them.

In the field of education, in addition to civics and history, geography was presented as a useful curricular space to reaffirm nationalist sentiments in children. Conceived as "a place of circulation and sedimentation of discourses produced in the broader intellectual and cultural field" (Quintero, 2002), it reproduced certain imaginaries about sovereignty, nation and homeland in young people. An initiative of the National Gendarmerie called "Argentines! Let us march to the borders", organized together with the Ministry of Education, was used to select students between 16 and 18 years old to send them to border areas to participate in "various activities of affirmation of sovereignty, tributaries of territorial nationalism" (Lvovich, 2009). This relationship

between youth and armed forces on the borders not only remained, but in 1979 the National Gendarmerie itself undertook the creation of the Children's Gendarmerie, with the purpose of "concentrating the youth subject to the most diverse influences; orienting them, bringing them together and removing them from any negative factor that could make our youth, teenagers and children prone to any kind of deviation" (Lvovich & Rodriguez, 2011, p. 7). Thus, the last Argentine military dictatorship focused on border regions to exercise national sovereignty, reinforcing the discourse on the idea of defending the nation. It insisted on training teachers in provincial and national history and geography, on the investment of 80 million pesos in border areas for cultural activities with arguments aimed at the struggle to stop cultural penetration, and on the strengthening of national culture and the fear of losing these areas (Rodríguez, 2015), to homogenize the *national culture*. Such culture was to be transferred to all corners of Argentine soil as argued by Julio César Gancedo, who was Secretary of State for Culture of the National Ministry of Culture and Education.

Regarding economic policy, the region's dictatorships presented divergences since the Paraguayan and Argentinean dictatorships carried out reforms typical of neoliberal governments. In contrast, the Brazilian dictatorship was characterized by adopting "a statizing perspective of the economy, promoting primary industrialization, investing resources in port, transport and general industrial infrastructure" (Guizardi, 2020, p. 17). The city of Foz do Iguaçu was an example of state presence as it was built as a military enclave resulting from the development of and investment in public works by the five *de facto* governments that succeeded each other from 1964 to 1985. With the argument that "Brazil was an 'aggressor country', a country in expansion" (Rodríguez, 2017, p. 65), the government justified the idea of an invading Brazil, interested in altering the national territory with developmentalist projects that set an agenda in regional geopolitics such as the Itaipú hydroelectric dam. The planning and construction project took place throughout the 1970s and was put into operation in 1984, becoming the largest hydroelectric power plant in the world until 2011. The economic power and the consolidation of successive *de facto* governments of the neighboring country led the last Argentine military dictatorship to sustain and harden its border policy with the argument of national defense through a greater state presence and population projects in border areas.

New threats

With the process of restoration of democracies in the region and the change of perspective of the Argentine government regarding the positioning with Brazil, in 1985, with the so-called Declaration of Iguazu, a meeting took place between the presidents of both countries in the city of Foz do Iguaçu in 1985, in which the Tancredo Neves Bridge was inaugurated and where there were statements about the relationship between the two countries. They emphasized the real and symbolic union brought about by the bridge, in addition to its contribution to regional development and the strengthening of bilateral relations between the two countries. Until then, there had

been a lack of coordination between the security forces of each country, which strictly followed the concept of territorial law in the border segment (Ferrari, 2011). Among the issues discussed were illicit drug trafficking; democratic consolidation; the creation of a joint commission focused on cooperation and integration; the energy, transportation and communications sectors; scientific and technological cooperation; and incentives for economic and commercial cooperation, among others (Declaración de Iguazú, 1985). These issues set an agenda for regional integration and the facilitation of bilateral relations.

A year later, in Buenos Aires, the *Argentina-Brazil Integration Agreement* was signed, in which it was decided to establish the *Program for integration and economic cooperation between the Argentine Republic and the Federative Republic of Brazil* with the objective of "stimulating integration, balance and seeking to consolidate the security and development of the region" (Acta para la integración argentino-brasileña, 1986). That same year, also in the city of Brasilia, the *Argentine-Brazilian Friendship Agreement* was celebrated with the slogan "Democracy, peace and development" under the guidelines of cooperation and integration between both countries, in addition to reaffirming "the solemn commitment to participate actively in the construction of a fair and equitable international order" (Acta de Amistad argentino-brasileña. Democracia, paz y desarrollo, 1986). In 1988, the *Treaty of Integration, Cooperation, and Development between the Argentine Republic and the Federative Republic of Brazil* was signed, which stipulated "the harmonization of customs, internal and external trade, agricultural, industrial, transport and communications, scientific and technological policies, and others that the States Parties may agree upon" (Tratado de integración, cooperación y desarrollo entre la República Argentina y la República Federativa del Brasil, 1988), to strengthen economic cooperation and the integration process between both countries. Bilateral relations between the two countries were formalized through various treaties and agreements that laid the foundations for combining the national with the regional, even at the security level. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century, the new threats at the global level began to transform, changing what had to be securitized.

The end of the Cold War in 1991 laid down the principles of global security to be employed in the face of the emergence of "new threats" in Western countries, taking as a reference the United States and those European countries that during the last decade of the 20th century began to form part of the European Union. With the advent of a world perceived as globalized and in continuous movement, most states tightened and strengthened border controls (Bigo, 2002), intending to defend and maintain a supposed national order in response to the increased flow of people and goods worldwide. One of the new threats mentioned was global terrorism, mainly associated with populations of Arab origin, reactivated in 2001 as a consequence of the attack on the Twin Towers. Accordingly, due to the large presence of the Syrian-Lebanese population in the Paraná Tri-Border, and the attacks on the Israeli Embassy in 1992 and the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association in 1994, these elements were closely linked to the existence of terrorist activities in the region. It was presented as an insecure,

chaotic and dangerous area where border controls were ineffective and where the countries in question had to increase control and vigilance over their territorial limits, thus truncating the regional integration projects set up with the re-establishment of democracies. The establishment of the link with terrorism began with reports from the U.S. State Department that were widely disseminated in the national and international media[4] (Agulló 2017; Bello Arellano, 2015; Montenegro & Giménez Béliveau, 2006; Rabossi, 2007).

Governmental and journalistic discourses have not only affirmed the presence of Hezbollah and Al Qaeda terrorist cells but also sustained "the theory according to which the Tri-Border Area is a breeding ground for drug trafficking, terrorism and smuggling" ("Preocupa la seguridad en la triple frontera", 1997). The region has been characterized as an enabler of countless practices such as those mentioned above and even those such as human trafficking, money laundering and irregular migration. What is not usually mentioned in the news and reports are precisely the geopolitical causes that have led to depicting it as a *lawless zone*, highlighting its geographical location as the point of convergence of three South American countries and the Guarani aquifer, one of the largest freshwater reserves in the world and where a large number of natural resources are clustered. On the other hand, the large commercial center of Ciudad del Este and the presence of the Iguazú Falls, one of the seven natural wonders of the world shared by Argentina and Brazil, allow for the fluid and continuous movement of people and objects between the cities, whether for tourism or commercial reasons. The latent threats have led to a spectacular image of the Paraná Tri-Border, presenting it as a region where danger and illegal activities are the order of the day, where chaos, fear and unrest prevail, and where the State maximizes its control so that external threats do not transgress national boundaries.

The securitization process in the Paraná Tri-Border: fears, threats and security

The preservation of the national order and the defense of the territory are the arguments that the national States have sustained for several decades to carry out a reinforcement of border control. However, the threats that generate fear and unease have been transformed over the years. During the military governments, the idea of populating and defending the borders from the non-Argentinean others was promoted to reinforce this national ideology permanently. Decree 887/94, entitled "Border Zones", sought to unify the so-called border zones for development and border security zones (Zonas de frontera, 1994). Although it may initially appear to be an administrative unification based only on geographic criteria, the definition of border zones is based on both laws that determined each type of zone. Law 18575, which named them border

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[4] In the section called "A fondo" of BBC Mundo there are headlines such as *La posición de EE.UU.*, where it can be read that "the Bush administration believes there are financial ties between the Tri-Border and fundamentalist groups" ("La posición de EE.UU.", 2005).

zones for development, established the promotion of "sustained growth of the space adjacent to the international limit of the Republic" and set the objective of "ensuring the integration of the border zone into the rest of the Nation" (Zonas y áreas de frontera, 1970), which sustains the spirit of a homogeneous, integrated and secure nation. The (re)construction of the idea of a *nation* was a focal point in the security policies, a nation that had to be defended from the others, the hostile and dangerous neighbors. Thus, the *de facto* government promoted a series of measures regulated through decrees and laws whose ultimate goal was to strengthen and populate border areas. With the fall of the dictatorships in the region's countries and the return of democratic governments, bilateral relations between Argentina and Brazil were reestablished and projects focused on regional integration began to be considered.

Nevertheless, for the logic of the state based on the control of and over the territory, whatever happens beyond the national border is constructed as insecure. Insecurity generates risk, fear and unease in societies, and the response to this problem is the argument that borders must be controlled to maintain national order in the face of external threats. Through discourses and practices of demarcation and (re)construction of the border, which have been mutating over the decades, the idea of reinforcing the border is reproduced following the "geopolitical model of states as rigidly defined territorial units where each state can gain power only at the expense of others, and each has control over its own territory" (Agnew, 1999, p. 504). Not only from governmental institutions but also with the help of the media, threats have been constantly developing and transforming, which does not imply a substitution of one for the other but rather a coexistence between several of them. One can read news headlines such as "Regional response with European support against document forgery in the Tri-Border" (Eurofront, 2022), "The Golden Hydra: how the Barakat clan that finances Hezbollah operates in the Tri-Border" (Sierra, 2018), "Prefecture seized more than 2 000 000 pesos in smuggled cell phones at the Iguazú border" (De Mora, 2020), "Waterway: U.S. Calls China's possible presence a threat" ("Hidrovía: EEUU califica la posible presencia de China como una amenaza", 2022), among many others. These show that threats have been changing and have been used differentially in the decision-making process regarding what should be securitized.

As Bigo (2008) states, security and insecurity are outcomes of a securitization process. These two categories that are usually normativized as positive and negative, respectively, depend on the field effects of the actors involved in defining what should be securitized and the acceptance by an audience. The author suggests that the relationship between security and insecurity is not one of opposition but rather of contrariety:

> Insecurity is, for example, "terror" or "threat" or "fear" or "risk" or "unease" depending on their disciplinary background… and security is the "contrary": it is the struggle against, the freedom from… But it is not sure at all that the rise of security practices, especially coercive ones, diminishes the insecurity practices. (Bigo, 2008, p. 124)

Securitization shows a process that transcends the more classical notions of security, making it part of a broader dynamic where it is interrelated with insecurity, and they are not opposed to each other. With the management of this rhetoric, the ins-

titutionalization of political power (Abrams, 1988/2000, p. 62) known as the *State*[5] has historically constructed and enunciated certain threats as dangerous. To the state discourses are added the discourses of non-governmental agents and those of society itself, who together demand *greater security* than that which already exists in the face of possible new threats.

The securitization process draws on both discursive and performative levels, i. e., everyday bureaucratic decisions, the relationships and knowledge of security professionals and technological and technocratic practices (Skleparis, 2016), which come together as field effects. At border checkpoints, the discourses and practices of a multiplicity of actors are assembled and acquire their own particularities of planning and execution according to the context. When the progressive opening of borders began, and the opportunity to cross to Foz do Iguaçu arose, a person in charge of consular tasks pointed out in a conversation certain differences and particularities in the way controls are carried out on both sides of the bridge. On the Argentine side, the immigration procedure is always mandatory, with security forces located nearby to ensure that no one crosses the border without having completed the procedure. Meanwhile, in Brazil, if the entry to the national territory is for less than 24 hours and within a radius of up to 50 km, it is not necessary to carry out the migratory procedure. On the other hand, if an individual enters the country for more than one day or a distance of more than 50 km, they must complete the immigration registration in person at the office and fill out a written form. At first glance and from the author's personal experience, there is a feeling of arbitrariness in having the choice of whether or not to carry out the procedure, in addition to the fact that the security forces are not in charge of controlling who did or did not go to the checkpoint. This is because the control over mobility moves to other points of the city, as was observed with the vehicle controls on the roads and with the rounds of Federal Police agents accompanied by dogs at a bus terminal.

The maintenance and tightening of border control in the Paraná Tri-Border Area is based on defending against that which crosses national borders. The non-national other, the latent threat of terrorists and the great potential for illicit acts are the grounds for (in)security professionals (Bigo, 2008) to reproduce discourses and carry out security practices that are part of border control. Meters away from the Tancredo Neves Bridge, on the Argentine side of the region, is the Iguazú-Foz do Iguaçu Border Center, which is made up of the National Directorate of Migration, the General Directorate of Customs, the National Agri-Food Health and Quality Service (Senasa, by its acronym in Spanish: Servicio Nacional de Sanidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria) and the Argentine National Gendarmerie. These governmental institutions bring together

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[5] "The state is, at most, a message of domination, an ideological apparatus that attributes unity, morality and independence to the disunited, amoral, and dependent workings of the practice of government" (Abrams, 1988/2000, p. 62). The word *State* will be used following this definition and perceiving it as institutionalized political power.

different (in)security professionals involved in border control and are supervised by the coordinator of the Border Center.[6]

> Here we have to coordinate. Here we have to try to work together and, well, everyone should contribute what the organization has to contribute. For example, I need to speed up the passage. In order for people to pass faster, I need more lanes enabled. It is not enough to have Migration inspectors doing the control for them to enter and no, I have to complement it with personnel from Customs and Senasa. (Personal communication, November 1, 2021)

The coordinator states that the work of each of the professionals must be carried out collaboratively between the institutions to expedite the crossings subject to border control. However, in 2020, a new threat to nation states arose, giving rise to an exceptional measure to reinforce and tighten border control: the closing of borders.

Securitization and border closure

The Argentine government decreed in March 2020 the closing of borders along the entire national territory with the health-based rationale of mitigating the advance and number of contagions caused by the worldwide coronavirus pandemic. Similar to most of the countries in the world, the border closure policy implied a hardening of border controls to prevent anyone from trespassing the national borders. Fear and unease about an unknown virus prevailed, and the way governments found to stop its advance was to stop its carriers: human beings. The response of nation states to mitigate the growth of the pandemic was to interrupt human travel abruptly. The border closure was decreed at the end of the summer season, a season in which the Iguazu-Foz do Iguaçu border crossing is more frequented than other seasons due to its location near the Iguazu Falls and because it is part of one of the routes chosen by tourists vacationing in Brazil. On the Tancredo Neves bridge, when the last transfers authorized by the Foreign Ministry before the total closure were completed, the Police of Misiones and the National Gendarmerie fenced off the crossing "to prevent the access of tourists trying to enter the country despite the total closure of the borders" (Barrios, 2020).

The border closure measure was based on people's fear of unknown threats such as a virus. People are the ones who experience fear as a form of response, Reguillo (2000) states, adding "However, it is society that constructs the notions of risk, threat and danger, and generates standardized modes of response" (p. 66), which are transformed according to place and time. Fear appears as that feeling provoked by a threat that must

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[6] With the creation of the Border Centers, in 1980, it was proposed to appoint "a member of the senior personnel of the Armed or Security Forces as head" (Centros de Frontera, 1980). This changed in 2017 with Decree 68/2017, when it was established that the position of coordinator should be held by civilian personnel under the Ministry of the Interior, in addition to assigning to the National Border Commission and the institutions in charge of border control "the need to increase border integration, facilitate the transit of people, expedite international trade and prevent complex transnational crimes such as drug trafficking, human trafficking and smuggling" (Comisión Nacional de Fronteras, creación, 2017).

be securitized, and borders are spaces where this fear of anything that may cross the national boundary is continuously generated and dramatized. Due to the transmission of the virus from person to person, the focus was placed on the Iguazu-Foz do Iguaçu border crossing since the official figures of the Argentine State show it to be one of the crossings with the highest number of migratory movements in the country. The head of the National Directorate of Migration herself commented to a newspaper of the province of Misiones that she had visited "with Governor Herrera Ahuad some border crossings, and we saw the fear due to the number of foreigners who usually enter the province for tourism (...). On Sunday, it was decided to close all borders hermetically" ("Desde Migraciones aseguran que", 2020). The fear of the flow of people generated unease because there was the possibility of catching a virus until then little known and, faced with this, the states fell into the *territorial trap* by responding with geographical and administrative logic as a first reaction to the exceptional (Bigo et al., 2021). These authors wonder whether the coronavirus pandemic can be seen as a renewal of the governmentality of unease, i. e., as an original form of government to provide security and protection; yet another cog in a broad securitizing process in which new actors intervened and expert medical knowledge was incorporated.

The health dimension prevailed among the priorities in decision-making by (in) security professionals, which generated an interruption and transformation of how the security process had been deployed in the region until then. As stipulated by Decree 274/2020 (Prohibición de ingreso al territorio nacional, 2020) and extended by Decree 313/2020 (Emergencia sanitaria, 2020), at the time of closure and over eighteen months, the sanitary control measures at border crossings involved those exempted, who could cross the national border with the presentation of a negative PCR result. The *exempted* group was "persons employed" in the movement of goods, carriers, crew members and pilots. This group was completed by the security forces in charge of border control and national routes and new participants who were part of the securitizing practice of closing the borders. Health professionals were included in the group *exempted*, as it was an exceptional measure based on health grounds and because of the need for expertise in epidemiological issues related to the care of people and the control of contagions. When the progressive opening of checkpoints began, the Tancredo Neves land border crossing was one of the pilot tests at a national level, enabled by Administrative Decision 935/2021 (Corredores Seguros, 2021) in September, under the category of safe corridor.[7] The requirements implemented for the crossing were the presentation of the vaccination certificate, a negative PCR result and an electronic affidavit completed with personal information, thus coordinating sanitary and migration control. Initially, with the opening of the border crossing as a secure corridor, the affidavit was implemented for all persons crossing. Then, as of

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[7] Basualdo (2023) problematizes the use of the *safe corridor* category, in addition to including that of *health corridor*, and investigating its political production in the context of pandemics.

April 2022, when the border crossings were *normalized*, the affidavit was requested of non-resident foreigners.

The affidavit shows how border control is shifting and requests that epidemiological and transit data be provided virtually, complemented by the presentation of documents at the border post. As Walters explains,[8] this *delocalization* of the border refers to the fact that, although control and policing functions were previously concentrated at the spatial border, "currently there is a disaggregation of border functions away from the border" (Walters, 2006, p. 193). As can be seen, for the ordering and control of a given population, the power of government must be exercised through administrative practices since the "set of legislative measures, decrees, regulations, and circulars make it possible to introduce security mechanisms" (Foucault, 2006, p. 22).

The implementation of the affidavit as a security mechanism to control the movement of people caused delays after a couple of months at the Iguazu-Foz do Iguaçu Border Center checkpoint. This occurred because several people did it on the spot due to a lack of knowledge and misinformation about the measure or a lack of internet connectivity, as it had to be completed virtually. Given the request for "efficiency and effectiveness" ("Herrera Ahuad: 'Vamos a pedir eficiencia'", 2022) by the governor of the province of Misiones to the Minister of the Interior to speed up the circulation, in addition to other reasons at the national level, the national government eliminated the requirement of the affidavit in August 2022, a decision based on the relaxation of sanitary measures. The argument that the electronic affidavit would "streamline the procedure of migratory movement, as well as lighten the processing of the information provided to the health authorities" (Dirección Nacional de Migraciones. Nuevo requisito de ingreso y egreso al territorio nacional, 2020) had a different effect in practice by hindering the dynamics of border control, as evidenced by complaints from tourists, traders and authorities in the region.

The border closure can be understood as part of a securitization process that involved the incorporation of new border control practices and the transformation of others already in place. Some of these changes in security practices were due to the border closure and others prior to it, as expressed by a prefect in an informal talk held in November 2021. While at that time the land border crossing had been open for one month, five months later, in April 2022, the Puerto Iguazú-Puerto Tres Fronteras river crossing, controlled by Prefectura Naval Argentina, was opened. The Prefect explained that before the pandemic, their responsibilities were based on controlling people and goods crossing the Paraná and Uruguay rivers and that new tools and technologies used in river control have been incorporated in recent years. Regarding the border closure measure and the decommissioning of the ferry to cross to Paraguay, he commented that the interruption of the circulation on the watercourses transformed their functions. They continued with their patrols but had to modify their schedules, adopt sanitary measures, and ensure that no one crossed the rivers unless it was someone who belonged to the excepted category. This shows that the population is governed

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[8] Walters in turn draws on the analyses of Bigo (2002) and Salter (2004).

through various security practices (co)constructed with the discourses of society itself and of government agents in charge of decision making, or those in charge of managing and executing them. In short, in the face of the growing wave of contagions, the argument put forward by national governments worldwide was the fear and care of the population in the face of a new virus, reconfiguring the securitization process around the sanitation of border control.

Conclusions

This paper sought to reconstruct the securitization process on the Argentine side of the Paraná Tri-Border. The transformations that have characterized this process were addressed through a historical overview from the last military dictatorship up to the present day. With the conceptualization formulated in critical security studies, the category of securitization was used to account for a historical process motivated by the fear and unease generated by certain threats to the social order. Those named as (in)security professionals emerge as those seeking to respond to and combat these threats through security discourses and practices.

During the last civic-military-ecclesiastical dictatorship, ideals pertaining to the defense of the homeland, the homogenization of national identity and the continuous construction of the national territory prevailed, the latter through settlement policies in border areas. External factors behind the national borders were an enemy that had to be defended against through the control and reinforcement of national borders. With the restoration of democracy in Argentina and Brazil, bilateral relations between the two countries began to be outlined with an emphasis on integration and regional cooperation. Nevertheless, with the reordering of the post-war world and changes in international security, new global threats arose for the States, which responded to some of them through the hardening and strengthening of border control practices.

The securitization of borders has been transformed and reconfigured according to the prevailing historical moment, as the fear of threats changed over the decades. A nation that was supposed to defend and reaffirm itself as such was adversely affected by the alleged presence of terrorism in the Paraná Tri-Border. Over the years, the region became associated with new *illicit* practices, such as smuggling, human trafficking and smuggling of persons, money laundering and irregular migration. In an interconnected and globalized world in which movement does not cease, accompanied by the growing sophistication and progress of security and technological devices, States have sought to respond to these threats through various security practices, which have not replaced one another but rather have been combined and coexist with each other. National borders and their territoriality form the backbone of the decisions on what must be controlled: that which threatens the national order. The perception of the Paraná Tri-Border as an insecure and chaotic region, which generates fear, operates as the main basis for the national State to provide security.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the securitization process was reconfigured around stopping flow through border closures, with the incorporation of new control practices and the incorporation of medical knowledge into the broader process taking place there. After the progressive openings of the borders until the so-called "return to normality" of border controls, the question that arises is how the securitization process will be transformed and reconfigured in the coming years?

Acknowledgments

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