



Gender and Nation under re-signification by the Argentinian supporters of legal abortion¹

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Abstract

In this paper, I broaden the Argentinian research on sexual and non-reproductive rights through the lens of gendered nationalism. I present the articulation between gender and nation and the way throughout history women's and feminist movements have been contesting and resignifying hegemonic notions of motherhood and nation to dispute their place and achieve their goals. I study different periods of Argentinian history in which notions of gender and nation were being articulated and I arrive at the recent political context in which there has been an expansion of women's rights and legal abortion was first discussed in the National Congress in 2018. I scrutinize in particular to the pro-Bill lawmakers' speeches using feminist Critical Discourse Analysis to unpack the constitutive elements of discourses and examine if they reproduce, sustain, or transform relations of domination. With this research, I expect to fill a gap in the theorization of gender and nation in Latin American contexts by presenting the connections between feminism and nationalism, how feminist movements dispute, re-signify, and re-produce notions of national belonging, and the implications this may generate.

Keywords: Gender; Nation; Abortion; Feminism; Argentina.

Resumen

En este artículo, amplió la investigación argentina sobre derechos sexuales y no reproductivos combinando éstos con teorías feministas del Estado-Nación. Presento diferentes periodos de la historia argentina mostrando la articulación entre género y nación y la forma en que los movimientos de mujeres y feministas han ido cuestionando y resignificando las nociones hegemónicas de maternidad y nación. Así, arribo al reciente contexto político en el que ha habido una expansión de los derechos de las mujeres y el aborto legal se debatió por primera vez en el Congreso Nacional en 2018. A través del Análisis Crítico y Feminista del Discurso, examino los discursos pronunciados por los legisladores que votaron a favor de la legalización del aborto en

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pos de vislumbrar el modo en que las nociones de género y nación han sido resignificadas, sosteniendo y contestando discursos hegemónicos y relaciones de dominación. Con esta investigación, busco llenar un vacío en la teorización de género y nación en contextos latinoamericanos y presentar también las conexiones entre feminismos y nacionalismos. Este estudio permite una mejor comprensión del modo en que los movimientos feministas disputan, resignifican y reproducen las nociones de pertenencia nacional y las implicaciones que esto puede generar.

Palabras clave: Género; Nación; Aborto; Feminismo; Argentina.

Introduction

The issue of legal abortion awakens all types of debates that crisscross diverse questionings and answers. As Morán Faúndes (2013) acknowledges, voluntary abortion strains cultural mandates crossing through the body such as motherhood, the heterosexual family, and the community, and values around freedom, life, and death. In Argentina, the issue of reproductive and sexual rights has been studied from different disciplines and perspectives but not from feminist theories of nationalism. While historical studies frame abortion within women's struggles for rights' expansion and feminist activism and resistance, legal studies put the focus on ethical concepts and constitutional discussions. Moreover, some scholars examine the activism against legalized abortion and its strategies of intervention.³ However, national elements traverse the abortion debates, especially those reinforcing motherhood as a national responsibility. The body acts as a contested terrain that exceeds biological reproduction and concerns social and cultural reproduction in societies where "women's sexuality and reproductive capacity (...) frequently symbolize the nation and its future" (Smyth, 2005, p. 36).

Theories of gender and nation helped me to understand how much patriarchy is grounded in political configurations, being motherhood, for instance, sacred not only in familial spaces but also in national imaginaries and state structures. However, the articulation between gender and nation is not so simple to outline, and issues regarding the nation-state are relevant to different positions including women's and feminist movements. Throughout history, they have been contesting and resignifying hegemonic notions of motherhood and nation to dispute their place and achieve their goals. The argentinian abortion debates were not the exception and therefore, in this paper, I specifically examines how hegemonic imaginaries of gender and nation have been contested and resignified by the lawmakers that voted in favor of the Bill on legal abortion in 2018.⁴

To do so, this research follows the theories of gender and nation combined with feminist critiques of nationalism, the State, Law, and citizenship. All of them are crisscrossed by decolonial feminist

³ Historical analysis can be found at Alcaraz (2018); Bellucci (2014); Burton (2017); Sutton & Borland (2013); Zurbriggen & Anzorena (2013) ; legal studies at Bergallo (2019); Brown (2008); Maffia (2018); Zicavo, Astorino, & Saporosi (2015); and studies on conservative activism at Bessone, (2017); Carbonelli, Mosqueira, & Felitti, (2011); Peñas Defago & Morán Faúndes (2014).

⁴ This paper is part of a much broader investigation carried out during 2019 as a thesis to approve my Master's Degree. There, the study deepens the analysis of the legislators' speeches in the abortion debate in Argentina in 2018, emphasizing the common postulates of the positions in favor and against the Bill and the arguments put forward by each position, framing them against broader social movements that give support to each one.



perspectives which I use in the analysis and to describe the building of the Argentinian nation-state. Then, I study different periods of Argentinian history in which notions of gender and nation were being articulated. I arrive at the recent Argentinian political context in which there has been an expansion of women's and feminist movements and the Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal Seguro y Gratuito (National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe and Free Abortion, hereafter the Campaign) was launched. The Campaign presented several times in the Argentinian Congress a bill to legalize abortion entitled Proyecto de Interrupción Voluntaria del Embarazo (voluntary termination of pregnancy project) which was finally discussed in 2018.⁵ I scrutinize in particular to the pro-Bill lawmakers' speeches using feminist Critical Discourse Analysis – a methodology that helps to unpack the constitutive elements of discourses and examine if they reproduce, sustain, or transform relations of domination. My primary sources are the transcripts of the speeches given by more than 200 legislators in 35 hours of debate in June and August 2018. Finally, I point out the arguments and discourses contested by the lawmakers for the Bill that challenge, sustain and resignify traditional notions of gender and nation.

With this research, I expect to fill a gap in the theorization of gender and nation in Latin American contexts⁶. I also hope to contribute to the analysis of anti-abortion arguments within feminist critiques on nationalism. I examine the connections between feminism and nationalism, how feminist movements dispute, re-signify, and re-produce notions of national belonging, and the implications this may generate. This study of the co-articulation between gender and nation-state also broadens the scope of International Relations looking at how these structures are going through processes of transformation while gender is under discussion. Finally, I attempt to contribute to the struggle to make abortion legal in the entire region, not because I completely trust in state institutions but mostly so that women's autonomy over their bodies can be recognized in the general narrative of our national communities.

Feminist theories of nation and the state

Issues concerning reproduction and sexuality exceed the sphere of intimacy and personal decisions. Throughout history, they have been articulated, regulated, and contested within

⁵ At the time of conducting this research, in the first half of 2019, abortion was punished in the Argentinian Criminal Code within a model of partial decriminalization based on causal factors (Verón, 2018). The 85th and 86th articles categorize abortion as a crime against the law and establish only two cases where abortion is not punishable: in cases of risk to the life or health of the mother, and in cases of the rape of a feeble-minded or demented woman (Burton, 2017). In 2018 and after seven attempts from 2007, it was the first time that a Bill on the voluntary interruption of pregnancy reached debate in the Congress. The Chamber of Deputies approved the Bill but the Senate rejected it. At the end of 2020, under the presidency of the *kirchnerist* Alberto Fernández, the voluntary interruption of pregnancy up to 14 weeks was approved and established by Law 27.610. Beyond 14 weeks, it only allows access to the practice if the pregnancy is the product of rape or in the face of danger to the life and health of the pregnant person. After signing the informed consent, abortion must be guaranteed in the services of the health system or with its assistance within a maximum period of 10 days (CELS, n.d.).

⁶ In Latin America, the studies of gender and nation are still relatively modest. The journal *Íconos* from FLACSO Ecuador (2007) published a special dossier regarding gender and nation in Latin America and, particularly about Argentina, Laura Masson (2017), Diana (Taylor, 2005) and Donna Guy (1995) have framed their investigations using these theories. These studies are relevant but not enough to have a further comprehension on the importance that the nation had in the current Argentinian abortion debates. These scholars consider different historical periods of analysis and lack a deeper articulation between nation, motherhood, politics of reproduction and gender re-configurations, as I do.



discourses of the population, sovereignty, community interest, and national values. The theoretical lenses of feminist critiques on nationalism addresses the way the discourses of nation and the discourses of gender intersect and are co-constructed (Yuval-Davis, 2004). These feminist perspectives on nationalism have problematized both the theoretical approach to concepts and the production and reproduction of national discourses. Regarding the former, the nation is defined as an imagined, limited and sovereign, political community (Anderson, 1983). As a distinctive imaginary that joins personal and collective identities, nations mobilize emotional powers and the national rhetoric revolves around special topics. On one hand, it addresses temporal axes of past, present, and future, related to a common origin and culture, continuity/tradition, and future generations. On the other hand, the national rhetoric has spatial axes in its connection to boundaries of territory and population. Last, it implicates political axes referred to sovereignty, unity, legitimacy, and membership (Calhoun, 2002; Wodak, Hirsch, & Mitten, 2005).

In opposition to the discursive production of an 'essential and eternal' national identity, discourses of the nation are the result of a complex effect of competing discourses over time that are narratively constructed according to particular interests, audiences, spaces, and socio-historical contexts. Furthermore, the inner construction of the national identity implies an operation of power that marks the inclusion/exclusion process of who and what counts as national and who and what as foreign (Billig, 2010; Smyth, 2005). Consequently, the (re) production process of the nation has specific racial, class, and gender dimensions, and a theory of gender power is then crucial for a comprehensive analysis.

Theorists of the nation agree that the nation was imagined as a 'natural' extension of the familial and kinship relations, extrapolating both the human bonding and the relations of authority to the macro level. Even the term nation comes from the word 'natio': to be born (McClintock, 1993). However, feminist critiques had called attention on the naturalization of women's and children's subordination to the male-adult which allows the justification of hegemonic national projects and the legitimization of other hierarchical forms of domination (McClintock, 1993). Moreover, nations as families are conceived in heterosexist terms, reinforcing the heteronormative binary man/woman that denies sexual diversity (Peterson, 2000). The traditional and 'natural' feature of the family, which is heterosexual, patriarchal and reproductive, is conceived as the original cell of the nation. Thereafter, women are ambiguously included/excluded into the nation, mainly through their relation to men (McClintock, 1993). Their role in the nation is usually symbolic, reproductive and supportive, emphasizing that womanhood is inherently identified with motherhood.

The national heterosexual family imaginary assigns different places for women and men in the nationalist enterprise related to hegemonic notions of femininity and masculinity. And, although in some analysts gender is presented as a separate category, it is never an isolated factor but is intersected with sexuality, race, and class in the hierarchical assignation of national places. Nira Yuval-Davis (2004) elucidates three dimensions in which gender (connected with the other categories) and nation work particularly together. Firstly, the genealogical dimension, concerned with the 'myth of common origin' and the 'purity of the race', pays special attention to biological reproduction. Women, because of their reproductive capacity, are key to nationalist concerns about the quality and quantity of the population.⁷ Secondly, the cultural dimension considers

⁷ Yuval-Davis recognizes three discourses that dominate national discourses of population control: 'people as power' in which demographical growth is crucial for the development of the nation; eugenic discourse



women as the cultural reproducers and the cultural signifiers of the collectivity. Women are not only assigned to transmit the 'authentic' folk but also to embody the essence and honor of the nation (Yuval-Davis, 2004). Thirdly, the civil dimension refers to state citizenship in relation to the national membership. The author points out that nation and state are complexly intertwined but it is still possible to define the state as a "body of institutions which are centrally organized around the intentionality of control with a given apparatus of enforcement at its command and basis" (Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989, p. 5). In this sense, state membership and citizenship are also a matter of power relations, connected to gender dynamics.

Western modern societies founded their states' elemental structures based on liberal theories of the social contract. They shaped an imagined narration in which, in an original moment, individuals agreed to give up part of their individual freedom to the achievement of civil freedom and security. However, the original contract theory is equally constituted by a sexual contract, and freedom is interrelated with the subjugation of women (Pateman, 2009). Certain men entered into contracts and became 'individuals' capable of agreeing. While they agreed to form a fraternal society, they also agreed on the access to women's bodies. Civil society was divided into two spheres in which only one was politically and socially relevant. The other, the domestic one, was constructed as an intimate and private sphere and the proper place for women (Pateman, 2009). Moreover, the western early state-making "involved 'normalizing' foundational dichotomies" such as mind/body, culture/nature, civilized/barbarian, public/private, masculine/feminine which were codified and taken for granted in the modern nationalist and colonial enterprises (Peterson, 2013, p. 60). The heteropatriarchal family/household was instituted as the core socio-economic unit to assure and control property transmission, citizenship, and socio-biological reproduction (Peterson, 2013). The (hetero) sexual contract was crucial in (re)producing structural inequalities that went beyond sex/gender and involved nationality, class, and race.

Decolonial theories add new dimensions to Pateman's and Peterson's conceptualization and emphasize also the modern colonial matrix of power that has operated globally since America's conquest. According to this matrix, social relations are structured in a capitalist, racist, Eurocentric, heterosexist and patriarchal way (Espinosa Miñoso, Ochoa Muñoz, & Gómez Correal, 2014). The scholar Aníbal Quijano (2000) explains that coloniality of power refers to the establishment of race as the basic form of social classification that naturalizes a human division between dominant/superior Europeans and dominated/inferior non-Europeans. In addition, modernity and eurocentrism involve the discrimination and silencing of the products and knowledge of non-European bodies (Mignolo, 2018). Decolonial feminists like María Lugones (2016) incorporate the importance of gender as an analytical category central to the coloniality of power matrix where all the gender relations were transformed after the conquest. According to Rita Segato (2016), in the colonial process, the sexual contract was introduced, strengthening the binary and hierarchical gender division, and extrapolating this logic to other power relations. The public sphere was captured by a particular type of subject that became the pattern of the universal. It is the masculine, son of the colonial conquest, white or bleached, owner, educated and 'pater familias' (Segato, 2016). The state, its institutions, and laws are products of and produce patriarchal and colonial relations of power that legitimize and assure structural violence.

While most of feminist critiques on nationalism and state examine the power of the nation-state and its institutions to disempower women and non-hegemonic subjects, other scholars study also

worried about the race/class/gender quality of the population; and Malthusian discourse which is concerned about overpopulation (Yuval-Davis, 1996).



the implications of women's movements making demands upon the state. The state, as an institution with considerable power to regulate gender and sexual relations, it has also been at the focus of feminist and women's movements (Smyth, 2005). Thus, as Georgina (Waylen, 1998) asserts, the state and its structures should be considered as sites of political struggle where actors can impact in changing those structures. Women seeking political power in formal institutions must reassess their traditional self-perceptions as well as dispute and rearrange social and political orders within the community (Kaufman & Williams, 2007). Part of these rearrangements consist on shaping contested national identities, myths of common origin and destiny, and demarcation between insiders and outsiders. At the same time, as Ranchod-Nilsson (2000) says, women's political activism involves changes to both in gender relations within households and in the understanding of what the state and the community should do and be.

Feminist movements' entering and disputing formal political spheres, especially claiming sexual and reproductive rights, affects the traditional scope of politics. In the first place, women demand being considered as legitimate actors in the public sphere whose personal issues matter on a collective scale. This demand breaks the public/private boundary highlighting that the public sphere regulates intimate issues, demanding to politically reconsider these regulations (Brown, 2008). In the second place, the claim for sexual and reproductive rights addresses that individuals and collectives' citizenship will not be full until the state recognizes their autonomy to decide on their bodies and identities. Moreover, community membership will not be complete unless individuals' subjectivity counts on its own and not as a mean for something else. Finally, women entering the political sphere challenges the traditional politics where it is not just changing the content of the laws but also the way in which decisions are taken. The struggles for sexual and reproductive rights make sense as part of a more general project to change unjust power relations within and outside the state's apparatuses. Therefore, the fight for legal abortion should be framed as a struggle to obtain affiliation and contest the legal discourse - the 'master narrative' in which imagined ideas of the nation are subscribed (Segato, 2016). The claim for legal abortion is a claim for women's recognition inside the national discourse as autonomous and fully individuals among other people.

Hegemonic imaginaries of Gender and Nation in Argentina⁸

In the following paragraphs, I outline the gendered articulation between nation, motherhood, sexuality, and reproduction in Argentina in four periods from the War of Independence until the return to democracy in 1983. The first period under examination refers to the construction of the Argentinian nation-state during the first century after the war of independence in 1816. In this first stage, the dominant elite symbolically and materially constructed the Argentinian nation as a homogeneous, civilized and Eurocentric one. In addition, the binary 'Civilization/Barbarism' developed by the writer and second Argentinian president, Domingo Sarmiento, had two related connotations (Sarmiento, 1874). On the one hand was the separation between Buenos Aires, the

⁸ As the literature specialized on it is not wide, I write this section combining scholarship regarding the development of Argentina as a nation-state (García, 2010; Segato, 2007) and the history of women and women's movements in the country (Barrancos, 2007; Di Marco, 2010). In addition, I look at those public issues concerning sexuality, reproduction, and women's bodies as relevant for political purposes to analyze the articulation between motherhood and the nation-state. The works of Nari (2004) and Felitti (2009) study the political regulation of childbearing and motherhood through different Argentinian historical periods and help me to develop the way reproduction has figured into concepts of the nation and the contestation and resignification towards it, carried on mainly by women's movements.



'head' of the country, urban and developed, and the savage and illiterate interior 'body' (Briones, 2005). In terms of population, the division was between the accepted *criollos*, children of European immigrants, and the non-accepted *mestizos*, indigenous, *gauchos* and people of African-descent. A homogenizing project of 'ethnic terror' was ensured through institutional and cultural mechanisms which spread forms of surveillance and violence to suppress diversity (Segato, 2007).

The process of building a uniform ethnic model was concerned with the quality and quantity of the population and was summarized in the motto used by the architects of the nation: 'Educate, populate, and sanitize' (Segato, 2007). To sanitize was referred to cure the sick 'others' within the territory who were immigrants or natives and must be healed to belong to the nation, mainly through education. Besides, to populate was related to the elite's concern with emptiness and extension of the territory which should increase its population to be a sustainable country. As McClintock (1993) points out, the uses of 'empty land' is related to the notion of a 'virgin land' waiting for male-insemination and territorial appropriation. In fact, during 1878-85 the Argentinian state organized military campaigns to annihilate the indigenous populations and extract their lands and relegate them to the margins (García, 2010). More than a virgin woman, Argentine land was posited as one whose children were killed so that she could then breed new exceptional ones. Both symbolically and actually, the emptiness of the land served as an excuse and desire for the elite to promote and force a certain type of European immigration and white reproduction (Nari, 2004). Following the conceptualization of Yuval-Davis (1996), Argentinian women's function in the nation was associated to their reproductive role as cultural and biological reproducers of a particular neutral and white ethnicity, civilized and healthy enough to populate the country.

The motherhood duty and the relevance of the traditional family were constantly part of the state's rhetoric and measures at least until the return to democracy in 1983 (Felitti, 2011). They were supported both by the continuous threat of an empty place and by the Catholic Church doctrine which established the eminently reproductive function of heterosexual marriage (Felitti, 2009). In this first period until the Second World War, the concern over emptiness and the future pure race resulted in a set of medical, political, and educative practices and discourses to create the adequate 'mother', with an internalized maternal instinct, and homogeneous ways of raising children (Nari, 2004). However, as continued to occur in the other stages, the birth rates were not increased as desired, proving that women maintained control over their reproduction, especially with abortion practices in this first period. Moreover, the initial women's movements of that time used the duty of devoted and loving motherhood as a citizenship pledge. In particular, since the beginning of the XIX century, socialist feminists demanded civil and political rights in compensation for the fundamental social mission they were carrying out as mothers (Felitti, 2009). The right to vote was finally achieved in 1947 under the role of the Peronist government which I address in a second stage of analysis.

This second period covers the first two Peronist governments from 1946 to 1955 in the post Second World War context. According to "the 20 Peronist truths", Peronism is a political movement that works for the motherland and the common good, promotes social justice, economic sovereignty, and national unity, and has its basis in Christianity and humanism. In addition, its core values are work for the protection of human dignity and childhood, seen as crucial for the making of national future and grandeur. "To invigorate the family is to strengthen the nation since it is its own cell", said Juan Perón himself in 1944 (Álvarez Rodríguez, 2006, p. 123). Thus, he established the proper central place of women in the nation: physical and moral reproductive mothers of



Peronist or 'justicialist' values, considered as Argentinian values. However, during this time, middle-class women in Argentina entered massively to universities and working places, expanding the hegemonic ideal of women-mother (Borrescio, 2015). At that time, the modern woman had to work and participate in the economic and public sphere as an extension of their maternal duties, without losing them at all. The tolerable activities for women were cooking, sewing and community service, among others. Evita, the first Peron's wife represents the iconic figure of this period, where she proclaimed herself the mother of all the Argentinians and styled herself as a devoted mother caring for the poor, always in a subordinate position dedicated to her husband (Luna, 2000). As Diana Taylor (2005) also addresses, Evita rhetoric of 'mother' of her people was used to justify her public roles exceeding hegemonic gender norms and not being a mother she herself.

During the 60s and 70s, after the demographic explosion, the western 'developed' countries started to worry about the increased levels of population and launched measures to combat it in the 'underdeveloped' countries. The reaction to this and the birth policies carried out by the dictatorship governments constitute the third period of analysis. The stigma of being an empty country was resumed once again, now as a degree of national development and sovereignty against external imperialist forces (Felitti, 2009). Conservative governments rejected family planning policies on the grounds that they were attacking both the state's sovereignty and Argentinian family moral values. Even more, they justified their punitive and anti-democratic measures as a path to save the Christian family and fight against the 'corrupted' leftist way of life. The dictatorship governments of the 50s, 60s, and 70s defended a national identity based on a monogamous, heterosexual, procreative and large family, educated in the values of Christianity. All throughout the three periods, the Catholic Church was an important political actor and worked to impose its values as constitutive pillars of the national identity (Di Marco, 2010). Therefore, in this third stage, everything against Christian morality was considered an "attack on the moral and the good habits" embodied in the figures of the foreign communist ideology (Felitti, 2009, p. 86). Despite this, Argentinian society was developing new ways of organizing the family, using contraceptive methods and contesting hegemonic impositions. Feminist movements and homosexual activist groups emerged in small numbers during the first years of the 1970s demanding legal rights, recognition, divorce, and abortion (Bellucci, 2014).

However, despite the increased politicization of sexual and reproductive rights, a restrictive and violent climate was established by the third Peronist government and the last civic-military dictatorship. Under the 659/74 Decree, the government completely criminalized abortion and totally banned the contraceptive pill because these were said to be an 'attack' on the Argentine family (Felitti, 2004). The subsequent authoritarian government left those measures untouched and reinforced the central role of the military state in "eradicating the diseased cells of the social fabric" (Zarco, 2011, p. 235). The government consolidated an authoritarian, patriarchal and murderous state through terror, tortures, forced disappearance of persons, and the theft of babies. Symbolically, the 'correct' women were relegated once more to their domestic and maternal duties, and pushed to 'remedy' their 'deviant' children and re-populate the emptiness left by the needed 'dirty war' (all of them euphemisms used to mask crimes against humanity). The leadership of the Catholic hierarchy was complicit in these crimes, covering up what was happening and even positioning the fight against abortion as the only fight for human rights in Argentina (Felitti, 2011).

Nevertheless, it was a group of women called the Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, hereafter "Madres") who led the protest against the murder



and disappearance of their children and human rights' violations (Zarco, 2011). This human rights movement gained social legitimacy, as Lynn Morgan (2015) writes, by strengthening "the subject position that gave meaning to courageous mothers willing to sacrifice everything for their children. Those children, in turn, came to represent both the terrible past and the resilient future of the nation" (Morgan, 2015, p. n.p.). Mother's insistence on them being the mothers of all the Argentinian affected by the dictatorship, challenged the notion of mothering as something private and individualistic. At the same time, this rhetoric symbolically put them as the mothers of the new Argentinian imagined community emphasized by the space they represent. Plaza de Mayo (May Square) is the space where most Argentinian crucial historical events took place and the main foundational site of Buenos Aires. By appropriating this mythical space, as Rosenberg (1992) analyses, Madres consolidated their position and desire of being the founders of a different collective life. Madres' political action based on traditionally feminine roles of love, caring and self-sacrifice strengthen new ways of activism in the region and impacted the development of future movements.

Recent political context: the path to the expansion of sexual and (non) reproductive rights

With the return to democracy in 1983, a new chapter in the Argentinian history was inaugurated. The new context opened the achievement of some sexual and reproductive rights, and the proliferation of social movements and new crucial political actors which enabled the questioning of hegemonic gender roles and national identities. During the second half of the 80s, women's movements reemerged in a collective scenario characterized by the expansion of social mobilizations for political causes. Indeed, all the public organizations were impregnated with the language and demands of human rights that led to the judicial trial of the members of the military government in 1985 (Burton, 2017). In Buenos Aires, the *Multisectorial de la Mujer* (Multisectorial for the woman) was formed and gathered women from different political parties, unions, and civil organizations to attain legal reforms regarding issues important to women. Their work led to laws arranging shared parenting (1985) and legalizing divorce (1987), and the ratification of the CEDAW convention (1985). Traditional pillars of Argentinian nation such as the importance of the armed forces and the Catholic Church were significantly discredited by their roles in human rights abuses during the dictatorship(s). Divorce and shared parenting were discursively legitimized as a way to protect the sacred value of the family (Felitti, 2009). In 1987, the Argentine branch of Catholics for Choice was founded, and in 1988 the Comisión por el Derecho al Aborto (Commission for the Right to Abortion) was formed when the founders met at the third Women's National Meeting (Bellucci, 2014). Nonetheless, their demand for cultural and legal recognition of abortion was dismissed by the mainstream institutionalized feminism who pragmatically demanded things that carried higher social acceptance, like the provision of contraceptive.

During the 90s, the international agenda interested in women's issues ambiguously permeated Argentinian politics. On one side, women started to be incorporated into the state institutions thanks to the first election Quota Law in the world (1991).⁹ However, the neoliberal government of Menem (1989-1999) endorsed the reduction of the state social responsibilities, the strengthening of the exclusive concentration of wealth, and the increase of social and economic

⁹ "The Argentine law requires women to constitute at least 30% of candidates and stipulates that at least one woman be placed in every third spot on the electoral list" (Baldez, 2004, p. 232).



inequalities (ciriza, 2013).¹⁰ In this context, feminist organizations went through a process of institutionalization both by the state and by international cooperation agencies, which was criticized by autonomous feminist groups (Masson, 2007). On the other hand, the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (1994) and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) legitimized the consideration of reproductive rights as human rights in Argentina. Nevertheless, these rights were related to reproductive health and responsible parenthood and dissociated from non-reproduction (like abortion) and non-binary sexual identities (Burton, 2017). That is why, I follow scholars like Bellucci (2014) and Brown (2008) when conceptualizing the demand for legal abortion as (non) reproductive and sexual rights in order to separate it from compulsory motherhood and coital penetration.

In Argentina, the millennium started with an increased economic, social and political crisis that ended in a social rebellion demanding the government's resignation in December 2001. In an environment of economic adjustment, unemployment, thousands of people below the poverty line and distrust in the political system, new types of social arrangements emerged (Burton, 2017). Urban lower and middle-class citizens organized themselves into the *Asambleas Populares Barriales* (Popular Neighborhood Assemblies) to discuss and solve common problems. Women played key roles in these local assemblies, leading and actively participating as *piqueteras* in the street demonstrations, picking up the tradition of protest forged by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo (Sutton & Borland, 2013).¹¹ In addition, the *Encuentros Nacionales de Mujeres* (National Women's Meeting) which annually gather women from all over the country, started to become more popular and to include thousands of women from different socio-economic backgrounds. In the 2003 Meeting held in Rosario, there was a specific workshop regarding abortion. There, the green scarves were first used, and an action plan to achieve the legalization of abortion was designed. This plan included the formation of a national campaign which was finally launched in May 2002. In the past two decades, the Meetings have constituted a fundamental political space for the claiming of sexual and reproductive rights and the legalization of abortion.

The unstable socio-political situation became more reliable after 2003 with the election of Néstor Kirchner as president. Coming from a Peronist tradition, Kirchner and his wife Cristina Fernandez, who was then the first Argentinian woman elected as president, built their government around nationalist and populist rhetoric. According to Lida Miranda (2015), the *Kirchnerist* movement consolidated an anti-imperialist nationalism evoking common Latin American conditions and rejecting liberal measures. In this sense, the new government criticized U.S interference in the region and strengthened the relationship with other South American countries. The nationalist and populist discourse called for a union of the Argentinian majoritarian 'people' against the minority oligarchic elite of businessman, landholders, owners of the corporate media monopoly, members of the Catholic Church hierarchy, and military men.

¹⁰ The year 1994 was the first time in which the political class discussed abortion for the first time. The issue gained attention after the petition of Rodolfo Barra – the Minister of Justice at that time- calling for the imposition of a clause defending the absolute right of life from conception in the Constitutional Convention of 1994. The multisectoral Front MADEL, formed mainly by women from different political parties, unions, and local organizations, managed to stop this clause that would have blocked any chance for legal abortion (Sutton & Borland, 2013). However, that did not prevent president Menem from years later, in 1998, declaring March 25 the Day of the Unborn Child, in an attempt to satisfy the Church's demands.

¹¹ *Piquete* refers to the standing or walking demonstration of protest in a significant spot. It started in Argentina during the 90s and became massive in the social rebellion of 2001-2002 that includes the uses of pans, burning tires, and highways blockades, among other things.



Moreover, Kirchnerism sustained a nationalist logic demanding sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands and rejecting the ‘vulture funds’ in international forums. In a positive economic atmosphere, and applying contradictory neoliberal policies, the government took the path of reindustrialization of the country, reduction of unemployment and expansion of human rights.

Thanks to the feminist and LGBTTT movements, new crucial laws were achieved such as Law for Reproductive Health (2003), National Program of Integral Sexual Education (2006), Law for Equal Marriage (2010), Law of full protection for the prevention, sanction and eradication of violence against women (2009), and a Gender Identity Act (2012). With this last law, sanctioned during Cristina Fernández’s presidency (2007-2015), Argentina became the first country in Latin America to legalize same-sex marriage in 2010 and the country with the world’s most progressive gender identity legislation in 2012 (Morgan, 2015).¹² Besides, there have been other important cultural transformations in the last years that politicize heteronormative gendered relations of power in different social spaces and go beyond legal arrangements. One of the main expressions of these shifts is the collective mobilization that the feminist movements and the #NiUnaMenos (Not one [woman] less) platform have articulated. Since 2015, the platform of Argentinian female artists, journalists and academics has launched campaigns against gender-based violence which organized large demonstrations throughout the country. The demand against ‘femicides’ also touched on other topics like sexual harassment, equal pay, sex worker and transgender rights, and the legality of abortion.

The National Campaign with the support of more than 305 groups, organizations and important public figures, put together a bill to legalize abortion that was launched in 2006, entitled Proyecto de Interrupción Voluntaria del Embarazo (voluntary termination of pregnancy project, hereafter the “Bill”). The Bill was based on a mixed regime of decriminalization of abortion which included both the consideration of casual factors and a system of deadlines (Verón, 2018). On one hand, The Bill proposed a period of 14 weeks in which abortion should be provided by the health system without needing to prove any reason for the decision other than the person’s consent.¹³ On the other hand, after that period, abortion would still be legal under certain circumstances: risk to the health and life of the *persona gestante* (expectant person), rape, and diagnosis of fetal malformation incompatible with life.¹⁴ From the first article, the Bill recognized the right to decide on the termination of pregnancy as a human right. In addition, the Bill stipulated the creation of

¹² The law understands gender identity as “the internal and individual way in which gender is perceived by persons, that can correspond or not to the gender assigned at birth” (Law 26.743, art. 2). All persons can request changes in their civil registry without needing to prove any surgical, hormonal or psychological procedure. In any case, the law guarantees individuals’ with the right to free access to any desired medical treatment. Despite being very progressive, these laws are still thought of in a binary discourse in which monogamous marriage is still the normative way of organizing the family and the legal registration of a transgender person’s identity was either female or male until the recent ID incorporation of the X in July 2020 (Alcaraz, 2018).

¹³ To summarize the Bill, I follow the one discussed in the Senate titled Proyecto de Ley en revision sobre Regimen De Interrupcion Voluntaria Del Embarazo (Bill under revision on the Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy Regime), expediente number 22/18, from the Chamber of Deputies. Available online:

<http://www.senado.gov.ar/parlamentario/comisiones/verExp/22.18/CD/PL>. Last accessed: 07/02/2019.

¹⁴ Lacking the exact word in English, I decided to translate *personas gestantes* as expectant people. In this paper, I follow the law and LGBTTT advocates’ position and recognize legal abortion as a right of women and persons who can get pregnant including transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people. In this paper, in general, I use the term ‘women’ as it was the dominant category of the debates and as a way to reduce the awkwardness that the term expectant people may generate.



services of counseling which should provide adequate pre- and post-procedure attention, and the provision of birth control information. In Articles 13 to 15, the draft law stipulated there be access to safe abortion in the public health institutions and regulated conscientious objection, rejecting the right of institutional objection. Lastly, it urged for the correct implementation and achievement of Integral Sex Education and the further training of health professionals in gender perspective education.

The main slogan, also printed on the movement's green scarves, states "sexual education to decide, birth control to not abort, and legal abortion to not die." It maintains that the recognition of reproductive and sexual rights needs universal access to public education and health services that sustain those rights. From being a minority inside the women's movement in the 2000s, the slogan became the main feature of the 2018 mobilizations. The huge mobilizations came to be called the *marea feminista* (feminist tide) which, in a round table in Argentina, Judith Butler (2019) described as something that comes and recedes and comes again with another tide and produces a different constellation. In a neoliberal, globalized, and capitalist context in which Argentina suffers high levels of poverty, inflation and unemployment, feminisms come to consolidate collective responses to all of them.

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

As mentioned before, in this study, I analyze the speeches given by the lawmakers in both Chambers of the Argentinian Congress during the voting days of the Bill to legalize abortion using a feminist Critical Discourse Analysis.¹⁵ The feminist critical discourse analysis elaborated by Michelle Lazar (2007) works on and problematizes the Critical Discourse Analysis approach. CDA groups a "cluster of approaches" from different authors with similar theoretical backgrounds and concerns (Meyer, 2001, p. 23).¹⁶ As the authors acknowledge, CDA is concerned with social problems and seeks to uncover critically the way discourse and language produce, reproduce, legitimize and contest social inequalities and power abuses (Meyer, 2001; van Dijk, 2001). According to Fairclough, CDA is an "analysis of the dialectical relationships between discourse (...) and other elements of social practices" (2003, p. 205). Particularly, it focuses on those social practices that are primarily discursive and figure as ways of acting, ways of representing and ways of being. Thus, CDA deals with the way an "order of discourse" articulates with different genres, discourses, and styles (Fairclough, 2003, p. 206). Feminist CDA points out that these social practices are not neutral but are gendered, such that the analysis should criticize, too, the work of discourse in sustaining patriarchal and hierarchical gendered orders (Lazar, 2007). It also recognizes the way those discourses are resisted, contested and transformed by individual subjects and collectivities. The aim, therefore, is contributing to a change in existing unequal (gendered) relations.

¹⁵ In the Chamber of Deputies, the debate and voting were held on June 13th and 14th, it lasted 23 hours and had 184 speakers. The Bill was finally passed by 129 to 125 votes, and 1 absence. In the Senate, the debate and voting were held on August 8th and 9th, it lasted 12 hours and had 60 speakers. The Bill was rejected with 38 votes against, 31 for, 2 abstentions and 1 absence. My primary sources are the official transcripts of these speeches, available on the official web pages of the Chambers.

¹⁶ For more information, check Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Teun van Dijk and Michael Meyer among others, who develop their particular critical methods of study mainly from the works of Foucault, the Frankfurt School and Critical Linguistics.



Feminist CDA shares its main characteristics with CDA. First, as discourses are conceived as socio-historical, the understanding of the context is crucial. Thus, the analysis is interdisciplinary and combines a linguistic approach with other social, political, cultural, historical and psychological perspectives (Meyer, 2001). Second, feminist CDA involves a hermeneutic process of attentive study of the discourse's meanings and its subtle ideological assumptions. In this connection, this method demands the reflexivity of the researcher in order to critically examine the analysis and practices and their (non) reproduction of hierarchical relations of power (Lazar, 2007). Third, CDA constitutes an open-ended approach where the text analysis is never complete and definitive (Fairclough, 2003). The production of knowledge is partial, situated and not neutral. Finally, and in line with everything above, as CDA is problem-oriented, each study should incorporate the theoretical and methodological tools that allow a closer approach to that problem and to the questions that guide the research (Wodak, 2001). With the aim to follow the questions that guide this research, I use feminist CDA analysis to pay attention to the gendered construction of national belongings through competing discourses. Thus, the analysis is developed through an interdisciplinary focus which articulates linguistic, historical, socio-political and feminist perspectives.

Pro-legal abortion's speeches in relation to the Nation-State

The widespread Argentinian women's movement, feminisms, and the Campaign constitute the broader background against which pro-legal abortion legislators framed their speeches and arguments. As described, the campaign mobilized the support of millions of people, public figures and organizations, and managed to install abortion in the public agenda. By focusing the analysis on the lawmakers' speeches I aim at two interconnected objectives. On one side, I analyze whether and to what extent feminist ideas and contributions are present in these speeches. On the other side, I examine the way the pro-Bill speeches maintain and re-signify gendered notions of nation, state, and citizenship. Here, I examine these latter arguments of the pro-Bill lawmakers in three interconnected thematic axes.

The presence of a feminist discourse

Despite differences among feminisms, the general feminist tactic of deconstruction implies the understanding of hierarchical binaries presented as natural, as socially constructed and therefore changeable. The gendered binary separates human beings into two opposed, complementary, and hierarchical sexes and assigns different roles and capacities to them. Through a patriarchal system, men were assigned the most important ability to produce valid knowledge as rational and full subjects (Peterson, 1992), whereas the woman and the feminine were portrayed as an irrational and passive object of male activity. As Peterson (1992) asserts, feminist discourse challenges this dichotomous separation and stands also for the consideration of empirical experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge, anchored in personal experiences and non-normative ways of being and doing. Moreover, most feminists increasingly propose to move beyond essentialized gender identities and denounce interlocking chains of domination such as patriarchy, capitalism, racism, colonialism.

A feminist stance has been present in some of the speeches given by the pro-legal-abortion lawmakers in the Argentinian parliament. For example, regarding the importance of the empirical experiences, Deputy Alejandra Ródenas from Santa Fe dedicated her whole speech to telling the



story of Julia, a 16 year old girl who died after having a clandestine abortion in 2010.¹⁷ Other lawmakers mentioned similar local cases that occurred to women like Belén, Ana Maria Acevedo and Liliana Herrera who died, were imprisoned or were forced to give birth. The anti-bill advocates also evoked personal stories to support their position, however, the difference here, is that the pro-Bill legislators emphasized that the ‘personal’ should count politically. Thus, they bring forth the feminist claim that ‘the personal is political’ and demand a political account on empirical issues. They request the legalization of abortion not because of rationality, religiosity, symbolic or moral consideration, but because it is related to women’s inner experiences.

As well as the incorporation of the intimate sphere into the public debate, a feminist critique of essentialized gender roles and identities is also present in the lawmakers’ speeches. In the first place, they recognized the historical roots of patriarchy in which women have occupied an inferior and subordinate position. Some referred to unfair previous laws regarding voting, divorce, and political participation, and other like Kirchnerist Deputy Nilda Garré emphasized the continued existence of a “male chauvinist and unequal society, in a society that harasses, abuses and even kills women”, in a clear reference to what the #Niunamenos movement has denounced. At the same time, these pro-legal abortion representatives construct other notions of gender relations and identities. The main emphasis is put on the recognition of women’s capacity and freedom to decide about their bodies, their future, and sexuality. Besides, the speeches highlight the contemplation of maternity as desire and not as destiny or obligation. In this direction, Chubut Peronist Senator Alfredo Luenzo referring to the anti-legal position asked “what do we intend? To transform the woman into an object? To say that the woman is only a womb, a reproductive organ, an incubator?” (p. 149). Seeming to answer these questions, Deputy Facundo Suarez Lastra from the Radical Civic Union reinforced that “there is no possibility of motherhood without the desire of the mother. There is no motherhood outside the womb and what constitutes someone as a mother is the desire to be one.” The dispute over women’s assigned position also led to the problematization of men social roles. Particularly male legislators recognized that they as men should not interfere in women’s decisions and as privileged subjects should retreat in their privileges.

The reconsideration of essentialized gender roles opened the space for the visibility of diverse gender identities and the critique of their subordinate social position too. Acknowledging the terms used in the Bill, some pro-legal abortion legislators mentioned not only women but also expectant people in their speeches. Deputy Silvia Horne called for integral sex education so that people can value and respect the other’s self-perceived identity in a clear reference to what the Gender Identity Act (2012) stipulates. Moreover, lawmakers like Gabriela Cerruti, Marcos Cleri, and Gabriela Estévez used inclusive language, appealing to the word ‘*todes*’ (all) and ‘*les pibes*’ (the youngs) to refer to a new Spanish version of the third person of the plural that includes men, women, trans and gender non-conforming people. Other legislators, especially those from the socialist parties denounced other chains of oppression embedded with patriarchy, such as the exploitation of workers, poverty, and misery under neoliberalism and financial capitalism. Deputy Romina Del Plá from a Trotskyite orientation said that “to go in depth in the rights of women we have to delve deeper in the fight for the rights of the workers and the exploited and for the

¹⁷ Quotes from the debates are cited by the name of the speakers. The full list of contributions can be found in the ‘References’ section. As mentioned in the methodological part, the quotes are extracted from the transcript of the 2018 debate sessions available on the official webpages of the two Argentinian Congress Chambers. The transcripts of the Chamber of Deputies are not page numbered like the Senate ones, so only the senator’s quotes are numbered in this thesis. The translations are mine.



emancipation of all forms of exploitation.” Bringing back Peterson’s (1992) proposal and through a feminist CDA, on the pro-legal-abortion speeches, it is possible to identify components of a feminist epistemology. These legislators criticize essentialized gender identities and the consequent equation of womanhood with motherhood. In addition, some of them recognize non-binary gender identities and denounce chains of oppression under capitalism.

A common past and a common destiny

The nation, as an imagined political community, constitutes a terrain of disputing discourses which gain some primacy over time. The speeches of the pro-legal abortion representatives are part of a dispute over the senses of the nation, State, and collectivity as they incorporate rhetoric around collective temporal axes, matters of belonging and citizenship that Wodak et al. (2005) identify in the discursive construction of national identities. Regarding the temporal axes, the lawmakers included the struggle for legal abortion in a broader storyline of crucial events in Argentina. In particular, the pro-Bill speeches situated the contemporary women’s movement as a legacy from the past Argentinian feminist and women’s movements and important women figures. In particular, members of different parties emphasized facts related to their political ideology. While the socialists recognized the suffragists of the beginning of the 20th Century and the *piqueteras* workers of the 2001 crisis, members of the Radical Party mentioned the achievement of women’s rights under the Alfonsín radical government. Some members like Deputy Josefina Mendoza also connected the demand for legal abortion with the University Reform of 1918 and related the student revolution of that era with the feminist revolution of this time. On the other hand, the Peronist representatives especially venerated the figure of Evita, her fight for women’s rights, social justice, and the end of double-standards. Deputy Nilda Garré asserted that she “want[s] to evoke the struggle of the suffragettes of the early 20th Century (...) which had the final impulse with that incomparable fighter who was Eva Perón, who if alive would be accompanying us in this new chapter.”¹⁸

Even if in particular different party members considered diverse women’s movements, in general, they all connected the fight for legal abortion with the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo’s movement, with also some ambiguous connotations. Talking about the role of women in the Argentinian history, Peronist Senator Alfredo Luenzo considered that “it is women who *ponen el cuerpo* [put their bodies on the line], as the Madres de Plaza de Mayo did. Women, in a clandestine and invisible condition, were those who *pusieron el cuerpo* to get their children back (...). They gave us an example” (p. 150).¹⁹ The expression centered on bodily issues refers not only to the content of the demands (tortures, domestic violence, health care) but also to the activist practices which involve non-normative forms of feminine embodiment. According to Senator Luenzo, like the Madres, women’s activism demanding legal abortion joins the concept of *poner el cuerpo* in an embodiment compromise to reclaim something that traverses the body. Madres

¹⁸ Both stances, for and against the Bill, ambiguously appealed to Evita’s authority to gain legitimacy. Especially to this pro-legal abortion position the use of Evita is quite controversial as, although she worked for some women’s rights and new positions, she promoted the ideal of a nationalist woman devoted to motherhood and caring of the house, husband and community (Luna, 2000).

¹⁹ The scholar Barbara Sutton (2007) explains that the expression *poner el cuerpo* is part of the vocabulary of women’s resistance in Argentina and means to “put the whole embodied being into action, to be committed to a social cause and assume the bodily risks, work and demands of such commitment” (Sutton, 2007, p. 130).



de Plaza de Mayo resemble the ideal of goodness and fair struggles for freedom, justice, and human rights. By appealing to their history and support, the lawmakers reinforced the idea of legalization of abortion not only as a valuable and just law but also as something morally correct. In fact, kirchnerist Deputy Horacio Pietragalla Cotri, himself a baby stolen during the dictatorship and whose identity was restored through the efforts of the Abuelas, regarding the presence in the Congress stage of Nora Cortiñas, the co-founder of Madres de Plaza, expressed: “Here there is a mother supporting us: ‘Norita’ Cortiñas. If this mother supports us and we look at our sides and she is there we are in the right place.”

Along with the figure of Evita, the uses of the Madres and Abuelas in the pro-legal-abortion discourse implies some contradictions. As explained before, the Madres and Abuelas organized themselves to resist the dictatorship government and demand information about their ‘disappeared’ children by appealing to their maternal duties. As scholar Debora D’Antonio (2007) asserts, Madres symbolically mutated from individual mothers to collective mothers of the new Argentinian democracy. Yet problematically, the pro-Bill legislators venerated the Madres and Abuelas less because of their maternal symbolism and more as human rights advocates against conservative forces. In fact, the Campaigners for legal abortion consciously chose the *pañuelo* (scarf) as their symbol as an echo of the white one used by Madres and Abuelas. According to these lawmakers, the history and the legacy of the Madres, Abuelas, and the women’s movements in general led to the consolidation of the current feminist movement. The present movement is constructed as formed mainly by young girls who, on a massive and strong scale, demand freedom and equality. Deputy Gabriela Cerruti from a center-left position interconnected past and present as follows:

Not so long ago we were told that Argentinians were the sons and daughters of the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo. I like to say that we are the daughters and the sons of those *‘viejas locas’ del pañuelo blanco*, and today we are the fathers and mothers of those *‘pibas locas’ del pañuelo verde*. The two scarves, united and interwoven in an intergenerational dialogue, are building the history of the conquest of rights and freedom in the country’s community, undoubtedly giving lessons to the world.

In this speech, the Argentinian community is being imagined as a family in which the Madres – with their history of struggle and value – appropriately raised the children whose daughters are continuing their struggle. The Madres and Abuelas were called *viejas locas* (crazy old ladies) alluding to how the military hierarchy first called them. Then, the Deputy defined the young feminist generation as *pibas locas*, *pibas* being a colloquial Argentinian expression used to refer to young, teenage, spirited girls.²⁰ Others lawmakers called the current movement the ‘*pibas’ revolution*’ or ‘daughters’ revolution’ in a sense that refers to the youth and active component of it but also to the idea of future embedded in it. They represent the present and the future of the community that will keep fighting for more rights and inclusion. By linking women’s mobilizations of the present with the past and the future, these lawmakers are incorporating them into the narrative of the nation. As Racioppi & O Sullivan (2000) point out, the notion of a national collective identity needs a shared sense of continuity with crucial events of the past oriented to a common destiny of the unit. With their discourse, the pro-legal-abortion legislators are re-defining hegemonic “myths of common blood and belonging” to incorporate an active presence

²⁰ The word *pibas* originally come from the lower class slang and cumbia songs with an erotic component. Now it refers to young girls who are mostly urban, independent, and spirited.



of women in them (Racioppi & O Sullivan, 2000, p. 18). Here, women are not only metaphorically assigned a symbolic, reproductive and supportive role in the nation as older critiques of gendered nationalism acknowledges. Women are also being considered as active members of the community, who contribute to its improvement and vividly embody its future, as new scholars like Waylen (1998); Ranchod-Nilsson & Tétreault (2000), and Kaufman & Williams (2007) examine.

The gendered nation-state under resignification

In these pro-Bill speeches, hegemonic national conceptions of women and motherland were also under revision. In the 2018 context where the official government was in negotiations with the IMF, some lawmakers used the demand for legal abortion to defend their political programs and ideologies. For instance, Deputy Marcelo Wechsler from the ruling liberal-conservative party associated individual freedoms to choose abortion with Argentinian economic freedoms to sign commercial agreements with the European Union. From an opposing party, Kirchnerist Deputy Adrián Grana criticized the agreement with the IMF and considered it Argentina's "loss of sovereignty of economic decisions, [where] tens of thousands of compatriots of this and the next generation will be condemned." Seconds before, the deputy mentioned in his speech that under the current patriarchal law punishing abortion, "the woman cannot decide about her future and about the place she wants to occupy in society and how she wants to do it." In this discourse, there is an equation between women's decisions and those of the nation. The latter was referred to by the Deputy as *patria* and Argentinians as *compatriotas* with an emphasis on the next generations. From the Kirchnerist party, rooted in nationalist and populist ideologies, the Deputy is locating Argentina in its particular geography and history of being under the influence of the United States and international organs. His conception of nation is one independent of external domination, which can take its own economic decisions just as women's must decide autonomously over their bodies, pregnancies and abortions. The traditional imaginary of the nation as a woman's body under protection analyzed by McClintock (1993) and Stoler (1989) gives space to conceive an independent nation/woman, sovereign, free of external coercion and self-determining.

Regarding the relation between the Church and the State, pro-legal abortion advocates criticized the historically strong presence of the Catholic Church in Argentinian political matters, such as in education, the past requirement that the president be Catholic, the church's involvement in military governments, its opposition to same-sex marriage and the state's legal obligation to (economically) support Catholicism. The pro-legal-abortion speeches portrayed a more manifest 'them' in the demarcation of the imagined national borders. The outsiders of the home-nation were constructed as opposed not only to the legalization of abortion but also to the achievement of other rights and laws. The 'them' was represented in a continuum that involves the Catholic Church, conservative sectors, militaries, and supporters of the dictatorship governments. Indeed, in their attempt to portray religious institutions as national outsiders, some lawmakers like social-democrat Senator Oscar Castillo pointed out that "the story of our Law, the story of our freedoms in the Argentinian Republic, is the story of secularization" (p. 160). He then described crucial moments of Argentinian history where some rights which the Church was against were achieved, casting these as signs of modernity, freedom, and advancement. All these notions appeared as well at the moment of describing the type of society defended in the pro-Bill discourses. The speeches put the legalization of abortion as a symbol of progress for an improved, civilized, and



modern society. As justicialist Senator Miguel Pichetto from Río Negro, referring to the abortion debate stated:

This is a structural debate that has to do with modern Argentina or with a backward Argentina. (...) Religion cannot impose on the whole country and the state the religious thought and vision on civil nature's norms that are part of the secular state. (...) I want to tell you that I am convinced that Argentina, when we can vote on this issue, will definitely enter into modernity, into a process of justice and equity, broader than the present one (p. 193,194,198).

The Senator's vision can be included into a positivist colonial paradigm in which human history is linear, progressive and societies are divided according the 'stage' of development in which they are (Quijano, 2000). According to Senator Pichetto's vision, modernity, synonym of secularization, equity, justice and achievement of women's rights, resembles the higher level of human progression. For other pro-bill lawmakers, modernity has also been directly associated with developed countries and they presented examples to show that the 'developed' countries are those which had legalized abortion and expanded rights to women. Moreover, for them, Argentina should have legal abortion because its idiosyncrasy is similar to these 'advanced' places. For instance, centre-right Senator Humberto Schiavoni proposed to copy Spain and Italy because, in general, "from there we descend in our country" (p. 67).

In addition, Peronist Deputy Fernando Espinoza argued in favor of legal abortion so that "Argentina will be at the forefront of Latin America – next to Uruguay– of what happens in the great democracies of the world, where it was already voted affirmatively long time ago." With their speeches, the pro-Bill legislators are reproducing colonialist hegemonic notions of Argentinian national identity. The scholar Rita Segato (2007), in her analysis of the configuration of the Argentinian nation, explains the process of whitening and Europeanization carried on by the ruling elite of the late 19th Century. As mentioned, there was a huge and violent project to produce national identity as modern, advanced, literate, and white in resemblance to Europe and superior to the rest of Latin America. In the pro-Bill discourse encouraging development and modernity, the lawmakers are reinforcing a racialized domination which rejects indigenous cosmologies and societies. Even more, they are losing track of the particular oppressions experienced in Latin America. According to this discourse, abortion can be legal not just because women's autonomy is valued but because it is a desired part of these resignified national configurations. However, these reconfigurations still reproduce colonial matrixes of power which divide the world into western and non-western and assign a superior value to the former, perpetuating hierarchical social relations.

Conclusions

In 1993, Anne McClintock, one of the leading scholars in feminist critiques on nationalism, explained the way the familial tropes figured in national imaginaries and sustained women's subordination into the nation. In her conclusion, she wondered if under progressive nationalism this iconography would still figure as national unity or radical figures would be developed. At the beginning of this research process, I aimed to understand the difficulties of making abortion legal. Based on longstanding feminist theories of the nation and common sense knowledge, my expectations were that the conservative discourses would line up with heteropatriarchal national imaginaries. However, after a feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of the speeches given by the



lawmakers in the 2018 parliamentary debates in Argentina, I came to the conclusion that the current articulation between gender and nation is more complex than expected and the difficulties of legal abortion are not so easy to outline. Conservative movements and anti-legal abortion legislators are not entirely upholding hegemonic national configurations nor are feminists and Bill's supporters entirely challenging 'the nation'. In fact, the nation is important for both positions showing that feminists need to set matters of national belonging to inscribe their demands. These settings challenge some national narratives but the nation component is present, and it even figures with familiar iconography where women are still its main symbolic cultural reproducers.

The speeches given by the pro-legal-abortion legislators in the 2018 debates incorporated feminist demands and epistemologies deconstructing gender essentialist identities and hegemonic roles assigned to them. In this discourse, the Argentinian nation was still symbolized as a woman figure who should be sovereign and free-decision maker against external forces at the present. These external forces were seen as either the Church and its allies or imperial forces and international organs. Here, independent women who fight for their rights came to represent the authentic Argentinian culture. Indeed, women's expected behavior was not related with biological motherhood but with cultural reproduction. As did the Madres de Plaza de Mayo who metaphorically gave birth to the new Argentinian nation, new generations of women should keep working in rights' expansion. Moreover, women's rights became the markers of Argentinian exceptionalism in Latin America, a signifier of a secular, progressive, modern and developed society. In this discourse, these characteristics were associated with Europe and western countries, reproducing hegemonic national notions in which Argentina has been portrayed as white and western, leaving unproblematized global unequal relations of power regarding capitalism and colonialism.

The nation under constant resignification opens a space for new questionings regarding the articulation between feminism and nationalism, feminist inscriptions in nation-state projects (should we still call them feminists?) and the effects and costs of achieving rights for women. These questions are here to stay, in a region where debates around legal abortion and the invocation of the nation within them are still going on. For centuries in Argentina, motherhood has been enshrined and grounded in national imaginaries, in link with religion and patriarchy. The goal of making abortion legal and, thus, legally stipulating disobedience against mandatory motherhood, have produced a situation in which both conservatives and feminists use national appeals in their campaigns. National sentiments are predominant in the configuration of social relations, politics of sexuality and reproduction, and gender arrangements, and they deserve a particular consideration, as I have given them in this paper.

The demand for legal abortion potentially challenges national imaginaries and state institutions and opens the question of the extent to which it is possible to chip away at these patriarchal, colonial, racist, and heterosexist structures. Perhaps one of the ways to achieve this should be keeping active alternative forms of doing politics instead of addressing all feminist struggles towards transforming formal political structures, as Rita Segato (2016) suggests. In a dialectical game, these alternative forms of community care and against violent exclusion may generate changes in cultural and social structures which eventually transform formal structures as well. In fact, the demand for legal abortion is part of this reciprocal articulation that aims at the state, nation, society, and families to recognize women's autonomy over their bodies, not because we don't have that autonomy but so that we don't die or suffer health risks when exercising that autonomy. In Argentina, feminist movements are succeeding in stopping the cultural association



of abortion with crime and instead relate motherhood to desire. With that, they are disrupting essentialized patriarchal views of gender which challenge also other unequal structures of power sustained by it, like those of the nation-state. The question of how to transform patriarchal arrangements remains for me, but I am more certain that the fight for a more just, inclusive, affective responsible, and mutually supportive world is making inroads and will ultimately transform traditional politics, defying dominant structures – from the inside and the outside.

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