

IMMIGRATION REMOVAL CENTRES AS THE EPICENTRE OF THE SECURITISATION OF MIGRATION: AN INSIGHT INTO THE MEXICAN CASE

Research Proposal – Amalia Campos-Delgado

1) Issue

The detention, separation, and criminalisation of Central American migrant families in the United States has been met by debate and international consternation. The image of children separated from their parents and held in fenced facilities became a powerful depiction that opened a debate on the moral and ethical standpoints of migration detention. Despite the fact that the Central America-US migratory corridor cannot be understood in isolation from the activities of control conducted in Mexico since 2001, the detention of Central American migrants by Mexican authorities has been considerably less exposed and questioned. Thus, the question that guides this research is: How do the Mexican immigration removal centres contribute to the securitisation of Central American migration?

Much has now been written about the securitisation of migration, that is the perception and construction of migration as a national security issue and the use of techniques of government to prevent, contain, and punish irregular mobilities (Bourbeau 2011). From the state's perspective, the securitisation of migration symbolises the power to control its borders against unwanted flows (Popescu 2012). States' strategies to govern migration are not restricted to their national territories. However, this externalisation of border controls is deployed differently according to migrants' means of mobility. When through regular channels, states govern migration through the issuing of visas and other pre-clearance processes (Infantino 2016; Torpey 1998). Whilst to govern those outside the frameworks of regularised mobility, destination states have forged alliances with neighbouring countries in order to contain migration (Longo 2016). Through this, destination states have externalised their borders and these countries, considered "transit countries", have become firewalls of migration and are crucial in the understanding of the governing of migration. Thus, the externalisation of border controls in countries of transit has added another layer of complexity to the analysis of immigration removal centres because it implies the use of detention as a preventive measure of migration control (Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias, and Pickles 2016; Menjívar 2014). This means that, in practice, immigration removal centres in transit countries operate as proxy detentions and are a key element in the deterrence strategy of destination countries.

Immigration removal centres are essential in the construction of migration as a security issue because they materialise the notions of otherness and containment (Aas and Bosworth 2013). Immigration detention is at the core of debates about how states exclude migrants from their society by detaining and deporting them. Therefore, they are a strategic component of how states govern migration (Coutin 2010; Gill 2016; Mainwaring and Silverman 2017). Further, the involvement of private actors in activities to govern migration has promoted the commodification of migration management and the creation of an "immigration industrial complex" (Doty and Wheatley 2013; Leerkes and Broeders 2010). However, while studies of migration detention policies have been influential, my work speaks to the need to examine border security as a practice, that is, to consider that the translation from policy to action is not unilinear but shaped by multiple elements as it is interpreted and performed by security actors (Côté-Boucher, Infantino, and Salter 2014). In this regard, scholars in border criminologies and critical border studies have emphasised the power-resistance dynamics within centres. They have called for an analysis of how the categories of insecurity and criminality, on which the securitisation of migration is built, orient the relationships between detainees and migrant officers (Bosworth 2014; Hall 2012; Nyers 2008). Despite the fact it is not conceived as a space for punishment, the forced immobility of migrants in these detention centres encourages a strongly hierarchical custodian-prisoner type relationship, depersonalised and shaped by animosity, and where there is little opportunity for migrants' agency.

However, much of these analyses stem from research done in migration destination countries such as the United States. In contrast, this project aims to examine Mexican immigration removal centres as the epicentre of the securitisation of migration and the externalisation of US border control. Therefore, it is contextualised under what I called elsewhere the Mexican Transit Control Regime (Campos-Delgado 2018) established in 2001 to detain and deter irregular migrants travelling to the United States. These actions of control must be examined in direct connection to the agreements signed between Mexico and the United States after June 2001. These agreements reinforce the security and control of the Mexico-US border and operate under a double objective. They aim to construct a "smart border" that heightens the flow of regularised mobilities while simultaneously strengthening control over irregular mobilities. In other words, through these agreements, Mexico agreed to detain third-country nationals travelling irregularly and trying to reach the US territory. Although designed without a specific targeted

population, the actions of control have focused mostly on detaining Central American migrants in transit. The Mexican Transit Control Regime reduces migrants' chances to arrive at the US border and this can be attested by contrasting the numbers of migrants apprehended by authorities in Mexico and the US. From 2010 to 2016 the Mexican Migration Institute detained 733,170 irregular migrants from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, while the US Customs and Border Patrol returned 25,236 irregular migrants from those countries (Unidad de Política Migratoria 2016; CBP 2016). Consequently, with the construction of a border-zone for migrants in transit, from 2005 to 2017 the number of immigration removal centres operated in the Mexican territory increased from 25 to 59. As was mentioned, immigration removal centres are at the core of debates around the securitisation of migration, however, despite its importance to understanding how Mexico governs migration, there is almost no information about what happens inside those walls. On a regular basis, civil society organisations that monitor human rights have no access and there is no previous academic research on this matter. Hence, in particular, this research challenges the lack of information and lack of accountability around migration control in Mexico. More generally, it contributes to the analysis of the externalisation of border controls in countries of the so-called global south and emphasises the interconnection between the macro and micro dynamics of the securitisation of migration.

2) Objectives

This research will examine the Mexican immigration removal centres as the cornerstone of the Mexican Transit Control Regime. In order to illuminate the daily operations of these centres, it will also explore the relationships between migration officers and detainees within these spaces. In order to do so, three specific objectives are outlined:

1. Examine the involvement of the US government in the operation of the Mexican immigration removal centres.
2. Map and analyse the set of rules established for the centres' operation.
3. Explore the situations that create tension and conflict between officers and detainees and the strategies of negotiation.

Through these specific objectives, it will be possible to explore the macro and micro dimensions of the centres dynamics. Thus, this research will shed light on the immigration removal centres as a central component of the transit control regime implemented in Mexico, on the framework upon which they operate and, finally, on the facilities' material conditions, and the relationships between detainees, as well as between detainees and officers. That is, this research will contribute to the understanding of the practices and experiences within the immigration removal centres and will add to a body of knowledge in border criminologies that has been predominantly focused on migration detention in Europe and Australia (Aas and Bosworth 2013; Cheliotis 2013; Pickering and Lambert 2001; Ugelvik and Damsa 2014).

3) Methodology

The methodology will be divided into two in accordance with the research objectives: (1) the first and second objectives will be addressed through information gathered via Freedom of Information Requests to the Mexican Migration Institute. Because of the secrecy surrounding the regime, Freedom of Information Request is a method that allows access to public and declassified information about state security and its operations. For example, it will be possible to know more about the material contributions that the US has granted to the Mexican Migration Institute; also, it will give the opportunity to examine how the Mexican government frames the acceptance of these contributions. (2) The third objective will be addressed through semi-structured interviews with migrant officers and irregular migrants. Potential participants of the first group will be reached through contacts established during my PhD research and using a snowball technique. As for the second group, potential participants will be met in a civil society-led migrant shelter, also previously accessed during PhD fieldwork.

4) Schedule

Activities	Months											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Literature Review	x	x										
Preparation of instruments for data collection			x									
Data collection				x	x	x						
Systematisation and analysis of data							x	x				
Presentation of initial findings								x				
Publication of research findings									x	x	x	
Presentation of research results												x

5) Statement of motivations to carry out project at CICC

There are two main reasons why I consider the CICC as the best place to carry out my postdoctoral project. First of all, my research is well aligned with the centre's Axis 4, Criminology and transnational issues, and particularly with the theme of Border Governance. Indeed, current research in criminology and borders is currently focused on immigration detention and as such, a criminology centre is the ideal place to carry that kind of research. Secondly, I wish to work alongside experts in the field. My research will benefit from the expertise of Karine Côté-Boucher, but also with potential discussions with scholars in the field of transnational policing and security, e.g., Samuel Tanner and Anthony Amicelle, and, in general, from the CICC's diverse research community and their approaches towards security, securitisation, and criminality. Thus, CICC is ideal for continuing my research agenda in the field of border regimes and the understanding of the interconnections between security issues and insecurity dynamics.

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