

## CLAS Open Seminars - Lent Term 2025

Mondays 5:15pm

SG1 Ground Floor, Alison Richard Building, 7 West Road, CB3 9DT

**Monday 24 February - 5:15pm**

***More degraded, but more open? The paradox of prison transparency in Argentina***

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Chair: [Pedro Mendes Loureiro](#) (University of Cambridge)

### **Abstract:**

Latin America has experienced an impressive growth in imprisonment over the last thirty years, albeit with high degrees of variation in different national contexts. Argentina is no exception. The incarceration rate grew by 287% between 1992 and 2023, reaching 240/100000. This growth has produced numerous dramatic effects within prison walls, exacerbating their traditional negative dimensions (overcrowding, poor living conditions, violence, etc.). However, there has also been an expansion of their porosity, a long-standing feature of the contexts of confinement in the region, embedded in different dynamics. Within this more general process, there is the paradox that throughout this period more and more actors from outside the Argentinean prisons have entered it to carry out various activities in direct contact with prisoners. The struggles for prison transparency have multiplied, despite the fact that the Argentinean prison services have maintained a constant search for opacity, connected with their high doses of militarisation and authoritarianism. This paper presents a map of these ways of producing a flow of information about what happens inside prisons, which draws on lived experience of incarcerated persons. It includes actions 'from above' - by state actors such as torture prevention committees, public defenders or the National Prison Ombudsman's Office - and 'from below' - by non-state actors, from the prisoners themselves to their families, including various types of social organisations. Some of these actions are aimed at producing transparency, such as those of the various mechanisms for monitoring detention conditions. They are, in this sense, 'direct' actions. But many of them are 'indirect', producing transparency while pursuing other objectives, such as the multiple initiatives of public universities in contexts of confinement. This is a 'contested', 'agonistic' transparency, which is far removed from the forms of transparency officially produced in the prison services of the Global North, which establish partial forms of managed visibility (Moore et al, 2024). The paper concludes by addressing the conditions of possibility of this paradox, of a prison that is both more degraded and inhuman and more open and intervened.



**Máximo Sozzo** is Professor of Sociology of Law and Criminology at the National University of Litoral (Argentina). He is also Leverhulme Visiting Professor at the Law School of the University of Edinburgh, UK (2023/2025). He has published more than 70 chapters' articles in scientific journals, 7 books and 16 edited collections in the field of social and historical studies on crime and crime control. His latest books in English are: *Punishment in Latin America. Explorations from the margins* (Edited with L. dal Santo. Emerald, 2024), *Decolonising the Criminal Question* (edited with A. Aliverti, A. Chamberlen & H. Carvalho. Oxford University Press, 2023) and *Prisons, Inmates and Governance in Latin America* (Palgrave, 2022). He is currently Editor in Chief of *Punishment and Society. The International Journal of Penology*. He is doing research now on struggles around prison transparency and accountability and the metamorphoses of penalty in Argentina.