

Peruvians in Cordoba: migration, garment workshops and community practices

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Abstract: Based on the findings of an ethnographic research, this paper proposes to analyze the labor trajectories in “informal” garment workshops of Peruvian migrants who live in territories of urban relegation of Cordoba (Argentina), regarding their strategies to access the city and family reproduction. Moreover, it explores the community practices, as resources of local organization intended for self-management, mobilized in neighborhoods in connection with the development of garment workshops. This study shows how some processes that exceed migration itself –such as presence/absence (selective) of the State in urban spaces, informal labor networks and difficulties to access housing– are related to mobility and labor insertions, making it possible and stimulating the existence and proliferation of informal garment workshops in specific places of the city.

Key words: urban space, garment workshops, Peruvian migrants, communitarian practices, autonomy of migration.

Resumen: A partir de los resultados de un trabajo de campo etnográfico, este artículo se propone indagar en las trayectorias laborales en talleres textiles “informales” de migrantes peruanos que viven en territorios de relegación urbana de Córdoba (Argentina), en el marco de las estrategias de acceso a la ciudad y de reproducción familiar. Asimismo, reflexiona sobre las prácticas comunitarias, en tanto recursos de organización barrial tendientes a la autogestión, que se despliegan en esos territorios en relación con el desarrollo de los talleres textiles. Este estudio muestra cómo ciertos procesos que exceden la migración en sí misma –como la presencia/ausencia del Estado, las redes de trabajo informal y la dificultad para el acceso a la vivienda– se relacionan con las movilidades e inserciones laborales de la población migrante de forma tal que posibilitan y estimulan la existencia y proliferación de talleres textiles informales en zonas concretas de la ciudad.

Palabras clave: espacio urbano, taller textil, migrantes peruanos, prácticas comunitarias, autonomía de las migraciones.

Introduction

From the results of an ethnographic fieldwork, this article will enquire on the forms of living urban spaces —conceived as a historic and political construction (Wacquant, 2007: 21)—, from the analysis of the way in which certain “migrant” labor paths, such as textile work, articulate with the modes of production and appropriation of these spaces, in the context of a search for strategies of subsistence and familial reproduction.

In particular, it considers the labor careers of Peruvian migrants, men and women, who have arrived in recent decades in the City of Cordoba (Argentina) and live in territories of urban relegation. In like manner, it reflects on the solidarity links and community practices that migrants unfold in these territories regarding the development of garment workshops. In territories of urban marginalization, these links and practices serve as a neighborhood organizational resource that tends to self-management.

In the case of Peruvian migrants, community practices do not come from an indigenous tradition —as it may be the case of Bolivian migration, reconstructed in studies by Bastia (2007), Colectivo Simbiosis/Colectivo Situaciones (2011) and Gago (2014)—, but from the strategies and possibilities activated in their journeys as migrants in the destination places. Journeys that include the guesthouses they arrive to, shared with other countrymen, the networks unfold in the processes of arrival to recipient cities and also some spaces in these cities, to the development and maintenance of the garment workshop itself, in which a “know-how” configured from the centrality of sewing, as labor insertion for this population in the city of Cordoba, is nourished.

Around this, we will build the specificities of Sabattini, a marginalized urban neighborhood located in the east periphery of Cordoba and settled on fiscal plots owned by the national State. This space consolidates between 2009 and 2010 when a group of people, mainly Peruvian, start to *take*¹ the plots, as they no longer could afford living in other places of the city. The constitution of Sabattini fits the category of “villa” used in Argentina to refer to the set of plots in which there has been a succession of occupations, sales, re-sales in a paralegal manner and without basic services (Gago, 2014).

Even if Sabattini “meets the requirements”, in this work we refer to such space as “neighborhood”, for this is how the neighbors themselves call it. In their stories reiteratively appears the idea of the *effort* carried out to build a

1 Italics will be used to distinguish domestic categories.

space similar to a “neighborhood” not a “villa”, with the symbolic implications this poses in the ways of inhabiting the city (Magliano *et al.*, 2014).

Indeed, it is in these spaces where “informal” and “clandestine” garment workshops² are found, proliferate and operate without upheavals, looking for using the community resources of protection and labor force present there (Gago, 2014: 232). Well now, the argument proposed in this work goes beyond this premise: for us, the authors, the possession of an “informal” and “clandestine” garment workshop emerges as a condition of possibility from the obtaining a place to live, which takes place by means of a process of space appropriation in the context of the struggles to access the city. This way, the borders inside the cities work not only as an exclusion factor, but also as a field of possibilities around the search for subsistence strategies that challenge State control and regulation. The very arrival to Sabattini —as a space taken “illegally” according to the parameters established by the State— can be read as a result of mechanisms to dispute the state order, in the context of practices of “assertion to the right to the city” (Sassen, 2010: 396).

The thoughts that will guide this work fundamentally nourish from two theoretical trends. In the first place, it retakes the proposals of the approach of autonomy of migrations, which starts from considering migration as a creative and critical force inside social, cultural and economic structures (Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2008).

From this perspective, the exploitation faced by migrants always leaves a margin for the action they unfold as their “condition of possibility and material base for their impugnation potential” (Mezzadra, 2012: 163). This is to say, according to the autonomy of migrations, migrant struggles refer to daily strategies, questionings and resistances by means of which the migrants express their “conflicting” presence in the recipient countries (De Genova *et al.*, 2015).

In the case we analyze here, the mechanisms of exploitation faced by the migrants owing to their disadvantageous social, political, economic and cultural position in the destination cities activate forms of struggle and resistance. Precisely, it is in these spaces where power becomes concrete and

2 Retaking the Gago’s proposals, in this work the categories “informal” and “clandestine” are conceived from their creative potential and not only from their negative connotation. This way, the author defines “informality” using its character of innovation, which looks for new ways instead of its relation with the normativity that defines the legal/illegal (Gago, 2014: 21), and “clandestine” from a management of labor force that surpasses the legal parameters and that includes vital spheres within a broader government of the body and subjectivity of that who works (Gago, 2014: 141).

can be contested and where the oppressed (in this case an ample sector of the migrants) are part of the “social infrastructure *for* power” (Sassen, 2015: 21, italics in the original).

In the second place, this study recovers contributions from urban sociology to ponder the implications of the current processes of inequality, marginalization and resistance, recognizing that from the start of this new century “the city reappears as a strategic space to understand the critical tendencies in the reconfiguration of the social order” (Sassen, 2007: 129).

Those processes are not woven with the same fibers in all the places; on the contrary, the generic mechanisms that produce them and the specific forms they adopt become intangible when they are located in the historic matrix of relationships between classes, State and space (Wacquant, 2007). In such sense, in view of contributing to the field of discussion and study on cities, labor and migration in contemporary societies, this article inspires in readings of Das and Poole (2008), De Genova *et al.* (2015), Gago (2014), Mezzadra (2012), Sassen (2007, 2010 and 2015) and Wacquant (2007).

The study organizes in three sections. In the first, we will disclose the methodological strategy selected for the development of this research. Secondly, we will detail the forms taken by informality in order to think the strategies unfolded by migrants to live and survive in the urban space; to do so, we will examine the articulation between Sabattini’s forms of appropriation in the search for a place to live and the consolidation of certain jobs, such as sewing.

Dialoguing with these aspects, we will analyze the specificities of this economic sector in recent decades, intending to recognize the particularities of the segmentation processes of the labor market from the 2001 neoliberal legitimacy crisis in Argentina; this is to say, when new forms of informality appear and reproduce in a scenario of increasing preeminence of territorial dimension.

In the third place, we will enquire on the solidarity links and community practices present in the inception and functioning of garment workshops in marginalized urban neighborhoods; and also on the tensions and disputes that appear in terms of the power relations and inequalities between migrants themselves. These ties and practices link to singular ways of appropriation and negotiation of the urban space and at the same time they are fundamental “for the production and maintenance of labor forms of intense exploitation” (Gago, 2014: 47).

Although the relation between textile labor and migration has turned into a topic of growing interest for the academy in Argentina in recent years,

this article takes up the challenge of approaching an aspect that has received scant attention: the articulation between forms of appropriation of the urban space, informality in daily life and development of determinate labor insertions of the migrants, Peruvian in this case, who arrived over the last decade in the country.

In this context, we intend to go beyond the description of the exploitation logics that effectively sustain the garment workshop to give an account of everything behind their functioning and that expresses not only precariousness but creativity as well as solidarity and resistance. As suggested by Sassen (2007), it is important to recover the categories of place and production process to observe the multiplicity of economies —many of which are poorly trained and paid— and the labor cultures that compose the contemporary global economic system.

Ethnography as methodological strategy

In the case of Sabattini, textile labor is comprised in familial micro-enterprises under two main modalities: work as stitchers hired by workshops “outside” the neighborhood (generally, in the city downtown) and work in their own household, providing they own a workshop that can hire not only the family but neighbors, Peruvian as well. In both cases, the migrants engage in the sewing of clothes copying a model they receive from the intermediary with the brand's owner. These intermediaries can be from Argentina or migrants with more ‘successful’ trajectories in economic activities. By and large, the patterns of the garments —*cuts* in domestic terms— arrive already cut, being the main task to assembly the garment.

Owing to its informality —and in some cases illegality— “entering” these workshops is not easy task. In fact, only after several months after we had started our fieldwork and after sharing other spaces of the neighborhood's daily life were we able to “enter” some workshops.

This way, we understand that this research would not have been possible without the intense ethnographic fieldwork collectively undertaken in Sabattini from August 2012 to the end of 2015. The centrality of the ethnographic fieldwork to analyze topics as the one approached in this study lies, following Das and Poole (2008: 20), in the fact that being “a form of knowledge that privileges experience”, it allows “introducing in the domain of the social that is not easy to access if the formal protocols used by other disciplines are followed”.

In Rokwell's (2009: 25) terms, by ethnography we understand those researches that "start from the [researcher's] longstanding experience in a locality and from the interaction with its inhabitants" and that "produce, as a result of analytic work, a descriptive document [...] in which the undocumented social reality is recorded and integrated into the local knowledge". In view of gaining this sort of knowledge, during fieldwork we resorted mainly to two data gathering techniques: participant observation and in-depth interviews.

Regarding the first technique, between mid 2013 and late 2015, we periodically visited four garment workshops located in Sabattini, reaching 40 field registrations. Of the four workshops we visited, two hired people (2 and 6 employees, respectively) and the other two only hired a couple. Over the visits, we were able to talk to both owners and employees (if there were), who are also Peruvians living in Sabattini.

These conversations occurred at the workplace and outside it, even though always in the neighborhood. In all the cases analyzed, the workshops (varying in size according to workloads, sort of machines and number of employees) are the result of familial projects. Among the particularities of the functioning of the textile work, we found that finding the intermediaries who live "outside" the neighborhood is basically a responsibility of the male owners of the micro-enterprises. It is them who normally set the price of the item to be charged once the assembly finishes. Moreover, the task of bringing and taking the cuts to the workshop mainly falls indistinctly on the proprietary couple of the workshop.

Finally, inside the workshop the owners and employees, men and women, work "in lockstep". Each has its own place and sewing machine in the workshop, and this is regularly kept. The owners, man and woman, supervise the work of all the employees and resolve doubts that arise. Likewise, they reserve the right to use more specific machines such as the *collareta* and the *remalladora*,³ if they have them. This is because not all the workshops in Sabattini have the same infrastructure.

Furthermore, we carried out three in-depth interviews, guided and recorded, with women who lived in the neighborhood and had or worked in garment workshops. The interviews were held just near the end of our fieldwork, when the confidence of our interlocutors was strong enough to deepen into issues regarding their workshops.

3 *Collareta* is a machine that allows sewing the neck of round-neck shirts with the front and back; while *remalladora* works with 3-5 threads that can sew in zigzag and straight.

Similarly, the informal conversations held in the context of our visits to the neighborhood became essential to deepen into the topics here dealt with. In this scenario, we have been able to reconstruct the migratory and labor trajectories of migrant families that live there, at the same time we managed to understand the singularities of this space not only in relation with the very survival and resistance strategies unfolded by the migrants, but also with the articulations and dialogues established with the metropolitan system as a whole. This is to say, with the development of certain sectors of the economy, as it is the case of textile industry, are dependent on the provision of inexpensive labor force concentrated in spaces such as Sabattini.

This way, ethnography as a methodological strategy provides tools to recognize the position of a zone of urban relegation in a hierarchical structure of places (measured in symbolic and material terms at once) and the function it fulfills in the reproduction of a concrete spatial, historic and economic context. As pointed out by Geertz (1973), the spirit of ethnography —and its main scope— lies in the analysis of social processes with limited times and spaces, favoring deep enquiring on such object, from the recognition that we do not study villages, but we study *in* villages. The main challenge of this methodological framework consists in demonstrating how the global processes can be interrogated from particular locations.

Informality as a form of subsistence: recent migrations, strategies to appropriate spaces and consolidation of the garment workshop

Our principal argument proposes that the existence and proliferation of the “informal” and “clandestine” garment workshop articulates with the existence of marginalized urban neighborhoods; this way, spatiality becomes a decisive factor in the migrants’ (in this case from Peru) labor trajectories and economic enterprises in Argentina. Hence, it is necessary to reconstruct how a garment workshop is built and functions sheltered by the construction of the marginalized urban neighborhood. Then, we are interested in identifying some of the specificities of textile industry in contemporary Argentina in order to unravel the logics present in the organization of sewing as a migrant work.

Inspired by the proposal of Glick-Schiller and Çaglar (2008), and by means of a microsocial perspective of a marginalized neighborhood in the city of Cordoba, we intend to dialogue with broader sociohistorical processes which allow shedding light on Sabattini’s singularities. These sociohistorical processes are determined by a context of increasing informal labor and

daily life in general that starts in the 1970's, it deepened over the 1990's and exhibits some specificities in the last decade (Antunes, 2011; Basualdo and Esponda, 2014).

In this panorama, the textile industry, reconverted from the reactivation of the sector after 2001-2002 into "migrant labor", reconfigures as the paradigm or pauperization and labor informality (Benencia, 2009; Basualdo et al., 2014; Caggiano, 2014). These dynamics are not alien to the functioning and reproduction of a global economic and social order, but as pointed out by Sassen (2007: 141): "the quotidian functioning of the complex of highly specialized services, which is largely supported on manual and poorly paid employment which are mainly taken by women and migrants", as it is the case of garment workshops in Argentina.

Sabattini and its specificities allow shedding some light on these premises. According to Censo de Viviendas, Hogares, Población y sus Características Migratorias (2014) [Census of Housing, Households, Population and their Migratory Characteristics] out of the totality of people who lived there, some 700 by 2014, 56% are Peruvian, 34% from Argentina, and the other 10% from Bolivia and Paraguay. Argentine population is mainly composed of children —many of which are children of migrant parents— and also domestic migrants, especially from the provinces of Buenos Aires, Misiones, Salta and Santiago del Estero.

The Peruvian migrants who live in the neighborhood concentrate in three economic sectors characterized by their informality, precariousness and instability: construction, textile work and remunerated domestic work.⁴ An ample set of the stitchers in Sabattini reached Cordoba owing to the existence of social networks that oriented their labor insertion after living in guesthouses where the same person from the workshop who had brought them (commonly another Peruvian) rented rooms there, where the workshop was (Magliano, 2016).

Over time, the possibility of affording the rent, difficulties to live as a family in such spaces —where there are many people— and willingness to "progress" activated the search for new places in the city; this way, in particular, fiscal plots, which at the time of the *taking* were unoccupied, emerged as concrete possibilities. By and large, the news that terrains were being occupied in an informal way circulated in neighborhoods and guesthouses where their relatives and friends live (Magliano et al., 2014).

4 Peruvian migration toward Argentina in general, and Cordoba in particular is a fundamentally urban and labor process that consolidates in the 1990's decade. In order to deepen into the most distinguishable characteristics of this migration, see the works by Cerruti (2005), Falcón and Bologna (2013) and Rosas (2010).

Given their labor trajectories (mainly informal) and their social background, migrants can only aspire to a certain housing sector that corresponds to “degraded zones”, which are accessed via the informal market (Terrones-Ribas, 2005: 204). In the case of Sabattini, a group of Argentines set limits to some plots stating they were the proprietors. Later on, they started selling them at accessible prices, compared with the formal market.

Being fiscal plots, their sale is informal, and so the property is only secured by the neighbors’ permanence there and not by a property title that endorses the possession. In legal terms, the occupation of land is a “usurpation”, a practice punishable by Argentine laws (Magliano *et al.*, 2014).⁵

From the urban relocation of these spaces, the possibility of a proper workshop becomes tangible and feasible to accomplish. The informality of the neighborhood fosters and promotes the development of certain productive activities that also remain in the informal sphere. We refer not only to the garment workshop, but also to the multiplication of small businesses and places to eat in Sabattini expresses the creative variations of informality searching for family subsistence.

Precisely, our main premise states that the construction of Sabattini was the condition of possibility for the later emergence of the proper garment workshop, sitting on forms of particular familial and neighborhood organization. The “protection” provided by the neighborhood facilitates the reproduction of certain occupations, informal and in very precarious and exploitation conditions. In the garment workshop determinate labor conditions are reproduced and these are linked to the deficiencies of the spaces where the workshops are and also to the ways in which the task is developed, which are supported on long working hours and piecework.⁶

In the large majority of cases, Peruvian migrants reached Córdoba to work in garment workshops of other countrymen. From the very moment in which they arrive in the city, the expectation of progress is present; which comes from the desire to stop being an employee and become a workshop owner. According to what we have reconstructed in fieldwork—and similarly to the journeys of Bolivian migrants sewing in Buenos Aires (Colectivo

5 These spaces do not have formalized public services. Up to 2015, Sabattini did not have water service, public lighting, sewers and natural gas. Likewise, houses with electricity are irregularly connected (which defines the poor quality of the service). In 2014, the municipality establishes a weekly special circuit to collect waste in the neighborhood.

6 Piecework implies a previous agreement on the price to pay per each garment assembled: the faster the sewing, the faster the money is collected, which becomes lengthy working hours.

Simbiosis/Colectivo Situaciones, 2011)— the idea of their own workshop structurally arises as a migratory project, still knowingly that they have to work as employees first.

This expectation, for its part, is accompanied by the promise of being no longer tenants in order to become proprietors of a house, keeping in mind that the space for the workshop is at the same time part of the house. This way, after some time working as “employees” and living in rented rooms, the option of a workshop of their own emerges in parallel to the opportunity of a house of their own, from the occupation of fiscal plots that up to the moment of the families’ arrival were vacated lands.

Once the issue of housing is resolved, the purchase of sewing machines—which are different according to the task on the garment— defines a different way of working; this is what allows changing from employee to entrepreneur. This purchase is made according to two strategies: in cash in full and/or in instalments by means of directly agreeing with the machines’ owners.

The migrants’ main complaint regarding this last modality is the cost of the interests they have to afford when the machines are not paid in full — purchases and the payment of instalments are also kept at informal level—. In Sabattini, most of the workshops has from two to nine machines, on average.

As we previously stated, in the enterprises with two machines only a couple works (a man and a woman), while workshops with more machines incorporate other employees, Peruvian as well, who work for the owners, which at the same time are the owners of the house. Likewise, the workshops in the neighborhood fundamentally produce local brands consumed outside. It is in “downtown”, in spatial and symbolic terms, where that which is produced and assembled in the garment workshops of marginalized neighborhoods is consumed.

Well now, to understand the logic underpinning the functioning of “informal” and “clandestine” garment workshops where migrant population lives and whose owners are also migrants, it is necessary to recognize the inequalities present in urban environments, which express in ways of living and inhabiting the city marked by marked asymmetries and restrictions that stimulate the reconfiguration of certain economic activities that nourish on such inequalities. Sewing gives and account of that.

In Argentina, the textile sector experiences a first significant change in the 1970’s decade. From the second half of such decade, textile industry—and its large enterprises such as Grafa, Sudamtex and Alpargatas, which developed under the model specialized in mass production of undifferentiated goods

for the basic consumption of the working class with growing incomes—enters into a deep stagnation crisis (Benencia, 2009: 49).

This crisis deepens in the 1990's, when the textile industry was dismantled as a result of the massive entrance of importations favored by the peso-dollar convertibility. After the socioeconomic crisis experienced in Argentina in 2001-2002, the end of the exchange rate parity and the devaluation of the Argentine peso generated a revitalization of the industry over such decade, even though upon new bases: outsourcing production in small workshops, whose workforce was mainly composed of migrants from the countries of the South American region.

As stated by Basualdo and Esponda (2014: 34-35), even if outsourcing has existed for much longer than the global capitalist crisis in the 1970's, after this period this process changed from being a sort of subordinated labor relation to a leading role in the set of labor regulations. The economic crisis made that a large number of migrants looked for a reinsertion in certain economic sectors instead of returning to their countries.

In this context, “the textile industry, clothing and footwear served as a shelter for this population” (Benencia, 2009: 47).⁷ Certainly, it is the last link of the chain, the one of clothing production, the most propitious scenario for irregular situations to occur because of the entrepreneurial strategies that tend to outsource certain production processes and do not take responsibility for the labor spaces (Barattini, 2010: 463). This way, the large enterprises do not participate directly in production, but they hire smaller companies, pursuing the most flexibility of workforce, in the right amounts and according to production needs (Basualdo *et al.*, 2014; Castles, 2013).

In marginalized neighborhoods, informality and irregularity breed on the lack of State regulation in the context of selective presence/absence. This selectivity indicates that spaces as Sabattini are not entirely alien to the practices and interferences of the State. This way, in this marginalized neighborhood, the (municipal, provincial and national) State makes itself present by means of social and political groups that act as intermediaries before the neighbors' demands.

7 In the context of a variety of dynamics and forms of organization of the textile work, in this article we do not approach —neither do we discuss— the category of “labor slave” as a category to name these dynamics and forms. Such category has extended and gained legitimacy to problematize politically and in the media the existence of a “clandestine” and “informal” in Argentina, in a more general context of the debate on human trafficking for labor and sexual exploitation. The direct relation between the textile work and labor slave makes other forms of informal labor organization invisible, which in spite of reproducing exploitation logics express strategies and decisions made by the migrants and their families looking for subsistence and familial “progress”.

In the face of specific events such as a storm or flooding, the State presence becomes effective via direct assistance (metal sheets, mattresses and food). Likewise, people who live in these spaces are addressees of social policies and programs which the State sets up in view of “alleviate” their vulnerable situation. Among them, we can mention Asignación Universal por Hijo (AUH) [Universal Endowment per Child],⁸ national scope; Boleto Estudiantil Gratuito⁹ [Students' Free Ticket], provincial scope; and, Vale lo Nuestro [Ours is Worth], national scope but managed by the municipalities.¹⁰

As claimed by De Marinis (2011: 89), cases like Sabattini evince the “economization” of the State’s energy, which refers to a new “light” format of the state activity that does not imply a “retreat” or “disappearance”. These “economization” and “lightness” of the State in Sabattini is what allows the existence and reproduction of the garment workshop, in the context of the centrality acquired by the territorial dimension as a condition of possibility for itself: no textile enterprise in the neighborhood meets the legal regulations stipulated for their functioning and maintenance, which at the same time remain outside the circuits of State control.

The territorial dimension enables other sorts of regulation that emanate from the needs of the populations, which intend to secure their political and economic subsistence (Das and Poole, 2008: 24). This is expressed as an “active process of migrant labor inclusion” (Mezzadra, 2012), not by means of legalization, as it is the case of Europe and the United States, but their informalization.

Most of the migrants who live in Sabatini have a regular status. According to statistical data, and retaking the category established by Ley de Migraciones N° 25.871 [Law on migration] in force as of 2004, almost 70% of the migrant population living there had permanent housing, 12.7% transitory, and 8.7%, precarious (Censo de Viviendas, Hogares, Población y sus Características Migratorias, 2014).

8 AUH is social insurance that operates in Argentina as of 2009 and provides unemployed people, who work in the informal sector or who earn under the minimum wage, with a monthly benefit per each child under 18 years or handicapped.

9 *Boleto estudiantil gratuito* was implemented in 2014 by the provincial government and regular students, teachers and supportive personnel hired by public or private schools with state contribution. It includes the initial, primary, secondary and high-school education and students of public universities in the province of Córdoba.

10 The plan *Vale lo Nuestro* is a program to strengthen nutrition received by families with scarce resources that live in the city of Córdoba.

Following Mezzadra's (2012) reasoning, this leads to a process of "differentiated inclusion", in which informality —in labor and in everyday life— seems to be a condition produced and a key aspect in processes of mobility. The forms and modalities of this informality, especially in the context of solidarity links and community practices that emerge in the context of Sabattini and in the opening and maintenance of the garment workshop will be the main object of the next section.

Reciprocity, neighborliness and disputes: on the practices that favor the consolidation of the informal garment workshop

In the neighborhood, garment workshops hold a place in the family household. This way, over the three years of the fieldwork in Sabattini, we witnessed the transformation of some houses in function of the construction and consolidation of workshops. By and large, the first thing neighbors build is a room that allows them, in the context of informality, to secure a space to live and from which they can not be evicted.

Once their presence and possession of the plot is legitimized, the construction of a common space that commonly coincides with the kitchen and which, for its part, is the place where the first machines are placed. They are small spaces with poor or absent ventilation, almost no natural light and with extremely dangerous electricity connections. The cables, intertwined and hanging low, make it necessary to walk carefully so as not to move connections and illumination in the place.¹¹

To the extent that they acquire *cortes* —this is to say, that they establish links with people outside the neighborhood who act as intermediaries with the brands and provide them with parts to assembly—, the families who aspire to build their own workshop go acquiring new machines. In this building, spaces to live are gradually relegated to enlarge the workshops. This is to say, the workshop occupies rooms destined for other uses such as kitchen or new bedrooms.

However, with the intention of differentiating the "private/domestic" from "labor", the owners try a number of strategies to divide and harmonize the spaces. This way, for instance, all sorts of fabrics are placed as walls to separate the kitchen from the workshop. Similarly, the few items of furniture there are in the house are arranged so that they divide the space of the workshop and bedrooms.

¹¹ For an analysis of the insalubrious conditions linked to the "informal" garment workshop's conditions, see Goldberg (2013).

This rearrangement of the houses in function of the workshops must be understood from the intrinsic relation there exists in these neighborhoods between housing, labor and family. What occurs in such rearrangement is the product of a family rearrangement in function of the labor space. And this because, as observed by Gallinati (2014: 93), there is “vital dependence between the migrants’ both spheres of life”, while “without the domestic space, the workshop’s operators would not be able to develop their work and without it they could not even afford the expenses of such precarious and unhealthy houses” (Gallinati, 2014: 93).

Being at the household, the workshop turns into a space with children at all times, of both the owners and employees. The long working hours implied by this sort of work (10-12 hours a day) makes women with no one to look after their children take them to the workshop.

Over our fieldwork we observed that together with the machines’ layout, one finds the carriages with babies beside their mothers while they sew. This way, the labor space combines productive, reproductive and care activities, even with the limitations this implies.

Once the workshop starts to take off and acquire new *patterns*, the workshop operators require not only new machines, but also more specific machines to undertake other sorts of tasks. *Collareta*, the only machine that does the finishing with the precision necessary, thus becomes a much appreciated tool. However, as it is also the most expensive, in the beginning of the workshop the owners cannot afford it. At the same time, to secure the growth of the workshops, it is necessary to hire people who are willing to work in utterly precarious conditions and also increase the network of contacts from *the outside* to obtain more *patterns*.

It is then that at the time the workshops start working when a series of actions take place —at once solidary and competitive— which based on the notions of reciprocity bind the neighbors in a series of interchanges, which we refer to as “community practices”. Following Gutiérrez-Aguilar (2008), we understand that these are forms of organizing practices based on self-regulation and self-government. These practices, conceived as a “social make”, are supported on the “economy of reciprocity” (Gago, 2014: 47), which intends to make available “know-hows and resources that make it possible to develop life in a time marked by scarcity and the frailty of the established ways of social reproduction” (Quiroga-Díaz and Gago, 2014: 11).

As we pointed out, in Sabattini, the “informal” garment workshops and their growth are supported on these practices. One of the most common is the temporary interchange of sewing machines, depending on the needs

of the various workshops in the neighborhood. This way for instance, when a neighbor who does not have a machine —such as *collareta*— and it is essential to use it to complete a task, they ask to borrow it from a neighbor.

In most of the cases, the borrowing is made without a problem, being implicit that the one who borrowed it will have to return a similar favor when the borrower needs. The circulation of machines and favors between neighbors who have workshops has enabled their sustenance and growth.

Pandero [tambourine] is another practice we repetitively observed in the neighborhood. It is an informal system of cash loans, generated by a steady group of people —neighbors, in this case— that mainly contribute with a fixed sum, which is distributed by turns among them. Once a month, the receiver of the money is raffled, this way, at the end of the cycle of *pander*, everyone received their corresponding money. What is important in this system is that it enables the neighbors to have an important sum of money that they could not have individually at once.

As commented by a lady, the benefit of *pandero* is that the money arrives “together at once”. As she explained, “if you save the dough, you end up pecking at it. On the contrary, if you do this way, then you later receive it all. You have to make an effort, but when you receive it, it is very good” (Eliana, Peruvian migrant, 27/02/2014).

This loan system, which seats on informality and nourishes on community relationships to expand, is fundamental to consolidate the garment workshops for the sum of money makes it easy to buy the most expensive assets, which are indispensable to kick-start the workshop.¹² This way, the *pandero* system can be thought of as a community practice, as it supports on relations of trust and neighborliness that compel to reciprocity.

Furthermore, we also pointed out the importance of hiring people as the workshop grows. Since two people are not enough to respond as fast as the business demands, those who aspire to consolidate their workshops are in need to “hire” new people. In all of the cases we knew of, those who cover this demand are neighbors, Peruvian as well, who at the moment do not have a job.

This way, a continual circulation of people who also take these posts as they become available. And also, on occasion, workshops make room for neighbors they trust and who really need an income. However, since the margins are reduced, in order to make a difference there has to be heavy doses

12 Those with no workshop can also participate in this system, second-hand cars, motorcycles, and appliances are some of the most wanted goods and because of which they enter the *pandero* system.

of exploitation in these relations. In a conversation we had with a neighbor, she told us that she had been offered a job in a workshop in the neighborhood, but even if she needed the money, she was not fully convinced to accept it, because the payment was very bad. She then explained.

I was offered a job to sew the pockets of pants. But they paid two pesos each I sewed. And I worked out, each pocket takes my five minutes. Then to be able to have something like a wage, I had to be sewing all day long. You know, I had to be all day long to get some money! (Liliana, Peruvian migrant, 09/10/2014).

In a context of precariousness and scarcity, the labor horizon reorganizes in function and from neighborliness ties that enable and facilitate the development of labor dynamics that feed on the same precariousness.

Finally, we also mentioned the importance of having and extending the networks of contacts toward those who offer patterns in view of increasing productivity and thereby the size of the workshops. To secure such contracts it is fundamental that an acquaintance introduces and recommends the workshop owner to these people from the *outside*. The neighbors “pass on” and share these contacts as a way to gain the confidence of the one who deal with *cortes*.

If we understand the community practices as solidary actions that, in case of scarcity, intend to rise the possibilities of survival, it may be thought that this network of interchange of contacts, recommendations and trust works as such; however, once again, the community’s horizon also has conflicting elements.

The workshop owners express that, in the face of the offering of patterns, it is essential to accept them quickly and make sure they will be able to make it in short time. “Then one finds out how to deliver in time —the owner of a workshop told us—, but if you don’t say you deliver quickly, they look for another to do so” (Fermín, Peruvian migrant, 10/12/2014).

These “others” are Sabattini neighbors; this way, certain competence regarding who receives the patterns is generated. Then, there appear certain strategies —such as presenting a cleaner more ordered workshop or hire more people to finish in shorter time. Again, the ambiguity and ambivalence of the communitarian cross the neighbors’ practices, in this case the workshop owners.

At the same time that neighborliness ties make contacts, labor force and even the assets of a workshop circulate, they can tension the links from the competence between them after obtaining the patterns in order to turn workshops operational and more “productive”.

By and large, those who work, at theoretical level, with the notion of community practices link this sort of actions to social forms and political logics related to the sphere of the indigenous. On the contrary, by retaking this notion in this research, we are interested in shedding some light on “the practical capacity of the various human communities to cooperate with one another” of what Gutiérrez-Aguilar (2008: 35) speaks of.

This way, we understand—and intend to show—that in the case of the garment workshops we analyze here, the community practices that support and propitiate them—as well as those disputes that tension them—have a grassroots identity linked to the space of the neighborhood and to its constitution process.

This way, unlike that observed in the Bolivian garment workshops in different neighborhoods of Greater Buenos Aires (Bastia, 2007; Gago, 2014), in Sabattini’s workshops the “community capital” mobilized to support and reproduce in daily life has nothing to do with knowledge that “travels” with the migrants from origin to destination. This is to say, it is not related to an “ethnic” or “national” knowledge and with the modalities to access and build the neighborhood.

As we have observed, these workshops’ “community capital” is built around neighborliness ties; ties forged in the context of destination and consolidated in function of taking and occupying a common space in view of acquiring a place to live. It is in this process, and in the absence of State policies, that the effort to build a neighborhood is carried out as a community. There it is where neighborliness, supported upon a strong national identification, configures as one of the relationships that structure these migrants’ lives. This is why, the appearance and proliferation of garment workshops in these spaces can only be understood in their intrinsic relation with the neighborhood’s construction and consolidation.

In like manner, the disputes around the workshops are based on this relation with the neighborhood. Fundamentally, by means of the resources that were collected in function of community mobilization and which are later privately utilized in the workshops. As shown by Gago (2014: 184), “the clandestine workshops utilize the community achievements for their own benefit”.

This way, in the same manner in which some “villas” in Buenos Aires, in Sabattini, the electricity service gained through the neighbors’ struggles works as a “free infrastructure” for the workshops’ owners. Hence, the issue of electricity becomes a central concern and a topic of constant conflict. The owners of garment workshops are usually blamed on the abrupt outages which occur over and over at times of heavier demand.

There also exists certain persecution against them: in more than one occasion we heard how the workshop owners are blamed on the electricity cuts. This way, talking to a neighbor in Sabattini, she commented us that one day an owner was almost lynched after the neighbors suspected he had between 16 and 22 machines at home. The man, outraged by the accusation, defended himself arguing that he only had four (Mónica, Peruvian migrant, 25/09/2014). What is central in this dispute relates to the neighbors' moral judgments on how to use scarce collectively-gathered resources.

It is noticed thus the indissoluble relation between workshop and neighborhood. It is as we stated at first, our approach is that indeed the proliferation of the "informal" and "clandestine" garment workshop cannot be without the neighborhood. This is to say, by means of the constitution of urban spaces —peripheral, informal and where the State has a selective and "economized" absence/presence— is that workshops appear and reproduce, submerged in a social fabric where the communal becomes power and ambiguity.

Conclusions

In the article we reflected on the territorial dimension the labor trajectories in sewing of the Peruvian migrants recently arrived in the city of Cordoba. Especially, this work's line of argument revolved around the premise that the informality that distinguishes the life trajectories of Peruvian migrants (and not only them) in Argentine cities, Cordoba in our case, works as a condition of possibility to develop determinate labor niches, as the textile.

In this regard, we were attentive to the warning by GlickSchiller and Çaglar (2008: 18, about not reducing the migratory dynamics to an "ethnic" issue by ignoring the broader processes that shape the economic activities of the inhabitants of a city and of the migrants, in particular.

On the contrary, we intended to express how processes beyond migration itself —such as the "thinned" presence of the state in certain spaces and contexts (De Marinis, 2011), informal social networks, difficulty to access housing— relate with specific mobility and labor insertion in such manner that they enable and stimulate the existence and proliferation of "informal" and "clandestine" garment workshops in specific spaces in the city.

This way, we intend to give an account of the emergence of these workshops not as an ethничal issue on its own —as if migrants because of being migrants opened and worked in the workshops—, but as a conjugation of elements that facilitate certain labor trajectories in urban environments,

both in ejecting and recipient countries. This way, the garment workshop is part of the informality in the everyday life of a broad set of migrant families in Argentine cities, at the same time it is one of the few labor insertion options they have in the country. Precisely, it is such informality that configures the neighborhood and the communal as key axes for life reproduction.

By focusing on these workshops from a non-normative perspective, we gave an account of the variety and complexity of practices and ties there produced, showing that even in adverse existence conditions, people —in this case Peruvian migrants in a neighborhood in the city of Cordoba— unfold a series of strategies that intend to secure their social, familial and community life from “neighborliness” ties. Ties which appear from and because of a common space in particular: the neighborhood. This, as we have analyzed in the first section, closely relates with the path and trajectory of these people *as migrants*.

Finally, we understand that comprehending the functioning of these workshops would not be complete if we overlooked the contemporary global economic systems (Sassen, 2007 and 2015) and, particularly the economic system of the city. The phenomena we analyze here must be problematized in the light of the growing precariousness and informality that characterize the XXI-century labor market. This way, the garments produced at low cost —because they are assembled in a space characterized by informality and by a “cheap” workforce— are bought in the city *downtown* by people of middle and wealthy sectors.

Even if this article did not approach these topics in-depth, it would be interesting to trace the path of these garments from production to consumption in future research. Probably, this would refer to the multiple and varied forms in which the city connects, relates and interacts, reproducing —but also contesting and challenging— inequalities.

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