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Editors

Migration in South America

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Contents

Part III Racism Xenophobia and Struggles Over Migrant's Rights

Chapter 10
Inequalities and the Social Process of Categorizing: Migrant Work in Argentina's Garment Industry

Sergio Caggiano

10.1 Introduction

Migrant associations, like other social organizations, generally form around social categories. As migration objectifies nationality (Sayad, 1998), national categories are often the touchstone of these associations. On other occasions, being a migrant—regardless of one's country of origin—becomes relevant in and of itself, allowing diverse national identities to converge. Though it may not be exceedingly common, in cases of labor migration, the category of "workers" can also become the principal motivation for getting organized and fighting for rights. In recent years, as the prevalence of women migrants has received attention, organizations specifically targeting migrant women have formed. The demands expressed by these women's associations are related to the inequalities their members face, inequalities that are approached as the offshoots of two categories—woman and migrant—without questioning the inequalities themselves.

Some migrant associations, however, have noted the importance of the relations between inequalities and categories, and have addressed these relationships more emphatically than other social organizations. This can be attributed to the dynamic and complex features that migration contributes to belonging. The revision of this relationship between inequalities and categories also has to do with the reflexivity migration brings, particularly in relation to aspects of life migrants previously took as given (Schnapper, 1988), i.e., nationality, citizenship, class, gender, generation, etc., all of which are revised in light of new frameworks of interpretation.

The principal source of debates and friction between migrant associations is related to the category that can best explain the injustices migrants face. When the inequality itself becomes the focus, however, the broader relationship between

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categories and inequalities can itself become an issue. Certain migrant associations have begun to engage with a question popular in the social sciences in recent years, that of whether inequalities and the source of inequalities are categorical. This leads in turn to the question of how categories operate in social life and to an exploration of inequality, another notion that is often taken as a given.

Specifically, this article addresses worker associations that formed at garment workshops in the Argentine capital and Greater Buenos Aires in the past 15 years, as the large number of Bolivian migrants running or working in these factories created a truly ethnic labor market.[1] Most of the worker associations that formed have drawn on an ethno-nationalist conception of identity, on the one hand, and on a moral and legal conception of class, on the other. However, an alternative position gradually took hold, especially in groups with a large number of younger migrants or first-generation Argentines, emphasizing the need to consider the multiple inequalities at stake. These young people noted their reluctance to choose from among the available categories of identity, given that, in their view, the real challenge was identifying how these categories related to inequalities. These youths believed that the social and political organizations that grouped garment workers should work to make these multiple inequalities visible, not pigeonhole them in a single category.

Beyond the political implications of thinking about inequalities and social categories in this way, the input of these young migrants helps us to understand how the two are related. In this regard, the first analytical step is to specify these inequalities, that is, to explore what objects of inequality are produced and reproduced and who are the subjects involved (Pérez Sainz & Mora Salas, 2009). The question as to what inequalities arise in garment workshops yields multiple concrete answers, as in any social situation. Within the workshops, a person's unequal position varies in relation to a range of matters (pricing, work hours, type of activity, sales channels, etc.). When a confrontation related to these objects of inequality arises, social classifications and categories come into play. The question as to who will be party to these struggles depends on an active process of politicizing some of these objects of inequality.

[1] I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Buenos Aires and La Plata (capital of the province of Buenos Aires) in 2009, 2012, 2016, and 2019. As part of this fieldwork, I held 26 unstructured individual and group interviews with migrant members of associations representing both workers and employers from the garment industry, as well as with migrants and non-migrants from garment unions and other associations that protect the rights of workers in this sector. Participant observation at meetings and public activities was another facet of this work. Over the course of these interviews and observations, migrant work in garment workshops became increasingly politicized. During the different stages of the fieldwork, I also tracked coverage of the topic in the migrant press, though the tracking proved difficult given that many of the publications did not come out regularly. In 2019, I expanded my review of the immigrant press with a systematic analysis that drew on secondary sources and the verbal and written interventions by members of the migrant associations on blogs, YouTube channels, and the digital archives of community media outlets. (Some of the data presented herein has been published in Caggiano, 2014, 2019).

Specifying inequalities has repercussions on two parallel analytical levels. First, this focus offers a specific path for understanding the interconnection or fusion of social categories. A concrete analysis of the ways in which mechanisms for generating inequalities (exclusions, exploitation, distanciation, hierarchies) are linked is an entry point for explorations that seek to go beyond existing categories (class, gender, nationality, generation, etc.)

On the other hand, specifying inequalities draws attention to the coexistence of different systems of representation (Hall, 1996) and frameworks for interpreting them. Different systems and frameworks for attributing meaning to social positions and relations exist in any society. These frameworks are used to define the objects and subjects of inequalities. Migratory movements bolster these different frameworks of representation and interpretation. The case analyzed here underscores how the availability of alternative viewpoints, often opposing or incongruent, plays a role in politicizing inequalities.

This article is organized as follows. The first section provides a brief overview of the main positions in the debate surrounding inequalities, categories, and social classification. In the following section, the conditions of migrant workers in Argentina's garment industry are described, before turning to the stances of the different organizations in the third section. The insights of certain migrants regarding conflict lead into the fourth section, which explores how actors define themselves in relation to their struggles against certain inequalities. The three final sections (one on the objects of inequality and two on those affected by the inequalities) contain the analysis and main argument of the article, specifying the objects of inequality and the politicization of subjects in relation to them. In addition, the last two sections examine the analytical repercussions of specifying inequalities for research on multidimensional and interdependent social inequalities and for a consideration of the different interpretative frameworks that come into play. In addition to summarizing the main findings of the article, the conclusions reveal that inequalities and the creation of inequalities are categorical, provided these categories are viewed dynamically.

10.2 Inequalities, Categories, and Social Classification

In his landmark work, Charles Tilly delved into the forms, causes, and consequences of persisting inequalities and their ties to categories. Paired categories of inequalities like black/white, man/woman, citizen/foreigner, he noted, "do crucial organizational work." Durable inequality depends, largely, on "the institutionalization of categorical pairs" (Tilly, 1998, p. 8).

Rogers Brubaker has, however, criticized Tilly because he "shows how inequality can be categorical, but he does not show how categorical the generation of inequality really is" (Brubaker, 2015, p. 15), arguing that distinct categories of difference—like citizenship, gender, or ethnicity—help produce and sustain durable inequalities in different ways. Brubaker distinguishes between "two forms of

inequality: inequality between *categories of positions* and inequality between *categories of persons*" (2015, p. 39). He notes that the access to opportunities and rewards on the basis of categories of persons persists in the modern age, but its force has waned significantly over the past two centuries. In other words, though it is possible to consider that "[s]trictly categorical inequality between clusters of positions is the rule [...] strictly categorical inequality in the allocation of persons to positions, or in the social production of persons, is the exception" (Brubaker, 2015, pp. 45–46). The author adds that "[i]nequality has increased dramatically in recent decades. But it has not become more categorical" (Brubaker, 2015, p. 46).

In my opinion, an emphasis on social categories as evolving and interwoven can enrich both Tilly's and Brubaker's approaches to inequality. The two authors acknowledge the important role of historical dynamics in the processes they describe. Yet in the case of Tilly, social categories appear, at times, as the outcome of a process confined to the past that culminates precisely with a certain distribution of categories. For Brubaker, although historical dynamics remain active, the distinctions between one category and another persist: racial, ethno-national, class, gender, and other categories all have their own independent history, regardless of eventual overlap or complementarity.

Underscoring the historical dynamic of these categories implies focusing on the social process of classifying and categorizing, not taking its results as a given. As in the old but still relevant question by E. P. Thompson on class formation, it is conflict that allows the main actors to come forward, interests to be staked, and the interests of others to be acknowledged or dismissed (Thompson, 1963). The process of producing classifications and categories goes hand in hand with the production and reproduction of inequalities. Social classification "refers to long-term processes in which people vie for control of the basic spheres of social existence; its outcomes configure how power is distributed" (Quijano, 2000, p. 367).

In order to advance our understanding of the processes and categories of social classification, it is thus necessary to explore what it is that actors seek to control within these basic spheres of social existence. Specifying the objects of inequality will contribute to an understanding of the process by which social categories form and are transformed. Precisely because of the dynamic nature of this process, these categories overlap and are interwoven.

10.3 Migrant Work and Labor Conditions in the Garment Industry

Throughout the world, business strategies such as outsourcing production, subcontracting, and hiring informal workers tend to hit low-income migrant workers the hardest (Portes, 1995; Sassen, 1991). This is particularly true in the garment industry (Green, 1996; Montero, 2011; Ness, 2005), where outsourcing to small informal workshops and piece-rate pay allow big brands to stay afloat in a highly unstable

sector characterized by volatile demand (Quinteros, 2000). Major apparel brands thus limit their own activity to design, molds, branding, image, marketing, and sales (D'Ovidio, 2007). Though it is impossible to know exactly how many garment workshops exist in Argentina's capital and Greater Buenos Aires, at the beginning of the 2010s there were an estimated 15,000 (Arcos, 2013).

As in other sectors such as agriculture, seasonal work, domestic work, restaurants, and hotels, informality in Argentina is a particular problem in the garment sector, which mainly employs Bolivian migrants. After a marked drop during the second half of the 1990s, clothing production was one of the most dynamic sectors in the country's economic recovery following the 2001–2002 crisis (Montero, 2011). During the crisis, outsourcing and the subcontracting of garment workshops increased, and this trend continued even during the economic growth of the following decade (Boffi, 2013). Despite a sustained rise of the gross domestic product following the 2001–2002 crisis, informality hovered at around 37% for over 10 years (Bertranou & Casanova, 2013), and, according to industry estimates, experienced little change during the second half of the 2010s. Considering the number of unlicensed facilities and informal workers, more than 80% of clothing production in the city and province of Buenos Aires is thought to have been done in less-than-legal conditions during those years.

A percentage of the clothing produced at the garment workshops is sold at sprawling informal markets, some of which supply small retail stores across the country. The rest goes to major Argentine and transnational companies and labels that outsource to them. In the face of inadequate state control—or none at all—and the rekindling of an ethno-national identity that facilitates migrant worker recruitment (Caggiano, 2012), the resulting ethnic job market (Parra García, 2019) adapted aspects of the popular Andean economy to the intense exploitation and flexibilization associated with neoliberalism.

The intermediaries between workers and major brands are the Bolivian owners of garment workshops, some of which are family-run and range in size from small to medium, generally with 20–30 sewing machines, though sometimes more.[2] Though many are now successful business people, the fact that sweatshop owners are often tailors themselves serves as a promise of success for those currently sewing at the workshop. This also means that the owners are very familiar with the living and working conditions of their employees, as they had similar experiences when they were tailors. Some of the workers in their garment workshop may also hail from their community or origin, or even be family members, suggesting a certain proximity between owners and workers. At the same time, when most of the current sweatshop owners were themselves tailors two or three decades ago, the owners were either Koreans or Jews. This leads many to represent their advancement as a milestone for Bolivians, while suggesting a threat by external forces looking to push them out of a niche they have formed.

[2]When the companies/brands are large, the chain can expand and become more complex, with intermediary companies and workshops hired by the large brands re-outsourcing to other production units that then manufacture the garments (Boffi, 2013).

10.4 Migrant Organizations, Discussions, and Reflexivity

According to Pries and Sezgin (2012), for many years studies of migrant associations focused on their role in integration processes. Certain early works explored the economic, political, and cultural impact of organizations in the destination country (Devoto & Míguez, 1990; Fernández, 1992). More recently, as part of transnational studies, a good number of scholars have focused on the cross-border activities of these organizations (Itzigsohn, 2009; Portes & Fernández-Kelly, 2015). On the other hand, interest has turned to lobbying by migrant associations and even their involvement at protests and rallies (Flam & Lloyd, 2008; Sezgin, 2008).

Migrant organizations play a key intellectual role to the extent to which they "express, accelerate, channel, trigger, control and forge the public perceptions and the self-awareness of social life, social practices, tensions, conflicts and claims of migrants" (Pries & Sezgin, 2012, p. 300). In this regard, they are very much involved in encoding and categorizing mobility and in determining whether relations can be considered unequal, fair, or unfair.

In prior works, I have examined how Bolivian migrant associations (or the social organizations working with this population) approach the overlap of class and nationality in Argentina's garment industry (Caggiano, 2014, 2019). In the middle of the 2000s, an unlicensed garment workshop caught fire in the Buenos Aires neighborhood of Caballito. Two adults and four children, all Bolivians, died in the fire. Subsequent state interventions to shut down other illegal workshops, combined with worker protests, brought the working and living conditions in these workshops to the public eye.

The two largest social organizations—Fundación La Alameda and the Asociación Civil Federativa Boliviana (ACIFEBOL)—adopted completely different stances on the matter. The first of the two organizations spoke of the infringement of workers' rights, using a language of class that ultimately boiled down to a moral critique of "trafficking" and "slave labor" (Montero Bressán, 2018).[3] The second organization launched an ethno-national defense of sources of work for *paisanos*, citing the discrimination "the community" suffered. La Alamada and many migrants accused the ACIFEBOL of defending Bolivian workshop owners who exploited their fellow countrymen and women (Caggiano, 2014, 2019).

Since then, the issue of the garment workshops has become a thorny one for the migrants themselves, many of whom are extensively involved in the debate. In 2010, for example, at the II Conference of Bolivian Organizations held at the Bolivian Consulate in Buenos Aires, the discussion focused on whether organizations should be formed around "culture and customs, or around the condition of

[3] The Textile Workers Association (UTC), part of La Alameda's Cooperativa 20 de diciembre, gathered information and reported the "underground sweatshops" to the authorities. It also encouraged workers to form internal committees at licensed textile factories, unlike the Trade Union of Garment Workers (SOIVA), which never got actively involved in what was happening at these workshops. In 2007, the UTC merged into a new, larger organization, Fundación La Alameda, which had more funding and ties to international foundations (Barattini, 2010; Caggiano, 2019).

exploited workers." Some of those in attendance argued in favor of overcoming the issue by appealing to the unity of "the Bolivian people" and "workers," noting that this "was not a contradiction but instead two parts of a single identity" (II Encuentro de organizaciones sociales de la colectividad boliviana, 2010).

In its coverage of the event, the most important paper of the Bolivian community in Argentina, *Renacer*, made its contribution to the debate: "What are we," the journalist asks, "Native peoples, Bolivians, or exploited workers?" A bit later, the participants decided that this was an issue "to be resolved as part of the process" (Aparicio, 2011).

A short time later, a tense but fruitful dialogue between the groups Colectivo Situaciones and Simbiosis Cultural, and intellectual Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, explored some of the nuances of the debate. Activists, many of whom were young, and—in the case of Simbiosis Cultural—Bolivian migrants or first-generation Argentines, discussed the challenge of interpreting family relations and community traditions in the context of global capitalism. With regard to certain organizations that claimed to represent the community—particularly ACIFEBOL, which defended the garment workshops—the migrant groups were unequivocal in their criticism: "Mafia-like, nationalistic, and in awe of the pecking order" (Colectivo Situaciones and Simbiosis Cultural, in Rivera Cusicanqui et al., 2011, pp. 11, 16).[4]

A Bolivian intellectual visiting Argentina, Rivera Cusincanqui drew on another framework—that of legitimate domination and paying one's dues—to interpret the situation of Bolivian garment workers. Unlike organizations like La Alameda and the mass media, Rivera Cusicanqui did not see "slavery" as a concept that would shed light on these complex forms of exploitation and subordination. "Young people are always poor" but "while allowing themselves to be exploited, they are also building their microenterprise," (Rivera Cusicanqui et al., 2011, pp. 19–20). According to the author, youth trust in a system of "deferred reciprocity" (Rivera Cusicanqui et al., 2011, p. 21) in which exploitation is viewed as necessarily temporary. The complex process of manumission suggests a progressive autonomy of the migrant workers with regard to the exploiter, under the understanding that someday, the exploiter will treat them as equals and compensate them for their efforts through prestige. This also implies a "circuit of giving back" in another sense: "This person was exploited and now it's his or her turn to exploit" (Rivera Cusicanqui et al., 2011, p. 8).

At the end of 2015, another fire—this one in the Flores neighborhood—revived the dialogue and gave the movements new strength. Two children died in that blaze, both children of sweatshop workers who were also injured. The night after the fire, La Alameda held a mass in front of the workshop. After one of the group's key members had been elected to the city legislature, the organization continued to

[4] Though the book cover mentions only the two groups, "Rivera Cusicanqui et al." is cited in the book credits. Given that the book is in fact a dialogue between the two groups and the author, and the aim here is to distinguish between the opinions of the two, the reference "Colectivo Situaciones and Simbiosis Cultural, in Rivera Cusicanqui et al." will be used in reference to the statements by the group and "Rivera Cusicanqui et al." in reference to the author's own statements.

denounce these "underground sweatshops," always homing in on a certain legally and morally abhorrent aspect, like the fact that thousands of children were living in the workshops.

ACIFEBOL remained active but gradually lost ground to a new organization, the Committee for Alternative Garment Industry Work (COTAI), which other actors see as the more or less direct heir of the association. COTAI has, on occasion, actively addressed xenophobia in areas such as access to healthcare and has also defended the workshops without considering the heterogeneity of the Bolivian migrant population, thus reiterating ACIFEBOL's ethno-nationalist approach.

With these developments, new activisms common since the mid-2000s were restored. On the one hand, there was a moralistic and class-driven activism against discrimination tied to a global agenda (Pries et al., 2012), connecting the issue of migration with criminal justice (Mansur Dias, 2014). On the other, there was an activism drawing on community ethno-nationalism that steadfastly defended the garment workshops without taking a critical look at what occurs behind their doors.

In the meantime, the same day as the fire, the group that would go on to become the Flores Fabric Workers Assembly (ATF) met for the first time, with the support and involvement of members of Simbiosis Cultural and tailors, neighbors, and teachers from local schools, along with representatives from organizations and unions affiliated with the Argentine Workers Confederation (CTA). The newly-formed assembly developed a novel approach to the issue and consolidated some of the concepts that Simbiosis had been working on for several years.

In its first announcement, the ATF laid the groundwork for understanding garment production in the region. They noted that the garment workshops, like the small farms in Greater Buenos Aires and other Bolivian labor niches, are not "a 'Bolivian' problem," but part of circuits of production and consumption that involve society as a whole. They underlined the heterogeneity of "Bolivian migrants," a group that includes both "workers" as well as "entrepreneurs." At the same time, they came out staunchly against a "witch hunt" and a crackdown on informality "because when the persecution of popular illegalities begins, it quickly evolves into racist persecution of the poor" (Zuker, 2015).

The announcement, like several public interventions of one of the most well-known members of both the assembly and Simbiosis Cultural, insisted on moving past a perspective that distinguished only between victims and victimizers. Like Simbiosis before it, the ATF instead proposed to explore the complexities of the circuit of production and consumption and the many factors on which it depends. A setting characterized by a lack of regulations and labor flexibilization relies on different class positions, the calculations and aspirations of tailors who hope to own a sweatshop someday, the memories of the sweatshop owners who were once in their shoes, the actual potential for social mobility in an adverse socioeconomic context with no alternative routes, and horizontal and vertical *compadrazgo* relations (Albó & Barnadas, 1990).

10.5 Reformulating the Question

Scholars in different spheres of academia have commonly explored the tension between class versus ethnonational belonging in migrant associations—and which of the two prevails (Devoto, 2003, p. 312). Different cases reveal the diverse variables that can come into play. In the case of Moroccan migrants in Paris, for example, Dumont (2008) has explored the question of whether a migrant organization prioritizes class identity (emphasizing its ties to French trade unions or other local organizations that defend people's rights) or national identity (with strong connections to state agencies back in Morocco). Chung (2005), in a study on Korean migrant associations in Los Angeles, California, has distinguished between the more apolitical, ethnic organizations formed by migrants with a better socioeconomic position, and the more universalist, progressive associations formed mainly by workers. Among Northwest African migrants to France, Baillet (2001) noted almost the opposite: the universalist associations, heirs to a long tradition of integration in the destination country, attract more well-off migrants (and their descendants), while the members of the associations focused on ethnicity tend to be poorer. In a case study on Mexicans working at greengrocers mainly owned by Koreans or Korean-Americans in New York city, Ness (2005) found that the isolation of the job tended to reinforce connections with fellow Mexicans. In a context of an ethnic division of labor and a lack of ties with established migrant organizations, these coworker relations served as a launch pad for organizing and making demands.

Research such as this would seem to address concerns like those expressed at the II Conference of Bolivian Organizations, ones that can be boiled down to the question posed in the newspaper *Renacer*: "what are we?" Some of the considerations and variables presented in these studies can be applied to the case of the Bolivian migrants to Buenos Aires. However, in keeping with Thompson, I believe it is more productive to apply the question of "what are we" to the specific struggles of these migrants. In other words, perhaps the guiding question is not so much "what are we", but "what is the struggle—and what is the object of inequality targeted in that struggle—that makes us what we are?" The rewording of the question and the identification of the object of the struggle make it necessary to pinpoint other aspects of the debate between organizations.

Some pieces in the newspaper *Renacer* have examined these aspects, particularly the fundamental difference between discrimination/lack of recognition and migrant exploitation. These questions are also a key part of political reflections of Simbiosis Cultural, whose fundamental aim was summarized in a book by one of its most well-known members as unveiling "the terrible inequalities within our migrant community" (Vasquez, 2010, p. 26). In this wording, the conceptual limits of "community" are recognized and the community is also assumed to be "ours." This is because the book, which the author describes as an "outcome of internal work" within the association, strives "to understand the many contradictions [of] the Bolivian community" (Vasquez, 2010, p. 35).

10.6 What Are the Objects of Inequality?

These contradictions are related to inequalities both within the community and beyond. While the question of "inequalities between whom"—in or out of the community—is one of two key questions, it falls flat, as Pérez Sainz and Mora Salas (2009) have noted, without another question: "what are the objects of inequality?" In other words, addressing the concerns surrounding community and inequalities means identifying the object of the inequalities.

If the focus is on the organization and control over production, the owners of small workshops are complicit in—and personally benefit from—the appropriation of surplus labor by major companies. Yet if the focus is on the circuit of garment sales and the immense value ascribed to it, it becomes clear that the big brands—which set the price per garment that workshop owners will be paid—profit by cornering the garment market, to the detriment of small factory owners and the tailors themselves.

If, instead, the emphasis is on the work of reproduction, the appropriation of women's work by certain men is equally daunting. In this regard, most women at the workshops are hired on a verbal contract that requires great flexibility, requiring them to cook instead of sew, for example, depending on the seasonal demand; or to juggle household work with garment work in their own homes, in the case of small family-run workshops. There are also obstacles for women to receive on-the-job training to improve their skills and with it, qualify for better job (Caggiano, 2022).

In addition, this form of appropriating women's labor at the workshops is a topic that has only recently been addressed, and by only a handful of migrant organizations. This brings to light another key aspect of the situation, which is that men—especially husbands, but also fathers or brothers—are often opposed to women's activism, revealing that political participation and the drawing up of public demands are also structured asymmetrically (Caggiano, 2022).

Respect is distributed unequally as well. In a discriminatory context, migrants experience a lack of social recognition of their achievements and trajectories, even when they are economically successful. The urban celebrations of Bolivian patron saints, often sponsored by the garment manufacturers and greengrocers, provide workshop owners with an opportunity for recognition (through sponsorship) and, by association, recognition of the tailors that work for them as well (Tassi et al., 2013).[5]

In other words, the three sweeping types of inequalities noted by Therborn (2006, 2011) are present and active here in different ways. The first are resource inequalities, which can be seen in the appropriation of labor time, in the cornering of

[5] Social hierarchies are expressed and reiterated at these community celebrations. In order to qualify for certain roles within the festivities, a hefty outlay is required. The covering of community expenses and the public exhibition forge ties of reciprocity that strengthen the circuits for worker recruitment and the illusions of being successful in the destination country (Caggiano, 2012; Giorgis, 2004).

manufacturing niches, the ascription of value, and the double burden. Existential inequalities refer to the lack of respect, disparagement, and limits on others' autonomy or ability to participate in decisions. Third, vital inequalities are present from the start and are tied to the social construction of unequal life opportunities—the fires in the sweatshops being perhaps the most extreme example—and living conditions that increase the incidence of respiratory diseases like tuberculosis (Goldberg, 2014).

The mechanisms by which inequalities are produced and reproduced —distanciation, exclusion, hierarchization and exploitation, as Therborn notes (2006, 2011)— all come into play almost simultaneously in this case. Interestingly, while certain mechanisms are a better fit for certain types of inequality, a single mechanism can influence different inequalities. Exclusion, for example, can apply to a market niche or to a circuit of value ascription, but also to who gets to speak in public. Exploitation clearly structures the extraction of surplus in the production of a marketable good, but also the appropriation of unpaid care and reproductive tasks.

When asking, then, what objects of inequality come into play, myriad yet highly specific examples appear. At times, it seems impossible to address more than one of them at a time, resulting in contradictions. Identifying different and specific objects of inequality is a first step toward shedding light on the apparent aporias of migrant (and perhaps other) activism.

10.7 Inequalities Between Whom 1: Entangled Inequalities

The question "inequalities between whom" can only be posed after the objects of inequality have been politicized. This is an active process in which the objects themselves are defined or redefined, and the actors involved in the struggle and their positions are produced or transformed. Because, as Quijano has noted, "peoples" can have "a place and a role with regard to controlling work and another very different and even opposing place or role when it comes to controlling sex or subjectivity, or in power institutions. And these may change over time" (2000, p. 369).

The exploitation of tailors and the management of the production system by major brands depends on garment workshop owners cornering the ethnic labor market; these owners are, in turn, fearful of being ousted from this niche. While, as I mentioned, migration objectifies national belonging (Sayad, 1998), it is common for some of the inequalities to be structured around the exclusion or distancing of an ethnic or national group. Group organizations like ACIFEBOL or COTAI are not, then, the only ones to foster a community-wide struggle: the struggle also requires a number of agents in the destination country who contribute to this objectification. When La Alameda interprets the exploitation of tailors as neglecting to meet one's duties or comply with the rules, inequality is instead attributed to wrongdoers who turn their back on their responsibilities versus honest workers who see their rights being violated. Other mechanisms link other inequalities and add internal hierarchies to exploitation, like the varying levels of prestige (and payment) ascribed to

caretaking tasks or the garment manufacturing tasks often assigned to women, such as cutting, ironing, folding, stacking, cleaning, removing threads, etc. These tasks especially fall on women and younger migrants, particularly those hailing from rural areas or Indigenous communities. On the whole, migrant organizations rarely consider this an issue.

As a result, a research on the entanglements of structures of inequality (Costa, 2011) could make an initial contribution. The process that Matsuda referred to as "asking the other question"[6] is enriched if the forms and mechanisms of inequality are specified. Instead of merely citing "gender inequality," "racial inequality," "class inequality," etc.—expressions that rarely contribute to a greater understanding—this means bringing to light the process of social classifications, the rankings associated with specific objects of inequality, and their mechanisms. Thus "exploring how categories of race, class and gender are intertwined and mutually constitutive, giving centrality to questions like how race is 'gendered' and how gender is 'racialized', and how both are linked to the continuities and transformations of social class" (Davis, 2008, p. 71) is only possible if the objects of inequality are specified.

As a result, social categories do not operate transparently or unequivocally. Social categories are inevitably comprised of heterogeneous, mismatched elements. Brubaker has argued that although inequality has increased in recent decades, it has not become more categorical. This only holds true if what the sociologist refers to is the increasing difficulty for institutionalized power-operators to impose clear, distinctive labels. Such labels were never so clear, after all, at the level of concrete interactions, at least not in the Latin American context.

It is impossible to analyze class structure without considering race and ethnic belonging in Argentina—and, indeed, across Latin America. The same applies to analyzing Indigenous identity outside of class structure, or being a man or woman outside of ethnic hierarchies, and so on. In fact, foreignness is also a category tied to class, sex-gender, and social-racial systems, among others. Yet this is not an exercise in abstract classifications but the outcome of disputes over multiple inequalities.

In the circuit of sweatshops, people adopt different positions in the face of various objects of inequalities. The first task for any social struggle involves defining what actors participate in these inequalities. Yet precisely because there are so many inequalities, the resulting panorama cannot be a list of simple and differentiated categories but an imbrication of composite and continuously developing categories.

[6] "When I see something that looks racist, I ask, 'Where is the patriarchy in this?' When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, 'Where is the heterosexism in this?' When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, 'Where are the class interests in this?'" (Matsuda, 1991, as cited in Davis, 2008, p. 73).

10.8 Inequalities Between Whom 2: Systems of Representation

With the aim of specifying inequalities, Simbiosis Cultural and the ATF started a second important movement. Though seemingly paradoxical, the explicit demand in response to internal inequalities within the community was "open the garment workshops." At the end of June 2015, 2 months after the Flores workshop burned down, the ATF distributed a flier with an eloquent subtitle, "Lifting the Popular, Migrant Economy out from the Ghetto." "In the face of the easy solution of obligatorily shutting down," the group instead proposed "opening the workshops to understand them." The idea was for the "broader system" in which the workshops are immersed—and the "beliefs" that help sustain them—to surface (ATF, 2017, p. 3).

This demand, which lays out a goal and the measures to achieve it, reveals that the objects and subjects—the "what" and the "whom"—of inequalities are defined in relation to different interpretative frameworks. This is often decisive in migratory contexts, as Pries suggests when observing how migrants "*simultaneously* position themselves in the system of social inequality of their community of origin and in the social structure of their destination community" (Pries, 1997, p. 37). Yet more than two interpretative frameworks are at stake here because there are a vast number of diverging frameworks in both the society of origin and the destination. When put into play through dialogues of varying scopes between the different agents, these frameworks comprise alternative "systems of representation" for the same work and production process, as Stuart Hall explained. And each "produces a different definition of the system. Each also locates us differently […] Each thus *situates us* as social actors or as a member of a social group in a particular relation to the process" (Hall, 1996, p. 39).

Returning to the exchange between Rivera Cusicanqui, Colectivo Situaciones, and Simbiosis Cultural, when the sociologist argues against the idea of so-called slave labor, she proposes instead exploring a particular logic of labor organization at the workshops connected to Andean systems of production, circulation, and consumption. The members of Situaciones and Simbiosis, in contrast, argue that the workshops, as the unit of reproduction of the garment industry, are an integral part of the capitalist economy. This is a fundamental point. It is about more than the fact that there are different systems of social relations, but also the degree and level of autonomy or dependence that exists between them. How long can a non-capitalist logic survive within capitalism? How much does such a logic contribute to capitalism—and how much does it call capitalism into question or transform it? Can this logic develop separately from capitalism? How does being part of capitalism affect the shape that logic takes? Is this logic an autonomous system of relations or yet another twist in the convergence of all historically known forms of labor "around and under the thumb of the capital-salary relationship […] and of the global market" (Quijano, 2008, p. 188)?

The giving back of prestige noted by Rivera Cusicanqui and the recognition of its worth in the Andean world are carried over to the workshops. In this carry-over, changes occur. The exchange of prestige, honor, or acknowledgment will find its place in ways of recognizing worth and assigning a value to it within contemporary capitalism (Boltansky & Esquerre, 2016). How can the exchange of prestige be tied to capital accumulation? Is it part of getting the most from a workforce—or does it fall within the realm of a *compadrazgo* system that is both horizontal and vertical? Perhaps the answer is yes in both cases.

Different institutions are enmeshed in a complex weave. With their hierarchies and regulations, Andean family relations are part of the global garment manufacturing system. Capitalist relations are part of the economics of celebrations (*fiestas tradicionales*); these celebrations integrate the capitalist economy. None of these or other institutions emerges from these imbrications unaffected. And the multiple times and spaces of transnational migration only add more complexity: where does one follow through on differed reciprocity? How long is the deferral? When and where does the ostentation that plays a role in recruiting a workforce come into play? (Caggiano, 2012).

And if the conversation turns to trajectories, timing, and systems of representation, it is no surprise that youth is another topic of discussion. When applied to garment workshops, the idea that "young people are always poor" and need to pay their dues (Colectivo Situaciones and Simbiosis Cultural, in Rivera Cusicanqui et al., 2011, p. 19) brings up another reticulum of inequalities. In community economies with limited capitalization and mechanisms for regulating surplus, intergenerational inequalities are laid out so that, ideally, they will be distributed among all community members over the course of their lifetimes. Yet in Buenos Aires, young migrants from communities like these, youth from urban areas, or Argentines whose parents are migrants do not occupy unequal positions just in terms of their elders, but also among themselves and in relation to other youth (and other adults) who are neither migrants nor first-generation Argentines. It is no coincidence, then, that the young members of organizations like Simbiosis (Groisman, 2019) are the ones expressing another point of view altogether. They note, with some degree of irony, "The vast majority of the sons and daughters of workshop owners have no desire to attend 'sweatshop university.' They prefer the other kind" (Colectivo Situaciones and Simbiosis Cultural, in Rivera Cusicanqui et al., 2011, p. 25).

Opening the workshops, and discovering and sharing the interpretative frameworks and systems of representation involved could lead, in some cases, to using other frameworks and systems of representation for the purposes of comparison. It may also serve, quite simply, to put the frameworks on display and facilitate a discussion about the very logics for understanding (and combating or defending) inequalities. Opening the garment workshops and the systems of representation is the second step toward shedding light on the apparent aporias of migrant (and perhaps other) activism.

10.9 Conclusions

Migrant work in Argentina's garment industry already has a history of action and political reflection set off by fires in sweatshops. Major media outlets, international organizations, and certain state agencies have described this work by invoking concepts like slavery, human trafficking and servitude, and criminality.

From the moment in which the topic appeared on the public agenda, social organizations have been involved and were, in fact, in many ways responsible for getting it on the agenda. Some of these organizations engage in a fluid exchange with the mass media, international organizations, and state institutions about these notions and approaches. The organizations formed and headed by migrants took another path, focusing exclusively on the migrant community and defending the garment workshops. In the face of a defense of garment workers by La Alameda (and previously, by UTC) from the outside —a defense that workshop owners often experienced as an attack against them—ACIFEBOL (and later, COTAI) organized a defense from within.

Over time, organizations like Simbiosis and community media outlets like *Renacer* paved a new path: opening garment workshops. It is no coincidence that those in favor of this path are youth, many of whom were born in Argentina to migrant parents or migrated as children. Put off by notions like slavery, servitude, and criminality, and confident that the issue is not about—or is about more than—discrimination, they use a broader concept, always in plural, and always underscoring the need to be specific: inequalities. Not from the outside and not only from within. Opening the workshops can allow myriad inequalities to be unraveled by considering the "multiple, fluid structures of domination" in which the workshops are immersed (Mohanty, 1991, p. 13).

The first aim of this article has thus been to specify the objects of inequalities. Instead of relying on the existing definition of inequality among the actors involved, the challenge was to explore types and mechanisms of inequality and its concrete objects. This is essential to understanding how social classifications and categories take shape in the struggle surrounding these objects.

This analysis makes two contributions. First, it takes the sum of categories one presumes to understand (class, gender, nationality, generation, etc.) and transforms it into a concrete analysis of the enmeshed dimensions of difference and inequality associated with mechanisms (exclusion, exploitation, distanciation, hierarchization) that generate resource, vital, and existential inequalities.

The second contribution, which is captured in the call by the organizations to open the workshops, is the need to identify the systems of representation and the interpretative framework that give meaning to social relations and positions. The diverse systems available in a society and those that are put into motion during migration to link different societies offer alternative—and sometimes conflicting or incongruent—points of view.

In their own recursive reflexivity, then, the organizations shed light on the relationship between social categories and inequalities. Inequality is categorical whenever there are things that can and cannot be done based on whether someone ascribes to—or is ascribed to—an institutionalized category of belonging. An example is someone who is trained to be in a certain ethnic labor niche, as well as someone who has no other option; or someone who will automatically be assigned a certain role in a workshop because she is a woman or a recent arrival from a rural community. Finally, the creation of inequalities is also categorical if we understand the categories to be dynamic, the unstable outcome of struggles to transform or maintain inequalities. Inevitably, these are categories that are compounded, imbricated, and always open to interpretation within alternative systems of representation.

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