Living on the Construction Site

Paraguayan Construction Workers in Buenos Aires

_by_
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Argentine enterprises subsume Paraguayan migrant workers into the construction industry in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area, subordinating them to the demands of production by temporarily housing them on the construction sites themselves. Ethnographic fieldwork carried out on various construction sites between 2006 and 2015 shows how this practice overlaps with wider processes of global transformation in labor relations. The lodging of workers on construction sites is an increasingly widespread strategy for capitalist entrepreneurs to exploit the migrant workforce even further.

Las empresas argentinas han incorporado a los trabajadores migrantes paraguayos a la industria de la construcción en el área metropolitana de Buenos Aires y los han subordinado a las exigencias de la producción, alojándolos temporalmente en las obras mismas. Un trabajo de campo etnográfico realizado en varias obras entre 2006 y 2015 muestra cómo dicha práctica se entrelaza con procesos más amplios en la transformación de las relaciones laborales a nivel global. El alojamiento de los trabajadores en las obras es una estrategia cada vez más extendida para que los empresarios capitalistas puedan explotar la mano de obra migrante aún más de lo que ya hacen.

Keywords: *Construction industry, Migration, Paraguay, Subsumption, Labor relations*

This paper analyzes the little-known consequences of the informality endured by most Paraguayan migrant workers in Argentina, in particular the men who work in the construction industry in the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires.[1] Against the background of extensive research on labor issues (del Águila, 2012; 2014; 2016), I will focus on one aspect of these workers' experience: the fact that a significant number of them sleep and, in general terms, "live" on the construction site itself. In the course of my ethnographic research on metropolitan-area construction sites between 2006 and 2015,[2] it became

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TABLE 1
Paraguayan-born Argentine Residents by Place of Residence, 1869–2010

National Census	*Argentina*	*Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area*	*Other Provinces*
1869	3,288	–	–
1895	14,562	9.3	90.7
1914	28,049	11.2	88.8
1917	93,248	12.4	87.6
1947	155,269	13.3	86.7
1960	230,000	29.6	70.4
1995	250,450	73.3	26.7
2010	550,713	75.4	24.6

Source: Data provided by Fischer, Palau, and Pérez (1997), Pastore (1972), Flores Colombino (1972), Carrón (1979), and the 2010 Argentine census.

apparent to me that this situation was the product of complex labor reconfigurations that are part of the current reorganization of capitalist modes of production (Antunes, 1996; de la Garza Toledo, 2012).

Paraguayan presence in Argentina can be traced back to the very emergence of these nation-states, but Paraguayan settlement in the metropolitan area is much more recent (Table 1). In the initial stage, Paraguayan migrants fulfilled a cyclical demand for temporary work in the Argentine agricultural sector, mainly across the border provinces. According to Maguid (1997), a second period began around 1945, as Paraguayan migrants began taking up the regional and mining jobs abandoned by Argentine internal migrants who, in turn, moved to the metropolitan area. As of 1960, with the decline in the prices of local products and the beginning of mechanized harvesting in the country's Northwest, Paraguayan migration (and border migration in general) changed course, looking for new opportunities in the metropolitan area. The areas included construction, manufacturing, and domestic service, all of which were better paid there than in the rest of the Argentine provinces or in the migrants' countries of origin (Balán, 1990; Maguid, 1997). This began a slow process of urbanization of Paraguayan migrants, who moved into Buenos Aires and other Argentine cities. By 1990, the metropolitan area had clearly become the main destination for Paraguayan workers in Argentina.[3]

Maguid (1997: 38) suggests that by 1990 the first signs of what would become a truly "informal labor market" in the metropolitan area had begun to appear:

> Despite the limited labor absorption of the modern production sector during those years, the informal sector grew; productivity levels were not too low, which meant that it was possible to employ many people with adequate income levels. Additionally, there was an oversupply of qualified labor and a demand for unskilled workers, which would explain the absorption of the additional workforce supplied by border immigration.

For many years Paraguayan immigration (and cross-border immigration in general) were mostly technically illegal, but several amnesties and regularization programs helped transform this situation.[4]

TABLE 2

Employed Nonmigrant and Paraguayan Migrant Males in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area by Occupational Group (%), First Semester of 2003

Occupational Group	*Nonmigrants (1,870,381)*	*Paraguayan Migrants (67,535)*
Service industries	73.8	35.1
Construction	10.4	39.8
Production of non-agricultural goods	15.0	23.8
Production of agricultural goods	0.5	0.8
Domestic services	0.1	0.6
No information	0.1	–

Source: Bruno and del Águila (2010).

TABLE 3

Males Employed in Construction in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area by Occupational Qualifications and Migratory Status (%), 2003

Occupational Qualifications	*Paraguayan Migrants (26,886)*	*Nonmigrants (195,547)*
Professional and technical	3.9	13.7
Operative	89.9	74.0
Unskilled	6.3	12.4

Source: Bruno and del Águila (2010).

PARAGUAYAN WORKERS ON METROPOLITAN-AREA CONSTRUCTION SITES

Classified by occupation, 39.8 percent of Paraguayan males residing in the metropolitan area work in construction as opposed to 10.4 percent of Argentines (Table 2). Paraguayans in the construction industry are mainly concentrated in the operational skills areas (Table 3). Consistent with the results of other analyses (Bueno, 1994; Panaia, 1985; Silva, 2000) that have portrayed construction as an essentially informal productive environment., when it comes to Paraguayan workers precariousness is standard (Table 4). In 2008 more than three-quarters of Paraguayan construction workers were employed informally; a gap of 20.7 percentage points with regard to Argentine workers reveals the comparatively privileged position enjoyed by natives in the sector. High levels of precariousness among Paraguayan migrants are not limited to those working in construction, but the gap between migrants and others is greater in construction (13.3 percentage points [see Bruno and del Águila, 2010]).

One of the more reliable indicators of sector informality is the absence of social security. According to Mingo et al. (2012), the lack of retirement benefits can lead to limited or no health care, and in addition these unprotected workers earn considerably less than registered ones. The lack of benefits may be associated with violations regarding other rights, such as those related to labor agreements: holidays, working hours, and safety and health

TABLE 4
Access to Retirement Benefits (%) by Occupation and Migratory Status in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, 2003

	Construction		*Remaining Occupations*	
Access to Benefits	*Paraguayan Migrants (15,547)*	*Nonmigrants (73,266)*	*Paraguayan Migrants (28, 402)*	*Nonmigrants (1,212,416)*
Yes	22.6	43.4	45.5	59.3
No	77.3	56.6	53.6	40.3
No information	0.1	–	1.0	0.4

Source: Bruno and del Águila (2010).

standards. It nullifies the benefits of Law 26.494, which ensures a provisional differential welfare scheme for construction workers that enables them to retire at the age of 55. Finally, failure to contribute to the work termination fund on their behalf leaves workers helpless if they lose their jobs. The absence of any investment in health and safety, workers' insurance, the termination fund, and bonuses or paid holidays amounts to clear financial savings for many Argentine employers. It follows that construction companies will show an interest in a more flexible, more docile, and less unionized workforce.[5] In short, overexploitation of the migrant workforce is naturalized practice in estimating construction costs. Verbal contracts doubtless contribute to this situation.

My fieldwork revealed two main ways of getting work in construction—offering one's services "door-to-door" or employing social network connections. A construction company will rarely advertise for masons, plumbers, or carpenters, and it is also highly unusual for a worker to submit a résumé in applying for work. Workers either bicycle or walk around the central Buenos Aires neighborhoods looking for construction sites and offer their services to the foremen there, mentioning the kinds of things they can do. If they get a job, they will be on trial for an undetermined period at the foreman's discretion, during which they will need to demonstrate what they have said they can do.[6] While this happens on a daily basis, the most common way of obtaining employment on construction sites is through social networks. As Vargas (2005) points out, the construction industry is held together by bonds of trust. Social networks help build the trust needed to sustain arrangements and exchanges that are often informal and verbal.

According to Vargas (2005: 31), the construction industry "relies on bonds of trust based on national affiliation to work a certain way, including the establishment of agreements that lie outside the bounds of the law to guarantee higher profits to companies and contractors, along with employment and acknowledgment for the workers." Nationality serves as a guarantor of the fulfillment of the covenants made between employees and contractors and between contractors and architects, becoming "the enabler and performer of a certain form of labor organization" (23). For this reason, Paraguayan contractors (acting as intermediaries) will seek to hire other Paraguayans. From Vargas's perspective, being a Paraguayan can be considered a resource that, to some extent, gives the

worker an advantage in the labor market because it will be interpreted by foremen, contractors, and architects almost as a synonym for "inherent qualifications" for construction work.

While this is an interesting idea, I would argue that it cannot explain the high proportion of Paraguayan workers on metropolitan-area construction sites. Most of the people I spoke to had gotten their jobs through acquaintances already working on the site. Paraguayans do not offer work to their compatriots merely because they come from the same country. The trust so aptly pinpointed by Vargas is undoubtedly based on something more. When I asked workers who had recommended them for their first and latest jobs, the most effective types of bond turned out to be kinship, local origin (belonging to the same locality in the place of origin), and neighborhood (shared residence in the metropolitan area).

UNDER CONSTRUCTION: CORPORATE CONTROL AND RESISTANCE STRATEGIES

From its very beginnings, capital has tried to adapt the workforce to production (Gaudemar, 1991; Harvey, 2003; 1998; Leite Lopes, 2011; Marx, 1977 [1867]). Thus, in its relentless pursuit of dominance of workplaces, management has appealed to both material and symbolic factors on the basis that "the more entrenched they both are in labor relations, the harder it will be for workers to express their interests collectively" (Montes Cató, 2007: 1). While the processes discussed here refer to a specific occupational sector, they need to be addressed in the context of what have been called the new labor relations (de la Garza Toledo, 2001; 2012)—the reconfiguration of the capitalist mode of production that in recent decades has led to deepening fragmentation and precariousness in the social relations of production (Antunes, 1996). My research emerges from the understanding that capitalist globalization has served as the main engine behind the demographic and organizational transformations in labor in recent decades (e.g., Antunes, 1996; Braverman, 1974; Castells, 1999; de la Garza Toledo, 2012; 2001; Harvey, 1998; 2003).

In the Argentine construction industry, control of the workforce often translates into a set of strategies deployed by companies to constrain workers within wage labor conditions, limiting and blocking the development of their subjectivity and/or the possibility of collective organization. In the construction sites I visited, this took the form of normative and disciplinary measures that, while varying in form from one company to another, broadly sought to limit, as far as possible, absenteeism and other violations such as the sabotage of machinery or the theft of materials (fittings, copper cables, tools, ceramics, cement bags, etc.), all of which are common on construction sites. The most common control method was the effective presence on-site of foremen, security personnel, and other managers, whose powers extended to checking departing workers' bags, breathalyzer checks, and restrictions on leaving the site during the lunch hour. There were also devices such as machines that forced laborers to stamp their work cards upon entering and exiting the site, ensuring that the company paid

only for effective working hours while indirectly evaluating the worker's commitment to the production process and the company.

Camcorders have been introduced in recent years because of the alleged need for "general security," and while this is a recent development it has irreversibly transformed the workplace. Like the Panopticon (Foucault, 1975), cameras generate uncertainty and fear among workers concerned by the prospect of being watched by their employer. This is because company managers can access cameras in any location via their mobile phones; they can check, for example, whether workers have left the site before the end of the workday. The workers interviewed said that, among other issues, they could no longer bring women onto the sites, lie down and rest, or spend a few more minutes at the table to finish a game of cards. While these types of control certainly limited workers' deployment of subjectivity and their collective organization, I never witnessed any situation in which they openly expressed their discomfort at being watched to their employer. As Gualberto (interview, August 17, 2011) put it,

> Paraguayans, in particular, are very shy men, meek. . . . They're not the type that goes and complains to the boss. . . I don't know why this is. . . . because they do like to talk politics. . . . The issue is, they do not like to commit themselves in this regard. . . . I think it has a little to do with being cautious.

Thus, the fact that they fail to express their dissatisfaction does not mean that it does not exist. Paraphrasing Scott (2000), the dispute between subordinates and the managerial culture in some contexts tends to take the form of a hidden discourse that rarely becomes public. That said, there are certain control mechanisms that manage to escape any type of resistance strategy on the part of the workers. Maybe because of its ambiguity, housing workers on the site is perhaps the most effective of these—"most effective" only insofar as workers agree to it and thus sustain it (Burawoy, 1989).

LIVING ON THE SITE

Construction sites are future goods and, as such, a sign of status for anyone who can acquire the finished spaces. At the same time, they are living and working spaces for those who construct them but will not be able to inhabit them once they have been transformed into goods. The fieldnote that follows (from the Pumacahua site, February 12, 2008) conveys some of this dual character:

> The construction site is similar to many of those currently around the neighborhood. Orange peels, plastic bottles, remnants of yerba mate and cookie packages lie scattered everywhere on the floor. Workers have already moved their *cuchas* [shelters] into the half-finished apartments; there are several mattresses on the floor and some blankets. Clothing and footwear hang from makeshift wooden racks. There are also pots, carafes, and cooking items. The Paraguayans at this site share their workplace with two Argentine plumbers and a Bolivian electrician, but the latter do not sleep at the site.

During their initial stages, all construction sites look more like shantytowns than future buildings; vacant lots are not natural workplaces and must be

adapted and transformed. Thus, the first task on a site is assembling the worker shelters (*cuchas* or *boliches*), the sheds made of metal sheets and wood that will serve as the workers' quarters during the first months of work, before there are any concrete structures under which to take refuge, and lodgings for a significant number of Paraguayan workers while construction is in progress. Once the building has been completed, the workers will return to Paraguay or seek new work, perhaps once again living on the site.

While staying on the site means substantial savings for workers, contractors and companies also save on night watchmen through this practice. Moreover, companies obtain much more than cost savings by lodging workers on the site: they ensure the worker's absolute subordination during the construction process. According to Escobar, a Paraguayan contractor (interview, July 23, 2008),

> In the sites here, there are contractors who tell people to come work here, they'll pay them 300 pesos per day in Paraguayan guaraní (around US$2 per day), but they'll give them food and accommodation. Then they dump these mattresses as thin as a piece of paper on the construction site and go to the supermarket and buy them these bones, those that people buy for dogs, that nobody wants, and feed them that.

Paraguayan youths, he said, generally follow an immigration pattern:

> They see that the neighbor bought a bike, for example, then they say: "I'm going to Buenos Aires. I'll work for a year, sleep at the site, not spending money on anything, make a difference, come back and buy myself a bike." But after a month a colleague tells them: "Come, let's go clubbing," and there they get a taste for partying and spend it all. . . . There are people to whom you can give 2,000 pesos on a Saturday and by Monday they don't have a penny.

As Escobar pointed out, the younger ones seek short-term construction jobs in order to save money and return to Paraguay with an economic edge in a hostile job market. For those who already have families, working in the metropolitan area may be a consequence of their role as providers and their need to send home regular remittances. The common rationale regarding on-site lodging seems to be that, by saving on housing costs, workers have access to income that would be difficult to obtain in Paraguay.

What, then, are the consequences of this practice? A social science concept that is often overlooked—the Marxist notion of subsumption—will clarify the situation. Broadly speaking, Marx understood subsumption as the process through which labor becomes the instrument for the valorization of capital. He distinguished two "moments" in this process. Under "formal subsumption," work previously performed under precapitalist conditions began to be organized and directed by a capitalist without substantially modifying the mode of production or transforming social relations in depth. For Marx (1864) the surplus value extracted by the capitalist in this context arose from longer working hours (plus absolute value): "The distinguishing character of the *formal subsumption of labour* under capital can be made most plain by comparison with situations in which capital already exists in particular subordinate functions, but not yet in its ruling function, the function in which it determines the general form of society, as directly buying labour and directly appropriating the production process." The second

moment, "real subsumption," was the subordination of labor to capital when the procedures, machinery, and technology employed managed to displace the worker's initiative in the production process and transform him into an operational instrument (Castillo Mendoza, 2003 [1991]). In Marx's (1977 [1887]: 645) words,

> The prolongation of the working-day beyond the point at which the worker would have produced an exact equivalent for the value of his labour-power, and the appropriation of that surplus-labour by capital, this is the process which constitutes the production of absolute surplus-value. It forms the general foundation of the capitalist system, and the starting-point for the production of relative surplus-value. The latter presupposes that the working-day is already divided into two parts, necessary labour, and surplus labour. In order to prolong the surplus labour, the necessary labour is shortened by methods for producing the equivalent of the wage for labor in a shorter time. The production of absolute surplus-value turns exclusively on the length of the working-day; whereas the production of relative surplus-value completely revolutionizes the technical processes of labour and the groupings into which society is divided. It therefore requires a specifically capitalist mode of production, a mode of production which, along with its methods, means, and conditions, arises and develops spontaneously on the basis of the formal subsumption of labour under capital. This formal subsumption is then replaced by a real subsumption.

Real subsumption thus entails subordination to the working capital in the company and the subordination of the work performed in the whole social space, particularly in the private family home environment, where the reproduction of the labor force invisibly guarantees the reproduction (and valorization) of capital. Again, in Marx's (1977 [1887]: 432) words:

> But when surplus-value has to be produced by the conversion of necessary labour into surplus labour, it by no means suffices for capital to take over the labour process in its given or historically transmitted shape, and then simply to prolong its duration. The technical and social conditions of the process, and consequently the mode of production itself must be revolutionized, before the productivity of labour can be increased. Then, with the increase in the productivity of labour, the value of labour-power will fall, and the portion of the working day necessary for the reproduction of that value will be shortened.

Thus for Marx real subsumption implied the subordination of technology, culture, subjectivity, politics, and social relations to the cycle of capital. In a post-Fordist context, and as part of the above-mentioned "new labor relations," the subsumption of labor to capital seems to have been transformed into the deepening of certain contradictions in the workplace. Companies increasingly value workers' "loyalty," "commitment," and "trust"[7] much more than their skills and qualifications for concrete productive activities. On construction sites, this means that the worker must be willing to have the job demand increasingly more of his person and occupy more of his private life (Figure 1).

What is a general policy across the world of labor acquires specific features in the construction industry. The construction of a building usually requires a "free" labor force in the sense that it is preferable that the worker have no social ties that would keep him from fulfilling the job requirements when necessary and urgent. As a rule, workers must accept all kinds of extensions to regular working hours: the pouring of a concrete slab cannot be interrupted or the

Figure 1. Bedding for workers who sleep on the site.

material will spoil; if the truck carrying rebar is late, workers will have to wait for it in order to move the materials onto the construction site; and so on:

> One spends more time here than at home. At home, at best, you arrive, eat, shower, and go to sleep right away, because tomorrow you must be up at four-thirty, five in the morning ready to come to work. [Rubén, interview, July 12, 2014]

> If the boss calls you, you must go, no questions asked. On Saturday or Sunday, a holiday, rain or shine, you have to go . . . because you've been left in charge of the site, so the boss may need you. [Cristián, interview, March 21, 2015]

A young migrant newcomer to Buenos Aires without family obligations or commitments will be more capable of responding effectively to these requirements than a native worker of the same age. If to this we add the predominantly rural origin of Paraguayan construction workers, it is understandable that these workers are more accustomed to navigating the worlds of work and private life as spaces that are not very clearly defined:

> We also have difficulties . . . because most of those that come, they come from the countryside . . . the bush, the village. . . . Some have no TV back there in the village. . . . They have trouble communicating. . . . I have an illiterate brother who more or less understands Spanish but cannot directly speak it. . . . In Guarani . . . there are difficulties with that too. . . . There's work, you can find some. . . . Most of us work in construction. We are used to heavy-duty Paraguayan work . . . because we come from the countryside. . . . We cannot complain about that . . . we find work. [Horacio, interview, March 7, 2009]

Figure 2. Taking a brief nap on the site.

Extended working hours allow for what Marx called "absolute surplus value." The consent involved is expressed in the fact that for many young migrants these extended workday situations appear desirable because of a "salary fetishism" (Leite Lópes, 2011) whereby the lengthening of the working day is seen as an opportunity to work more hours and thus earn more money. It goes without saying that, in the eyes of the employer, this is doubtless more profitable: extending a single worker's hours saves on all the costs of hiring an additional laborer to do the leftover work (Figure 2).[8] Miguel, a former construction worker, summed up the situation as follows (interview, February 13, 2011):

> The working culture and . . . so many years of disadvantageous conditions and suffering in Paraguay, given the years of repression, have fostered a tame social being. So Paraguayans calmly come here and work themselves to the bone as they traditionally do, no? They're popular, both on the site and in domestic service. They are valued, their services much sought after; this is also an advantage of that.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Living on the construction site means much more than sleeping there. First, the workplace inhabited daily by the workers shows a clear lack of division between spaces meant for production and for reproduction. The general hygiene conditions of the workplace (bathrooms, kitchens, locker rooms, and

canteens are all precariously built) are a clear example of the way the idea of a construction site in progress helps legitimize the absence of such amenities. The Law of Health and Safety at Work 19.587, through its Regulatory Decree 911/96, calls for bathrooms, changing rooms, and canteens in sufficient quantity and proper conditions, but the lack of strict state control often leads to neglect of these requirements. Needless to say, failing to invest in all these aspects entails significant savings for the capitalist in terms of the cost of the production and reproduction of the workforce, and this helps us understand increased migrant employment in the area. Migrant workers already prepared to address these issues may better tolerate the shortcomings and precariousness of these workplaces than native workers accustomed to other conditions.

What is the relationship between the subsumption of life to capital and the kind of commitment and loyalty that the production process is beginning to demand of these construction workers? As we have seen, the subsumption of life by capital aims to produce commitment, involvement, and mobilization of subjective resources in the service of the job (Montes Cató, 2007). De la Garza Toledo (2001) has identified as the essential feature of the new labor relations the elimination of the separation between different aspects of life to create a single "system." Thus, by various mechanisms, the business sector keeps seeking to control the interactions between laborers both within and outside the workplace, a clear attempt to extend the productive logic to areas that are not related to work. Following Pagura (2008: 7) and considering that capital's ultimate goal is the production of surplus value, we see that the current trend in production is no longer limited to the factory/office/workshop "but extends to the whole of social life, encompassing spaces traditionally used for 'reproduction' and 'consumption.' Thus, and given that the whole of social life can potentially produce surplus value, life and work become almost synonymous and are conducted in the concrete terms of the real subsumption of life to capital." In the case of the metropolitan-area construction sites, the absence of a domestic sphere among recently arrived young migrants is exploited by companies to make the most effective use of a worker's labor capacity. Housing workers on-site extends the business rationale into the private living space, covertly organizing workers' free time (or workforce reproduction time) and subordinating it to the productive sphere. This complex phenomenon certainly extends beyond construction sites to many other productive sectors. Many lines of inquiry must remain open, among them the way other migrant groups experience these same processes and the many other mechanisms employed to generate commitment and loyalty among construction workers and the ways in which the latter manage to resist these efforts.

NOTES

1. The metropolitan area of Buenos Aires covers an area of approximately 2,681 square kilometers. According to the 2010 national census, it has 13,520,000 inhabitants. It is generally understood to be made up of 24 administrative units called *partidos* or *municipios.* Each municipality is governed by a mayor elected by direct resident vote. The relationship between the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires and the rest of the metropolitan-area municipalities is quite close given that a large part of the population that resides in the latter commutes daily to the city for work. Most of the construction workers reside in metropolitan-area municipalities and travel daily to the city, where most of the real estate projects and construction work are located.

2. My work as a technician and then a graduate in occupational health and safety on construction sites for more than a decade affected my research in various ways. First, given that I was working on the sites while doing fieldwork, the research did not follow "orthodox" norms. I started as a participant and became a participant-observer. I began strictly ethnographic visits to the sites around 2011, but many of the conversations and field data here presented took place before that date. This peculiarity had both positive effects (e.g., a "privileged" kind of participant observation) and negative ones, diversely affecting the disposition of interviewees. For this reason and perhaps more so than in other projects, reflexivity (Guber, 1999) was fundamental to this research. Some issues were difficult to broach with the subjects, especially since they knew I worked for the construction company. Given the context, I sought to develop an attitude of "epistemological surveillance" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1995). In the interviews, this meant an added effort to capture and interpret the ways in which the subjects assessed the communicative situation, especially considering their unequal relationship with me. In most cases, this was legitimized and defined in advance by the different roles we each played in the production process. Between 2006 and 2015 I developed an accident prevention and observation program that was implemented on sites across the metropolitan area. This paper includes field data and fragments from interviews conducted on such sites and/or their surroundings.

3. The construction industry is known across the world for being markedly "masculine." While studies have shown most of the tasks on a site could well be performed by women (Ness, 2011), in Argentina construction work practically means work done by males. At the same time, Paraguayan women make up the majority of Paraguayan immigrants in Argentina (Gaudio, 2012), and, in keeping with the regional trend, Paraguayan migration has become markedly more feminine in recent decades (Dobree, 2014).

4. Migrant amnesties in Argentina were generally granted by democratic governments after periods of repression and attempts to stop border immigration (Fuld, 1997). The first three sought to socially integrate undocumented migrants. The 1974 Peronist government issued the fourth and mentioned "abuses on the part of employers" and the existence of "a veritable black labor market." Alfonsín granted the fifth in the same spirit as the previous one, and the last took place under Menem as the restrictive government gaze began to show signs of radicalization. While the Programa de Radicación Patria Grande (2006–2009) promoted by the Néstor Kirchner government was technically not an amnesty but "a state policy that aims to extend into the future" (Cerrutti, 2009), it helped many regional immigrants obtain formal residence in the country. Most of them were of Paraguayan origin (approximately 264,438 began the regularization process, but only a fraction of them completed it).

5. A recent study by the Center for Research in Work, Distribution and Society states that the monthly income of South American migrant workers in Argentina is 23 percent lower than the national average. The document shows that the low wages of Bolivians, Paraguayans, and Peruvians are directly linked to labor informality: half of migrant workers are placed in precarious conditions by their employers (Bertranou and Casanova, 2013). National data clearly indicate that migrant workers suffer from more precariousness in the labor market, are less likely to get salaried work, and are paid less hourly than nonmigrant workers. A detailed study carried out by the ILO shows that employment conditions improved considerably less for migrants than for other employees (Bertranou and Casanova, 2013). Fabio Bertranou and Luis Casanova (2013) have estimated that between 2003 and 2012 informality declined 15.2 percentage points among nonmigrants and only 4.8 percentage points among migrants. This dynamic did not change in any significant way over the years.

6. In the Argentine construction industry, a worker's expertise is expressed in "categories" (assistant, middle officer, officer, specialist officer) that correlate with wages. In October 2016, for example, according to the Unión Obrera de la Construcción de la República Argentina an assistant's salary was 51.48 pesos (around US$3 per hour).

7. We should keep in mind the importance of kinship, local origin, and the neighborhood as free sources of "reliable" workers. From the point of view of subsumption, the creation of trust and, consequently, trust in the construction industry predate a building's construction and, in this sense, are dimensions of the subjectivity of the workers that capital subsumes into production.

8. It is interesting to compare construction in the metropolitan area with what Ribeiro (2006) describes regarding Brasilia. Among other issues, he speaks of the "legal ambiguity" (71) underlying the treatment of migrants during construction processes and the modes of recruitment, selection, and control employed to organize the flow of workers around the specific needs of the

production process (healthy young males with an average age of 23 years and no families). Pagura also addresses the problems arising from the relative scarcity of women in the area and the absence of a domestic sphere for the social reproduction of the labor force. He shows how worker lodging camps grew as an extension of the productive logic: the social organization of the lodging space to foster control and surveillance, thereby subordinating free time to the sphere of production.

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