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## Industrial Anthropology in Argentina

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### Abstract

This paper examines the history and practice of industrial anthropology in Argentina. The development of this subfield is discussed in the context of Argentina's recent history and research institutions.

**Keywords:** Argentina, industrial anthropology

### Introduction

The anthropology of work has only recently become a research focus among Latin American scholars. The first

systematic studies of work by Latin American-based social scientists began in the 1960s; even then most such research was carried out by sociologists. However, work and workers have never been absent from ethnographic research in Argentina. Descriptions of work lives have often appeared in studies by political, medical, economic, and educational anthropologists. Although numerous anthropologists in Mexico and Brazil and other Latin American countries have been focusing specifically on work for some time now, Argentinean scholars were less active in this field until the 1980s. This article reviews the work that has been

done to date in a country with many salaried industrial workers.

### **Anthropology of Work in the Context of Argentinean History**

Anthropology in Argentina at first focused on culture history, with great emphasis on archaeology. Among socio-cultural anthropologists diffusionary approaches taken from German, French, and Italian theorists were common in the first part of the 20th century (Menéndez 1978:48–49). In the early 1960s, there was a renovation of sociocultural anthropology in Argentina. This process was left unfinished because of a military coup in 1966 that affected national science policies and forced many researchers into exile.

Aside from a brief period between 1973 and 1975, sociocultural anthropology in Argentina from 1966 to 1983 was dominated by phenomenological and cultural–historical approaches. Research focused on indigenous peoples. After a democratic opening in 1983, anthropologists examined a wider variety of topics and became attentive to contemporary theoretical approaches (Garbulsky 2003:12). In the mid-1980s, Argentinean anthropologists began examining industrial work carefully.

The development of studies of industrial work in the 1980s must be placed in the context of recent Argentinean history. During the last military dictatorship, the government favored neoliberal models of development with an emphasis on the concentration, centralization, and internationalization of wealth. This meant the dismantling of an industrial model that had dominated government policy since the 1940s. Under these policies, state-owned industries proliferated via import substitution and subsidies for companies of all sizes. The number of industrial workers increased exponentially in and around large cities such as Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Tucumán, and Rosario.

The neoliberal policies adopted by Argentinean governments since the time of the last military dictatorship have resulted in the privatization of state-owned companies (oil, ironworks, telecommunications, railways, electricity, gasoline, water) and the closing of many small and medium-sized enterprises. Labor conditions have been adversely affected at different times by the brutal human rights policies of the military dictatorship, hyperinflation in the late 1980s, and high unemployment rates (around 30 percent) in the 1990s. This has led to an increased number of illegal businesses and deteriorating housing, health, and educational conditions. Anthropological research on industries in Argentina therefore has taken place during a period in which workers are in many ways in worse positions than they were before the 1980s. In particular unions have much less influence than previously (Giniger 2007).

### **Anthropological Studies of Industrial Work in Argentina**

At the end of the 1950s there were significant changes in the organization of social sciences in Argentina. Departments of sociology, psychology, and anthropology were created at national universities. There was an increased emphasis (though at first not in anthropology) on contemporary social problems with numerous studies of peasant economics and social organization, urban life, health,

and social change. Interdisciplinary research became more common (Garbulsky 2003:4). Studies of workers by anthropologists focused on topics such as living conditions, the effects of economic and labor policies, and the characteristics of industrial communities. Relatively little emphasis was placed on processes of production.

In the past two decades, there have been increasingly complex and sophisticated studies of the working world in Argentina. These diverse studies do not seem to me to constitute a coherent theoretical approach to industrial work. Moreover, they have only occasionally been carried out by research *teams* from anthropology departments. What follows is a summary of some of the more important work by anthropologists examining industrial enterprises in Argentina.

(1) Eduardo Menéndez (1978) made early contributions to the study of the health of industrial workers.

(2) Federico Neigburg (1988) conducted ethnographic research among cement workers living in a factory village in Olavarría in the province of Buenos Aires.

(3) Mabel Grimberg (1997) has conducted research among graphical workers in the province of Buenos Aires.

(4) Santiago Wallace (1998) conducts research among beer workers in Quilmes. He has been especially interested (e.g., Wallace 1996) in laborers' ideas about the meaning of work.

(5) Ricardo Rosendo (1998) focuses on how workers' activities are controlled by management in a post-Fordist era. Virginian Manzano (2004) specifically examines this topic in the metal-lurgy industry.

(6) At the beginning of this century, the conditions of the working class were especially grim as a result of years of neoliberal policies. Many studies have examined the consequences of loss of employment in the formal sector. Anthropologists have examined the lives of unemployed workers and their participation in informal economy (Perelman 2007) and attempts by workers to gain control of factories (Fernández Álvarez 2004). There have been intriguing studies (e.g., Ferraudi Curto 2005; Manzano 2004) of the "piquetero" movement, in which workers (often women) have blockaded roads to protest conditions. Based on his Argentinean research, Perelman (2007) has suggested that there should be a subfield of the anthropology of work devoted to the unemployed.

(7) A group directed by Gloria Rodríguez at the national university in Rosario has made co-ordinated studies (Soul 2003) of labor conflicts and workers involved in reorganization of production.

(8) The economic crisis of the first part of the century has passed; employment opportunities are now somewhat better in Argentina. Moreover, many states in Latin America are less quick to adopt neoliberal policies. Argentinean anthropologists have increasingly taken on projects critical of certain aspects of capitalism. A notable example is the work conducted by a team under the direction of Mirtha Lischetti (2006, 2007) on the situation of Chilean laborers.

(9) Perhaps because of the improved economic situation in Argentina, anthropologists have been conducting more small-scale studies of employed workers. Dario Soich (2003) takes an "anthropology of the body" perspective in examining workers' resistance to certain attempts to control labor processes. María Alicia Serafino (2004) studies the participation in

the workforce of Bolivian families in a neighborhood north of the city of Santa Fe. Martha Roldán (2004) characterizes tempo-spatial configurations and work organization in businesses disseminating different types of "information." Juan Schapiro (2004) has made a quantitative analysis of unemployment. Maria Alejandra Esponda (2008) examines the reorganization of production in a large metallurgy factory.

(10) Some colleagues and I have established an anthropology of work group at the University of Buenos Aires (Giniger, García, Gouarnalusse, Intrieri, Palermo, Presta and Rivero, 2007). Our goals are to summarize earlier studies, carry out systematic, coordinated research, and to conduct theoretical assessment of the field. Our ethnographic projects examine how labor conditions have changed since the end of the privatization process in the early 1990s, changes in workers' careers as productive activities are restructured in different industries, subjective views of power relations between employers and workers, and new types of labor movements (Giniger, 2007; Giniger and Palermo, 2006). We have also instituted three different undergraduate seminars focusing on the anthropology of industrial work.

### Conclusions

As Grabulsky noted 16 years ago (2003:12) the transition in Argentina in the 1980s to a constitutional government has offered many opportunities for social scientists. After two decades of research on work-related topics, it is time for scholars in Argentina to contribute more to a Latin American-based industrial anthropology. Topics that deserved further investigation include both theoretical issues (e.g., worker identity, globalization, and work in Latin America) and empirical problems (e.g., trade union conflicts, comparisons of manufacturing, and service workers). By doing so, anthropologists in Argentina can contribute to workers' movements. We can also join our Latin American colleagues in history and sociology in focusing on the problems of the working class in an ever-changing industrial world.

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## Photo Essay

### Transnational Migration, the Lost Girls of Sudan and Global “Care work”: A Photo Essay

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#### Abstract

This essay explores the work lives of a group of Sudanese refugees known popularly as the Lost Girls of Sudan. Like other women from the Global South, the Lost Girls often work in the care work sector as maids, babysitters, nannies, preschool attendants, food service workers, nurses, personal care attendants for elderly and disabled people. The article also explores the U.S. refugee policy of self-sufficiency.

**Keywords:** global care network, Sudan, refugees, Lost Girls, gender and migration, Lost Boys, economic self-sufficiency, transnational migrant labor

The Lost Boys of Sudan have become celebrity refugees with a cottage industry of documentary films, journalistic accounts, autobiographies, and novels describing their adjustment to America. Dave Eggers' *What is the What* hit the New York Times Best Sellers List last year. Nicole Kidman did the voice-over for a Brad Pitt – produced documentary about the Lost Boys, *God Grew Tired of Us*.

We hear less about the Lost Boys' female counterparts. This photo essay focuses on the overlooked Lost Girls by examining their work lives. Whereas the Lost Boys have received much media attention, the Lost Girls remain largely invisible. The so-called Lost Girls are the female children – now young women – who fled the Sudanese Civil War that was reignited in 1983. The Lost Boys and Girls, mostly orphaned and alone, started arriving in Kenya's

Kakuma Refugee Camp in the early 1990s. Numbering over 20,000 at the start of the horrific journey, fewer than 11,000 arrived in Kakuma. Humanitarian workers borrowed the term *Lost Boys* from the children's story Peter Pan to refer to the Sudanese orphans who fled the violence and trekked thousands of miles without food, water, or supplies, facing starvation. Once in Kenya, many of these children languished in Kakuma for nearly a decade.

In 2000, the U.S. State Department allowed nearly 4,000 Lost Boys to resettle in the United States but, for various reasons, only 89 Lost Girls were resettled initially. Unlike the Sudanese boys who were placed together, making them a more visible group of “unaccompanied minors” in the refugee camp, the girls were immediately integrated into foster families (Bixler 2005). These foster families were often hesitant to part with young girls who bring the possibility of a large bride payment consisting of cows and cash upon their marriage. Ultimately, the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) consulted Sudanese leaders in the Kakuma camp to assist in decisions about which youth should be resettled; the male elders with whom they consulted favored boys over girls. According to the elders, the Sudanese boys would be more likely than girls to obtain formal education in the United States and return to help build Sudan.

Because of the inequities faced by the Lost Girls, Refugee International urged the U.S. government and UNHCR to work together to resolve this situation by placing particular emphasis on unaccompanied females. Some Lost Girls