Informal and Reliable: Bolivian Immigrants in Korean Sewing Workshops in the Argentine Garment Industry*

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At the beginning of Korean migration to Argentina in the 1960s and 1970s, most Korean immigrants in Argentina were intensively involved in garment sewing and knitting jobs, working as employees at or owners of Korean workshops subcontracted by Jewish manufacturers. However, due to the substantial upward mobility of the Korean business community, eventually Korean workshop owners, out of necessity, started recruiting workers from outside of their co-ethnic networks. Based on ethnographic research in Argentina, this study aims to explore why and how Korean employers have created labor relationships exclusively with Bolivian immigrants in their workshops in the Argentine garment industry with a particular focus on informality. For Korean workshop owners who are managing their businesses extremely informally, it is strategic to turn to the group they feel is most trustworthy. Bolivian seamstresses prefer to work for Korean workshop owners as Korean employers are deemed more dependable, pay on time and in full, and provide relatively better working conditions in comparison to Bolivian employers. This research further proves that it is particularly crucial for linkages of bounded solidarity and tacit trust to be established among all actors involved when employment and business practices are managed in a highly informal environment.

Key words: *Korean entrepreneurship, Korean sewing workshops, Bolivian immigrants, Argentine garment industry, employment relationship.*

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Introduction

Since the beginning of Korean migration to Argentina in the 1960s, ethnic Koreans in Argentina have been intensively involved in the garment industry.[1] Currently, over 20,000 ethnic Koreans reside in Argentina and about 80 percent of them are engaged in the garment industry, in both production and distribution.[2] In the beginning, they began as employees at or owners of Korean workshops subcontracted by Jewish manufacturers.[3] However, as Korean garment businesses steadily expanded, Korean immigrants became a dominant group in the industry alongside the long-established Jewish business community.[4] In turn, Bolivian immigrants took over the lower-level sewing jobs, either as workshop employees or subcontractors, thereby replacing Koreans as the labor force.[5]

Because of the high concentrations of certain ethnic groups in the Argentine garment industry, a number of studies have been conducted focusing on their involvement and the inter-ethnic relationships in the sector. Because of the highly rudimentary, informal, and ad hoc characteristics of the clothing manufacturing sector in Argentina, several scholars have examined Bolivian immigrants' involvement in the sector and their coping strategies in the face of unregulated practices and exploitation.[6] In the case of Korean garment businesses, these previous studies addressed topics related to the intensive

[1]Gyobeom Lee, *Areuhentina haninimin 25nyeonsa* [History of 25 years of Korean immigration in Argentina] (Busan: Seonyeongsa, 1992); Jihye Kim, "Ethnicity, Opportunity, and Upward Mobility: Korean Entrepreneurship in the Argentine Garment Industry 1965–2015," *Asian Ethnicity* 21-3 (2020), pp. 373–392.

[2]Jihye Kim, "Ethnicity, opportunity, and upward mobility," p. 373.

[3]Gyobeom Lee, *Areuhentina haninimin 25nyeonsa*, p. 183.

[4]Jihye Kim, "Ethnicity, opportunity, and upward mobility," p. 373.

[5]Mirta Bialogorski, "La presencia coreana en la Argentina: La construcción simbólica de una experiencia inmigratoria" (Ph.D. dissertation, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2004), pp. 97–98; Jihye Kim, "Looking at the Other Through the Eye of a Needle: Korean Garment Businesses and Inter-Ethnic Relations in Argentina," *Asian Journal of Latin American Studies* 27-1 (2014), pp. 1–19.

[6]Tanja Bastia, "From Mining to Garment Workshops: Bolivian Migrants in Buenos Aires," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33-4 (2007), pp. 655–669; Roberto Benencia, "El infierno del trabajo esclavo: La contracara de las 'exitosas' economías étnicas," *Avá: Revista de Antropología* 15 (2009), pp. 43–72; Ariel Lieutier, *Esclavos: Los trabajadores costureros de la ciudad de Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: Retórica Ediciones, 2010); Jerónimo Montero, "Neoliberal Fashion: The Political Economy of Sweatshops in Europe and Latin America" (PhD diss., Durham University, 2011); Jerónimo Montero, "La moda neoliberal: El retorno de los talleres clandestinos de costura," *Geograficando: Revista de Estudios Geográficos* 8-8 (2012), pp. 19–37; Alejandro Goldberg, "Servitude and Slave Trade: The Case of Bolivian Immigrants Who Work in Clandestine Textile Workshops of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area," *Miradas en Movimiento*, special issue 1 (2012), pp. 188–202; Anna Porembka, "Argentina's Informal Economy: A Case Study of Patria Grande upon the Informal Textile Industry," (M.A. dissertation, Georgetown University, 2013).

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concentration in the sector[7] as well as the relationships Korean immigrants have established with the Jewish and Bolivian immigrants in the sector, mainly examining the views, perceptions, and stereotypes that the actors involved and the local Argentine people have created vis-à-vis "others."[8] However, none of the previous academic works have examined the informal management of Korean garment workshops or the direct experiences and labor relationships that Korean employers have built with Bolivian seamstresses, although the local media has vigorously engaged with this issue, defining the working conditions as slavery.

The apparel industry is one of the largest informal sectors in Argentina. In the clothing manufacturing sector, the workers generally have to contend with illegal employment practices, an unsafe or unhealthy working environment, and poor working conditions such as substandard lighting, ventilation, and sanitation facilities. While the number of Korean manufacturing plants, wholesale shops, and retail shops has increased remarkably, according to the best available estimates,[9] 20 to 30 percent of today's ethnic Koreans are still operating subcontracted sweatshops in which they typically hire Bolivian workers. Because of the relatively high living standard of Argentina in relation other countries in Latin America, it has been receiving many immigrants from neighboring countries, especially Colombia, Chile, Peru, Paraguay, and Bolivia. Among these, Korean workshop owners hire almost exclusively Bolivian immigrants for their workshops. This particular working relationship with Bolivian employees is a distinctive feature of Korean garment workshops in Buenos Aires.

By considering the two main characteristics of Korean garment workshops in Argentina –intensive informality and an exclusive employment relationship with Bolivian immigrants – this research aims to explore why and how informal practices have led to labor relations exclusively with Bolivian immigrants at Korean workshops in the Argentine garment industry. In his study, Light[10] found that in an unregulated informal economy, social networks are key for both employers and employees in providing important connections, cooperation, and, most importantly, norms for work standards and practices. Where the employment relationship is informal, another important element is trust, given the personal

[7]Jihye Kim, "Ethnicity, opportunity, and upward mobility"; Jihye Kim, "From Father to Son: 1.5-and Second-Generation Korean Argentines and Ethnic Entrepreneurship in the Argentine Garment Industry," *The Review of Korean Studies* 20-2 (2017), pp. 175–201.
[8]Mirta Bialogorski, *Presencia coreana*; Mirta Bialogorski and Daniel Bargman, "The Gaze of the Other: Koreans and Bolivians in Buenos Aires," *Patterns of Prejudice* 30-4 (1996), pp. 17–26; Jihye Kim, "Looking at the other through the eye of a needle."
[9]Interview with Hanjun Park, former president of the Chamber of Korean Entrepreneurs in Argentina.
[10]Donald W. Light, "From Migrant Enclaves to Mainstream: Reconceptualizing Informal Economic Behavior," *Theory and Society* 33-6 (2004), p. 711.

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nature of the work involved.[11] Following Light's argument[12] – that it is important for reliable relationships to be established among the involved actors in informal practices – this study examines the working relationship that Korean workshop owners have built with Bolivian immigrants beyond the relationship with Korean co-ethnics, by paying close attention to why the establishment of trustworthy employment relationships is vital in an informal environment.

Immigrant entrepreneurs tend to operate as contractors or subcontractors in the lower ranks of the industry, and an unenforced legal structure allows them to get away with widespread tax evasion, ignore rules and regulations, hire illegal immigrants and pay them under the table.[13] These activities are closely intertwined with government regulations and controls,[14] and this situation has provided the framework for understanding the employment relationship between Korean sewing workshops and their Bolivian workers. In particular, unlike the previous studies on ethnic relationships in the Argentine garment industry that focused on views, perceptions, and stereotypes that have been created of the other groups, this study has been carried out through visiting the workshops, hearing firsthand from the actors involved, scrutinizing their experiences and lives, and delving into the sector's unregulated practices and exploitation – an invisible but key aspect of the clothing manufacturing sector. Employing long-term fieldwork and a bottom-up perspective on social life, I deliberately position this research in order to develop an extensive picture of social structure as well as a detailed understanding of social life at the level of everyday interaction. Therefore, this study provides a space where social actors speak for themselves rather than through the voice of a researcher.

Research Methods

In Argentina, I conducted three rounds of very intensive, almost daily ethnographic research: (i) from November to December 2012; (ii) from February to June 2014; and (iii) in May 2018. My research was greatly helped by the fact I am native Korean and fluent in Spanish. I approached interviewees through a snowball (chain-referral) sampling technique, whereby existing study participants helped me recruit further participants from among their acquaintances. For this

[11]*Ibid*., p. 711.
[12]*Ibid*.
[13]Jan Rath, *Unraveling the Rag Trade*, p. 1.
[14]Ivan Light and Victoria D. Ojeda, "Los Angeles: Wearing Out Their Welcome," in *Unraveling the Rag Trade*, ed. Jan Rath, pp. 151–68; Jan Rath, *Unraveling the Rag Trade*, 2002; Ivan Light, *Deflecting Immigration: Networks, Markets, and Regulation in Los Angeles* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006); Prodromos Panayiotopoulos, *Immigrant Enterprise in Europe and the USA* (London: Routledge, 2006); Prodromos Panayiotopoulos, *Ethnicity, Migration and Enterprise* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

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study I conducted 48 in-depth interviews (26 with Koreans, nine with Bolivians, six with Korean Chinese, four with Jews, and three with Argentines). The main participants were active Bolivian workers and Korean entrepreneurs with experience in managing garment workshops, but I intentionally included retired Korean entrepreneurs and members of other ethnic groups with various trajectories within the garment industry in order to incorporate diverse experiences with and opinions about the business development and informal practices of Korean sewing and knitting workshops and about Korean employer relationships with Bolivian employees. Interviews with Korean community leaders, specialists, economists, and NGO representatives within the sector were fundamental in order to supplement insufficient secondary data and fully understand the Argentine garment industry – a highly informal sector about which there is a significant lack of information.

Applying ethnographic methods, I paid close attention to the specific issues and factors that the interviewees themselves considered crucial in terms of employment practices in Korean garment workshops. I primarily relied on semi-structured and open-ended interviews to encourage participants to speak about their experiences and opinions freely; as they talked, I endeavored to guide them towards the research questions. The interviews usually took 1 to 2 h. They were audiorecorded and transcribed in the same language in which they were conducted.

In addition, I carried out archival research in the archives of the *Korean Times* in Buenos Aires and engaged in participant observation in several sewing and knitting workshops run by Korean immigrants. I also visited the labor market on Cobo and Curapaligüe streets in Flores and had informal conversations with both potential employers and employees. This labor market, at the end of 109 Chon (Koreatown) and the start of the shantytown (Villa Rivadavia), serves at the place where, around 8 a.m. every morning, Korean workshop owners seeking new seamstresses can find, negotiate with, and hire potential Bolivian immigrant workers on the spot.

It is important to mention that there is no official or objective data to understand the situation in the sector because of the highly informal nature of the industry. Thus, along with my interview data, my field notes, which were kept daily to record all the details arising from my observations, informal conversations, questions, and reflections, were one of the foremost outcomes of my field research, helping me document and construct the full picture of the Argentine garment industry as well as develop insights on the complex and dynamic interactions, issues, and practices related to Korean workshops and their daily functioning.

I carried out thematic analyses[15] by coding, organizing, and classifying my field data into detailed themes and topics. First, I preidentified themes using existing literature and my knowledge of the research field. I then used the qualitative analysis software NVivo to go over all my field data thoroughly and classify it in terms of those themes. In addition to those preidentified themes, I looked for

[15]John W. Creswell J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2018).

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new themes arising from the field research and examined the various dimensions of those themes. Finally, I went back to each thematic area, linking it to a theoretical explanation and taking into consideration the limitations of existing theories. In the data analysis process, I dealt with each interview in its original language, only translating into English specific statements that I wanted to incorporate into this article.

Labor Relationship Beyond Co-Ethnic Boundaries

In previous studies[16] collaboration among immigrants was considered crucial to immigrant survival as well as business development. Faced with discrimination, disadvantages, and difficulties in the host society, immigrants relied on ethnic ties and solidarity and cooperated to form communities, open businesses, and overcome obstacles.[17] In this way, "ethnic resources" are created and utilized among members of the same ethnic group and are seen as a vital advantage for immigrants in developing their businesses and providing them with employment opportunities.[18] Similarly, the "ethnic enclave," which refers to a geographic area with a high concentration of an ethnically close community, helps provide new immigrants with opportunities and information through networking.[19] For instance, in the Cuban enclave in Miami, immigrant employers can take advantage of a large pool of cheap, trustworthy, and diligent laborers with similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds, while their co-ethnic employees obtain other forms of benefits such as job training, prospects for managerial positions, and future self-employment opportunities.[20]

By tapping into ethnic networks, resources, and solidarity, immigrants are able to establish and develop businesses in the host society as well as provide employment for co-ethnics who are newly arrived or do not have enough resources to set up their own business. Co-ethnic employers and employees seem to draw mutual benefit from the co-ethnic relationship. Yet, the same co-sponsorship mechanism that trains co-ethnic workers to move out and open up

[16]Ivan Light, "Immigrant and Ethnic Enterprise in North America," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 7-2 (1984), pp. 195–216; Illsoo Kim, *New Urban Immigrants: The Korean Community in New York* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Alejandro Portes and Roberto Bach, *Latin Journey: Cuban and Mexican Immigrants in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Ivan Light and Steven Gold, *Ethnic Economies* (San Diego: Academic Press, 2000).
[17]Ivan Light and Steven Gold, *Ethnic Economies*.
[18]Ivan Light, *Ethnic Enterprise*; Ivan Light and Steven Gold, *Ethnic Economies*
[19]Alejandro Portes, "The Social Origins of the Cuban Enclave Economy of Miami," *Sociological Perspectives* 30-4 (1987), pp. 340–372.
[20]Dae Young Kim, "Beyond Co-ethnic Solidarity: Mexican and Ecuadorean Employment in Korean-Owned Businesses in New York City," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22-3 (1999), pp. 581–605; Ivan Light, Richard B. Bernard, and Rebecca Kim, "Immigrant Incorporation in the Garment Industry of Los Angeles," *International Migration Review* 33-1 (1999), pp. 5–25.

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their own businesses drives up the cost of co-ethnic labor and introduces competition.[21] For instance, the shift towards hiring Mexicans and other Latinos in Korean-owned businesses in New York City was an attempt by Korean immigrant entrepreneurs to adapt to the retention problems and increased labor costs associated with their Korean employees.[22] On the other hand, there are only few businesses run by Mexicans and Ecuadorians, and many immigrants cannot find employment within the ethnic economy of their own group.[23]

In order to better portray employment patterns in the Los Angeles garment manufacturing industry, where Asian entrepreneurs (including Koreans) and Latin American workers are concentrated, Light suggested a tripartite conceptual framework: (i) an ethnic economy that consists of ethnic entrepreneurial firms and their co-ethnic employees; (ii) an immigrant economy that is composed of immigrant entrepreneurs and other (non-co-ethnic) immigrant employees; and (iii) the mainstream economy, i.e., native, host-country employers with immigrant employees.[24] Immigrant economies arise when entrepreneurs of one immigrant group hire workers from another immigrant group. According to previous studies,[25] immigrant entrepreneurs tend to have a preference for hiring co-ethnics. However, immigrant economies normally arise when immigrant entrepreneurs are not able to fill the necessary jobs with co-ethnic workers and low-entrepreneurship immigrant groups take jobs provided by high-entrepreneurship immigrant groups.[26] This process expands the economic opportunities of both groups by linking the networks of employers and workers beyond ethnic boundaries.[27]

Because of the significant number of ethnic minority-owned businesses and their remarkable contribution to the economies of many Western countries, immigrant entrepreneurship has attracted ample scholarly attention. However, until now, the theoretical debates on immigrant enterprise have been analyzed and advanced primarily through empirical studies conducted in developed, largely Northern Hemisphere countries in North America and Western Europe. Relatively few studies have addressed immigrant-owned businesses in developing countries. This regional bias against developing countries has resulted in a major research gap in the field of immigrant entrepreneurship. In particular, labor relations at immigrant firms in South America, where much higher informality is exhibited compared to their North American counterparts, has not been

[21] Dae Young Kim, "Beyond Co-ethnic Solidarity."
[22] *Ibid.*
[23] *Ibid.*
[24] Ivan Light, *Deflecting Immigration*, pp. 85–94; see also Ivan Light, Richard B. Bernard, and Rebecca Kim, "Immigrant Incorporation"; Light and Ojeda, "Wearing Out Their Welcome."
[25] Dae Young Kim, "Beyond Co-ethnic Solidarity"; Ivan Light, Richard B. Bernard, and Rebecca Kim, "Immigrant Incorporation."
[26] Ivan Light, Richard B. Bernard, and Rebecca Kim, "Immigrant Incorporation."
[27] Dae Young Kim, "Beyond Co-ethnic Solidarity"; Ivan Light, Richard B. Bernard, and Rebecca Kim, "Immigrant Incorporation."

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examined. Through an empirical analysis of Bolivian workers at Korean sewing workshops in the Argentine garment industry, I address the extent to which ethnic Koreans in a developing country have shaped immigrant entrepreneurship and working relationships with other immigrant groups compared to patterns in developed countries, thus making a contribution towards bridging the gap in both migration and Korean studies.

Korean Entry into Sewing and Knitting Jobs in Argentina

Koreans first began to arrive in Argentina in 1965 under a governmental program designed to boost the country's agricultural sector.[28] They were settled in the province of Rio Negro on previously unworked land, which they were expected to work.[29] However, as most of the immigrants' experience was in office environments, they struggled with the work involved in establishing and running farms. The Korean government tried to support them, but their lack of experience in farming and in the agricultural industry and insufficient economic resources led to feelings of maladjustment, resentment, and unhappiness.[30] Most ended up leaving southern Argentina and moving to the capital, Buenos Aires, to start new lives there.[31] Their failure to pursue rural agrarian life ended up revealing a new opportunity for them and for those that would follow.

Once in Buenos Aires, the Koreans quickly came to focus their economic activities primarily on the knitting and sewing industry, working as subcontractors for Jewish factories in the city's slum areas.[32] As many previous scholars in migration studies have found,[33] the main driver of self-employment

[28]Gyeongsu Jeon, *Segyeui Hanminjok (6): Jungnammi* [Koreans in the world (6): Latin America] (Seoul: Tongirwon, 1996), p. 62.

[29]*Ibid*., p. 62.

[30]Hea-Jin Park, "Nobody Remembers the Losers: The Story of Korean Agricultural Emigration to South America" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Australian National University, 2013).

[31]Jeongsu Son, "1960 Nyeondae Nammi Nongeom Imin: Beurajil, Areuhentina, Paragwai [Agricultural Immigration in South America in the 1960s: Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay]," in *Jungnammi Haninui Yeoksa* [Korean Experience in Latin America], ed. (Gwacheonsi: Guksapyeonchanwiwonhoe, 2007), pp. 163–164.

[32]Jihye Kim, "Ethnicity, opportunity, and upward mobility," p. 377.

[33]Ivan Light and Edna Bonacich, *Immigrant Entrepreneurs: Koreans in Los Angeles, 1965–1982* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Ivan Light and Steven Gold, *Ethnic Economies*; Ivan Light and Carolyn Rosenstein, *Race, Ethnicity, and Entrepreneurship in Urban America* (New York: Aldine Transactions, 1995); Pyong Gap Min, "From White-Collar Occupations to Small Business: Korean Immigrants' Occupational Adjustment," *The Sociological Quarterly* 25-3 (1984), pp. 333–352; Pyong Gap Min, *Caught in the Middle: Korean Merchants in America's Multiethnic Cities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Roger Waldinger, Howard Aldrich, and Robin Ward, *Ethnic Entrepreneurs: Immigrant Business in Industrial Societies* (Newbury Park: SAGE Publications, 1990); Giles Barrett, Trevor Jones, and David McEvoy, "Ethnic Minority Business: Theoretical Discourse in Britain and North America," *Urban Studie*s 33-4/5 (1996), pp. 783–809.

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for the first generation of Koreans in Argentina was the language barrier, which closed doors to them in the labor market. For those in the early stages of immigration, garment sewing and knitting subcontracted work was one of the most suitable options as it could be carried out without significant language skills or capital investment.[34]

Co-ethnic solidarity facilitated an extensive reliance on community networks, and through these networks, skills were passed on and tasks, materials, and opportunities were distributed efficiently.[35] Those with more experience taught newer arrivals how to operate the machinery[36] and parceled out the jobs, essentially acting as “middlemen” between the local manufacturers and other Korean subcontractors, efficiently assigning tasks according to fabrics, patterns, or colors and earning commission from Korean subcontractors.[37] Subcontracting was sometimes carried out among families and larger kinship groups, as well as in cooperation with the local extended Korean immigrant community.[38]

The relatively small capital investment to start a garment sweatshop – such workshops required small workspaces and a few relatively inexpensive machines – was also an important source of motivation for many Koreans to engage in the sector.[39] After working in humble sewing and knitting jobs as employees for several years, they saved up adequate funds to start up their own businesses.[40] This proved an agreeable, accessible, and clear path towards steadily improving their economic situation.[41] Some became clothing manufacturers, retailers, or wholesalers in their own right, and some moved to another sector to run different types of businesses, such as grocery shops.[42]

Other studies confirm that the garment industry is attractive to immigrants because it offers a variety of jobs that can easily accommodate their conditions.[43] As locals view these kinds of jobs as low in prestige and tend to shun them, they tend to be easily filled by immigrants, as found by Waldinger[44]; in this case, fresh Korean arrivals to the United States. Likewise, some of my interviewees

[34]Jihye Kim, “Ethnicity, opportunity, and upward mobility,” p. 378.
[35]*Ibid.*, p. 378.
[36]Gyobeom Lee, *Areuhentina haninimin 25nyeonsa*, p. 183.
[37]*Ibid.*, p. 181.
[38]Jihye Kim, “Ethnicity, opportunity, and upward mobility,” p. 378.
[39]*Ibid.*, p. 379.
[40]*Ibid.*, p. 379.
[41]*Ibid.*, p. 379.
[42]*Ibid.*, p. 379.
[43]Ivan Light and Edna Bonacich, *Immigrant Entrepreneurs*; Mirjana Morokvasic, “Immigrants in Garment Production in Paris and Berlin,” in *Immigration and Entrepreneurship: Culture, Capital and Ethnic Networks*, eds. Ivan Light and Parminder Bhachu (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1993), pp. 75–95; Ivan Light, Richard B. Bernard, and Rebecca Kim, “Immigrant Incorporation”; Chin, Margaret May, *Sewing Women: Immigrants and the New York City Garment Industry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).
[44]Roger Waldinger, *Through the Eye of the Needle: Immigrants and Enterprise in New York’s Garment Trades* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), pp. 136–137.

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suggested that Argentine people were reluctant to take on sewing and knitting jobs, leaving them within easy reach of those first Koreans in Argentina, who soon created for themselves a niche in the sector. Thus, these pathways that Korean immigrants undertook in the early stages are quite common and are similar to the ways in which many immigrants engage with the clothing production sector in other countries.

The Shift from Korean to Bolivian Employees at Korean Workshops

Leveraged with family and ethnic labor, hard work, discipline, and the effective use of reliable community networks, the small Korean workshop owners made notable economic progress. A Jewish interviewee attributed the Koreans' rapid success to low costs and better-quality work:

> The reasons why Jews preferred Korean sweatshops were simple. Argentine workshops charged more, but Argentines did not sew clothing as well as Koreans. (Male, 57 years old, Jewish Argentine; author's translation).

In the 1980s, as government programs attempted to eradicate slums where a large number of Korean workshops and residential areas were located, numerous Koreans moved to residential areas with better living conditions.[45] However, those Koreans who could not leave their familiar networks settled close to the shantytowns where they had been living and working, particularly around Villa Rivadavia in the district of Flores.[46] Another reason why some chose to remain near Villa Rivadavia was the access to new immigrant labor from Bolivia that resettled in the slums despite the government programs.[47] A Jewish businessman who had long been working in the sector described the development of Korean subcontracted workshops as follows:

> Those were other times. In the 1970s and 1980s, if you worked hard running a small sweatshop based on family labor for two or three years, you could buy a house or accumulate enough money to start another business, such as a retail garment shop or even a wholesale shop. Additionally, they [Korean immigrants] didn't spend their money. They didn't have time to spend the money they made, because of the hard work. Around 1985, Korean immigrants started to be very visible in the wholesale and retail garment sectors throughout the whole country. Yet after that, Bolivian workshops replaced the Korean ones very quickly. (Male, 57 years old, Jewish Argentine; author's translation).

Apparently, they did so for most of the 1970s and the 1980s. In the 1990s, the number of Korean sweatshops declined, while the number of manufacturing

[45]Gyobeom Lee, *Areuhentina haninimin 25nyeonsa*, pp. 232–33.
[46]*Ibid*., p. 237.
[47]*Ibid*., p. 239.

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plants, wholesale shops, and retail shops increased remarkably. It is estimated that these days only 20 to 30 percent of Korean Argentines are ethnic Koreans operating subcontracted sweatshops in which they typically hire Bolivian workers.[48] Within the Korean community, this subcontracting is regarded as the lowest step on the business ladder as it requires limited start-up capital. Many ethnic Koreans from China (Joseonjok) who arrived in Buenos Aires in the 1990s settled within the local Korean community and took over the operation of sweatshops.[49] One Korean Chinese who achieved relatively rapid success in running a sewing workshop put it this way:

> I managed to buy several [sewing] machines by borrowing some money from other Korean Chinese [immigrants]: a few hundred from here, and a few hundred from there. The shop [owners] I was working for helped me a lot. They paid me in advance and gave me a lot of sewing to do. I bought seven [sewing] machines with $5,000 [US]. I first hired Korean Chinese and later several Bolivians. […] Just in the summer in 1996 I made $15,000 [US] profit. (Female, 57 years old, migrated in 1995; author's translation).

As previously discussed, starting a sewing or knitting workshop was a preferred entry-level business for many Korean immigrants in the early years, because it required little initial capital. Today, operating a garment workshop is no longer a preferred option. On one hand, it requires intensive managerial supervision; on the other, it does not seem to provide large profits. Nevertheless, a few Korean immigrants continue to operate subcontracted sweatshops.

Compared to the previous stage when most workers at Korean sewing workshops were co-ethnics, one of the distinctive changes in Korean workshops was a shift in the primary labor force. My field data suggests that Korean workshop owners used family and co-ethnic laborers for their workshops in the 1960s and 1970s; machine sewing and knitting work was primarily conducted by Korean immigrants. However, eventually, with the increasing demand for production and the expanding scale of their workshops, they extended their employment pool to include non-co-ethnics, especially undocumented Bolivian or Paraguayan immigrants for low-paying knitting and sewing work.[50]

According to Rath,[51] more standard tasks in the garment industry are allocated to employees with fewer skills and to those who are newer and therefore less trusted. While entrepreneurs prefer to recruit co-ethnics for such jobs, as they expand their operations and move up the social ladder they find they can no longer rely on familial and co-ethnic networks, necessitating recruitment from

[48]Interview with Hanjun Park, former president of the Chamber of Korean Entrepreneurs in Argentina.

[49]There is no official data or up-to-date figures vis-à-vis the number of Korean Chinese immigrants in Argentina. According to the community leaders, in previous decades the estimated number of Korean Chinese immigrants was 2,000, but this figure has now decreased to approximately 500.

[50]Mirta Bialogorski, *Presencia coreana*, pp. 97–98.

[51]Jan Rath, *Unraveling the Rag Trade*, p. 177.

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outside these networks.[52] This has been the case in most Korean workshops in Buenos Aires. As indicated, only in the initial period – primarily from the 1960s through the 1980s – newly arrived Korean immigrants intensively engaged in sewing and knitting work. Subsequently, due to the substantial upward mobility of the Korean business community, a significant number of Korean immigrants advanced from garment sweatshops to the commercial clothing sector.[53] In addition, in the new century, Korean migration to Argentina almost completely dried up.[54] As a result, Korean workshop owners, out of necessity, started recruiting workers outside of their co-ethnic networks. This is quite similar to cases of Korean businesses in the United States, where Korean immigrant entrepreneurs hire non-co-ethnic employees when co-ethnic workers are less available as they move out and open up their own businesses.[55]

Later, Bolivian immigrant laborers came to be preferred over Argentine and other Latin American workers.[56] Because of its relatively higher living standard, Argentina has long been a target of migrants from other Latin American countries, especially Chile, Peru, Paraguay, and Bolivia. In the last few decades, the influx has largely come from Bolivia, Paraguay, Peru, and Colombia. However, Korean workshop owners hire Bolivians almost exclusively for their workshops, and only on the rare occasion, Peruvians and Paraguayans. Korean workshop owners believe Bolivians are much easier to manage in an informal environment, as they tend to be illegal residents without proper documentation and are stereotyped as being "submissive, discipline workers who respond to the expectation of the Oriental employers."[57] On only one occasion I found a mix of Bolivian, Peruvian, and Paraguayan employees working together in a sweater factory owned by a Korean Chinese wholesaler. This employer did not find it difficult to manage workers from different ethnic backgrounds. She had been working in the industry for more than 5 years; further, she viewed experienced workers as more trustworthy than newer ones.

In my analysis of Korean owners' discourse, these owners specifically addressed attributes based on stereotypical/presumed Bolivian cultural features and even physical traits. Among the comments: "Bolivians are submissive and diligent. They [Bolivians] have similar a character to us [Koreans]. They are obedient and work hard." The following is representative of those views:

[52] *Ibid*., p. 178.
[53] Jihye Kim, "Ethnicity, opportunity, and upward mobility," p. 383.
[54] *Ibid*., p. 383.
[55] Dae Young Kim, "Beyond Co-ethnic Solidarity"; Ivan Light, Richard B. Bernard, and Rebecca Kim, "Immigrant Incorporation"; Ivan Light, *Deflecting Immigration*.
[56] Mirta Bialogorski, *Presencia coreana*, pp. 97–98; Mirta Bialogorski and Daniel Bargman, "The gaze of the other," p. 21.
[57] *Ibid*., p. 21.

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> Bolivians are quiet, patient, and submissive compared to others. Once I hired Peruvians, and they were not as diligent as Bolivians. They demanded their rights and higher salaries, after working for some months with us. In addition, Bolivians don't talk a lot during work. I heard of some cases where Peruvians sued Korean factory owners. Peruvians are smart. In contrast, Bolivians are much better, because they don't talk – they just work.[58] (Female, 57 years old, migrated in 1994; author's translation).

According to Rath,[59] in cases where the entrepreneurs' primary input is cheap and flexible labor, as is the case of subcontracted workshop owners in the clothing industry, the reduction of transaction costs by mobilizing social networks for labor recruitment appears crucial; this may involve violating the law – paying workers off the books, avoiding taxes, ignoring health and safety regulations – and thereby running significant risks.[60] Because of the informal issues involved in the management, entrepreneurs try to find co-ethnic workers who they consider more trustworthy within the community network. However, Korean workshop owners cannot hire co-ethnic workers since the influx of new migrants has ceased and most community members have achieved upward social mobility. As confirmed in their interviews, for the Korean workshop owners who are operating their businesses informally, i.e., under the radar, it is strategic to choose Bolivian immigrants, the most reliable non-co-ethnic group, the one deemed "submissive and diligent and without formal documentation." The next section analyzes, in detail, the informal practices and working conditions in Korean sewing workshops in order to better comprehend the exclusive working relationship that has been built between Korean entrepreneurs and Bolivian employees.

Informal Practices in Korean Sweatshops

Typically, Korean sewing or knitting workshops are not formally registered. Most Korean workshop owners I interviewed explained that it is not convenient for them to manage their workshops formally, as this can cause them to be a primary target for strict surveillance from government inspectors or the police. Thus, most of the sweatshops are invisible or clandestine, and when they are identified, the bribing of police and tax or city government agents is commonplace, as most Korean workshop owners agreed:

> No [tax] inspector has visited our house [workshop] yet. However, since we are immigrants, police officers come a lot, so we give them money every month. We are not doing it individually but collectively. We give them 200 to 300 pesos [US$20 to US$30] per month. Every month, a lower police agent comes to collect the money and pass it to the superiors. Our

[58] Jihye Kim, "Looking at the other through the eye of a needle," p. 10.
[59] Jan Rath, *Unraveling the Rag Trade*, p. 10.
[60] *Ibid*., p. 10.

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workshop is illegal [not formally registered], so that's how they cut us some slack. (Female, 33 years old, migrated in 2007; author's translation).

It is difficult to meet all the regulations that the government requires for a formal sweatshop: the floor, lighting, windows, ventilation, workers' wage, and so on. In addition, if we register the sweatshop formally and make it visible, inspectors and police officers come often to check every single thing. Because of corruption, we prefer not to register formally. […] If they fine us, we must close the workshop and move somewhere else, because we cannot pay that money. So bribing is the best way to solve the problem. […] We offer bribes regularly to inspectors and city police officers. (Male, 58 years old, migrated in 1994; author's translation).

Likewise, in Korean sweatshops the "labor problem" is solved through the informal hiring of Bolivian immigrants without legal residence status or a work permit. Argentine regulations – tight until the 1980s, relaxed in the 1990s, and retightened since 2003 – distinguish between "home-based work" and "labor"; the former is only loosely regulated, while the latter is highly restricted and protected.[61] Within the garment construction process, stakeholders (manufacturers) distribute fabric and patterns directly or through middlemen to sweatshops as "home work," thereby avoiding the strict labor laws. If "contractors" are detected between manufacturers, middlemen, and producers, they are subject to a whole range of working conditions and wage regulations that dramatically change the profit picture.[62] Illegal immigrants (holders of expired tourist visas) are viewed as a perfect fit for such jobs because they cannot access legal work without a residence permit. Among them, Bolivians (primarily), Peruvians, and Paraguayans have specialized in actively using their ethnic networks to provide and distribute these illegal jobs. The issue grows ever more complex because of state capacity deficits. Montero[63] argues that the incapacity of the state to enforce its own regulations is due to the lack of inspectors and/or to corruption within the enforcement division of the government. Such factors intertwine to produce a highly unregulated business sector.

Employees are hired informally with no contracts; I neither encountered nor heard of any Korean workshop owner hiring seamstresses formally. The working conditions of the sweatshops in general are considered unacceptable, as I noted during my own visits to several Korean-owned workshops. Some workshops I visited provided better working conditions, with larger spaces and air conditioning during the summer; nevertheless, they were not registered and employees were hired informally.

In the past, a significant segment of workers in Korean-owned sweatshops worked and lived under one roof. In the 1990s, the unregulated business practices and exploitation in sweatshops run by Korean immigrants in Buenos Aires

[61] Jerónimo Montero, "Neoliberal Fashion," p. 214.
[62] *Ibid*., p. 214.
[63] *Ibid*., p.214.

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were revealed in major newspaper articles that portrayed highly negative images and generated unfavorable stereotypes of the Korean community within the host society.[64] Today, few Korean-owned workshops where employees work and live under one roof remain. In the meantime, as many Korean entrepreneurs and Bolivian employees agree, working conditions in Korean workshops have improved gradually. According to my interviewees, in most Korean workshops, employees normally work 12 h daily from Monday through Friday (from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.) and for 5 h on Saturdays (from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.). Sometimes during the busy seasons, seamstresses may work more, including on weekends and holidays. This is especially true for those who are paid on the basis of the number of garments or parts of a garment produced (piece-rate system).

The pay for seamstresses is usually calculated either by piece or by the hour. Korean workshop owners mentioned the advantages and the disadvantages of each system. In the case of the hourly system, seamstresses work calmly and slowly, so the quality of sewn garments is generally high, while the quantity produced may be low. By contrast, under the piece-rate system, workers sew fast, so the number of completed garments increases, whereas the quality tends to be lower; this means that the owners must individually check the sewn garments carefully. The worker's salary may also vary depending on tasks, capacity, and sewing quality. Thus, depending on the sewing skills required for the clothing order, Korean workshop owners usually discuss the payment system and tasks directly with employees when hiring. Assistants, the lowest-ranked employees in a garment workshop, are usually paid on an hourly basis. Some Korean workshop owners indicated that Korean Chinese workshop owners tend to pay employees a little bit less than Korean owners, but according to my observations, there is no relevant difference between the workshops run by Korean or Korean Chinese owners in terms of salary and working conditions. The Korean owners further suggested that Bolivian workshop owners pay much less than Koreans and that the working conditions in Bolivian workshops are much worse, a claim confirmed to me by Bolivian employees.

Recurring high inflation and exchange rate fluctuations can affect the negotiation of a seamstress's salary. These also complicate the conversion of their salaries into US dollars; however, applying the typical exchange rates at the time of my field research (10 pesos to US$1), I estimate that employees in Korean sweatshops earned US$300–$400 a month. A workshop owner elaborates further in the following interview:

> In our workshop, employees mostly work for hourly pay. Until last month, we paid 17 pesos per hour for assistants, but this month we are paying 21 pesos because of inflation. Currently, we are paying 24 pesos an hour for the highest and 21 pesos for the lowest. Employees work

[64]Corina Courtis, *Discriminación étnico-racial: Discursos públicos y experiencias cotidianas* (Buenos Aires: Editores del Puerto, 2012), p. 146.

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from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.; they have a half hour for lunch. We also give them milk and bread at 9 a.m. and tea and biscuits at 5 p.m.. It is very difficult to manage a sweatshop nowadays. This month, the workers' salary increased by 4 pesos an hour and the cost of providing their lunch box also went up from 16 pesos to 20 pesos, but our payment from the wholesaler remains the same. (Female, 54 years old, migrated in 1998; author's translation).

The above interview illustrates how owning and managing a workshop is not a profitable or easy business. Furthermore, getting workers to work in such precarious and informal conditions at a very low wage is also complicated.

Bolivian Immigrants' Preference for Working at Korean Workshops

Bolivia experienced a severe economic crisis in the 1980s and 1990s during which mineral prices nosedived and governmental restrictions were imposed on the state-owned mining company.[65] As a result, many Bolivians needed to find other ways of ensuring their livelihood.[66] Emigration became one of the options, with many making their way to Buenos Aires, where they concentrated in the garment industry, with up to 50 percent taking up jobs in workshops.[67] Official data shows 426,394 Bolivians living in Argentina in 2019,[68] while unofficial data estimates over 2 million, including those who are undocumented.[69]

Bastia[70] reported that for Bolivian employees, the nationality of workshop owners was important, but not in the way she expected: they preferred working for Korean owners. In immigrant businesses in the United States and Europe, it was found that immigrant workers seek work outside their own ethnic group when there are few employers in their own ethnic group and thus a restricted pool of jobs in the ethnic economy of their own group.[71] However, this is not the case for Bolivian workers in the garment production sector in Buenos Aires, as the main immigrant group managing garment workshops is Bolivian. So why do Bolivian seamstresses prefer to work in Korean workshops?

Bolivian employees acknowledged that Korean employers demanded a longer working day and expected better work; however, they felt that they were compensated for these demands with higher wages.[72] They also felt that Korean workshop owners could be more reliably counted on to be paid in full and

[65]Tanja Bastia, "From Mining to Garment Workshops," p. 660.
[66]*Ibid*., p. 660.
[67]*Ibid*., p. 660.
[68]https://datosmacro.expansion.com/demografia/migracion/emigracion/bolivia
[69]https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-65381-2006-04-09.html
[70]Tanja Bastia, "From Mining to Garment Workshops," p. 661.
[71]Dae Young Kim "Beyond Co-ethnic Solidarity"; Ivan Light, Richard B. Bernard, and Rebecca Kim, "Immigrant Incorporation"; Light and Ojeda, "Wearing Out Their Welcome"; Ivan Light, *Deflecting Immigration*.
[72]Tanja Bastia, "From Mining to Garment Workshops," p. 661.

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according to schedule.[73] An interview with a Bolivian employee who had worked in both Korean and Bolivian workshops offers a detailed comparison:

> I worked for the first Bolivian workshop owner about six months… or more… almost eight months. There [at that workshop], I was told that Korean workshops paid better. So I went to Cobo [Street] where we [Bolivians] usually meet Koreans for work. […] Yes, there were differences in payment and food. Koreans paid better and the food was also better. *Paisanos* [co-national Bolivians] pay but not in full. I would say that for 15 days, they pay you 500 [pesos], then 200, then 100, etc.; you don't ever see all the money owed to you at one time. Koreans pay you at once for 15 days: 2,000 of 2,000 [pesos] or all together 3,000 of 3,000 [pesos] owed. […] I prefer to work for Koreans rather than Bolivians. A friend of mine works for her friend, a Bolivian. I asked her if her friend paid well. She told me "Yes, come to work with us," but the place is very small and closed – there is no ventilation. I don't understand how she works in such a small place. […] At the Korean workshop where I work currently, the downstairs is the home and the upstairs is the workshop, which has big windows for ventilation. *Paisanos* allow you to take a break [of] only half an hour, but Koreans give 45 [minutes] for lunch. This is another difference. Food is also better [at Korean workshops], although these days Koreans buy food made by Bolivians, instead of cooking like they used to. (Female, 45 years old, migrated in 1992; author's translation).

The interview above is typical of Bolivian interviewees, most of whom confirm that Korean workshop owners seem to be more reliable in terms of payment and that working conditions tend to be comparatively better in workshops run by Korean owners than those run by Bolivians. The incorporation of immigrants into the labor market of the host society is a dynamic process.[74] The research conducted by Sanders, Nee, and Sernau[75] indicates that at the low end of the labor market scale, immigrants are constantly on the lookout for even a marginally better job since every penny counts and the conditions of work are frequently harsh, irrespective of the employer. Therefore, to improve their circumstances, it is not surprising that many Bolivian immigrants move rapidly to Korean garment workshops after working for workshops run by Bolivian immigrants and acquiring the necessary skills over a short period of time. This practice is widely regarded as a pragmatic strategy for achieving upward mobility among newcomers; nevertheless, with their foreign credentials and lack of local experience, significant upward progression is unlikely.[76] Another interview provides details as to why Bolivian workers prefer working for Korean-owned workshops:

> They [Korean workshop owners] get afraid when I tell them: "If you don't pay on time, I will report you to the police." and they say "no, no, no, no, please." But Bolivians just say, "How

[73] *Ibid*., p. 661.
[74] Jimy Sanders, Victor Nee, and Scott Sernau, "Asian Immigrants' Reliance on Social Ties in a Multiethnic Labor Market," *Social Forces* 81-1 (2002), p. 306.
[75] *Ibid*., p. 286.
[76] *Ibid*., p. 286.

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> you can report me to the police? I am your *paisano* [co-national]!" [Interviewer: But then why do Bolivian workers still work for Bolivian workshop owners?] Because some have just arrived, so they don't know where to find work. Those same Bolivians bring workers directly from Bolivia. They [Bolivian workshop owners] don't let them [Bolivian workers] go out, not even to the corner. That is the reason why some *paisanos* don't know anyone around here. Others who know people escape [from Bolivian workshops] and want to work with Koreans. (Interview with participant whose information has been withheld; author's translation).

The above interview suggests that at least initially, both Bolivian workshop owners and employees benefit from the working relationship established based on ethnic networks and solidarities. For those Bolivian workers who want to migrate to Argentina, getting a job offer from a Bolivian and learning sewing skills and working at workshops run by co-ethnics is an agreeable arrangement despite poor working conditions and low pay. In return, Bolivian workshop owners resolve the labor shortage by using their networks to bring in new immigrants from Bolivia that they can hire more cheaply. However, as discussed in the case of Bolivian workers hired to work in Bolivian sweatshops, working for a co-ethnic employer is not always beneficial or advantageous, particularly for those vulnerable and in desperate need. Because of those disadvantages and abuses generated by co-ethnic employers, Bolivian workers tend to prefer working in Korean-owned workshops.

The strength and maintenance of trust networks within an ethnic group are dependent on the clear delineation of strict boundaries between "us" and "them."[77] Their very insulation from the world of the "other" facilitates constant monitoring, mutual aid, reciprocity, trust, and barriers to exit.[78] Thus Bolivian workshop owners may prefer to hire co-ethnics believing they will be more trustworthy, loyal, and reliable, and do not view it as risky to hire them informally. However, as McGrath argued, in some cases employers will exploit the relationship while others may avoid doing so and even behave in ways that exceed the expectations of the employer–employee relationship.[79]

Furthermore, the data reveals that trust can be created in working relationships between different ethnic groups, and that unreliable, dysfunctional relationships can occur between co-ethnic employees and employers. In short, working relationships and boundaries between informal and formal management depend on the networks of bounded solidarity and tacit trust forged by the actors involved.[80] Hence, the "labor market" on Cobo and Curapaligüe streets in Flores functions as an informal labor recruitment center, providing linkages for both

[77]Charles Tilly, "Trust Networks in Transnational Migration," *Sociological Forum* 22-1 (2007), p. 6.
[78]*Ibid*., p. 12.
[79]Brian McGrath, "Social Capital in Community, Family, and Work Lives of Brazilian Migrant Parents in Ireland," *Community, Work & Family* 13-2 (2010), p. 156.
[80]Donald W. Light, "From Migrant Enclaves," p. 710.

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Korean employers and Bolivian employees. It was established as a valuable informal network hub with relatively reliable connections between the two ethnic groups – Koreans and Bolivians.

Conclusion

Based on Light's categories,[81] the hiring of Bolivian workers at Korean workshops is clearly a case of an "immigrant economy," one composed of immigrant entrepreneurs and other (non-co-ethnic) immigrant employees. Links with other immigrant groups facilitates the access of employers to potential non-ethnic employees and vice versa, thereby enhancing the economic opportunities of both groups.[82] Like in the cases of Mexican and other Latino immigrants in Korean-owned manufacturing factories and grocery shops in the United States, establishing a labor relationship with other immigrants beyond co-ethnicity is quite common in Korean-owned businesses in the United States[83]; indeed, "immigrant economies" are also constituted by many immigrant firms in other countries, as Light suggested.[84] At first glance, Korean workshop owners in Argentina have seemed to have a similar tendency to hire non-Korean immigrants, like those cases of "immigrant economies" in other countries. However, their exclusive employment relationship with Bolivian immigrants has been a characteristic peculiar to Korean sewing workshops in Argentina. In this research, I attempt to demonstrate the huge influence of informal practices in the manufacturing sector on the particular employment relations between Korean entrepreneurs and Bolivian employees.

In most sweatshops in Argentina, informal and exploitative practices were prevalent. This is an obvious indication of the lack of enforcement of regulations on the immigrant contractor segment in the garment industry.[85] In the case of subcontracted workshop owners in the Argentine clothing industry, where the management is involved in substantial risks, such as hiring employees without formal contracts, avoiding taxes, and ignoring health and safety regulations, a reliable employment relationship between employers and employees is particularly crucial.[86] From the perspective of Korean workshop owners, Bolivians are the most trustworthy non-Korean immigrant group among Latin American immigrants; therefore, it is more expedient and less risky to hire Bolivians for the arduous sewing tasks in their clandestine sweatshops. In other words, for Korean

[81]Ivan Light, *Deflecting Immigration*, pp. 85–94.
[82]Light, Bernard, and Kim, "Immigrant Incorporation"; Light, *Deflecting Immigration*.
[83]Dae Young Kim, "Beyond Co-ethnic Solidarity"; Ivan Light, Richard B. Bernard, and Rebecca Kim, "Immigrant Incorporation."
[84]Light, Bernard, and Kim, "Immigrant Incorporation"; Light, *Deflecting Immigration*.
[85]Jan Rath, *Unravelling the Rag Trade*, p. 19.
[86]Light, Bernard, and Kim, "Immigrant Incorporation"; Light, *Deflecting Immigration*.

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workshop owners who are managing their businesses extremely informally, it is strategic to choose the most reliable group, the one deemed "submissive and diligent," when they cannot hire co-ethnic workers.

Contrary to the assumption that co-ethnic employments are the most favorable and beneficial, Bolivian seamstresses, the primary workforce of the sector, prefer to work for Korean workshop owners who offer certain advantages; Korean employers are deemed more reliable or dependable, pay on time and in full, and provide relatively better working conditions. Bolivian employees perceive that their co-ethnic employers take advantage of co-ethnic working relationships. Thus, the label of "co-ethnic" does not function as an absolute and fixed rule or filter for a reliable relationship, as trust can be created in the working relationships between different ethnic groups, and unreliable, dysfunctional relationships can occur between co-ethnic employees and employers.

The findings further suggest that ethnic networks and solidarities are regarded as available resources that can facilitate the creation of effective co-ethnic employment, but reliable working relationships can also be established beyond co-ethnics. It is particularly crucial to establish linkages of bounded solidarity and tacit trust that reach beyond the co-ethnic community when employment and business practices are managed in a highly informal environment, such as the case of Bolivian seamstresses in Korean workshops in the Argentine garment industry.

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