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Looking at the Other through the Eye of a Needle: Korean Garment Businesses and Inter-Ethnic Relations in Argentina*

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ABSTRACT

The Argentinean garment industry has evolved into a dynamic and complex inter-ethnic environment wherein ethnic Koreans, while conducting their businesses, have established a particular set of inter-ethnic relations with other minority groups. This research aims to explore the types of relations that Korean immigrants have established with Jews and Bolivians, through the analysis of the perceptions and stereotypes which Koreans explicitly hold vis-à-vis Jews and Bolivians. The research shows that a number of factors, such as hierarchical labour relations, economic inequalities, business competition and conflict, and other cultural practices, have been involved in the processes of shaping and reshaping the Korean relations with other minority groups. This study further argues that discourses emphasising "racial" differentiation as well as generalised images and stereotypes of "others" have unfortunately helped generate and harden prejudices and discrimination.

Key Words: Argentina, Koreans, Bolivians, Jews, garment business, ethnic relation, perception, stereotype, discrimination, prejudice

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INTRODUCTION

Of approximately 20,000 ethnic Koreans in Argentina,[1] more than 90% are engaged in the garment industry, in both production and distribution. Whereas the local Jewish business community had previously dominated the Argentinean garment industry, post-1960 apparel industry was gradually penetrated by Korean entrepreneurs, who first began their work as sub-contractors of Jewish-owned factories. As Korean garment businesses steadily expanded, Korean immigrants became a dominant group alongside the Jewish community. In turn, Latin American immigrants, primarily Bolivians, took over the lower-level clothes-manufacturing jobs, either as workshop employees or sub-contractors, thereby replacing Koreans as the labour force. Therefore, the Argentinean garment industry has been a dynamic and complex inter-ethnic environment wherein ethnic Koreans have established relationships with other ethnic groups.

The labour sector is the primary area where ethnic Koreans interface with other ethnic groups. Usually older Koreans socialise among themselves focusing on intra-community life without establishing relations with non-Koreans. For younger generations, the school is the primary area for interaction with non-Koreans. Thus, as the result of labour-based relationships between Koreans and other ethnic groups within the garment industry, the direct connection of ethnic Koreans with other ethnic groups has been established intensively, although not exclusively (Bialogorski and Bargman 1996a, 20; Courtis 2012, 140).

This research aims to explore the inter-ethnic relations that Korean immigrants have established with other ethnic groups, particularly with Jews and Bolivians. The study pays particular attention to the perceptions and stereotypes which Koreans have developed vis-à-vis Jews and Bolivians; these are views of "others" that have been constantly constructed and re-constructed in the context of Korean business activity. In so doing, this study focuses on the following questions: (1) what labour relations the Korean immigrants have established with each group, with an emphasis on Korean business patterns and labour articulations with other groups; (2) how ethnic Koreans have perceived and constructed the "others" in the labour contexts; and (3) what social mechanisms or factors have influenced creating, stabilising and reinforcing the boundaries among these

1 In this research the simplified terms 'Koreans', 'Jews' and 'Bolivians' have been used instead of 'ethnic Koreans', 'ethnic Jews' and 'ethnic Bolivians', all of which include not only first generation immigrants but also second and third generations who were born in Argentina.

three groups.

Most information analysed comes from my field research in Buenos Aires from 20 November to 20 December, 2012. The field research was conducted primarily in the garment industry cluster areas of Metropolitan Buenos Aires (Once and Flores neighbourhoods). I formally conducted 12 in-depth interviews (9 Koreans, 1 Jew, 1 Bolivian, and 1 Argentinean). For interviews, persons at various levels and positions within the garment industry were identified: 5 wholesalers, 2 retailers, 1 textile provider, 1 manufacturer, 2 sub-contractors, and 1 employee. Korean or Spanish was used for interviews, and each interview took approximately 1-2 hours. The objective of interviews was to understand the nature and management of Korean businesses and to explore perceptions and stereotypes regarding the other ethnic groups. Apart from the interviews that I conducted during my field research in Buenos Aires, I had a lot of informal conversations with people working within or outside the garment businesses. Informal conversations and participant observations helped me document more insights on issues and practices related to ethnic relations in their daily life.

It is important to mention that this research is the initial stage of data collection, so the analysis made in this preliminary research allows drawing only partial conclusions. The data presented here can be used only in a limited way to interpret complex and dynamic interactions between ethnic groups as well as other related issues affected by the host society. In particular, the views of these other groups on Koreans will be documented and analysed for a more comprehensive study later on. However, considering that only limited research has been conducted regarding immigrants in the Argentinean garment industry and that there are no official or objective data to understand the situations in the sector, this preliminary research contributes to identifying and comprehending the relevant issues in the field and to establishing a foothold for further investigation.

PREVIOUS STUDIES ON THE TOPIC

Beginning with Barth (1969), a number of sociological and ethnographical studies have addressed the construction of and nature of ethnic group boundaries and identities (Brubaker 2004; Glick Schiller 2008; Erikson 2002; Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Jenkins 2008). These researchers established that ethnic relations have been constantly created, de-constructed and re-created depending on the social situations in which an ethnic group

interacts with others. Therefore, my understanding of the problematic nature of ethnic groups as a unit of analysis has influenced the theoretical frameworks of this research. I have also used other relevant literature on ethnic relations throughout the analysis in this research so as to carefully examine how Korean immigrants have shaped and reshaped relationships with the other groups in the context of the Argentinean garment industry.

In a related area, the high rate of self-employment among Korean immigrants in the United States has led to a number of studies focused on their business activities in that country. These previous studies discussed mainly the push and pull factors that drove Korean immigrants to operate highly independent businesses (Light and Bonacich 1991; Chin, Yoon, and Smith 1996; Min 1996; Min and Bozorgmehr 2000). In particular, many researchers (Light and Bonacich 1991; Kim 1981; Min 1996; Min and Kolodny 1999) indicated that Korean entrepreneurs in the United States play a middleman minority role, because they are conducting their business activities in a vulnerable position caught between white providers and low-income black customers. Other studies have directly addressed inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts generated in the course of Korean immigrant economic activities in the United States. Particularly In-Jin Yoon (1997) argued that the concentration of Korean immigrants in small businesses in Black and Latino neighbourhoods caused racial tensions between Korean business owners and other minority residents. With a different focus, Dae-Young Kim (1999) examined the mutually beneficial working relations between Mexicans and Ecuadorians in Korean-owned businesses in New York City.

Few studies have been conducted, despite almost 50 years of Korean immigration history in Argentina.[2] In particular, Korean apparel businesses have been overlooked in Korean migration/diaspora literature, although the contribution of ethnic Koreans to the local garment industry has been significant in many respects.

Limited previous research addressed issues directly related to Koreans and other ethnic groups in the Argentinean garment industry. In the 1990s, Bialogorski and Bargman (1996a; 1996b) carried out research on the ethnic relationships, which Korean immigrants established with Jews and Bolivians in the course of their economic activities. Their research focused on the particular situations and periods in which Korean businesses expanded rapidly while competing against the Jewish community and concurrently replacing the Korean labour force with Bolivian immigrants

2 Principally see, for example, Lee (1992), Mera (1998), Courtis (2000; 2012), Bialogorski (2004), among others.

on the workshop floor. Although their studies contributed to understanding Korean ethnic relations with other minority groups, the findings are not sufficient for interpreting the current issues and conflicts among these ethnic groups. In particular, Bolivian immigrants, the major labour resource, have gradually taken on distribution activities to become one of the competitors of the Korean community. For a more comprehensive analysis of the topic this study carefully considers the previous findings as well as fully investigates the recent changes and issues within the Argentinean garment industry.

KOREAN GARMENT BUSINESS PATTERNS AND LABOUR ARTICULATION WITH OTHER MINORITY GROUPS

Before an analysis of the perceptions and stereotypes that Koreans have on other ethnic groups, it is important to understand the labour relations that Koreans have established with other minority groups in the course of their economic activities. In this section, I provide the socio-historical contexts and current issues of the Argentinean garment industry by paying particular attention to Korean business patterns and labour articulation with other groups.

Many sociological studies (Waldinger 1984; Morokvasic 1993; Light et al. 1999; Rath 2001; Buechler 2003; Panayiotopoulos 2010) have proved that immigrants have played an important role in the garment industries in the US, the Netherlands, France, Germany, Britain, and Brazil. However, there is little research conducted with respect to immigrants in the Argentinean garment industry. Previous studies (Bastia 2007; Benencia 2009; Lieutier 2010) dealt only with Bolivian immigrants in the Argentinean garment industry, focusing on their trajectories, ethnic networks, and working conditions. It is relevant to point out that the lack of reliable figures in Argentina (in particular, official statistics on the sectors) and the limited amount of previous research related to the topic significantly hampered the collection of data for this research. Thus, except for the cited parts, the contents provided and discussed in this section are based on my interviews on and conversations with immigrants during my field research in Buenos Aires.

Sephardic Jews, mainly from Middle Asia, and Ashkenazi Jews, originating in Central and Eastern Europe had immigrated in the early decades of

the 20th century and previously worked in the Argentine garment and textile sectors (Bialogorski 2004, 133). The working relationship between Jews and Koreans began immediately after the arrival of the latter in the 1960s (Bialogorski 2004, 133). Since most Koreans started out in modest sewing and knitting jobs as subcontractors for established Jewish entrepreneurs, the relationship between the two groups was initially established in complementary terms – in production (Koreans) and in distribution (Jews). However, as Korean entrepreneurs progressed from subcontracting to becoming independent manufacturers or wholesalers in their own right, their relationship evolved into competition (Bialogorski 2004, 133).

With the rapid expansion of Korean-owned wholesale shops and garment factories in Buenos Aires in the 1990s, the relationships between the two groups were increasingly defined in terms of competition, economic benefits and business strategies such as production quality, cost, and legality (Bialogorski 2004, 134). Over time, however, the Korean community has become well established in the garment districts alongside the Jewish business community, evolving into a stable and peaceful relationship.

Until the beginning of the 1980s, the garment wholesale shops were concentrated in the Once neighbourhood. The exponential increase of Korean wholesalers in the capital of Buenos Aires resulted in the establishment of a new garment wholesale area known as Avenida Avellaneda (Bialogorski 2005, 296). In more recent years, this commercial district has come to span almost forty blocks in west-central Buenos Aires that is now a thriving hub for wholesale clothing sales.

Avenida Avellaneda is in the Bajo Flores neighbourhood, where Jewish immigrants had originally settled more than a century ago. Until the late 1970s, there were only a few shops on this street, as the neighbourhood was mainly residential (Lee 1992, 319). Thus, although many Jewish people left the garment industry, many building owners within the garment districts are Jews, the original owners, who rent their shops to Koreans.

Currently, most Koreans are concentrated as wholesalers, retailers or factory owners within the garment industry. Many Korean garment wholesale shops are complex production and distribution operations. That is to say, these shops not only sell clothes at wholesale to other retailers, but also directly manufacture clothing to sell in their own businesses.

Two or three times annually, the Korean owners travel to Europe or the US to observe new trends in fashion. They purchase the preferred new styles and hire Argentinean designers to imitate these new models and create manufacturing patterns. Then they purchase textiles from Jewish

or Korean companies and hire cutters to cut the fabric. These cutters usually work on the second or third floors of the wholesale shop.

Afterwards, the Korean wholesale shop owners send cut fabrics and materials to their own workshops, where Bolivian workers (or other Latin Americans) sew the products. Alternatively, they send the cut fabrics to a Korean or Bolivian sub-contractor's factory to complete the assembly process. In some cases Korean factory owners complete the sewing and knitting work with their own employees; however, I have not yet identified any Koreans working as garment workshop employees.

Often, in Korean garment wholesale or retail shops the Korean owners are also cashiers; typically, they employ local Argentines as shop assistants. These Argentinean employees play a key role at Korean wholesale or retail shops because they are the mediators between Korean shop owners and Argentinean customers who often have communication difficulties (Bialogroski 2004, 97).

The third key industry group, Bolivian immigrants, take the clothing manufacturing jobs as sweatshop workers or small factory owners. As a consequence of the severe economic crisis in Bolivia in the 1980s and 1990s, including plummeting mineral prices and the restrictions on the state-owned mining company, many Bolivians pursued livelihood diversification strategies, including immigration (Bastia 2007, 660).

Buenos Aires was the main destination for migrants of this group. According to Bastia (2007, 660), Bolivian migrants have concentrated in garment work. Her research (2007, 660) indicates that approximately 50% of Bolivian immigrants have experience in working in garment workshops in Buenos Aires. The garment industry is one of the largest informal sectors in Argentina. It employs many illegal immigrants and most workshops operate without legal authorisation. Many Bolivians work 12 hours daily from Monday through Saturday at low wages in these garment workshops. Wages vary greatly, depending on their work experience, the accommodation arrangement, and the type of work. My interviews indicate that the wages vary from 1,500 to 3,000 Argentine pesos, equivalent to $300-600 US dollars per month. In many cases, the employers provide employees with food and lodging, and workers leave the workshop only on Sundays. As the Bolivians are often an illegal workforce in garment sweatshops, they are usually considered the lowest ranked group, socio-economically, in the Argentinean garment industry.

More recently, Bolivian immigrants have gradually taken on production works as sub-contractors or workshop owners. In addition, some of them have undertaken distribution activities by acquiring wholesale shops in

the garment districts or small shops in the open markets. In particular, the garment fair, *La Salada*, where immigrants sell illegally imported or locally manufactured clothing, is becoming more popular among Argentinean retailers from the provinces.

As illustrated in this section, the Argentinean garment industry has been a complex and dynamic site in which Koreans have established diverse labour relations with Jews and Bolivians through both regulated and unregulated practices. In the following section, I will carefully analyse Korean relations with Bolivians and Jews by focusing on the major issues grounded on previous theoretical literature.

ETHNIC RELATIONS AND SOCIAL BOUNDARIES

Ethnicity is the application of systematic distinctions between insiders and outsiders; between us and them. Two or several groups who regard themselves as being distinctive may tend to become more similar and may simultaneously become increasingly concerned with their distinctiveness if their mutual contact increases (Barth 1969; Erikson 2002; Cornell and Hartmann 1998).

Ethnic groups are social creations wherein ethnic differences are basically a matter of group perceptions. Groups may be objectively quite similar but perceive themselves as very different, and the converse is equally true (Manger 2012, 8). In interactions between or among groups, there is always a structure of ideas and images through which a particular community perceives its differences with respect to the social, ethnic or cultural "others" (Bialogorski and Bargman 1996a, 17).

Thus, an analysis of one group's perceptions and stereotypes of the other groups advances an understanding of their inter-ethnic relationships. In the perceptions, images and stereotypes revealed by Koreans throughout interviews and conversations, Jews and Bolivians appear to be clearly differentiated from the rest of the Argentinean society. I have collected relevant perceptions and stereotypes regarding the Jewish and Bolivian groups present in Korean immigrant interviews and conversations. Those interviews and conversations lead me to pose important questions about social mechanisms and factors involved: how economic inequalities, business competition and conflict, as well as other social practices have influenced in creating, maintaining and reinforcing ethnic boundaries between Koreans and the other ethnic groups.

Socio-Economic Inequality and Ethnic Relations

Social mechanisms stabilise the boundaries among ethnic groups and give meaning to them over time. In this light, the analysis of inter-ethnic relations must recognise the influence of local labour, and of political and class relations on their formation (Betancur and Gills 2005, 160; Eriksen 2002, 35). In this section, I highlight the correlations between social classes and ethnic stratification by analysing the interviews with Korean immigrants.

During my field interviews, it was possible to observe that Korean perceptions of "others" are informed by positions and working relations established within the garment industry. Here are two examples:

- "Koreans and Jews have the same positions here in garment wholesales, but I would say that Jews are better than us. I think that clothes made by Jews are a little bit more expensive than ours, but they make better quality of clothes. Personally, I don't have any relations with them. I don't have any Jewish friends. But all the employees in my manufacturing workshop are Bolivians".
- "I think there are 30% Jews, 50% Koreans and 20% Bolivians in the garment wholesale sector. Most Jews run wholesale businesses. Although the number of small Bolivian shops is increasing nowadays, most people who work in clothing factories are Bolivians".

As we can see in the interview comments above, one of the most noticeable characteristics of Koreans' views of Bolivian and Jewish people has evolved from the hierarchical working relationships within the Argentinean garment industry. Previous studies (Worsley 1984; Van den Berghe 1987; Wade 1997; Eriksen 2002) suggested that the term "ethnicity" refers to relationships among groups that are often ranked hierarchically within a society. That is to say, persons belonging to specific ethnic groups are often associated with particular social classes. In this case, the interrelationship between social class and ethnicity can be significant, and ethnic membership can be an important factor in class membership.

In many cases, perceptions are related to the landlord/tenant relationship, such as "Jews are landlords who take advantage of charging high rents" or "Jews live very well off the high rent they charge us". Interestingly, perceptions or stereotypes that Koreans have about Jewish people are also connected with their positions within the host society. In one of the interviews, the relations between Koreans and Jews are explained

in terms of social and political positions beyond labour contexts: "in my opinion, although Bolivians are moving up economically, Koreans see them as members of inferior classes for cultural and historical reasons. With respect to Jews, it is different. Even when Koreans often criticise Jews, Koreans have higher for Jews socially. Maybe Jews are very powerful people, have influence on media, politics and businesses. They have power over many areas in this country. That is why they are respected".

Regarding Bolivian immigrants, Korean immigrants hold very different views from those they have on Jews. Primarily, Koreans conceive of Bolivians as sweatshop workers / inferior and poor / illegal immigrants. All of these descriptors are related to Bolivians' entry-level positions within the garment industry. In particular, I observed that Koreans never used the term "employees" or "sweatshop workers" in their conversations. They simply used the term "Bolivians" as the synonym for "factory employees" or "sweatshop workers". Of course, "Bolivian" is not a job or an employment category, but a word that refers to people from Bolivia. However, for ethnic Koreans in Argentina, the word "Bolivian" has a specific meaning limited to their job and position within the garment industry. According Cornell and Hartmann (2007, 261), inter-ethnic relations are highly asymmetrical and contingent on labour categories. In this regard, ethnicity is largely manipulated and used as a tool to identify and subordinate peoples and keep them apart.

During the last two decades Argentina has received many immigrants from Latin American countries, such as Bolivia, Paraguay, Peru, Colombia, Chile, and Brazil (Ministerio del Interior 2009). However, Koreans hire almost exclusively Bolivians for their manufacturing workshops. With regard to their particular preference for employing Bolivians rather than other Latin American immigrants, Koreans attribute it to Bolivian cultural features as well as physical traits.

- "Bolivians are quiet, patient and submissive compared with others. Once I hired Peruvians, and they were not as diligent as Bolivians. They [Peruvian employees] asked for 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 very clever. In contrast, Bolivians are much better, because they don't talk, just work".
- "Bolivians are small but physically well prepared to stand working hard for long hours".
- "Bolivians have big lungs because they are from the highlands so

they can endure long-hours work".

Cornell and Hartmann (2007, 178) suggested that labour markets are a common site of ethnic and racial identity construction, since every society's division of labour offers a ready-made categorical framework, including associated status. Worsley (1984, 240) expressed a similar view that if class divisions and ethnic divisions overlap, such as when all workers in a given factory, industry, town or region are of the same ethnic background, ethnic solidarity becomes further strengthened by mutual reinforcement (class divisions and ethnic divisions) in a congruent or isomorphic manner. Thus, the concentration of one ethnic group in a particular labour workforce strongly influences the production of collective images of that ethnic group in that particular labour category; for example, Korean views on Bolivian employees in sweatshops. By the same token, these ethnic interactions established in workplaces provide the processes by which ethnic boundaries between "us" and "them" are reinforced.

Competition and Conflict

Ethnic relations are commonly considered forms of conflict and competition. However, intergroup relations are never totally conflictual. Ethnic groups do not exist in a perpetual whirlwind of discord and strife; cooperation and accommodation also characterise ethnic relations (Manger 2012, 6). Ethnic relations tend to be harmoniously kept, once the various ethnic groups are ranked hierarchically in a social system and ethnic hierarchy is maintained over time. However, when subordinate groups attempt to change ethnic hierarchy, conflictual relations evolve.

As mentioned previously, with the rapid expansion of Korean-owned wholesale shops and garment factories in Buenos Aires in the 1990s, the relationships between Koreans and Jews in the Argentinean garment industry were increasingly defined by competition and conflict (Bialogorski 2004, 134). These days, nevertheless, harmonious and peaceful relationships have been observed between the two groups since the Korean community has positioned itself advantageously in the garment districts alongside the Jewish business community. Therefore, inter-ethnic relations can be of a conflictual nature or a peaceful process depending on the situations in which two different groups interface.

Some Korean perceptions of Bolivians reflect anxiety as currently Bolivians are rapidly expanding small businesses in the garment districts or into the open markets. This has fuelled the rapid increase of Bolivian

garment businesses, a fact that distinctly influences Korean perceptions of Bolivian people. Some Korean interviewees look at Bolivians not only as sweatshop workers. They think that Bolivians are currently achieving the same position as Koreans hold within the garment businesses: "it seems to me that it is true that we Koreans look down on Bolivians. But nowadays there are a lot of Bolivians with money. There are Bolivian businessmen that are well received by the Korean community, and that are also respected. I know of a Bolivian that owns *Escrombo*, a famous brand of clothes for women, I think. This man went to a lot of Korean marriages".

The improvement of the positions of Bolivians within the garment business is possibly helping change how they are perceived by Koreans. For instance, one of the Korean interviewees stated: "for me it is a normal process. We learned working in this industry under Jewish businessmen and developed our own businesses. Bolivians are doing the same things we did in the past. For Bolivians, nonetheless, experiences are different. I think for them it is easier than for us, because they hire people from the same country. It will be much easier to manage workshops, so they will be able to make rapid progress".

On the other hand, because of some disturbances attributed to Bolivian street vendors (*manteros*) in the garment districts recently, rising tensions between the two groups have been documented. Negative images of Bolivians have often been reflected in Koreans conversation. One good example is: "these days our relations are very bad. We make efforts to go to Europe to bring new designs every season; however, they just copy and sell on the streets without paying a very high rent. Do you know how expensive the rent is here on Avellaneda Street?" Some Korean interviewees expressed that currently Bolivians have better positions within the host society because Bolivians speak Spanish and they can get permanent residence easily because they are from a neighbouring MERCOSUR (Southern Common Market) country.

When groups strive for the same limited resources, markets and spaces, their interrelations take on the characteristic of competition and conflict, and ethnicity can emerge as an important element. Cornell and Hartmann (2007, 100-101) indicated that there is often a utilitarian logic to ethnic and racial identification. When it is advantageous to draw a boundary between one set of claimants to opportunities or resources and another group, ethnicity and race lend themselves admirably to the task. Consequently, race and ethnicity are commonly called into play in situations of competition over scarce resources: jobs, housing, school access, prestige,

political power, among others (Cornell and Hartmann 2007, 100-101). With the current expansion of Bolivian businesses into the sector the opportunities for competition between Koreans and Bolivians for the same spaces and resources have evolved. As a result, ethnic tensions and conflicts have lately become more visible by reinforcing the boundary between these two groups.

"Race" and Ethnic Relations

During my field research in Argentina it was observed that some Koreans clearly distinguish Bolivians according to physical appearance or skin colour. For instance, "it is very easy to distinguish between Argentineans, Bolivians and Jews on Avellaneda [Av.]. Just go out in the streets and look at people. People who wear small *gorritas* [hats] are Jews. People who carry big trunks or *carritos* [shopping carts] are Argentinean retailers from provinces. The smaller people with dark skin are Bolivians". This was just one example, but physical appearance or skin colour was a common issue raised by the Korean immigrants in their interviews or conversations. Therefore, in this research I further argue that "race" is a relevant element in strengthening the ethnic boundaries among the three groups, in particular between Koreans and Bolivians.

I have documented that Koreans' indentifying dark skinned people with Bolivians within the garment industry serves to further discrimination. In addition, I have also observed that Koreans do not want to share places such as restaurants, beauty salons, or public baths with Bolivians. These discriminatory behaviours and comments have not been explicitly revealed in Korean interviews, but my informal conversations with Koreans and Bolivians have allowed me to infer that strong race-based discrimination exists among Korean against Bolivians in the garment business areas or the Korean town. For instance, an Argentinean girl from a beauty salon mentioned that some Korean ladies complained about sharing the space with Bolivian costumers, asking the owner to leave Bolivian costumers out. A Bolivian taxi driver also told me that a friend of his was not allowed to enter a Korean restaurant. Similar stories have been present in other conversations, which leads me to infer that strong discrimination and rejection against Bolivian immigrants is at hand within the Korean community.

Eriksen (2002, 9) pointed out that discrimination based on presumed inborn and immutable characteristics ("race") tends to be stronger and more inflexible than ethnic discrimination which is not based on "racial"

differences, because members of a presumed race cannot change their assumed inherited traits, whereas ethnic groups can change their cultural practices. Hence, ethnic boundaries between "us" and "them" based on racial or physical differentiation may generate a more negative image of, rejection of, prejudice or discrimination against the "others".

Manger (2012, 37) also drew attention to the fact that particularly where physical differences, such as skin colour, are pronounced, extremely wide schisms develop between groups, and the lines of ethnic division remain rigid and relatively impermeable for many generations. In this regard, even though Bolivians are making rapid and notable progress within the garment industry, the boundaries between Koreans and Bolivians will not be easily changed or diminished, as long as this strong sense of race based discrimination against Bolivians persists.

Stereotypes, Prejudice and Discrimination

According to Manger (2012, 52), stereotypes are reinforced through selective perception. This means that people take note of those cases that confirm their stereotypical pictures and overlook or ignore those that refute them. Furthermore, these stereotypical traits will be inferred even if they are not evident, so that the observers of an ethnic group will interpret the actions of groups members based on the preconceived image (Manger 2012, 52).

Ranking "others" according to one's own standards and categorising them into generalised stereotypes serve to widen the gap between "us" and "them" (Rose 2006, 127). Stereotypes, of course, are generalisations about groups of people that are exaggerated, overly simplistic, and resistant to challenge/disproof. Stereotypes also stress a few traits and assume that these characteristics apply to all members of the group, regardless of individual characteristics (Healey 2006, 78).

During my field research in many cases Korean immigrants gave me a strong impression that the ways in which they perceive Bolivians is based on categorised hierarchical positions in the garment industry, that is, Koreans on the top and Bolivians at the bottom. In interviews and personal conversations it was possible to notice that these unbalanced relations were perceived as normal: "Bolivians don't even have basic education; they are poor and usually they are here illegally. In any case, we are helping them, because we are providing jobs, house and food. Actually, Bolivian workshop owners are worse than we Koreans. I've heard that Bolivian owners are taking more advantage of their people

[Bolivians] than us [Koreans]". Similar comments heard time and again lead me to assert that perceptions and definitions of an "us and them" base tend to generate negative behaviour or discrimination against the "others". Such stereotypes make it possible to divide the social world into kinds of people, and they provide simple criteria for such a classification (Eriksen 2002, 30).

Nevertheless, although in this research I pay attention to the relevant patterns and issues related to Korean perceptions and stereotypes regarding other ethnic groups, it is important to mention that I intend not to generalise on the entire Korean community. In particular, comments below made by a young entrepreneur (second generation Korean Argentinean) reflect the flexible and transformative dimensions of perceptions on other ethnic groups.

- "After finishing secondary school, I started to work as a manager in a Korean workshop. After working several years there, I learned how to run a business in the garment industry. I am running a very small business. I buy textile and cut it home. I send the cut textile to a Bolivian workshop. After manufacturing the clothes, the Bolivian owner brings the complete products back. I sell these clothes made in the Bolivian workshop to a Jewish businessman. The Jew, my business partner, is doing very well in his business. He has three wholesale shops: two on Avellaneda [Av.] and one in Once. In addition, he has two big [retail] shops on Santa Fe [Av.] in Palermo. I like working for him. He is very conscientious, because he always pays his bills on time. He has never been late. Once I worked for Korean wholesale shops. Koreans always had excuses not to pay on time or pay less. In addition, since I am young, it is worse".

Therefore, in further research it will be helpful to incorporate and analyse data in accordance to generational gaps and differences of ethnic subgroups in order to better comprehend the intricate and complex issues related to ethnicity and race within the Argentinean garment industry.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

As a result of the labour-intensive nature and the vertical structure of the garment industry, ethnic Koreans have established specific types of relationships with other ethnic groups, particularly with the Jewish

and Bolivian communities. As seen in the analysis of the perceptions and stereotypes which Koreans hold vis-à-vis Jews and Bolivians, various factors within the common environment of the Argentinean garment industry have been involved in the processes by which ethnic Koreans have defined these "others".

The hierarchical structure of the garment industry plays a crucial role in the process of maintaining and reinforcing ethnic boundaries between Koreans and the other minority groups in the course of daily economic activities. In particular, economic differences, positions and labour categories have strongly influenced the stabilisation of ethnic strata among the three groups. Current conflicts and competition over limited resources, business opportunities and spaces have also affected their relations, primarily those between Koreans and Bolivians nowadays. The generalised images and stereotypes of the "others" tend to be based on fantasy and exaggeration regarding habits, behaviour, and practices. Moreover, ethnic boundaries built on physical differentiation generate strong discrimination against the "others".

As can be seen through the relations among Koreans, Jews and Bolivians in the garment industry, ethnic relations have been constantly created and re-created depending on the social situations in which an ethnic group interacts with others. It is a perfect situation to see how ethnicity is not a set of static symbolic features of a group, but a network of different ideas and practices made relevant in social interactions. The point is not that "real differences" between/among groups are unimportant, but rather that "differences" give social relevance to groups in a contact situation (Eriksen 2000, 168). The case study significantly illustrates that ethnic relations are contingent on social contexts and that ethnic boundaries are relational and situational.

Nevertheless, there are still limitations for thorough conclusions about the meanings and consequences of the ways in which Koreans relate to other groups within the Argentinean garment industry. In particular, the views of these other groups on Koreans should be incorporated and assessed for a more comprehensive analysis of the relational dynamics involved. Since ethnic relations generated, established, and maintained between/among groups of people are rather complex, further research based on more thorough analysis of discourses about the "others" will contribute to unravelling the ambiguity and diversity of ethnicity and "race". Specifically, it is the intent of this research to further develop the understanding of prejudice and discrimination in migration contexts.

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