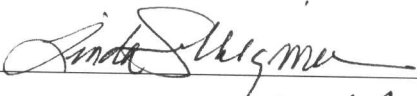


"WE ARE CLIENTS OF THE EARTH": VALUE CREATION AND THE  
PRODUCTION OF SPACE AMONG BOLIVIAN MIGRANTS IN BUENOS AIRES

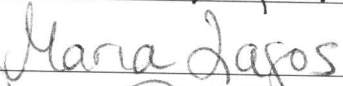
by


Charles R. Dolph  
A Thesis  
Submitted to the  
Graduate Faculty  
of  
George Mason University  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
The Requirements for the Degree  
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Anthropology

Committee:

 Director





 Department Chairperson

 Dean, College of Humanities  
and Social Sciences

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“We Are Clients of the Earth: Value Creation and the Production of Space among  
Bolivian Migrants in Buenos Aires”

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Arts at George Mason University

By

Charles R. Dolph  
Bachelor of Arts  
Kenyon College, 2002

Director: Linda J. Seligmann, Professor  
Department of Anthropology

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George Mason University  
Fairfax, VA

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## **Abstract**

### **“WE ARE CLIENTS OF THE EARTH”: VALUE CREATION AND THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE AMONG BOLIVIAN MIGRANTS IN BUENOS AIRES**

Charles R. Dolph, M.A.

George Mason University, Spring 2011

Thesis Director: Dr. Linda J. Seligmann

Neoliberalization in Argentina has been characterized by a spatial strategy of interior exclusion from the Federal District of the capital, Buenos Aires. The eradication of slums and polarization of class and space beginning during the military dictatorship pushed poor residents and immigrants out of many areas of the Federal District and onto the margins of Greater Buenos Aires. Yet, paradoxically, it is often the labor of such marginalized groups that produces the urban space of the Federal Capital, and by extension, the Argentine nation. This thesis focuses on processes of value creation and the social constructions of space and time among Bolivian migrants, particularly construction workers, in Buenos Aires. Focusing on labor at the point of production, the thesis shows how Bolivian migrants actively articulate capitalist value creation, and in doing so become caught up in and reproduce the social relations of capitalist production. As projects of neoliberal globalization foment urbanization and migrations, however, migrant communities recreate alternate value fields to the dominant neoliberal ideologies of free markets and discourses of nationalist modernity. The thesis thus moves on to consider the dialectic of market and society through an analysis of value creation in Bolivians' ritual performance of worshipping a nominally Catholic virgin each August in a shanty town of Buenos Aires.

## **Chapter One – Introduction**

### **Circulating representations: Pachamama and the nation**

One day in June 2010 I went to visit a friend in the *villa* (shanty town) of Ciudad Oculta (which means “Hidden City”) on the border between the insulated Federal Capital and the sprawl of Greater Buenos Aires, where the majority of the city’s more than thirteen million inhabitants live. I had asked Daniela<sup>1</sup> if she knew anyone who was working in construction, as the intended focus of the fieldwork for my master’s thesis was on Bolivian migrants and the labor process in the city’s construction industry. She responded that her cousin’s neighbor was a foreman who might be able to help me out. So I met Daniela at the train station in the neighborhood of Liniers at about 10:45 in the morning on a sunny day. She informed me that her cousin was going to pick us up and drive us to nearby Ciudad Oculta, and suggested we get some *salteñas* (a popular morning snack among Bolivians) in the meantime. On our way, we passed a bustling street scene of mostly Bolivian street vendors selling a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, rice, grains, flour, and other staples from huge sacks, a few French speaking Africans hawking knock off clothing and watches, along with various places offering international money wiring services and a bus line advertising direct routes between Buenos Aires and the cities of Cochabamba and Santa Cruz, Bolivia.

After eating our *salteñas* and catching up for a bit (we had not seen each other recently), Daniela's cousin called to say he was in Liniers, so we made our way a few blocks down, where he picked us up on the corner. I jumped into the back seat and Daniela introduced me to her cousin Felipe, a thin, 30-ish guy with a mop of black hair, explaining that I had lived in their hometown for two years some time back. Amused by this, Felipe greeted me and we headed off for Ciudad Oculta, going through Buenos Aires' former beef center of Mataderos (literally "slaughterhouse"), and onto Avenida Eva Perón, which separates it from Ciudad Oculta. There we met Ricardo, Felipe's foreman neighbor, a physically formidable guy in his late 30's with black curly hair and a wispy mustache. I explained to Ricardo that I was an anthropology student from the United States interested in the construction industry, and maybe I could come visit his site sometime. He seemed more or less indifferent to all of that, and suggested we all go get something to eat.

We headed into the *villa* by way of an unmarked entrance down a narrow passageway until we came to a small chalkboard-like sign hanging on an open door, offering *fricasé* and *picante de pollo*. The woman operating the place, and much of the clientele (including Daniela and Felipe), they informed me, were from the Bolivian town of Santiago de Cotagaita, a provincial capital in Bolivia's Andean Potosí department (about five hours north of the Argentine border at Villazón), and my site as a Peace Corps Volunteer from 2003-2005. We each order a *fricasé*, and a two-liter of soda to share. I look around and notice a now outdated 2009 calendar on the wall with a picture of the

town's soccer team, including seven or eight people whom I recognize and played soccer with on an almost daily basis during my time in Bolivia.

Astonished by such a close connection to rural Bolivia (and to my own past), I accompanied Daniela, Felipe, and Ricardo to Felipe's house in the *villa*. Like the other houses in the *villa*, it was a tall and narrow structure, three floors in total and connected by dangerously narrow and winding staircases. From the roof was a view of the empty hospital which, as Felipe explained to me, was abandoned by the Argentine state during construction in the 1980's, supposedly when it was realized that the foundation was unstable. It is around this abandoned hospital, a visual reminder of state retrenchment, that Ciudad Oculta has grown in recent decades. Felipe and his girlfriend Claudia worked sewing clothing for Lacoste, the evidence of which I noticed immediately upon entering, in the forms of the huge Lacoste poster on the wall, the various articles of Lacoste clothing lying about, and the three sewing machines in the house.

What really struck me, however, was the pair of virgin figures sitting side by side in Felipe's living room. Felipe informed me that he was this year's *pasante* (sponsor) for the *villa's* festival for the Virgen de Urkupiña, celebrated every August initially in a rural area of Bolivia's Cochabamba department, and later as a national scale festival which has been widely embraced by communities of Bolivians in the exterior. Behind glass cases and adorned in ornate gowns, one virgin had a Bolivian flag sash across her body, the other an Argentine flag sash. In front of the virgins was a stand with three rows of candleholders, used during the *q'oa*, the monthly gathering when people in the neighborhood come to burn incense and make a *ch'alla* (ritual libation), made by

sprinkling alcohol on the ground in front of the virgin figures. The Virgen de Urkupiña is Catholicized as the Virgin Mary and often conflated with the Andean deity *Pachamama*, which embodies at once Andean notions of Mother Earth and spacetime. I was impressed by the fact that there were *two* virgins, side-by-side, adorned with the national symbols of the Bolivian and Argentine flags. Before leaving, I coordinated future plans with Ricardo, who said he would talk to the architect about my project, and headed back down the narrow passageway out of the *villa* to the bus stop.



**Figure 1.1 – The two Virgen de Urkupiña figures in circulation during the celebration in the *villa* of Ciudad Oculta, adorned with national symbols of Bolivia and Argentina.**

Some time later, I attended the monthly *q'oa*. Seated next to Eustaquio, a short *orureño* (as men from the Andean highland of Oruro, Bolivia call themselves) with an unruly mustache, and his wife, he explained to me the reason that they continue to do

such ritual offerings, far from home as they are: “We still do the *ch’alla* and the *q’oa*. It is the *Pachamama* who takes care of us, whether we are here or there. Because, you see, we are clients of the Earth.” Eustaquio’s comment summarizes, for me, the condition of many Bolivian migrants I met and came to know (and in some cases reconnect with) in Buenos Aires.

On the surface, the tough realities of peoples’ lives as migrants on the urban periphery of Buenos Aires and their exploitation as wage laborers could lead one to think that they are alienated from their work, from society, and from themselves. While there is no doubt that some of them have been caught up in the drug abuse and violence that people of all social classes complain of in contemporary Buenos Aires, this was not the case among those whom I knew. My fieldwork at construction sites in the Federal Capital of Buenos Aires and in the *villa* of Ciudad Oculta revealed a complex web of social relationships that connected people along a rural-urban continuum between various parts of Bolivia and Buenos Aires.

It was these social relationships, manifested through ties such as *compadrazgo* and *paisanaje*, that structured peoples’ working and living situations, and which provided much of the material and cultural wherewithal for the celebration of the Virgen de Urkupiña in August. In the course of fieldwork I found that although many people – even those who did not appear to be alienated from their work or their work group on construction sites – were alienated from a wage structure that institutionally and overtly exploited them based on their Bolivian nationality. Yet, they offered to the Pachamama in the monthly *q’oa* and in the August festival for the Virgen de Urkupiña. They did so

speaking of the “nation” together with *Pachamama* as the providers of work. In his reflection that they are “clients of the Earth,” Eustaquio provides some insight into my central ethnographic interest, which is how these Bolivian migrants actively understand their situation as wage laborers on the urban periphery of Buenos Aires.

Eustaquio’s comment that they do the *q’oa* and the *ch’alla* because they are “clients of the Earth” also brings into relief my theoretical interest in processes of value creation and the social construction of space and time. What does it mean to be a client of the Earth on the urban periphery of Buenos Aires in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century?

### **Some issues shaping the research**

#### *Value creation and the social construction of space and time*

While an extensive discussion of the theoretical literature on processes of value creation and its relations to the social constructions of space and time is clearly out of the scope of this thesis, some general points must be made.<sup>2</sup> The connections between religious ritual and economic value, as well as the social constructions of space and time, have been longstanding avenues of anthropological inquiry at least since Durkheim (1976) speculated on them nearly a century ago. More recently, authors such as David Graber (2001, 2009) have noted that theories of value creation hinge on the difference between Marxian and Maussian notions of value. Marx, in the *Grundrisse* (1973), developed the labor theory of value, which broadly proposes that it is a complex of social relations, inscribed transmaterially into objects by the creative actions of living labor and represented in the money form.<sup>3</sup> Maussian conceptions of value (1966), on the other



hand, hold that it emerges in exchange, the social bonds of the gift created by the “spirit of the thing given.”<sup>4</sup> Numerous authors have argued that the contrast between these two approaches to value creation – production (Marxian) and exchange (Maussian) – are exaggerated, leading them to question the sharp dichotomies between supposedly traditional, non-monetary, pre-capitalist, gift economies that are seen as being incompatible with modern, monetized, capitalist, commodity economies (Graeber 2001; Appadurai 1986; Bloch and Parry 1989; Harris 1989).

Subsequent debates in economic anthropology have not produced any consensus reconciliation between these two conceptions of value creation.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, anthropologists working from a Marxian perspective (implicitly or explicitly) increasingly recognize not only the source of value in production, but also its realization in a wide variety of circulatory practices by which the third party, public recognition of value is consecrated through representational semiotics, which can happen in multiple media (Munn 1986; Coronil 1997; Graeber 2001; Turner 2008). Thus, while Marxian and Maussian notions of value differ in their focus on its source in either production or exchange, they are not as far apart on the idea that third party mediations are needed in order to realize value.<sup>6</sup> “Value,” writes David Graeber

is simply how we represent the meaning or importance of our own actions to ourselves. These become meaningful and important by being part of some larger social totality, real or imagined; this must also necessarily happen through some material medium: if not money, then treasures, tokens, performances, privileges, and so on. The medium can be almost anything, but its nature has very definite implications as to how this realization of value takes place (2009:108).

Public recognition, basically, is the process by which people represent the value of their actions; value creation is the process through which actors create social meaning. Realizing value in circulation, then, in a generic sense carries a performative aspect, even if it happens through seemingly anonymous paper bills. The implication, according to David Graeber (2001:76-78, 216-217, 2009:108-09), is that “society” then consists of the potential audience in the eyes of whom individual actors (including in the very literal sense) seek recognition.

Terence Turner has carried Marx’s value theory even further, arguing that it is “an anthropology which is applicable in principle to all social systems and forms of social production, including those that do not involve the production and exchange of commodities” (2008:43). In capitalist contexts, however, it is the money form, as representative of value and third party mediator of exchange that makes the generalized capitalist system of production (and the division of labor), exchange, and circulation possible (Turner 2008:50).

Marx (1973) actually identifies three roles of money in the *Grundrisse* – as measure, medium, and – as representative of wealth – a form of social power, which presupposes that access to wealth cannot be secured by other means. For David Harvey (1996:234), the heterogeneity of spacetimes under capitalism is reflected in the heterogeneity of money and its uses. In the form of measure or embodiment of wealth, such as in gold or precious stones, money does not circulate widely, and is thus spatiotemporally circumscribed. As medium of exchange, however, money can assume various forms (paper, coin, credit, etc.), circulates freely, and can articulate with Mauss’s

gift economies. As a form of social power (Marx's "representative of general wealth"), the control of money implies a territorial socio-political system, in short the state and its organs.

Thus, according to Harvey: "...the social constitution of spatio-temporality cannot be divorced from value creation or, for that matter, from discourses, power relations, memory, institutions, and the tangible forms of material practices through which human societies perpetuate themselves" (1996:231). In the capitalist world, then, individuals and groups in seemingly disparate contexts – localized labor processes, territorial states (and their apparatuses), an international order of states and the global economy – are all mutually constitutive agents of value creation and spatiotemporal transformation, potential audience members to whom the value of creative action can be projected.

#### *Neoliberalism: urbanization and the state*

Thus, authors such as Fernando Coronil, in his historical ethnography of the Venezuelan state, articulate a key concern for ethnographies that focus on value creation: how it "entails the reproduction or transformation of social and cultural formations" (1997:41).<sup>7</sup> Territorial states have historically been and continue to be vitally important in social processes of value creation. They are key agents in pushing the commodification of land, labor, and money, an urbanizing process of capitalist markets (and market relations) cascading into new spaces (Lefebvre 1991, 2003; Polanyi 2001). While projects of neoliberalization have led to pronouncements of the demise of the nation-state in favor of the "fertile ground of deterritorialization" (Appadurai 1996:38), authors such as Ferguson

and Gupta (2002) stress that the spatial practices of contemporary states in response to such challenges to their “vertical encompassment” are themselves part of a broader shift to neoliberal governmentality.

David Harvey (2003) has discussed urbanization and the state in light of these opposed logics of the molecular dynamics of capital flows and (relatively) fixed territorial power. According to Harvey (2003) the molecular flows of capital *over* space and time must occur along physical infrastructures *in* space and time. The “friction of distance” encountered by the molecular dynamics of capital accumulation thus lead to the geographically uneven development of urban and regional agglomerations. While such uneven development is a consequence of the molecular logic of capital, these agglomerations can then come to exert strong influence on the body politic of the territorially defined state within which they are contained.

Neoliberalization, in this framework, does not entail the withering away of the nation-state. Rather, it is reconfigured to operate as a kind of pivot, conducting flows between supra- and sub-national forces and intervening as the “power that controls urbanization” (Lefebvre 1991:383), mediating within the scalar framework necessary to accommodate the time-space compression of capital accumulation (Harvey 1989; Brenner 1997; Lefebvre 2009b). Thus, urbanization is not as simple as a unidirectional flow of people from rural to urban areas. The commodification of land, labor, and money engenders historically contingent and geographically variable patterns of urbanization within and across territorially constituted nation-states.

With approximately three quarters of its population living in urban areas, Latin America is the world's most urbanized region, and also its most socially unequal (NACLA 2007). Urban areas in the region exhibit sharp social polarization, as gated communities and urban slums – cities within these urban agglomerations – are full with people at both social extremes of poverty and wealth. Yet, as a previous generation of urban anthropology showed, in South American metropolises rural to urban Andean migrants are not synonymous with social decay and disorganization, but instead activate historically deep and expanding social and kin networks along a rural-urban continuum in mediating the realities of urban life.<sup>8</sup>

Projects of neoliberalization have spurred another round of migrations in Latin America (and globally), as land reforms, deindustrialization, and so-called “economic integration” projects from NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) to MERCOSUR (Mercado Común del Sur, or Common Market of the South) have forced large swaths of the rural populations from Mexico to Bolivia into urban areas within their home countries and abroad, where they reformulate subsistence strategies and, in many cases, reconstitute webs of social relationships across geographic, political, and social borders.<sup>9</sup>

This neoliberal round of “time-space compression” (Harvey 1989) associated with capital accumulation sharpens questions over different modes of valuation and social constructions of space and time. As Bolivians migrate and are drawn into dependence on wage relations in Buenos Aires, they articulate capitalist value creation in the labor process and reproduce capitalist relations of production. They also recreate value fields in

which the value of their actions as wage laborers is represented to different social totalities than the “world market.” An ethnographic approach raises questions as to how different modes of value creation in the global economy play out for individuals and groups of people in specific times and places.

### *Ethnographic orientation and context*

I place a fluidly connected group of Bolivian migrants at the center of my analysis. Their movements between Andean Bolivia and Buenos Aires engage interconnected historical trajectories, from colonialism to contemporary social processes unfolding in the global economy. It is precisely in these spaces of social and cultural reproduction that the nexus of global forces, state-society relationships, and local processes are evident. Reterritorializing “communities of practice” (Gupta and Ferguson 1992) that stretch across geographical, political, and social borders meet the deterritorializing tendencies of global capitalism, opening up new questions about the meanings of transnationalism. Paul Willis and Mats Trondman offer that critical ethnography can recognize how the cultural practices of such communities are “entrained in the flow of contemporary history, large and small” (2000:6).<sup>10</sup> Ethnography, then, can help make more real what neoliberal projects mean for people in Latin America, where neoliberalism found some of its earliest applications in the 1970’s, including in Argentina.

The great majority of my informants were Bolivians from rural towns in the southern-central Andean departments of Cochabamba, Potosí, and Chuquisaca, and the

links between these Andean regions and Buenos Aires constitute the main networks of contemporary movement between Bolivia and Argentina.<sup>11</sup> Many of my informants were from the town of Santiago de Cotagaita. Cotagaita, as it is more commonly known, is five hours north of the Argentine border, and was my site as a Peace Corps volunteer from 2003-2005.<sup>12</sup> Many of the young people I met during my time in Bolivia now live in the conurbation of Buenos Aires, mostly wage laboring in construction and textile manufacturing or in a few cases pursuing their education. Many of them have family at various points between southern Bolivia and Buenos Aires which comprise the social and kin networks that are integral to peoples' movements over such large distances.

Argentina, meanwhile, is home to over half of South America's migrant population and one of the only countries in the Americas to maintain a positive net migration rate (Jachimowicz 2006). Buenos Aires – the type of global city identified by Saskia Sassen (1991) that acts as a node within the meshwork of mobile financial capital – is the eleventh largest urban agglomeration in the world according to the United Nations (2009), the third largest metropolitan area in Latin America (behind Mexico City and São Paulo), and one of the major worldwide destinations for South American migrants. The International Organization for Migration (2007) estimates that there are about three million Bolivians in the exterior – half of them in Argentina – while Bolivia itself is a country of only about ten million inhabitants.

I spent time in three principal areas of Buenos Aires, two of which were located in upscale areas of the Federal Capital where the construction sites I visited were located, as well as in and around the *villa* of Ciudad Oculta on the periphery of the Federal Capital.

While in practice the Federal Capital and the sprawl of the conurbation are one chaotic agglomeration, there are divisions within the city that reflect its history of urbanization. The division between the Federal Capital and Greater Buenos Aires was made formal in 1994 when a constitutional amendment granted autonomy to the Federal District, thus its current moniker as the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires.

The immediate historical context of urbanization in Buenos Aires is the 1976-1983 military dictatorship that eradicated many of the *villas* in the Federal Capital, pushing hundreds of thousands of poor and immigrant residents onto the margins of the city and into positions of squatting in the run up to Argentina's hosting the 1978 World Cup.<sup>13</sup> On the edges of the Federal District, the military state sometimes adopted different tactics, such as the erection of a huge wall around one of the *villas* in order to hide it from sight during the World Cup. This *villa* has since become known as Ciudad Oculta, which means "Hidden City"; it is where most of my informants lived. The population of Ciudad Oculta (and peripheral areas like it) swelled with the eradication of other *villas*. Ironically, many of my informants who lived in Ciudad Oculta worked in areas such as Belgrano, building over and around the sites of eradicated *villas*.

The dynamic between these two areas of the city engages what authors such as Saskia Sassen (1991) have stressed are the spatial and class polarizations characteristic of neoliberalized global cities. Ethnographic attention to the material processes of these apparent polarizations demonstrates, however, that there are also interconnections between the poles in everyday life. The relationships between two areas of the city – Belgrano and Ciudad Oculta – mirror the dynamics of neoliberal Buenos Aires more



generally. This dialectic of polarization and connection is at the core of my ethnographic interest in the neoliberal state and spatially uneven processes of urbanization. In materially reproducing their exclusion from the Federal Capital through their labor in the city's construction industry, Bolivian migrants appear as active participants in the fluid process of constructing a neoliberal hegemony in Buenos Aires. The products of their labor in construction are constitutive of what Henri Lefebvre (1991) has called "abstract space," or the urban sphere of commodities and consumption within which the political power of the state enmeshes itself. In this way, social space itself becomes a tool of hegemony, as alienation from the product of one's labor manifests as exclusion from the city itself.

Bolivian migrants – and others from within South America – in short, do not fit into Argentina's national narrative of European immigration; yet they constitute the major movements of people and labor to contemporary Buenos Aires. While it seems easy to explain away the fact that people continue to make these movements because of simple economic necessity, this says next to nothing of their lives in Buenos Aires.<sup>14</sup> How do they constitute themselves as part of any wider community within an urban context that utilizes their labor, only to build walls around the communities where they live?

## **Methods**

I spent just under six months in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from mid-May through early November of 2010, leaving the city limits of Buenos Aires only once, in late

October to visit Cotagaita for the town's bicentennial. I leaned on contacts from my time in the Peace Corps to help me initiate fieldwork, and indeed my fieldwork would have been a pale shadow to what it was without their help. They helped me penetrate the worlds of construction and the *villa* of Ciudad Oculta and invited me to their soccer leagues and family members' birthday parties. Despite long gaps in contact and in many cases surprise at seeing me in Buenos Aires, they were enormously generous in helping me both as a fieldworker and as a human being on my own in a foreign country. I am reminded of Paul Stoller's reflection that:

Ethnographers in complex places like Harlem are compelled, I think, to work within the limited scope of their sociologically determined situation...my experiences and knowledge of West Africa have given me access to the dynamic but rather unstable community of West African traders in Harlem. By the same token, my whiteness and cultural difference have also limited my access to that community (Stoller 2002:27).

My previous time spent in Bolivia likewise helped me gain a certain level of access to a dynamic and somewhat unstable community of Bolivian migrants in Buenos Aires, and my cultural difference limited this access, as well. My scope was much more limited than Stoller's, in no small part because this was my first fieldwork experience. Nevertheless, I was able to spend time doing participant-observation that helped me understand how people – some of whom I have known now for the better part of a decade (albeit sometimes from afar), and others whom I came to know in Buenos Aires – are making sense of their lives.

I basically used a snowball approach to sampling (Bernard 2006), which, as anthropologists conducting research among migrant communities have noted (Pribilsky

2007), is a much more fruitful way to trace the social networks and life trajectories of migrants than any attempt at random sampling. I conducted participant-observation on three different construction sites in the Federal Capital of Buenos Aires, two of which were to be ten story apartment buildings around the corner from each other in the neighborhood of Caballito (which I will refer to throughout as Caballito One and Caballito Two), and the other, in the neighborhood of Núñez (which I will refer to as the Núñez site), was to be a five story office building.

The construction sites were at different stages of work, giving me at least some exposure to the labor process during each of the main stages. The vast majority of my time on-site – 51 days – were spent at Caballito One, which was in the third (bricklaying) phase of construction. I was initially given permission by the building company to stay only during lunchtime at this site, which in itself proved a valuable chance for fieldwork, as lunch, and especially the weekly *asados* (barbeques) every Friday, helped me build rapport with the crew and get to know the personalities involved. I eventually was able to be present during the workday, spending 24 days working with the crew at least part of the day on basic tasks such as preparing the mixes and sending them up to the workers on the upper floors, as well as hanging out and chatting with other people while they worked.

At Caballito Two I spent six days (though visited for shorter periods on many more occasions), mainly to get a feel for the work during the final phase of construction and to share an *asado* with this crew. Work on Caballito Two finished right about the time I left Buenos Aires. I spent four days at the Núñez site, mainly to have a chance to

see one of the days of the *hormigonada*, or pouring of the bases and columns that happens during the first stage of construction, as well as experience the Friday *asado* there, too. I also conducted interviews (recorded, except in one case where the person was not comfortable with it) with workers in a variety of positions at two of the sites, in addition to my many informal conversations with the bricklayers, plumbers, electricians, sheet metal workers, contractors, engineers, and architects who circulated through the sites on a regular basis.

My fieldwork beyond the construction sites brought me to a variety of settings. The most important of these was the *villa* of Ciudad Oculta, where the festival for the Virgen de Urkupiña took place in late August. I also spent many Sundays at the nearby Parque Indoamericano, where Bolivians recreated their rural soccer leagues on the urban periphery. On a few occasions I went farther out into the Green Belt of Greater Buenos Aires, where I was invited by a friend to birthday parties and some other special occasions of many of her extended family members. As with others who have conducted fieldwork with migrant populations in urban areas (Stoller 2002:x), my initial ventures into the contexts of construction sites and Ciudad Oculta were done in such a way as to minimize the feeling of intrusiveness into peoples' lives. I only gradually introduced the use of my notebook in front of people as they became more comfortable with me.

### **Outline of the chapters**

Including the Introduction and Conclusion, this thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter Two extends and historicizes the discussions of land, labor, and capital

as the three elements of the capitalist mode of production. I analyze the contemporary movements of Bolivians between the southern-central Andes and urban Buenos Aires, as well as the ongoing process of negotiating neoliberal hegemony in Buenos Aires as it has played out over the course of Argentina's shift from military dictatorship to democracy.

Chapters Three through Five explore the labor process in construction. Chapter Three provides a synthetic description of the different phases of construction, the organizational structure of construction sites, and the general rhythms of work. In Chapter Four, I adopt a cultural materialist approach to explore the practical aspects of the labor process, including its articulation with Andean notions of feeding, consumption, and games, as well as the relationship between plans and actions, camaraderie and conflict on-site, and alienation. In Chapter Five, I look more at the relational aspects of securing and obscuring surplus value in the labor process, including different exchanges and relations of time on-site, types and practices of informality, and the texturing of class and racialized nationality.

Chapter Six is an ethnographic account of the celebration of the Virgen de Urkupiña in Ciudad Oculta. Here I consider the realization of value, as discourses and material representations of money as well as national symbols attach to the virgin figures and circulate more generally during the festival. This chapter explores the connections between different modes of valuation as constitutive of social and cultural reproduction. In the concluding chapter I reconsider the major themes presented.

## **Chapter Two – Land, labor, and capital: Fictitious commodities, urbanization, and the state**

*Today Laymi are still quite clear how money is made: “It is in the bank. The metal goes to the United States and the money is made in a factory.” (Harris 1989:254)*

### **Introduction: Capitalist value creation – land, labor, and capital**

The Laymi of northern Potosí display a keen understanding of their position on the periphery of the capitalist world economy. While all money is not exactly created in a factory in the United States, the truth in this expression is not a literal one. In fact, it contains a much deeper historical recognition. The veins of the *Cerro Rico* (Rich Hill) in Potosí underwrote Spanish colonial expansion, providing more than half of world production of silver and gold from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> to mid-17<sup>th</sup> century as Potosí became one of the largest cities in the world with a population of 160,000 people (Kohl and Farthing 2006:38-40). More recently, the imposition of IMF-backed “structural adjustment” policies in 1985 led to the mass firing of Bolivian miners as the country’s tin-based economy collapsed (Gill 1997, 2000; Nash 1992). In this context, then, there is obviously a deeper recognition in the Laymi view from the periphery of the global economy that money flows through imperial centers.

Besides the primitive accumulation of the colonial era and the more recent imperial round of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2003) through neoliberal privatizations, Bolivia has been subjected to dispossession within the regional economy

of South America.<sup>1</sup> Landlocked since losing its coastline to Chile in the War of the Pacific (1879-83), Bolivia also lost the rubber producing region of Acre to Brazil in 1903 (during a rubber boom no less), as well as a large tract of land to Paraguay in the Chaco War (1932-35).<sup>2</sup> In all, Bolivia has lost over half of its territory since independence in 1825 (Kohl and Farthing 2006). Moreover, the Bolivian state has maintained an almost total negligence towards its dynamic of population loss. Some authors even contend that upon assuming the presidency in 2006 Evo Morales stepped into a situation where “in *Bolivia there is no migration policy*” (Domenech and Magliano 2007:26, emphasis in original).

Henri Lefebvre proposes that there are properly *three* elements to the capitalist mode of production: land, labor, and capital (1991:227, 282, 323-27). Karl Polanyi (2001:71-80) makes a very similar argument in proposing that land, labor, and money are what he calls “fictitious commodities” – things bought and sold though they were never produced to be. Fernando Coronil, in his historical ethnography of the Venezuelan state, channels these arguments in describing how Third World nations may find themselves in the neo-colonial position of what he has called “exporters of nature” in an international division of labor (1997). For Coronil, natural resources (oil in the case of Venezuela) are a powerful component of the productive forces of value creation, a point often overlooked in applications of Marx’s labor theory of value.

This is part of what Harvey (1982:106-117) identifies as the wider tendency to reduce the forces of production merely to technological change. Paradoxically, this potentially misrecognizes labor-power itself, even while adhering to the labor theory of

value. Labor-power, too, is both a commodity and a force of production. As Karl Polanyi (2001) points out, furthermore, it is attached to living human beings themselves part of nature, making its total commodification impossible. Recent feminist discussions of social reproduction, as well (Cravey 2005; Katz 2001), have been vital in foregrounding how migrant labor can end up “subsidizing” wealthier economies across national, regional, and family scales. According to Cindi Katz:

...the social reproduction of a migrant workforce is carried out in its members’ countries of origin. When they are employed elsewhere, this represents a direct transfer of wealth from generally poorer to richer countries. Variable capital produced in one site and tapped in another is no less a capital transfer than the extraction of raw materials, debt servicing, and the like (2001:710).

Thus, the historical configurations between state, territory, and population in Bolivia illustrate how so-called “third world” nations can more generally be exporters of natural forces of production – land and labor-power.

The purpose of this chapter is to place the contemporary movements between Andean Bolivia and Buenos Aires in the theoretical and historical contexts of wage labor, urbanization, and the state. In doing so, Philip Abrams’ (1988) insistence on historicizing states instead of reifying them remains paramount.<sup>3</sup> Territorial states, while critical in controlling urbanization, are not autonomous powers. Thus, James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta’s exhortation to pay ethnographic attention to how states “spatialize their authority” (2002:296) in meeting the neoliberal challenges to their vertical encompassment is also crucial. Historicizing these dynamics in urban Buenos Aires reveals the “ironies of multiculturalism and power” (Warren and Jackson 2002a:24) in the reliance of the city’s construction industry on migrant labor to reproduce its own



material exclusion. As these material processes play out against and within Argentine state rhetoric of a multicultural “Patria Grande” (Greater Homeland) of belonging, the reconfigured spatialities of urban segregation and class polarization produce and reproduce the “local hegemonies” (Guano 2002) of neoliberal Buenos Aires.<sup>4</sup>

### **Contemporary movements and transactional orders**

Migration is part of the deep cultural logic of subsistence-based movement for many Andean people.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, such movements are not givens: in the course of everyday lives people activate social networks, cross borders, and contribute to the social reproduction of the world capitalist economy, rural towns, and their households. Migrant-driven processes of urbanization have intensified and diversified dramatically in contemporary contexts and are directly related (though not wholly reducible) to changes in the capitalist world economy and the effect of state level policies in Bolivia.

Bolivia’s 1952 National Revolution and the two major policies that emerged out of it – the 1953 Agrarian Reform and the nationalization of the mining sector – changed the configurations between land, labor, and capital in Bolivia, and with it the political and social landscape of the country. In this context, the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB, or Bolivian Workers’ Union) emerged as the political counterweight to the Bolivian state (Nash 1993; Kohl and Farthing 2006; Ibáñez Rojo 2000; Sanabria 2000), while the agrarian reform shifted state support of industrialized agricultural production to the eastern lowlands.<sup>6</sup> Together with the redénomination of *indios* (Indians) to *campesinos* (peasants), these moves increasingly mobilized the rural population politically and in

space, as migrations to urban areas within Bolivia and abroad (principally to Argentina) have accelerated.<sup>7</sup>

The collapse of Bolivia's dominant mining sector and massive hyperinflation in the mid-1980's led to the imposition of the IMF-backed New Economic Policy (NEP) and Washington Consensus neoliberal democracy. Wholesale asset stripping followed the mass firings in the mining sector, which undermined the power of the COB. The Bolivian state gutted nationalized companies in oil and gas, telecommunications, airlines, power generation, and railroads under the 1994 Law of Capitalization.<sup>8</sup> In this context, thousands of Bolivians migrated to urban areas such as El Alto, the coca-producing Chapare of Cochabamba, the lowland agricultural lands of Santa Cruz, and increasingly abroad in reformulating their subsistence strategies.

Yet, among the meanings and uses of money that Olivia Harris describes among the Laymi of Bolivia's northern Potosí region, it is not the primary means of commanding labor, which is still mainly done through the reciprocal exchanges of *ayni* (symmetrical exchange) and *mink'a* (asymmetrical exchange). Migration (usually to urban areas), argues Harris, is for the purpose of obtaining commodified festival goods such as alcohol, coca, and cigarettes; "[I]t is thus harnessed to the reproduction of *ayllu* prosperity" (Harris 1989:246).<sup>9</sup> It would undoubtedly overstate the case to uncritically extrapolate from the context of northern Potosí to all migrant communities in the exterior. Nevertheless, in my fieldwork, I found that while peoples' migration strategies and experiences indicate a basic wage-laboring motivation, the kin and social networks

activated in these movements depend upon and reinforce non-commodified forms of reciprocity, including labor exchanges.

Analyzing such migration strategies, which articulate with but are not reducible to monetized exchange, invites us to consider what Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry (1989) argue is a general tendency to fetishize money “as devilish acid or as instrument and guarantor of liberty” (1989:30).<sup>10</sup> In response to what they see as this fetishism of money, Bloch and Parry propose that the formalist/substantivist tendency to reduce the question of whether “maximizing man” exists is not a simple “yes” or “no” but that all cultural systems must create

some ideological space within which individual acquisition is a legitimate and even laudable goal; but that such activities are consigned to a separate sphere which is ideologically articulated with, and subordinated to, a sphere of activity concerned with the cycle of long-term reproduction (Bloch and Parry 1989:26).

They propose, then, two “transactional orders” (1989:23-30) which necessarily articulate – that of the short-term horizon of capitalist market relations oriented towards individual gain, and the long-term horizon of social reproduction which is dependent upon individual acquisition, but necessarily subordinates it.<sup>11</sup>

Rural Andean patterns of organizing labor are structured by reciprocal relationships that stretch along different spatial and temporal horizons. They align two transactional orders, as the individual gain that comes from the selling of one’s labor for a wage (usually involving migration to urban areas) is subordinated to social reproduction at the household and community levels. Moreover, despite the rural/urban split engendered by the colonial encounter, there is no ultimate division between them, nor is it fruitful to enact a total division between migrants and their hometowns, or any of the

other potentially exaggerated dualisms of traditional and modern societies, monetized and non-monetized exchange, homeland and hostland, etc.

As authors such as Sarah Skar (1994) have argued, discussions of “migration” are potentially even an ideological trap in studies of peoples’ movements between the rural Andes and urban areas, proposing that they are instead better understood as “absent ones” (*illaqkuna*) in relation to their hometowns.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, Jason Pribilsky (2007), in his study of Ecuadorian migration to New York City, chooses to use the term “migrant” over “immigrant” to stress the reality that migrants first of all come from somewhere else. Such cautions resonate with the ideological descriptions of Bolivians in Argentina as “extractive immigrants” who come to take jobs away from Argentines, only to send the money back home to Bolivia (Caggiano 2006).<sup>13</sup> Thus I employ the term “migrants” for lack of a better alternative, conceding that it is a potentially loaded term.

### **Types of movement<sup>14</sup>**

In the course of interviews as well as conversations during extended participant-observation, I identified four major types of movements between Bolivia and Buenos Aires. While each of the types illustrate specific migratory horizons, they share certain commonalities in terms of strategies and goals. Almost uniformly, peoples’ response when I asked them why they had come to Buenos Aires was that they were looking for money (“buscando plata”, as they put it in Spanish). In other words, Bolivians’ migrations, in my experience, were shaped by strategies of wage laboring. As subsistence-based agriculture continues to be assaulted by new rounds of land reforms

(such as the 1994 Land Reform in Bolivia) and export-oriented agro-industry, urbanized wage labor gains increasing dominance as a means of subsistence.

Furthermore, social and kin networks emerge in the ethnographic context as vital symbolic and material resources that people draw on in their migrations and wage laboring strategies, as Patricia Vargas (2005) has noted of Bolivians in Buenos Aires' construction industry. Social networks are instrumental in providing migrants with places to live, access to labor markets (sometimes directly, in the form of contacts who are labor contractors themselves), as well as a means of recreating reciprocal social relationships both within the context of work and beyond.

*Back and forth movements: Jorge's story*

The first type, which I call "back-and-forth" movement, has been identified by other researchers of the Bolivian communities in Argentina (Giorgis 2000). These movements are driven by temporary searches for work with the longer-term goal of generating a wage labor option of future return to Argentina by obtaining the necessary documentation to work formally in the country. In my experience, such migrants were generally young men (though women are by no means excluded from this), single, and childless, making them situationally mobile. They can (and do) shift between jobs, living arrangements, and rural and urban areas in moving "back-and-forth" between Bolivia and Argentina.

Jorge, a single, 23 year old from Cotagaita whom I had known in passing while a Peace Corps volunteer, is one such migrant. In an interview and other informal

conversations with Jorge, he told me of his work experiences in the last five years or so. Jorge had worked sporadically as a miner (a common story of Bolivian men I talked to), both in the *Cerro Rico* of Potosí and around the Tupiza area just north of Bolivia's southwestern border with Argentina. He explained that his brother had actually come first to work in Buenos Aires, and he followed a few years later. Jorge, at the time of my fieldwork, worked in construction and stayed with his uncle Teófilo, who has been in Buenos Aires since 1975 (see Chapter Six), trading labor in his spare time towards his uncle's project of putting an addition on his house in exchange for room and board.

Jorge: I was here for about a year, and then I went back [to Bolivia] for *carnavales* [the yearly Carnival celebrations that fall in February/March]. And just in 2008 I started the process for the DNI [National Identity Document], so I didn't want to leave it unfinished. And so I came back here last year in ...October...no August I came back to get my DNI, but they gave me another deadline, and so that's why I'm back here again. And, you know, Argentina always is good to you [*te brinda muchas cosas*] and so that's why you keep coming back right? You know, get the DNI, then who knows? Maybe come the next year, and the next, like that.

Jorge continued that he only intended to stay in Argentina until August or so when he could get the necessary documentation to come back to Argentina and work in the future if he wanted to (though his plans were delayed numerous times and he was still in Buenos Aires when I left in November). Otherwise, he said, he would go back to Bolivia to help run the karaoke recently bought by one of his brothers in Cotagaita, where he plays the role of bouncer, ejecting (by force if necessary) excessively drunk or otherwise trouble-making patrons.

*Long-term migration: David's story*

The second type of migration I encountered is what I refer to as “long-term migration.” Such cases refer to those who have settled in Buenos Aires, have spouses and children there, and who have been back to Bolivia only occasionally since settling in Argentina, sometimes decades ago. I am hesitant to call these permanent migrations, as nearly everyone I talked to who fell into this category expressed at least a desire, and in many cases varying levels of plans, to return to their hometown in Bolivia to live at some point in the future, even in cases where five years or more had passed since their last visit. David, a generally quiet, hard-working man in his mid-20’s, from a town just outside of Potosí city, is exemplary of this migration pattern. He told me of his family’s migrations as agricultural laborers in the northern Argentine province of Santa Fe when he was young, then eventually to Buenos Aires, where they stayed:

David: Yea around Santa Fe. I’m not sure what the place was called exactly, but they [David’s parents] lived on a farm there. They came to Argentina to work.

Me: So, since you were a child your parents came here to work?

David: Yeah, yeah. Me and my brother especially, we came here with them from the time we were little kids. So, we kind of grew up here...Later they went back, my mom and dad, to Bolivia. They worked 2...3 years, because my mom’s brother got married. And when we came back, there were two options open to us: come here to Buenos Aires, or return to Santa Fe. And they [parents] decided to come here to the Capital just to visit, some cousins that were here. And we pretty much stayed here after that. We stayed permanently, and didn’t return to Santa Fe. And my parents left everything there in Santa Fe, everything they had done.

David, now in his mid 20’s, has spent nearly his entire life in Argentina, though he married a Bolivian from Sucre, with whom he has two children, both born in Argentina. Further, David’s migration history is indicative of the urbanization and industrialization of Bolivian migrant labor in Argentina. Had his parents decided to stay in Santa Fe,

David explained, they would have inherited the farm from the owner, a childless woman, and David and any of his family who stayed there would have been agricultural laborers. Instead, his parents chose to settle in the capital and David became a construction worker in urban Buenos Aires.

*Circuit migration: Nicolas's story*

The third type of migration I encountered was a circuit migration between the four major receiving countries of Argentina, Brazil, Spain, and the U.S. I talked with numerous Bolivians in Argentina who had family in two or more of these countries, and who had either migrated to one of them (other than Argentina) or had plans to. Nicolas, or *San Nicolas* (Saint Nick) as the other workers on the Núñez site called him, was an outgoing, 40-ish man with curly black hair and a cigarette almost constantly hanging from his lips while on-site. From a town in the central valleys of Cochabamba, Nicolas had spent most of his adult life in Buenos Aires and has family in Spain and the U.S., as well. He told me of crossing to the U.S. via Mexico with a *coyote* (one who smuggles people across the Mexico-U.S. border), which a cousin who had crossed before helped set up by fronting \$2,000.<sup>15</sup> Speaking of this migration to Arlington, Virginia (via Mexico) in 2004:

Nicolas: I have a cousin there, his name is Jose, he has a company there, a building company....So I was working with him, but we thought it was better that I didn't really go out, since I didn't have documents. And so one day one of his brothers says, 'Ah c'mon, let's go out just to eat something.' So, I said 'Yea ok, let's go.' And so this was the first time I went out in like two months. Two months without going out. I went straight from my door to work, not really even knowing where I was going exactly...So we went out, just about ten minutes away or so, I don't remember which neighborhood or anything. Anyway, so we



go, and we drink a couple of beers, and fuck, on our way to the car, the cops come up to us and they ask for documents. And I didn't have them, although my cousin did. And so they took me and detained me, and I was *incomunicado*...I was there fifteen days...And so they put me on a plane and deported me. They sent me to Venezuela! I called my cousin and asked him to send me some money. So he sent me money, and I took another flight, to Santa Cruz (Bolivia) and stayed there for two or three months before coming back to Argentina.

Nicolas's experience is indicative of the transnational character of much contemporary Bolivian migration. His social and kin networks extend between multiple national spaces – Bolivia, Argentina, Spain, and the U.S. – and were instrumental in his ability to carry out an overland migration to the U.S. via Mexico, his labor insertion in Virginia, and in sorting out the sticky situation of his deportation via Venezuela and return to Argentina.

*Return to Bolivia: Martín's story*

The fourth type of migration I identified is resettling in Bolivia. I met Martín, an easygoing man in his mid 30's from the town of Vitichi, about equidistant (three hours) between Potosí city to the north and Cotagaita to the south, when I made a trip to Cotagaita for the town's bicentennial celebration in late October of 2010. Martín asked me to take a few pictures of his young daughter, who would be marching in the parade with her school class as part of the bicentennial festivities. Martín, it turned out, had also lived in Buenos Aires and worked in construction. I asked him if he knew Franco, a labor contractor from a nearby hamlet whom I had come to know in Buenos Aires. "Oh sure," said Martín, "everybody knows Franco. I worked for him when I was in Buenos Aires."

Martín recounted some of his experiences in Buenos Aires from 1998-2001, during the worst economic and political crisis in the country's history. When construction

activity ground to a near standstill by the end of 2001, Martín left Buenos Aires to come back to Potosí, and started a construction company that does work for the municipality. It had been five years since I finished my Peace Corps service, and upon returning I noticed a small construction boom in Cotagaita. This included new elementary and high school facilities, a coliseum for sports events, a new central market, much new housing, and a partial damming of the river to generate the deposits of sand that are a key material in cement mixes. While I did not have a chance to do any significant fieldwork on the topic of such “new ruralizations,” Martín’s story provided an example of the return migrations spoken of by nearly all of my informants in Buenos Aires.<sup>16</sup>

### **Bolivian migrants and neoliberal hegemony in Buenos Aires: dictatorship and democracy**

Bolivian migrants in Buenos Aires are caught up in the contradictions that have been sharpened by neoliberalization. For example, while migrant labor subsidizes wealthier economies from the household to the national scale, neoliberal states may adopt a stance that inverts this. This contradiction is exemplified in the conflicts that arose over squatters in the monoblock apartments surrounding the Parque Indoamericano in December of 2010, when approximately 4,000 people (both Argentines and immigrants) camped out in the park to demand housing. When it appeared to some Argentine residents that the park may turn into a giant shanty town, the Argentine government initiated a census to find out where those camped out in the park lived, and under what conditions. Many Argentine residents blamed the situation on “los bolivianos okupas” (the “squatter Bolivians”), complaining that they were receiving special treatment from

the Argentine state. Buenos Aires mayor Mauricio Macri took advantage of the situation by blaming it on an "uncontrolled emigration to Argentina...It would seem that the city of Buenos Aires is having to support neighboring countries and that's impossible. Between 100 and 200 new people come to the city every day in connection with (a rise in) drug trafficking and crime, and we don't know who they are." While the labor of Bolivian immigrants is utilized without complaint in Buenos Aires, they are suspect – apparently as drug traffickers and criminals more generally – merely for being there.<sup>17</sup>

This pathologizing of Bolivians' presence in Buenos Aires is part of the legacy of Argentina's 1976-1983 military dictatorship. Lindsay DuBois, for example, describes how residents of José Ingenieros in the nearby neighborhood of La Tablada – like Bolivians around the Parque Indoamericano – were targets of state intervention "merely by virtue of living in such a neighborhood" (2005:107). The state action DuBois describes were the "censuses" carried out by the military apparatus. The interior exclusion of Bolivian immigrants in contemporary Buenos Aires, and its obvious similarity to the military state's efforts to control urbanization, invites us to think about the condition of Bolivians vis-à-vis the Argentine state in the historical context of neoliberal urbanization, from dictatorship to democracy.

#### *Urbanization of Buenos Aires: Federalization to neoliberalism*

The urbanization of Buenos Aires has been driven by migration patterns that are closely related to state ideology. The city was one of the first to experience large-scale industrialized urbanization in the Americas.<sup>18</sup> In 1880, it was federalized as the national

capital and separated from the Province of Buenos Aires, incorporating the neighborhood of Belgrano into the city limits in the process. Embracing Argentine statesman Juan Alberdi's ideological proposition that "to govern is to populate," founding father and president Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1868-1874) stimulated massive European immigration to Argentina. Almost six million immigrants – mostly European (predominantly Italian and Spanish) – flooded Argentina between 1871 and 1914, with Buenos Aires as the main port of entry (Guano 2003:149). Meanwhile, a process of internal colonization and conquest, especially the 1878-1880 Conquest of the Desert led by Julio Roca (who was later president from 1880-1886), was aimed at exterminating the indigenous populations of the interior. Together with European immigration, Argentina consolidated its "imagined community" (Anderson 1991) of race and nation as a reterritorialized Europe.<sup>19</sup>

By 1930, much of what is today the Federal Capital had been initially built upon, and in the post-war era the Federal Capital itself has seen almost no population growth, while Greater Buenos Aires continues to grow. The intense urbanization of Greater Buenos Aires has been fed by migrant streams from interior provinces of Argentina and neighboring countries, though the Argentine state has adopted a much less welcoming stance towards interior and regional migrants than towards its idealized past of European territorialization. For decades there was a perpetual housing shortage in the Federal Capital as the population of the *villas* grew.<sup>20</sup> State policy towards the inhabitants and community organizations of the *villas* swung back and forth in a pendular motion,

grudgingly accepting them as interlocutors, trying to co-opt them, or aiming to destroy the *villas* altogether.<sup>21</sup>

*Transforming Buenos Aires: Dictatorship and eradication of the villas*

Argentina experienced chaotic swings leading up to the military takeover on March 24<sup>th</sup> 1976. The preceding military regime of Juan Carlos Onganía (1966-1970) set itself up, unlike previous military *juntas*, to stay in power indefinitely. Yet, after alienating his own military apparatus, Onganía himself was toppled in 1970. After nearly two decades in exile, Juan Perón (who had previously been president from 1946-1955) returned to the presidency in 1973, only for the tenuously cobbled together factions of *Peronismo* to fracture with his death in 1974. Thus, the military takeover in 1976 led by General Jorge Videla (1976-1981) was, as Lindsay DuBois notes (2005), not terribly surprising.

The dictatorship, which stayed in power until 1983, sought to remold Argentine society. The goals of this transformation, dubbed the Proceso Nacional de Reorganización (Process of National Reorganization), entailed an urban transformation of Buenos Aires. This was oriented at projecting a certain idea of the Argentine nation on the global stage of the 1978 World Cup. As Lindsay DuBois notes, General Videla understood the process of “normalizing the industrial, educational, religious, territorial, and neighborhood spheres” as something to show off during the 1978 World Cup, which thus became the stage upon which the military dictatorship projected its idea of a “New Argentina and New Citizens” (DuBois 2005:86-87). The intended audience for this

projection of the Argentine nation was effectively the entire world, and especially the United States, who was materially and ideologically supporting the Dirty War at the time as part of Cold War politics.

Table 2.1 – Quantity of families, persons, and Bolivian families in *villas* in the city of Buenos Aires. Source: Susana Mugarza (1985:100).

<u>Year</u>	<u>Families</u>	<u>Persons</u>	<u>Bolivian families</u>
1966	21,713	95,511	4,343
1976	45,678	224,885	9,136
1978	25,608	115,236	5,122
1979	11,521	51,845	2,304
1980	9,234	40,533	1,847

Using the pretext of hosting the World Cup, the military sought to realize the state's long-standing goal of "eradicating" the *villas* of the Federal Capital. The target for the first eradication, initiated at the end of 1977 with the *Ley de Erradicaciones* (Law of Eradications), was the *villa* of Bajo Belgrano. Close to El Monumental stadium, home to the club soccer team River Plate and showcase for the upcoming World Cup, Bajo Belgrano also, as the Comisión Municipal de Vivienda (Municipal Housing Commission, CMV hereafter) noted, encroached upon "a zone of parks, lakes, the municipal golf course, private clubs, the equestrian field, etc...it was in a privileged zone of the Federal District" (Blaustein 2006:76, my translation).<sup>22</sup> Its eradication, according to the CMV, "reclaimed 7.2 hectares of extremely valuable land for an ambitious future plan that will bring a social and civic ordering to the Federal District, as belongs to all 'Great Cities' of cosmopolitan importance" (Blaustein 2006:76-77, my translation). Beginning with Bajo Belgrano at the end of 1977, the eradications overseen by the CMV pushed hundreds of

thousands of slum dwellers onto the margins of the Federal Capital, further out into the province of Buenos Aires, and beyond to interior provinces of Argentina and in some cases back to home countries.

The Plan de Erradicación de las Villas Emergencias (Plan for the Eradication of Shanty Towns, or PEVE) called for those *villa* residents not able to “solve” their own situation to move to housing in a state-built Núcleo Habitacional Transitorio (Transitory Living Nucleus, or NHT), and eventually on to a Núcleo Habitacional Definitivo (Definitive Living Nucleus, or NHD). These facilities were woefully inadequate, and in many cases worse than the *villas* themselves had been (DuBois 2005, Blaustein 2006). Despite their supposed temporary character, many became permanent. While the military state built a giant wall around what is now known as Ciudad Oculta, its population and that of the surrounding area swelled as people were pushed out from the eradicated *villas*.<sup>23</sup> It now effectively meshes with the NHT Eva Perón, which became permanent when the NHD’s proved far too few for the people pushed out from eradicated *villas*.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Land, labor, and capital: Neoliberal urbanization in Argentina*

The eradications of the *villas* in the Federal Capital were localized actions embedded in the more far ranging process of urbanization, which is not limited to the spatial reconfiguration of cities. The dynamic interactions between land, labor, and capital evident in Argentina’s process of neoliberal urbanization reveals the presence of deep state interests, whether during military or democratic regime. Beginning with the military dictatorship, state economic policy (in conjunction with the IMF) has eroded the

manufacturing base in favor of export-oriented agro-industry.<sup>25</sup> This was consolidated through two key pieces of legislation under democratically elected Carlos Menem (1989-1999), the Convertibility Plan and the National Employment Law (NEL), both enacted in 1991. The Convertibility Plan pegged the Argentine peso to the U.S. dollar, which had the doubly negative effect on manufacturing of making Argentine goods more expensive on the world market and imports of foreign goods very cheap, such that access to internal and external markets was weakened. This displaced social production within Argentina, which simultaneously came to privilege the ground rents generated by the extraction of raw materials and export-oriented agro-industry, as well as to rely disproportionately on imports of consumer goods to fill the gap left by deindustrialization.<sup>26</sup>

The NEL effectively restructured labor markets to discipline wage earners, ease the obligations of both the state and individual firms in contributing to social security, and loosened hiring and firing practices (Olmedo and Murray 2002), dynamics which I will explore in more detail in the context of Buenos Aires' construction industry in Chapter Five. This *patria financiera* (literally “financial fatherland”) neoliberal economic policy was aimed at reconfiguring the relationship between landed interests, industrial capital, and organized labor. While it began under the military dictatorship, it continues under democratic rule; it “represents the significant links between the grain giants and financial interests” in Argentina (Cooney 2007:12, 36).<sup>27</sup>

The production of space (in which the construction industry is key) superimposes itself upon the diminished production of things in space (displacing industrialization, in Henri Lefebvre's terminology) as a means of reproducing the dominant relations and



mode of production during Argentina's neoliberal period.<sup>28</sup> This has entailed the production of new urbanisms, beginning with the increasing spatial and class polarizations between the Federal Capital and the sprawl of Greater Buenos Aires.

The eradication of the *villas* in the run up to the 1978 World Cup was the type of creative destruction commanded by the state in order to produce the new urbanisms of neoliberal Buenos Aires along and through which capital accumulation would proceed. That is, *villas* such as Bajo Belgrano presented a barrier to the circulation of capital through an otherwise “privileged zone” of the Federal Capital. In order to overcome such a barrier, to find a “spatial fix”, space must be *produced*, and, in particular the “second nature” of urban space as the arena of everyday life and programmed consumption (Harvey 1982:414-444; Lefebvre 1991:89).<sup>29</sup> In the creative destruction of the *villas*, the Argentine state is an active agent in the production of space on a hierarchy of interlinked scales as part of the worldwide “scaffolding” of capital accumulation (Brenner 1997; Lefebvre 1991).

The military state also attempted (violently) to exercise its control over this process of urban transformation. The eradication of the *villas* was part of the state strategy of reconfiguring public and private spaces at every level in Buenos Aires, all aimed at instituting a social order to show off Buenos Aires as a “Great City of cosmopolitan importance” on the spectacular stage of the 1978 World Cup. According to Lindsay DuBois, the military apparatus disarticulated social ties by closing down public spaces as places of gathering and conducting regular home searches throughout the city:

Residents had no choice except to permit this eruption into their most intimate spaces. The military invaded the only social space that people had left, disrupting

it, ‘turning it upside down’...Meanwhile, non-familial social interaction had been virtually prohibited except in certain clearly prescribed contexts (2005:109).

Thus Lefebvre’s injunction that the forces of production allow an “intervention at all levels of space” (1991:89) played out during Argentina’s military dictatorship. Tactics of repression, including disappearances, torture, and the policing of space at all levels, exercised the state’s monopoly of legitimate violence as a means to control urbanization.

In this context, Bolivians’ movements to Argentina have broadly expanded from their seasonal, agricultural basis in the northwest to radiate into Buenos Aires, which is now their principal destination. This urbanization and industrialization of Bolivian migrant labor is evident in the experiences of people such as David and his family, whose story I recounted earlier in this chapter. This broad shift entails multiple contradictions: as Bolivian migrant labor has been progressively urbanized and industrialized in Argentina, the presence of Bolivian migrants in Buenos Aires is a material and symbolic contradiction to how the Argentine nation is imagined from within the city. Caught up in the eradication of the *villas* during military rule, communities of Bolivian migrants are again rendered legible to the state – now as supposed drug runners and criminals instead of wage laborers – through the use of the census, part of what Benedict Anderson has called the “totalizing classificatory grid” (1991:184) inherited from the colonial state.

#### *Neoliberal hegemony and abstract space*

The material reality of Bolivians’ labor in Buenos Aires’ construction industry is that it helps produce commodified and fetishized urban spaces. Marx identified the

fetishism of commodities as the process whereby labor power is inscribed in material objects, while the artifice of their production is simultaneously effaced. Henri Lefebvre extends the notion of fetishism, like Marx, pointing out its intimate relationship with alienation. The commodification of urban space has the highly contradictory effect of progressively circumscribing its producers out of those areas of the city in which their labor has been materialized, through projects of gentrification or “urban renewal.” This “abstract space” in turn becomes the “locus and medium of Power,” in the face of which its consumers, as “when confronted by the great Fetishes”, lose their critical abilities (Lefebvre 1991:94). The state enmeshes itself within this space through claims to territorial sovereignty, enlisting technocratic managers into bourgeois class interests in order to segment it through superficially benign idioms of “urban planning.” Historicizing the spatial practices of the Argentine state illuminates not its absence from the urban spaces of Buenos Aires, but its authoritarian presence in violently forcing and controlling neoliberal urbanization.

The “ambitious future project” for areas such as Bajo Belgrano (that “extremely valuable land”) that the CMV envisioned during the military dictatorship has been realized in the last two decades with the diffusion of spectacle into everyday life through the construction of shopping malls, theme parks, tourist trains, and a gentrified waterfront in the Federal Capital (Guano 2002). The consumption of urban Buenos Aires is a means of producing neoliberal subjects through a reterritorialization of transnational modernity, “yet another arena in which to imagine, represent, and perceive the influence of the United States on Argentina's neoliberal social, political, and economic course” (Guano

2002:184). Beginning with the 1978 World Cup, then, the Argentine state's mode of realizing value manifests as the type of "immense accumulation of *spectacles*" presciently written of by Guy Debord (1994:12).

The 1991 Convertibility Plan that led to the importation of North American fashions, commodities, and spatial arrangements has shifted Argentina's neoliberal gaze to North America as an ideal for its new project of modernization. Collectively bearers of the historical fear of encountering the indigenous within the national body, of finding "some lighter than normal feathers that subtly wreath" their heads (Joseph 2000:360), *porteños* find themselves squeezed in a kind of cultural-national hierarchy between the threat of the indigenous other and an elusive modernity.<sup>30</sup>

Conspicuous consumption has therefore become a means of warding off the imaginary wreath of feathers, and the social spaces *qua* commodities of urban Buenos Aires are likewise an interactive medium for *porteños* to express their North American conceit. "In third-world societies," writes Fernando Coronil, "commodities have thus become profoundly charged symbols" which "express hierarchies among cultures, not just magnitudes of value" (1997:36-37).<sup>31</sup> The changing spatiality of Buenos Aires is in-line with North American style privatization of the public sphere and "fortress cities" described by authors in other global cities such as New York (Low 1997) and São Paulo (Caldeira 2000). In other words, spaces as fetishized commodities have become the contemporary medium of practicing the foundational racial and national fictions of Argentina.

The Argentine state's shift from dictatorship to democracy, while simultaneously managing to deepen neoliberal economic policy, implies the progressive negotiation of a particular type of hegemony. Hegemony, which rests upon though is more expansive than the simple economic domination of a particular class (or class fraction), comes to engulf cultural practice in general, itself located within the wider societal context. It is "exercised, therefore, over both institutions and ideas" (Lefebvre 1991:10). Hidden within abstract space we find "concealed by its illusory transparency – the real 'subject', namely state (political) power" (Lefebvre 1991:51). Social space is thus at once the locus, medium, and tool of political power, as the state is fetishized along with the commodity (space) behind which it masks itself.

As discussions of Gramsci's concept of hegemony illustrate, however (Lagos 1993), it is not a teleological endpoint, but an ongoing and fluidly negotiated process in which dominant and subordinate social groups shape each other through historical moments, subject to pressures and challenges not fully under their control. Since social space appears as a tool of hegemony, uncertainty as to its continued production is likewise intertwined with a more general uncertainty as to the reproduction of hegemony.

#### *Renewing hegemony: Argentina's 2001-2003 crisis*

Argentina's 2001-2003 crisis, which culminated in the end of the Convertibility Plan and a default on the external debt, presented a challenge to neoliberal hegemony. Construction activity for the city of Buenos Aires reflects the roller coaster of Argentina's national economy over the last two decades since Carlos Menem's (1989-

1999) presidency (see Appendix A). In the many conversations I had with people on the subject, they spoke of the direct effect the crisis had, generally pushing them into more precarious working positions such as freelancing, scaling back contracting operations, or struggling to find work at all.

There has been considerable debate over the meaning of the 2001-2003 crisis and the forms of protest that took place in Buenos Aires.<sup>32</sup> Juan Carrera (2006) makes the important point that the crisis was *political* as well as economic. Carrera convincingly argues that the payout of the crisis reproduced the national accumulation process through the same political idiom under which it was consolidated in the 1940's: Peronist populism.<sup>33</sup> The meaning of slogans directed at political leaders, such as "*Que se vayan todos!*" ("All of them must go!"), he argues, do not represent a reinvention of politics. They merely represent the pressure by the petty bourgeoisie and the working classes to reproduce the national accumulation process in the context of the downward pressure of unemployment and rising poverty all over the country, and especially in Buenos Aires.<sup>34</sup>

This was echoed to me in many of the conversations on-site that turned to discussion of politics, as many people in construction expressed their hope that Néstor Kirchner would be reelected as president (he also served from 2003-2007, and his wife is currently in office with elections scheduled for later this year). Peoples' reasons for hoping Kirchner would be reelected, as they expressed them to me, were based upon a simple economic reality: at least with him we have jobs.<sup>35</sup> Since 2003, when Kirchner took office, the crisis has actually given way to a construction boom in Buenos Aires (see Appendix A).<sup>36</sup> Economic recovery since 2003 and its political expression in Peronist

populism have thus renewed the national accumulation process upon which Argentina's neoliberal hegemony rests. This situation illustrates how the ongoing process of constructing hegemony is not as simple as a class dictatorship enforceable through violence (as in the 1976-1983 military dictatorship), but requires the active consent of subordinate social groups, now ratified "democratically."

### **Moving between the poles: Franco's story**

The ongoing invisibility of people and places on the periphery of Buenos Aires' Federal Capital is part of this neoliberal hegemony. Ciudad Oculta – and other *villas* like it – still do not figure on maps of Buenos Aires. This type of "cartographic silence" (Harley 1988) both produces and reinforces exclusion from the social and spatial landscape. Notions of citizenship in neoliberal Buenos Aires are posited around racial and class-based idioms of belonging (Guano 2004), and the social invisibility of "slum dwellers" is often expressed around tropes of "foreignness."<sup>37</sup> There is a tendency in all of this to fall back on notions of a dual city – the spectacular consumption of the Federal Capital and the miserable poverty of the *villas* separated by an unbridgeable gulf. The actual relations that emerge in the daily life of the city, however, belie this. Thus, instead of drawing such a sharp dichotomy, I am interested in fleshing out what Javier Auyero (2000) stresses are the relational aspects of social exclusion and neoliberal hegemony in Buenos Aires.

While nearly all of the Bolivian migrants I knew working in construction made the daily trip from somewhere in Greater Buenos to the Federal Capital, not as many

moved between the different social spheres of the city. Franco, a labor contractor from a small town in Cotagaita province, provides an example of someone who can do so – and thus illustrates the interconnections between the poles. Franco is a tall man in his early 40's, with jet-black hair and a very outgoing personality. He was the labor contractor for the Núñez site, as well as two other sites in the immediate area of El Monumental stadium in the affluent neighborhood of Belgrano. Fidel is well known in Ciudad Oculta (and back in Cotagaita, as Martín had told me) among the network of Bolivians from southern Potosí who work in construction. I spent time with Franco in different contexts, riding around in his pickup truck and going to sites at which he contracted, at the soccer games in the Parque Indoamericano (near Ciudad Oculta) on Sundays, and on a few occasions at his home to eat dinner and help his children with their English homework.

The prevalence of social networks as “institutional mediators” among Bolivian migrants in Buenos Aires has been well documented.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, in studying social networks, authors such as Laura Clawson have argued for the need to pay closer attention to the “*active* processes through which they are created and maintained” (2005:238). In an interview with Franco at the Núñez site and in more informal conversations, he told me of his migration to Buenos Aires and subsequent experiences:

Me: So, how did you decide to come to Argentina?

F: Uh...no. My brother came first. And later, he brought us.

Me: And...when you started, you started as an *ayudante* (apprentice)?

F: Yea, yea.

Me: Did you know anything about construction when you started?



F: No, not much. A little, right? A little (*algo*), but nothing about the plans, none of that stuff.

Me: So, did you work on a lot of sites, rising through the ranks, like *ayudante*, *medio-oficial*, *oficial*, like that?

F: No, no. I worked like that just for three months or so. Two, three months... And later, I got a job there doing administrative stuff... Since there were a lot of people there, 300, maybe 400 people there, and they needed someone to take care of the time cards, to supervise that, to regulate the hours. My cousin set that up for me... And I had lots of people working for me in those days. I had about 200 people working for me back then. Until about '96 or '97. But then after that there was no work (*no habia laburo*).

Me: So, since then, you worked in the administrative part?

F: Except later when there was no work. Around '99 I went out to *provincia*, because my father-in-law was an *oficial*, and I learned *carpintería* [carpentry], but I didn't like it very much. I came back after about a year, because there was work again. I had some relatives who had a lot of work, a lot of sites, and they needed someone to help organize it... My cousin, who was a contractor, and still is, had a problem (*un quilombo*) with the company and they got rid of him. And so we got together. And since then we work with the same engineers and architects as we have on this site... But now I have less people working for me, only about 50 now.

Franco, then, has drawn on his own extensive network of immediate kin and extended family in setting himself up as a labor contractor, a position aspired to by many of those working in construction, as it affords more flexibility and demands little to no work on-site. Contracting, as Franco explained to me, consisted of submitting bids for different jobs based on total cost of labor, and, as he said, he and his family in the construction industry work with a pool of architects and engineers.

Franco's active process of creating and maintaining social networks reveals that he is socially and spatially mobile in Buenos Aires. In our experiences together during the workday, we spent most of our time driving around in his pickup truck between a

group of three sites, all in and around the Belgrano neighborhood, dropping off materials and tools he picks from the *deposito* (storage) in the morning. Franco generally spends the Friday *asado* (barbecue), which is the most important social event on construction sites in Buenos Aires, at the Núñez site. Besides his spatial mobility around the city and between sites, he is socially mobile between the worlds of labor and management. On days when there is no *asado*, many of the workers (eighteen of the nineteen at the Núñez site were Bolivian, many from hamlets in Cotagaita province) would walk down the road to a nearby, much larger site, outside of which a Bolivian husband and wife set up shop selling food such as *picante de lengua* and *tucumanas*. Franco, on the other hand, could usually be found at the café on the corner having lunch with the *porteño* engineer. He sometimes extended to me the very *porteño* invitation of “*Che, vamos a tomar una feca?*” (“Want to go have a coffee?”), using the *lunfardo* inversion of syllables on “café.”<sup>39</sup>

Franco likewise has deep and broad relationships with his workers. One of his workers on the Núñez site, who everyone referred to as *El Duende* (The Dwarf), a short man in his late 20’s from near Franco’s hometown in Cotagaita province, is his nephew and godson. As Nicolas (the foreman) explained to me, “*El Duende’s* father abandoned him when he was a baby. Franco always finds him work on one of his sites and looks out for him. He’s like a father to him.” Such ties of *compadrazgo* (referring to the fictive kin relationships of godparents), which is a lifelong relationship, are vital resources to securing work on an ongoing basis.

These ties with his workers extend to Franco's role in organizing two teams for the Sunday soccer leagues in the aforementioned Parque Indoamericano, adjacent to Ciudad Oculta. Most of the players on his two teams work on sites for which he contracts. When his teams were playing, Franco could generally be seen pacing up and down the sidelines yelling out encouragement at his team and sometimes invective at the referees. When his teams were not playing, he made the rounds, talking with people and keeping up his contacts. Sundays at the Parque Indoamericano were an all day affair, and had more than recreational significance, as they supported a bustling cash economy in food and drink, as well as activating the social and kin networks that are part of the social fabric for Bolivian migrants.<sup>40</sup> Since the conflicts over the "squatter Bolivians" that arose during the 2010 census, the park, according to a friend with whom I keep in touch by email, has been fenced off. The *paisanos* have had to find a new place to make their Sunday leagues, a situation that threatens the social fabric of the community and complicates the networking done by people like Franco.

In short, Franco moved between two social and spatial poles of neoliberal Buenos Aires in actively creating and maintaining the social networks crucial to his labor contracting. Equally comfortable eating lunch with *porteño* engineers in Belgrano where he uses quintessential *lunfardo* terms like "feca," or organizing teams on the urban periphery for the Sunday soccer leagues, Franco's experiences belie the idea that the class and spatial polarizations of neoliberal Buenos Aires have created an unbridgeable gulf between the insulated Federal Capital and the surrounding areas of Greater Buenos Aires. The meanings of the neoliberal state and urbanization in Buenos Aires are rendered

complicated and contradictory by the construction industry in general. Laborers from migrant communities who have reconstituted in other *villas* like Ciudad Oculta are building sometimes on top of and around the areas once home to now eradicated *villas*. Their alienation from the products of their labor is expressed as a wider exclusion from the city of Buenos Aires and, by extension, the Argentine nation.

## **Conclusions**

Contemporary Bolivians' movements between Andean Bolivia and Buenos Aires engage multiple historical trajectories. An expression of historically deep processes of subsistence movement, they are also caught up in projects of neoliberal globalization as they have played out in both Bolivia and Argentina. The ethnographic examples from this chapter have delineated what I saw as four major types of movement, each characterized by different wage-laboring strategies.

The process of urbanization and state practices in Argentina's neoliberal period which Bolivian migrants are both constitutive of and subject to is exceedingly complex. Philip Abrams argued that demystifying the state is a task that calls for "attending to the senses in which the state does not exist rather than to those in which it does" (1988:82). Yet, as Fernando Coronil argues, by dividing the "state system" and "state idea," and privileging the latter, Abrams misses that "[T]he process of masking is active – it entails not concealing a pre-existing reality but trans/forming it" (Coronil 1997:114).

The active transformation entailed by neoliberalization in Argentina has been in no small part a spatial transformation of Buenos Aires. The eradication of *villas* has given

way not only to the production but also the *fetishism* of space. This fetishism of space is instrumental in inducing the historical amnesias and selective imaginings of the Argentine nation. As the production and commodification of space proceeds, it is within social space that the political power of the state operates while the material record of its operation is effaced. In short, historicizing the spatial practices of the Argentine state reveals its active presence in reconfiguring the relationships between land, labor, and capital, including the eradication of the *villas* that have now been built over.

Bolivian migrants occupy an uneasy position vis-à-vis the Argentine state. While many work in construction, helping produce the segregated urban cityscape of Buenos Aires, social space itself has become a tool of neoliberal hegemony. Authors such as Cindi Katz (2001) argue that migrant labor subsidizes wealthier nations, yet in Buenos Aires the mayor blames “uncontrolled migration” for the city’s problems. Hegemony, in short, entails the mutual and ongoing shaping of dominant and subordinate groups. Thus, attention to the relational aspects of social exclusion reveals that the class and spatial polarizations of Buenos Aires are unevenly lived. As Franco’s movements between two spatial and social poles of the city demonstrate, social exclusion and neoliberal hegemony in Buenos Aires are relative and processual – not static and absolute. Thus, beginning in the next chapter, I will shift my focus from this historical contextualization of migration, wage labor, urbanization, and the state to consider the practical and relational aspects of the labor process in Buenos Aires’ construction industry.

### **Chapter Three – The *obra*: phases of construction, organization on-site, rhythms of work**

#### **Introduction: Construction boom in the Federal Capital**

In the context of Buenos Aires' post-2003 construction boom, a curious set of activities spill out onto the streets of the Federal Capital. Huge cement trucks can be seen roaming around, belching out exhaust and partially blocking the one-way streets outside of construction sites as they pump cement into the bases and columns of buildings under construction. While smartly dressed *porteños* navigate the streets, hailing taxis and buses on their way around the city, men in dirty work clothes and boots, and a series of colored helmets – blue, yellow, green, white – can be seen loading and unloading construction materials. Bricks, loads of sand, rebar, PVC piping, wood planks, arrive and workers duck into and out of hardware stores and the ubiquitous *supermercados* (supermarkets, similar to convenience stores) to buy tools as well as food and drink for their lunch.

Sites are blocked off by metal doors covered with periodically changing advertisement posters for Hollywood movies. Passersby are confronted with trucks dropping off or picking up materials, as well as the loud sounds of drilling, workers whistling to one another, and yells of “Che!” (literally ‘Hey!’), as someone on one floor yells up or down to get the attention of someone else. Inside, the sites are bustling with activity, at least one person (and sometimes more) throwing sand and cement into a mixer

to send up one bucket at a time to the upper floors, where workers are laying brick, doing the walls inside or on the exterior of the buildings, or any other of the myriad tasks involved in construction work.

*The labor process: Actions and subjectivity*

In describing the capitalist production process in the *Grundrisse*, Marx (1973) focuses, in part, on the creation of surplus value, which is to say the objectification of labor by capital. Yet he also identifies (though does not really explore) the subjective opening for creative activity, as the objectification of the relationship between labor and the raw materials and instruments of production is suspended in the production process, when labor “can be present only as the *living subject*” (1973:272). In this subjective moment, “*living labour makes instrument and material in the production process into the body of its soul and thereby resurrects them from the dead*” (Marx 1973:364, italics in original).

Wage labor and the appropriation of surplus value (surplus labor time) rests on the separation of labor from its product, but work itself – creative activity – cannot happen without the subjective moment of labor’s engagement with raw materials and the instruments of production. This subjective moment is the labor process. According to Michael Burawoy (1979:15), the subjective moment of labor gives rise to “two analytically distinct but concretely inseparable components – a relational and a practical aspect.” The relational aspect is the relations of production, or “the relations of the shop

floor which workers enter into, both with one another and with management,” writes Burawoy, while

In its practical aspect the labor process is a set of activities that transform raw materials into useful objects or fractions of useful objects with the assistance of the instruments of production. This involves labor, the expenditure of effort, the translation of the capacity to work into actual work, of labor power into labor. It is in the practical activity that the human species exhibits its potential for creativity, while the relational aspect expresses the potential for an ethical community of freely associated producers (Burawoy 1979:15).

So, there is more at stake in the labor process than exploitation: the organization of tasks and social interactions, the coordination and circulation of materials, human-machine interactions, time-discipline, techniques, games, camaraderie and conflict (Burawoy 1979; Willis 1977; Suchman 2007; Spittler 2009; Harvey 1982:106-119; Braverman 1998).<sup>1</sup>

The question remains, however, of what *types* of actions we are talking about in the transition from labor capacity to specific labor, as well as how to talk about “action” itself, both generally and specific to the construction industry. Immediately it is necessary to recognize that action is shaped by constraints and conditions – material, social, cultural, institutional – lest we be seduced into an “imaginary anthropology of subjectivism” (Bourdieu 1990:42-51), of action as pure and unconstrained intentionality. On the other hand, neither is the creative action of living labor simply the mechanical execution of plans. Lucy Suchman (2007:70) utilizes the concept of “situated actions” to “underscore the view that every course of action depends in essential ways on its material and social circumstances.”



Thus, in describing the practical and relational aspects of the labor process, my goal is to flesh out construction sites as dynamic spaces of actions and interactions, where social relationships are context dependent yet often far exceed the workplace. I envision construction sites themselves as dynamic entities that conduct large flows of energy, in interaction with the creative activity of living labor. The almost constant movement of people and materials into and out of the site is well captured by Henri Lefebvre's description of a building as a "complex of mobilities" (1991:93). According to Lefebvre, the opaque abstractness of a building hides the dynamic flows of energy taking place within, causing the "users" of space to abstract themselves in relation to it, precluding any criticism of abstract space.<sup>2</sup> An even cursory review of the labor process in construction helps illuminate the mobilities within and beyond.

### **Phases of construction and organization of the *obra*<sup>3</sup>**

The great majority of my on-site participant observation was done at Caballito One. Initially I was only able to stay during lunchtime, until the building company received some documentation needed for accident insurance to cover me while on-site. Even being on-site during lunchtime put me in a bit of a gray area. This was made abundantly clear to me one day when, arriving at Caballito One as usual, I reached in to lift the latch on the metal doors from the outside and walked into the site to see a woman holding a clipboard standing in front of me, and Ricardo (the foreman) walking towards us and giving me a throat-slashing gesture. I interpreted this as a sign that I should leave immediately (which I did). Ricardo later called me and told me when it was safe to come

back. It turns out the woman was there to do an inspection of the site, which had been happening frequently all over the city in the wake of a building collapse that killed two people due to an adjoining construction site that was not following building code. As I did not have insurance at that point, my being there even during lunchtime put the building company at risk for a fine.

Most of my description of the labor process comes from my time working on Caballito One. Hence the bricklaying phase of construction provides the foundation for much of my understanding of the practical aspects of the labor process. My time working was largely spent on the bottom floor with Miguel, a heavy-set man in his 30's who grew up in various parts of the valleys, highlands, and lowlands of Bolivia. Miguel's main task was preparing the various mixes and sending them to the upper floors, which I assisted in. This task was generally designated to an *ayudante* (apprentice), as it required the least amount of skill to perform and the most consistent heavy lifting.

Miguel had started at Caballito One as an *ayudante* just a week before I began spending lunches there. When Jorge, the *ayudante* whose back and forth movements I described in Chapter Two, quit (see Chapter Five), the job of preparing mixes fell mainly to Miguel. I assisted in this set of tasks most afternoons once I was able to stay on-site during the work, and Ricardo pitched in as needed while supervising tasks on the upper floors. Ricardo and Miguel became two of my closest informants on-site, helping me understand the rhythms of the work and learning how to prepare the mixes, as well as just hanging out and shooting the breeze by our improvised coffee station on the bottom floor during some of our few slower moments. Sometimes I was left for short periods to take

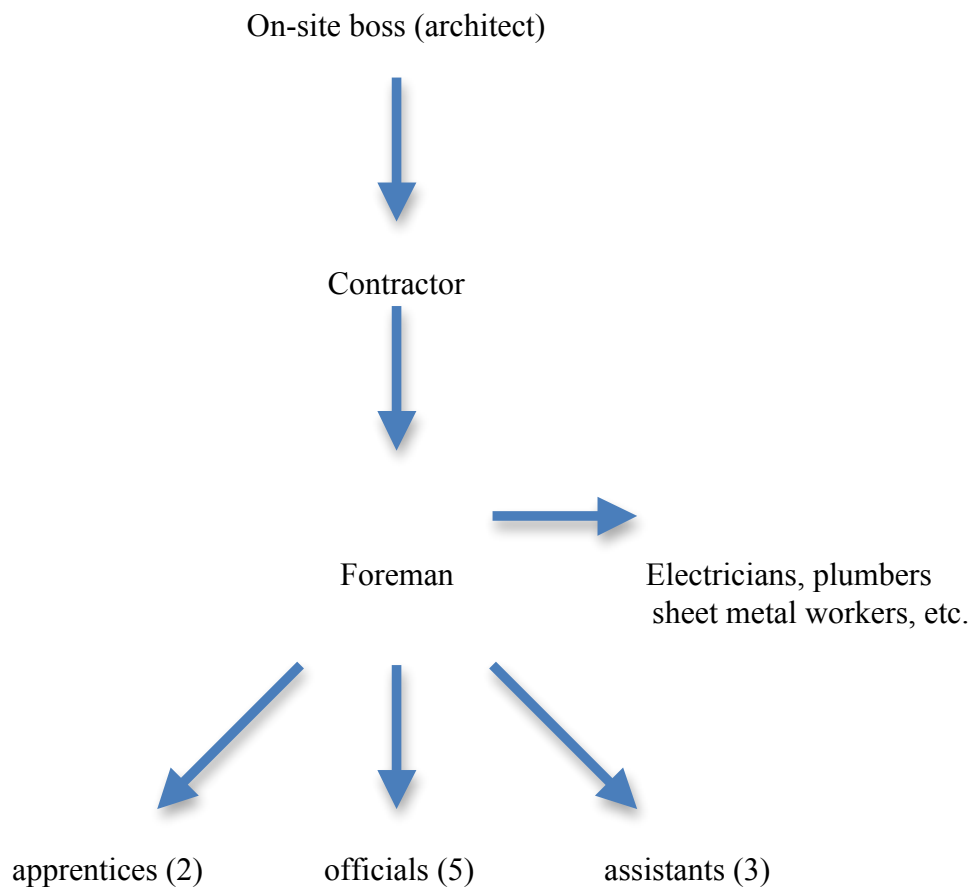
care of filling and sending the buckets up the *noria* – literally the “water wheel” – the system of circulating most materials between the floors. Otherwise, I would take advantage of some of the lulls in the action to go, sometimes with Ricardo, other times by myself, to the upper floors to check out the work and chat with people.

Tasks are delegated through a hierarchy on-site that varies slightly depending on which phase of construction is underway, how many workers are involved (more than forty requires a delegate from the union), and the practices of the building company. There is usually someone in the position of *jefe de obra* or *mayor de obra* (both roughly meaning “on-site boss”) who is in charge on-site, though not always directly overseeing the work. This position can be filled *de facto* by the architect or engineer on sites with relatively few workers.<sup>4</sup> The contractor, while technically a superior to the *capataz* (foreman), has varying presence on the *obra*. Franco was much more regularly present at the Núñez site than the contractor at Caballito One, for example, whom I only saw once during the entirety of my fieldwork.

The *capataz* is the hinge between management and labor, directing and supervising tasks on a daily basis. His status is reflected in the reservation of the white helmet for use only by the *capataz*. Other work groups must coordinate their comings and goings with the *capataz*, as well. At Caballito One, for example, when the electricians arrived to begin work, they coordinated with Ricardo to let him know they were going to begin working and to find out where they could make a spot for their tools and personal belongings. Under direct supervision of the *capataz* is the crew that corresponds to the stage of construction underway (though there is usually some overlap). There are three

general positions directly supervised by the *capataz* – *ayudante* (apprentice), *medio-oficial* (assistant), and *oficial* (official). Generally, the bricklaying crew used yellow helmets and the electricians used blue, though this was not as strictly followed as the reservation of the white helmet for the *capataz*.<sup>5</sup> The following is the hierarchy on-site at Caballito One:

Structure of the obra – Caballito One



**Figure 3.1 – Structure of the site at Caballito One.**

The division of labor on construction sites is extensive, and no one person ever sees all of the work, so any description of the various phases as a totality is necessarily a synthetic account. Moreover, the labor process is, in general, less mechanized in Buenos Aires than in metropolitan centers of the United States, particularly regarding the pouring of bases and columns. This was explained to me by Nicolas, the foreman on the Núñez site who had also lived and worked for a time with his cousin in Arlington, Virginia (see Chapter Two). According to Nicolas, whereas the bases (cement floors) are prefabricated and lowered onto the columns via a crane on sites in the U.S., in Buenos Aires most companies still have relatively set schedules (usually every fifteen days) for cement trucks to come and pump the *hormigón* (a mix of cement, stone, sand, water, and additives) into the rebar reinforced wooden frames for the columns and bases.

At Caballito One, the ten-story apartment building was being built over the remains of a three-story structure. So, because they were not building the walls from scratch on these floors, the existing brick had to be cut down to get the walls that would be put over them to the proper dimensions. There was something of a shortage of hand drills for this ongoing task, such that certain crew sometimes spent hours at a time with chisel and handheld sledgehammer knocking off this old layer of brick one swing at a time. One day as I was doing this with Mariano, an early 20's *cotagaitaño* (as men from Cotagaita are called) whom I had known during my time in the Peace Corps, the owner of the building company, Francisco, passed through and remarked to me about the relative lack of mechanization "We do things very much by hand here, no?"

There are four main phases of construction, which overlap at various points: 1) preliminary preparations; 2) pouring of bases and columns; 3) bricklaying; and 4) installation of tiling. I will not try to describe all of the actions that go into each of these phases, but instead give a general idea of how work proceeds between the phases.<sup>6</sup>

Preparations: The main preparation is to put up a break room and bathroom for the crew. This is usually a pretty ramshackle area with a lunch table, hooks for the crew to hang their belongings, and a bathroom with a few stalls and showers, since the crew usually bring their work clothes with them on the bus in the morning, change there, then shower and change back at the end of the day before taking the bus ride back home. On Caballito One, the pre-existing structure included what had been a pool house, as well as a nice barbecue pit, making it ideal for the Friday *asados* (barbecues) that were the major social event of the week on-site. Attached to this lunchroom were the living quarters of Mario, one of the two Paraguayans on-site, who had been living there for over a year since they broke ground. This lunchroom was significantly nicer than any of the others I saw and, as I was told, much nicer than what is usually found on-site. Connected by wooden steps to the pool house/lunchroom were the bathroom facilities where the crew hung their towels and showered at the end of each day, outside of which Mario had a clothesline strung up to hang his clothes out to dry. This phase thus also requires that plumbers and electricians enter to install plumbing and electrical connections.

Pouring of bases and columns: Before the pouring of bases and columns is the *replanteo*, or marking of two points on the floor as reference points in Cartesian space for future

tasks. With reference to the *replanteo*, any necessary excavation is done. As there are virtually no sites in the Federal Capital that have not been already built upon, whatever excavation takes place is to sink the shafts into which the base floor columns will be sunk. I did not have a chance to observe any excavation at all, but Patricia Vargas (2005:39), who was able to observe it for a ten-story building in the same neighborhood of Caballito, notes that a backhoe was used to dig the shafts about three meters deep. Once the shafts are sunk, the *carpinteros* (carpenters) begin work putting together the *encofrados* (wooden frames) into which is poured the *hormigón*. This consists of horizontal (for bases) and vertical (for columns) wooden frames reinforced with a rebar grid and fastened together with wire, the horizontal frame that appears as the ceiling from below acting as the floor for the subsequent level. Within the rebar grids, electricians and plumbers install metal boxes that house electrical and plumbing connections.

I was able to observe the *hormigonada* (pouring) for the subfloor and fifth floor base and columns at the Núñez site. Franco, as per our usual arrangement when I went to visit his site, picked me up on a corner near my apartment and took me to the site, this time carrying two machines called *helicopteros* (helicopters) in the back of his pickup truck. These are fans housed within a metal cage and aimed downward, gliding along a recently poured area to smooth and dry the surface. Franco and I arrived for the pouring of the subfloor (which will be the garage).



Figure 3.2 – The cement truck arrives for the *hormigonada*. The engineer stands next to the truck.



Figure 3.3 – The truck pumps the *hormigón* through the snaking hose, seen on the ground, filling the rebar grid on the subfloor.



Figure 3.4 – *Hormigón* is pumped up to the fifth floor to fill the *encofrados* of base and columns. One of the workers “steers” the hose as it pumps the *hormigón*.

The cement truck pumps the *hormigón* in bursts, as a worker “steers” the plastic attachment on the end – a sort of inverted vacuum hose – through which the material flows, spreading it in general proportion, while everyone else (ten to twelve workers for the subfloor) then shovels it around to fill the rebar grids inside the *encofrado* (figures 3.2 and 3.3). Long wooden *frotachos* (trowels) are used to smooth the surface of the horizontal bases and cement powder is sprinkled on top to help it dry. Some time later the *helicopteros* are run over the surface to further smooth it.

The process is largely the same on the fifth floor, though since the area is smaller, there are only eight workers total (figure 3.4). El Duende (Franco’s nephew and godson) uses a sort of large, motorized phallic tube to push the mix into the gap between the sides and floor where base and columns meet, while other workers gently pound along the vertical frames with their hammers to help the material settle into all the cracks and corners of the interior grids. The *hormigón* achieves maximum strength after about 28 days, though most of the vertical frame is taken off, according to Franco, after four days,



and the horizontal frame after fifteen days. After this is done on the base floor, bricklaying can begin, as the *carpinteros* (carpenters) give way to the *albañiles* (bricklayers) who start putting up the walls.



**Figure 3.5 – Caballito One, still in the bricklaying phase.**



**Figure 3.6 – Caballito Two, almost finished. Caballito One will look very similar.**

Bricklaying: Most of my on-site fieldwork was done in the bricklaying phase and I will subsequently discuss various aspects of it in greater detail, such that I will not go into extensive detail here. The crew had already started putting up the walls on the lower floors of the Núñez site before the final pouring of bases and columns. The pouring of bases and columns were done and the crew were well progressed on bricklaying when I started doing participant observation at Caballito One. Suffice it to say that by putting up the walls, adding various layers of mix over them and the floors (as well as over the outside of the building), and accommodating plumbing, electrical, and sheet metal

installations, this phase carries the structure from its bare skeleton of bases and columns to being ready for the final phase of construction.

Ceramic Tiling: In most cases, as it was explained to me, the *colocadores* (tile installers), begin working while the bricklaying is still in progress. The *colocadores* are responsible for installing the ceramic tiling in bathrooms and kitchens. While I did not have a chance to do extensive fieldwork during this phase, on the opportunities I did have I saw that besides the ceramic tiling, tasks during this phase take care of every last detail to prepare the building to be handed over to the tenants.



**Figure 3.7 – Laying the tiling on the sidewalk is one of the last tasks to be completed before the building is ready to be handed over.**

Though they are known as *colocadores* (installers), this is something of a misnomer, as much more goes into this phase than tiling. It includes painting both the inside and outside of the building, installing and connecting the water tanks and boilers, putting in the electrical gate and cobblestone-like brick surface for the garage, installing the elevators, and whatever else needed doing to finish up. Some of these tasks are

contracted out to individual firms who specialize in them, bringing small teams of workers in for short periods of time who are not directly employed by the building company and who move from one site to another doing the same specialized set of tasks.

### **Spatiotemporal orientations of the work**

Along with Marx's insistence that the control of labor-time serves as the basis for the creation of surplus value, studies of the relationships between changing modes of conceptualizing and representing time and the rise of wage labor owe much to E.P. Thompson's (1967) analysis of time, work-discipline, and industrial capitalism. There persisted in 19<sup>th</sup> century England, according to Thompson, a tension between wage labor and task oriented activity, as peoples' allegiances to the leisure time of Saint Monday (sometimes bleeding into a Saint Tuesday) were embedded within "the larger irregularity of the working year, punctuated by its traditional holidays and fairs" (Thompson 1967:76). As time oriented work came to dominate industrial capitalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sociological studies of industrial work such as that of Burawoy (1979) focused their attention on analyses of the game between labor and management of "making out" on piecework rates.

There is a relative autonomy from clock-time that marks the rhythms of the working day on-site. Furthermore, it is the rationality of the product being produced – space – that dictates the task-oriented character of the work. It is an intensely material process, with raw materials being combined and transformed on different time horizons. The drying and setting of the cement bases and columns, for example, necessitates about

a fifteen day wait between the pouring of ascending floors, with interior bricklaying taking place on lower floors at the same time as the *carpintería* of the *encofrados* (wooden frames) for the pouring of subsequent bases and columns.



**Figure 3.8 – The plumbers drill through and chip off walls and floors in order to install the network of pipes – part of the “complex of mobilities” inside the opaque shell of a building.**

Thus, although workers are paid by the hour, they work by task. While various groups (bricklayers, electricians, plumbers, sheet metal workers, etc.) may work simultaneously, the work of any one group generally depends on the work of another group. Just as the bricklayers cannot start putting up the walls on a particular floor until its bases and columns have been poured, plumbers, electricians, and sheet metal workers chip off and drill through the walls put up by the bricklayers where necessary in order to install plumbing installations, electrical wiring, and sheet metal ductwork.

There are general deadlines for such tasks to be completed, which are periodically evaluated between the architects, engineers, and owners of the building companies, as

happened one afternoon when a group of a half dozen or so men came from the building company and walked through the site, going over tasks and their time horizons as Miguel and I sent buckets of mix up the *noria*. Task oriented deadlines can lead to time crunches. In early September, for example, the architect at Caballito Two lost the better part of a week to rain, pushing him up against the October 5<sup>th</sup> deadline to hand the building over to the tenants. As a result, he began pulling a few of people off of Caballito One to go help make up time.

A synthetic view of buildings under construction reveals them as a “complex of mobilities”, conducting large flows of people, materials, and energies – human and machine. The material assembly in Buenos Aires’ construction industry takes place in a highly segmented progression, as different work groups move in and out of sites, depending on other work groups to provide the material foundation on which they complete their work. The work of different groups overlaps, and the development of a building from its foundations into a completed structure occurs over a long period of time, marked by stretches of uneven progress provoked by factors such as weather, unforeseen inspections, and other time delays. There is a clear, though in practice flexible, hierarchy on-site, and the completion of different tasks hinge to a large degree on coordination with the foreman. In the next chapter I will deepen my discussion of the practical aspects of the labor process, focusing especially on the bricklaying phase.

## **Chapter Four – Double vision: Plans, actions, and games in the labor process**

*Eternity is a child at play, playing drafts. The kingdom is a child's.*<sup>1</sup> – Heraclitus

*Children at play are said to ayni with god.*<sup>2</sup> (Mannheim 1986:267)

### **Introduction: Agency as outcome**

In the course of my participant-observation during the bricklaying phase of construction I spent extensive time helping Miguel (and sometimes a third person) prepare the various mixes and exchange materials with people on upper floors. I came to see materials and machines as constitutive of agency, which emerged as an outcome rather than a locatable thing. Materials were thus more than inert objects which only living labor could inscribe with value. They were also media of communication, messages, and mechanisms through which we circulated and exchanged a host of things – buckets of mix, bricks, water, drinks, money, tools, verbal and written exchanges, and so on. In short, agency on-site was diffused through human and non-human entities.

The material assembly itself took on a game-like quality to it, as well. In this way, the creative actions of construction labor articulated with the Andean game of building stone miniatures. The building of miniatures, which express individuals' desires for material items (houses, llamas, alpacas, cars, etc.), is a game first learned as children, but with much larger implications. For young people it is a form of *ayni* (symmetrical

reciprocity) in which the young player “interacts directly with sacred power sources (God, saint, stars)” (Allen 1997:76). These Andean conceptions of human action “are premised on a principle of consubstantiality, the assumption that all beings are intrinsically interconnected through their sharing a matrix of animated substance” (1997:74). As children become adults, they are “drawn from this decontextualised play into a network of adult interactive relationships. An adult person’s basic responsibility in life is to use acquired skills in order to participate in the web of reciprocal exchange...Adults consume the products of each others’ skilled work” (1997:76). Building, then, engages both play-like action and adult interactive relationships, including capitalist wage relations.

Thus, while Michael Burawoy (1979) describes the “playing out” of the capitalist labor process as a game which “manufactures consent” as to the relations of production, in this chapter I will suggest a more expansive notion of the game as it relates to the labor process and cultural conceptions of creative activity. The pervasive Andean game of building miniatures, in my view, finds expression in the labor process of construction work. Andean idioms of reciprocal exchange, feeding, and consumption emerge out of the creative activity on-site through which workers constitute themselves as active subjects. This creative action is also inscribed in capitalist relations of production. Thus, the interactive relationships between the game-like quality of the activity and the extraction of surplus value in the labor process itself is characterized by registers of mutual feeding and consumption, as well as the potential alienation of workers from the labor process and its mediation through the expressive needs of play.

## **Circulation of materials and human-machine interactions, or, feeding and consumption**

### *Circulating materials, coordinating action*

All kinds of materials circulate into and out of the site. Those most in circulation during the bricklaying phase are bricks, sand, cement, lime, and water. Together in varying ratios (and sometimes with a waterproofing agent), they make up the brick walls and the different mixes that go over them and on floors. During my fieldwork, we usually received two dump trucks of sand per week, and one load of cement and lime (usually 50 bags of each). Bricks arrived less often (much of the interior walls were already up by the time I started doing participant-observation), as did giant barrels of the waterproofing agent *Ceresita* added to certain mixes, PVC piping, rebar, sheet metal, and later the bags of plaster used to finally cover the walls before painting. Some of the smaller materials (such as rebar, some specific pipe fittings, or pieces of sheet metal) and certain tools were brought via flatbed truck, by one or both of the young Argentine workers employed directly by the building company, Enrique and Adriano, who enjoyed messing with the Bolivians almost as much as they did partaking of the Friday *asado*.

There were two main mechanisms of circulating materials between the floors of the site, the *noria* (literally “water wheel”) and the *malacate* (winch). Both circulated through what will ultimately be used as elevator shafts. The *malacate* was controlled by a kind of joystick and was used for circulating heavy and bulky materials, such as the wooden beams which supported the scaffolding used to work on the outside of the building. The *noria* was the main artery of the site, circulating materials up and down in a



closed double loop. Every bucket of mix and all bricks flowed upwards, while the buckets full of the brick that was chipped and drilled off the pre-existing walls on the first three floors, as well as any other debris, flowed down to us on the main level, all destined for our ever growing slag heaps lining the walls.

I spent a good deal of time with Miguel on the bottom floor of Caballito One, where we prepared at least two, and sometimes three different mixes: *ceresita*, *cal*, and *carpeta*. *Ceresita* refers to the waterproofing agent added to certain mixes; *cal* uses a greater proportion of lime powder (and no *ceresita*) and is used for the layer that goes over that in which *ceresita* is used (over which goes plaster and finally paint); and *carpeta* is the mix used for the floors and on top of which is added and spread around a water-diluted bonding agent the brand name of which is *Tacuru* (on top of this goes the ceramic tiles).<sup>3</sup> Any of the mixes may be made wetter or dryer simply by adding more or less water to the mix, which we often did upon request.



**Figure 4.1 – The *noria*, main artery of circulating materials; from ground level.**

When we received a bucket with a piece of brick on the main level, it meant *ceresita*, without brick meant *cal* or *carpeta*. If we were using all three mixes, we would tie a piece of white plastic around the bucket handle to indicate either *cal* or *carpeta*. There was also a “doorbell,” which the workers on the upper floors used to get our attention down below. The doorbell consisted of a piece of rebar sitting next to the *noria* on the bottom floor, tied with wire that ran through the shaft to the upper floors. When someone wanted to get our attention they would pick up and drop the rebar a few times via the wire such that it clanged on the metal base of the *noria*. Besides getting our attention to communicate about mixes, they also did so to coordinate the sending up of bottles of water and pop, bricks, big buckets of water, and sometimes written requests for how to change the way we were preparing a mix. Towards the end of the day Miguel would stop the *noria*, whistle up and ask Mariano how much more of the mixes they needed so we knew how much to prepare, trying to avoid having any leftover.

### *Rhythms of work*

“Hey asshole! What’s going on?!” Miguel yells up to Mariano on the sixth floor, stopping the *noria* so that they can hear each other. “Which do you want, goddamnit? *ceresita* or *cal*?!” Miguel then pours out six buckets of mix that have circulated back down to the ground floor. “Fucking Mariano,” he says to me. “He’s fucking things up.” Mariano, after first asking for six buckets of *ceresita*, then changes his mind and asks for *cal*, only to flip-flop again and say he wants *ceresita* after all.



**Figure 4.2 – Buckets of mix riding up the *noria*.**

This chain of communication and circulation connects Miguel and I on the bottom floor to the workers on the upper floors who are working on the interior walls and floors and out on the *balancín* (scaffolding) doing the *revoque* on the exterior of the building.<sup>4</sup> Miguel and I prepare mixes and send them up the *noria*, usually to people (such as Mariano) spread over two or more different floors, who then deliver them to the people who are working on the upper floors, such as David, whose long-term migration I described in Chapter Two. They then collect the empty buckets and send them back down to us to be refilled.

When I began working with Miguel, we had a smaller cement mixer than at the other sites I had visited, such that we made more loads of each mix than we would have with a larger mixer. My field notes from one Tuesday reflect the rhythm of a typical afternoon with the smaller mixer:

Downstairs again w/ Miguel; Ricardo there some of the time, or else upstairs doing *revoque* around one of the doors; 15 batches total (ceresita: 8 cal:7)

13:00 – 13:15                Batches: 2 (ceresita: 2 cal: 0)  
                                  also send up two big buckets of water, which Miguel explains the guys use to wet the walls, wash the buckets as needed

13:35 – 14:00                Batches: 5 (ceresita: 4 cal: 1)  
                                  3 man rotation during this time w/ me, Miguel, Ricardo; me: sand, load the noria, Miguel: mix, shovel Ricardo: noria, shovel; this is the **fastest pace so far**: one batch/ 5 minutes

14:10 – 14:20                Batches: 2 (ceresita: 1 cal:1)  
                                  one dryer batch of ceresita, which Ricardo explains is for around the door frames; *communication* – Ricardo says he will “ring the bell” when he wants the drier mix – rings three times total, 2-3 buckets each time – we mark the drier mix by putting a torn off piece of cement bag in w/ the brick piece

14:45 – 15:15                Batches: 4 (ceresita: 1 cal :3)  
                                  back to two man rotation (Ricardo upstairs doing *revoque* around door frames)

15:30 – 15:45                Batches: 2 (ceresita: 2 cal: 0)

15:45 – 17:00                Finish off by sending up the remaining mix

17:00 – 17:30                Clean-up mixer, buckets w/ water from the barrels, also clean mixing area

\*\*\*

A few weeks after this, the building company brought a larger mixer. “Finally,” says Miguel, “we’re out of the dark ages here,” referring to the bigger mixer. Based on the change in absolute volumes of sand, lime, and cement we used in the new mixer, I estimated it had a capacity about three times that of the smaller one. We prepared the mixes in the following ratios for the new mixer (3 small buckets = 1 big bucket):

Ceresita – 10 big buckets sand; 2 bags cement (50kg each); 3 ½ liters ceresita (+ water)

Cal – 10 big buckets sand; 3 big buckets lime (cal); 3 small buckets cement (+ water)

Carpeta – 10 big buckets sand; 3 small buckets lime (cal); 3 big buckets cement (+ water); Tacuru (plastic based liquid adhesive) diluted w/ water and poured on top of carpeta, then spread with a plastic ended broom.

One afternoon while taking a break and drinking Nescafe at our makeshift coffee station behind the *noria*, about a week after we started using the new mixer, I asked Miguel whether he thought the new mixer made the work easier or harder. He thought for a second and said “Both. Easier because we have to mix fewer loads, but harder because each load requires more of everything.” As I came to notice, the transition complicated things in other ways, too. For example, the increase in the volume of each load meant that come lunchtime there was usually quite a bit left over from the morning. After the mixes had been sitting for an hour during lunch, we had to start up the mixer and shovel some or all of each mix (each shovel-full increasingly heavy as it dries out) into the mixer and throw in a little more water to get it back to the proper consistency.



**4.3 – Miguel and I on the main floor. The new and bigger mixer is directly behind me, as Miguel is in the background using the old one. We had to wait until the next day for the proper cord to plug in the new one.**

Likewise, the increased volume had the unintended problem of excess mix, as it made it more difficult to calculate just the right amount of each mix in the afternoons. Miguel and I sometimes found ourselves having to prepare an extra half a load of something late in the day, while more often Mariano or another worker upstairs would be surprised to hear that we had more left of a mix than they thought, and have to coordinate with the other guys on how to make use of it all.

*Material semiotics: Feeding and consumption*

The forms of communication and exchange that take place on-site open onto a wide spectrum of questions about creative action. I initially attempted to interpret these actions and interactions in the framework of linguistic expression and indexical referents. Lucy Suchman, in exploring the concept of “situated actions,” suggests that communication is rendered mutually intelligible through contextual uses of language, and especially indexical expressions “that rely on their situation for significance” (2007:77). The exchange and circulation of such indexical expressions, furthermore, are themselves situated actions in that their expression and interpretation is an active process constituted and negotiated by listener and speaker.<sup>5</sup>

In other words, the receiver of an instruction must decode the message, so its mutual intelligibility is constituted in the action of its use. In the case of the brick signifying the request for a certain mix, one way to interpret this, it seems, is as a kind of collapsing of code and message: the presence of the brick signifies *ceresita*, its absence signifies whatever the other mix is.<sup>6</sup> Suchman, drawing on Bruno Latour’s Actor

Network Theory (ANT), writes that “agency is understood as a material-semiotic attribute not locatable in either humans or nonhumans. Agency on this view is rather an effect or outcome, generated through specific configurations of human and nonhuman entities” (2007:261).

Such material-semiotic exchanges may be said to emerge out of and in turn structure peoples’ actions and interactions via the *noria*. One afternoon, one of the workers upstairs, Pedro, sent Miguel and I a bucket with a brick piece in it, on which Pedro had written “ablándalo más!” (meaning “make it wetter!”), referring to the fact that the *ceresita* we were sending was a bit dry for their use. In this case, Pedro sent us two messages. First was the material referent of the brick piece, the deployment of which via the bucket on the *noria* communicated the request for *ceresita*. Second was the instruction to wet the mix, which was encoded on the brick itself, in this case transforming the brick piece into medium as well as message.

This “material-semiotic” reading seems generically appropriate, and appears to articulate with the notion of consubstantiality described by Allen, as well (1997). Nevertheless, I think it is insufficient for understanding the deep cultural processes at play here. Suchman’s analysis is situated in relation to written and spoken linguistic referents, such that iconic media communication is simply outside the scope of her inquiry. This is a key point, as I am struck by the *material iconicity* of the textuality. Catherine Allen (1997) argues that the difference between “two types of textuality – symbolic versus iconic, abstract versus concrete – brings to the surface deep prejudices in

a literate society: we think of iconic representation as crude and pictographic, a barbaric precursor of civilised literacy” (1997:82).

In short, it seems to me that a textual reading here based on indexical linguistic expressions and abstract textual communications potentially misses what is really a material, iconic textuality.<sup>7</sup> According to Allen, “these textual strategies must be understood as active, interactional techniques for changing the lived-in world; they include synecdoche (or the envelopment of the whole as part of a larger whole) and play with dimensionality” (1997:74). This “synecdochal thinking” allows for a back and forth movement between spatiotemporal scales.



**Figure 4.4 – Three buckets of *ceresita* waiting to be sent up the *noria*. Miguel and I exchanged buckets with the upper floors – full running up and empty down – both ways with the brick pieces coding them as *ceresita*.**

Such back and forth, reciprocal relationships are powerfully expressed through Andean cultural idioms of “feeding” and “consumption,” both between humans and between humans and cosmological forces (Allen 1997, 2002; Harris 1989; Mayer 2002;



Nash 1993). Moreover, as June Nash's ethnography of tin miners in Bolivia's Oruro department powerfully illustrates (1993), registers of feeding and consumption are not to be relegated to some "traditional" past, incompatible with "modern" contexts of wage laboring, urban life, and market relations.

As loci where cultural registers of feeding and consumption find powerful expression, construction sites, in my view, provide excellent contexts for observing such elasticity of scale. The assembly bears real resemblance to the building of miniatures, and in fact takes place on a sort of miniaturized scale. In part, this is what is so effectively mystified by the opaque shell of a ten-story building – even from the finished inside. Most of the materials, especially those used during the bricklaying phase that make up the interior walls and the smoothed exterior surface (in other words, what goes over the skeleton of the building) circulate one bucket at a time, with tiny pieces of brick acting as an iconic medium through which to coordinate their circulation.

Allen describes Andean notions of exchanging one another's skilled labor in the following way: "I consume my fellows' work (through its products), while my own work is consumed by my fellows" (1997:76). The workers on the other end of the *noria* did not literally consume the cement mixes we sent them, nor did we physically consume the empty buckets they sent back down. The productive consumption on-site emerged as we "consumed" one another's skilled labor in the process of completing our designated tasks – preparing mixes and sending full buckets from below, in exchange for empty buckets as the material results of our skilled labor were assembled above. Such feeding and consumption emerged through the material exchanges and circulation effected via the

*norio*. These situated actions were mediated by iconic, textual strategies that are indeed active, interactive techniques for changing the lived in world.

### **Plans, actions, and games**

#### *Taylorism and the separation of manual and mental labor*

This activity on construction sites, however, is inscribed in capitalist relations of production, including the division of labor. Marx, in Volume I of *Capital*, famously distinguishes human labor in the following manner: “A spider conducts operations which resemble those of the weaver, and a bee would put many a human architect to shame by the construction of its honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax” (1981:284). In other words, what distinguishes human labor is its aspect of previous planning.

Industrialization, as authors such as Harry Braverman have detailed (1998), led to an incredible division of labor during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Braverman, the introduction of Taylorist “scientific management” principles and the consolidation of monopoly capital in the 20<sup>th</sup> century split brain and hands as a means to control the labor process. Writes Braverman, the “*separation of conception from execution*” (1998:79) through concentrating planning in the hands of management is “the most decisive single step in the division of labor taken by the capitalist mode of production” (1998:87). The split, he continues, has given rise to an extensive division of conception-oriented labor and degradation of manual labor, as plans – the “paper replica of production” (Braverman

1998:87) – thus become “scientific” tools to control the labor process. What is the relationship between plans and the creative actions of the labor process? Are plans merely the pre-existing “rules” of the game?

### *Plans and situated actions*

Given the extensive division of labor on construction sites, the relationship between plans and actions is not at all immediately clear. One Saturday afternoon in October, I went to Caballito Two for an *asado*. The building was almost finished and already past its October 5<sup>th</sup> deadline. Victor, Andre, Luis, Enrique, Tomás, and I enjoyed a lunch of sausage, steak, and wine in the courtyard under the increasingly warm afternoon sun when their workday ended at 1:30. The *capataz*, Victor, a Bolivian who hails from just outside Sucre, and Tomás, one of the Paraguayan plumbers, began talking about David, who was filling in as *capataz* on the site around the corner for Ricardo while he recovered from eye surgery. I recorded the following exchange:

V: And the guy [David] really knows the plans.

T: Yea, he does.

Me: That’s something I don’t understand very well. What’s the relationship between the plans and what you guys do everyday? I mean do you guys go over the plans every morning to figure out what you’re going to do that day?

V: Yeah, sure.

Me: But someone like Miguel, he doesn’t need to know the plans in order to mix material down below, right?

V: No, no. Of course not. It’s the *capataz* that has to know the plans.

Me: So, but things like the *faja* and the *enchapado*,<sup>8</sup> are they in the plans?

V: No. The dimensions and measurements are what's there. But things like the *faja* and *enchapado* we figure out as we go. But the *capataz* is the one who has to know the plans. How else would we do the *replanteo* I mean? *Capataz* has to know.

This reality that work proceeds in a “figure it out as we go” manner was further clarified for me one afternoon a few days later.<sup>9</sup> While there was a lull in the action down below at Caballito One, I started my way up the flights of stairs to check things out and talk to people. On the second floor stairwell I came across Pedro doing a *faja* and I took the opportunity to talk him up a little. Pedro is a late 20's man from near Sucre, Bolivia, with an almost permanent grin on his face. He had come to the site after I began my fieldwork, transferring over from Caballito Two, which was almost finished. I felt like he and a small group of those who had come from the other site were suspicious of my presence, although I tried to go out of way to break the ice with them, explaining that I was an anthropology student from the United States who was interested in learning about construction work, and otherwise trying to engage them in casual conversation. Pedro, then, had been somewhat of an enigma for me, and I hoped that talking to him while he was in the middle of something might lower his guard a little. In the course of doing his *faja*, Pedro told me a little bit about himself and his experiences in construction:

P: I learned about construction in Santa Cruz [Bolivia]. I was working in this place that repaired televisions. I didn't like it, and one day this man offered me that if I wanted to learn about construction I could bring my tools [he names them], my trowel (*frotacho*), my level (*plomada*), my tape (*cinta*) and learn. So I bought my tools [looking very proud of himself], and I learned by working as an *ayudante*.

Me: So, you like construction work then?

P: Yup.

Me: What do you like about it?

P: I like this (indicating the *faja* that he is doing).

Me: You mean you like the work itself? The different tasks?

P: Yup, that's what I like.

Thus, while talking to Pedro, I also became more and more interested in the *faja* he was doing. He was going about using his trowel to scoop a small amount of mix from the bucket, throwing it onto the floor, and ever-so-gently pushing a small chipped piece of brick on top, after which he did the same thing about a foot away. Then he used a level to make sure the two sides were even. He subsequently took off the brick pieces from the top and threw more mix with his trowel, repeating the process to smooth what looked like a set of railroad tracks along the ground. Besides the *faja* on the floors before the *carpeta*, it is also done on the walls both inside and on the exterior prior to the *revoque*. The absolute straightness of tracks is not the issue, but rather that the two rails are even in height, as it is a guide to bring whatever is next (*carpeta*, *revoque*) to the proper measurement.

Ricardo had earlier explained to me that the *faja* is a sort of guide for the *carpeta* (floors) and *revoque* (walls). Seeing Pedro doing it (though I had seen it countless other times, including on the other sites), together with my previous conversation with Victor and Tomás helped clarify for me the relationship between plans and actions on-site. Pedro does not know the plans, which is to say the architectural plans and construction blueprints for the building, yet he achieves meaningful action. As Lucy Suchman argues:

Rather than attempt to abstract action away from its circumstances and represent it as a rational plan, the approach is to study how people use their circumstances to achieve intelligent action. Rather than build a theory of action out of a theory of plans, the aim is to investigate how people produce and find evidence for plans in the course of situated action. More generally, rather than subsume the details of action under the study of plans, plans are subsumed by the larger problem of situated action (2007:70).



**Figure 4.5 – Pedro’s *faja* is a material plan for the *carpeta* that will go over it.**



**Figure 4.6 – As with the floors, the *faja* on the wall is a material guide for the *revoque* that will go over it.**

In other words, planning *itself* is a situated action. Pedro's *faja* is a material plan, a guide for the subsequent action of *carpeta* or *revoque*; a material plan dependent upon the circulation of materials, use of tools, and Pedro's know-how. The walls and floors are of course represented in the building plans, and the exact locations of where walls will be erected is gauged with reference to the plans, but the situated actions of putting them up is not, indeed cannot be, contained within the plans.<sup>10</sup>

The precedence of actions to plans echoes Michael Burawoy's (1979) interpretation of the game between labor and management of "making out" on piecework rates in a Chicago area factory. In Burawoy's view, the game can be a tool of critique, implying "some notion of an emancipated society in which people make history for themselves, self-consciously and deliberately" (1979:93). On the other hand, argues Burawoy, it is the game itself that generates consent as to the social relations of production:

It is by constituting our lives as a series of games, a set of limited choices, that capitalist relations not only become object of consent but are taken as given and immutable. We do not collectively decide what the rules of making out will be; rather, we are compelled to play the game, and we then proceed to defend the rules (1979:93).

In other words, argues Burawoy, the game comes before the rules.

In the case of the construction industry, I find that the game-like quality of the activity subsumes planning. Yet, this does not imply an "emancipated society" of free producers. Workers are compelled to play the game, as it is constitutive of their social reproduction. Because this creative action at play in construction work is inscribed in capitalist relations, however, workers defend rules that they do not collectively decide.

*Feeding and consumption revisited: Capitalist metabolism, scales, and games*

At the same time, the game of building miniatures and its expression in waged construction work engages a set of social relations that are not reducible to (indeed do not originate in) capitalist relations of production. Most workers need not know the architectural plans to play the game. The game, then, is the kind of “value template” (Munn 1986) on which young people learn to execute the meaningful action that undergirds social reproduction.<sup>11</sup> The labor process in construction appears here as a kind of recontextualized game characterized by principles of reciprocal exchange and consumption of one another’s skilled work. As a value template, it is a potentiality towards social reproduction.

Furthermore, it is characterized by mutually encompassing, relational positions of scale. The miniaturized actions of material assembly and the totality of the ten-story building are not distinct poles of size, with the “small” scale acting as a metonymical stand-in for the “larger” one. Allen understands synecdochal thinking as a series of mutually enveloping scales, emphasizing “situations in which part and whole are structurally homologous, causing metonymy and metaphor to collapse into each other” (1997:84).<sup>12</sup> Large and small imply one another.

The idiom of feeding and consumption has wider significance, as well. While Marx wrote of the “metabolic interaction” between humans and nature (quoted in Coronil 1997:27), Rosa Luxemburg argued that the entire history of the accumulation of capital is “a kind of metabolism between capitalist economy and those pre-capitalist methods of production” (2003:436).<sup>13</sup> The reciprocal consumption between mines and miners in



Oruro, Bolivia described by June Nash (1993) is a case in point.<sup>14</sup> I suggest, then, a more general reciprocal relationship of feeding and consumption between the capitalist mode of production and games in the labor process. Just as ANT (Actor Network Theory) would suggest that such games are constitutive of agency (Latour 2005), Catherine Allen (1997) emphasizes that the reciprocal consumption of one another's skilled labor materially changes the lived-in world. Agency, as I have described it, emerges as an outcome. The capitalist mode of production feeds on these active transformations. It is not only able to *fashion* games out of the labor process, but to *incorporate* them from a diversity of sources, within the surplus value generating framework of wage labor.

This is not to argue that capitalist relations of production simply dissolve all other forms of social relations that they come into contact with. Rather, it is the ability of the capitalist mode of production to feed on other processes of substance that is, in part, the means of its reproduction. Nevertheless, the game does not belong to capital in any ultimate sense – construction did not begin with capitalism, after all. It is formally appropriated into the labor process, as a moment of capital, but the content and spatiotemporal horizon of the game is not reduced to that of capital as a material process and a set of relations. The game was played before capitalism and its horizon projects beyond it. The relational positions of scale that are engaged on-site articulate with the transactional order of social reproduction. As Bloch and Parry argue (1989), this transactional order engages with, but is not reducible to, the individual gain associated with capitalist relations of production and wage labor (see Chapter Six).

### *Double vision*

Recognizing such deep cultural processes can be difficult. In *The Phantom Gringo Boat* Stephanie Kane (2004:68-75) describes her experience among the Emberá of Panama, as she observed the creative activity of transforming a natural object (tree) to a cultural object (canoe). Canoe building, according to Kane, is a skill taught to younger men by older men, that they may become qualified to live with a woman. It is mediated by actions of “feeding” the canoe, which must “eat” in order to be transformed from a “dead” to a “living” object. She notes that a cross of sticks is left on top of the object after each day’s work, in order to ward off the devil from poisoning it. Writes Kane:

Not only did I not see the cross...but I picked it up *thinking it was a child’s toy*, took it apart, threw one part aside, and proceeded to measure the length of the canoe!...Because of the fusion of magic and measure, symbol and carpenter’s tool, in the form of a single object, I would have assumed that the significance of this object lay fully within the realm of practical function (2004:74-75, emphasis added).

Kane’s recognition that the cross actually had a dual existence led to “the development of a kind of double vision” (2004:75), necessary to perceive what was obvious to everyone around her.

A number of important points emerge from Kane’s analysis. Though she does not expand on it, I think her mistaking of the cross for a child’s toy is itself an important insight. It resonates with the game-like quality involved in cultural processes of material transformation, which is ethnological in scope. Furthermore, as a skill meant to give young men the qualifications to live with a woman, canoe building appears as intimately tied to social reproduction. In both of these ways – its game-like quality and social

reproductive capacity – it resonates with the Andean game of building of miniatures and notions of *ayni*.

Kane's own cultural displacement in her fieldwork is crucial, as well. Her admission that "my empirical bias would have led me to be perfectly satisfied with a unidimensional view of things" (2004:75) reinforces Allen's injunction (1997) over the cultural bias accorded to abstract, written textuality. Such biases can blind fieldworkers to the variability of communicative media used to coordinate the creative activity at play in any given situation, as well as its wider connections to material transformation and social reproduction. My recognition of the possible deep cultural forces at play in the labor process was anything but immediate. Only through the type of critical reflection suggested by Paul Stoller (1980) have I been able to question my own possible biases inherent in my participant-observation.

### **Feeding and consumption as generative of camaraderie and conflict on-site**

Practices of feeding and consumption are likewise important as they mediate social interaction between the workers apart from the work itself. At Caballito One, they became key contextual generators of camaraderie and conflict. Lunchtime, and especially the weekly (every Friday) *asados*, were the most important arena of building and expressing masculine camaraderie on-site, as well as the locus of an ongoing conflict that fractured this camaraderie along lines of nationality.

### *The asado*

Ricardo nearly always organized the *asado*, fronting the money to buy the meat, collecting from everyone afterwards, and often manning the grill. Besides the food, drinking wine during the *asado* and often (though on the sly) during the rest of a Friday afternoon was a major source of enjoyment for much of the crew. After eating, we would generally sit around for an extra hour, until 2:00 PM (lunch ends Monday – Thursday at 1:00 PM), telling jokes and stories, listening to music, giving one another a hard time, reminiscing about something, making plans for the weekend, and talking about whatever was going on at the time, from the World Cup to the global economic crisis. In short, the Friday *asado* was the most important social event on-site during any given week, and also provided me with some of my best opportunities for fieldwork.

The break-room at Caballito One was especially well suited to the *asado* due to the pre-existing structure there, putting the break-room in what had been a pool house, including a *parrilla* (barbecue pit), and even small living quarters for one of the Paraguayan workers who had lived there for over a year. Whereas the *parrilla* at Caballito Two was generally improvised over a wheelbarrow, at Caballito One the bona fide *parrilla* allowed for a more extensive *asado*, such that a number of workers came over from Caballito Two, as did Adriano and Enrique (the two Argentines employed directly by the building company) on a regular basis, often swelling the group to between fifteen and twenty people for the Friday *asado*.



**Figures 4.7, 4.8 – The barbecue pit was significantly nicer at Caballito One (top) than Caballito Two, often drawing people over on Friday afternoons for an extended lunch of meat and wine, generating both camaraderie and conflict on-site.**

I regularly brought the wine – two liters each of red and white, along with three two-liter bottles of grapefruit flavored soda to mix with them, which we achieved by cutting off the top half of an empty two-liter bottle and using the bottom half as a communal gourd to pass around the table. The consumption of alcohol, which was only ever officially allowed in the context of the *asado*, increasingly became a serious point of

contention between the crew and the management, as well as between certain of the workers. Ricardo filled me in one Monday on what had happened after our *asado* the previous Friday.

The electricians, he said, had carried on a bit too much with their drinking, and did not actually work at all Friday afternoon (I had seen them roasting an entire pig on a makeshift grill outside the break room). While probably not totally unusual, such a situation was certainly not appreciated by the management. At this point, however, Guillermo, the *porteño* architect, only had an office around the corner at Caballito Two, and Francisco, the owner of the building company, only occasionally came to either site. Unless someone told them, or they happened to catch the electricians red-handed (unlikely), they probably would not have been aware of an afternoon off for the electricians.

As Ricardo told it, Mario – one of two young Paraguayans on his crew – had told the bosses about the electricians’ shenanigans. Mario, who had been living at Caballito One for over a year, previously explained to me that he hoped to stay on as the maintenance/doorman when the building was finished. In Ricardo’s view, Mario had ratted out the electricians to curry favor with the management, hoping that it would help his chances of being kept on when the building was finished. “That Mario,” Ricardo said to me, “you have to be careful of him.”

Mario’s supposed ratting out of the electricians marked a turning point both for his relationship with the rest of the crew and on-site camaraderie. The timing of the incident coincided closely with the need to regularly bring a few workers from Caballito

One over to Caballito Two to help work there, as they were behind schedule and not far off from the intended completion date. Since the decision of whom to send over was Ricardo's, he chose Mario first every time, effectively banishing him for long stretches from Caballito One.

The situation created obvious tension during lunchtime, and especially regarding the consumption of alcohol during the Friday *asados*. Because Mario lived in the quarters attached to the break room at Caballito One, he was often around during lunchtime, though he had clearly gotten the message that he was something of a pariah. Many of the crew, who plainly did not trust him, often ate together in small groups on one of the upper floors if Mario was eating in the break room. Likewise, alcohol became something of a gray area. I still brought wine for the Friday *asados*, though Ricardo was generally very circumspect about having it out in the open. He assured me that management said it was still alright to drink, but that it had to be absolutely limited to the break room and only during the *asado*.

*Conflicts over time and consumption: The idiom of nationality*

The situation reached a breaking point one week when there was an incident involving alcohol consumption and one of the machines on-site. Eduardo, a 20 year-old born in Argentina to Bolivian parents, had been on-site for only about a month. On Friday, as was related to me the next day (I went to the *asado* at Franco's site that day), he and some others had been drinking during lunch and on into the evening after the shift ended, when Eduardo supposedly started messing around with the cement mixer. When

the management somehow caught wind of it, Eduardo was fired. Wearing a Barcelona soccer jersey and toting his backpack, Eduardo came in the next Monday to get his *libretta* (work papers) from the architect, and we chatted about the situation before he left:

E: That fuckin' Paraguayan [referring to Mario] went and told the bosses. We drank like usual at lunch, then I drank more in the afternoon. But I didn't mess with the machine like he [Mario] said. That's a lie...I got drunk a little, yeah. But we're supposed to be *compañeros* here. He shouldn't have done that. Fuckin' *paragua*.

Eduardo, in his interpretation of the situation, felt betrayed by Mario, who he thought should have showed loyalty to him as a fellow worker, instead of trying to get in good with the bosses. Likewise, he repeatedly attributed what he saw as his lack of loyalty to his nationality, using the derogatory term of *paragua* for him.<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 4.9 – The management formally banned alcohol consumption on-site after a worker supposedly got drunk and tampered with a cement mixer. The sign reads “Consumption of alcoholic beverages prohibited on-site. Anyone who does so will be punished. The management.”**

As a result of the incident alcohol consumption on-site was officially prohibited by the management and Mario became a total outcast on-site. He worked almost



exclusively at Caballito Two, despite the fact that his living quarters were at Caballito One. Conversation literally stopped in his presence, as the other workers just glared at him until he left their immediate area, then cursed him after he was gone.

As Michael Burawoy describes the dispersion of conflict on the shop room floor of a Chicago-area factory (1979:65-71), hierarchical conflict between labor and management was redistributed as lateral conflict and competition, worker/management conflict thus boomeranging around as worker/worker conflict:

Common sense might lead one to believe that the conflict between workers and managers would lead to cohesiveness among workers, but such an inference misses the fact that all conflict is mediated on an ideological terrain, in this case the terrain of making out (1979:67).

Behind this game of making out lies the control of time – the ability of workers to earn incentive pay potentially impinging upon management’s ability to extract surplus value. At Caballito One, the ideological terrain was also that of time – the conflict between the weekly rhythm of the *asados* and the potential threat they posed to productivity. The latent conflict between workers and management over productivity and worker safety on the one hand, and alcohol consumption on the other, boomeranged to divide the workers over Mario’s perceived disloyalty, itself borne out of his ambition to “get in good with the bosses” and his desire for upward mobility from construction worker to maintenance man. This conflict over consumption was repeatedly interpreted and played out along lines of nationality – all part of the “guerilla warfare” (Harvey 1982:117) waged in the labor process.<sup>16</sup>

## **Alienation: From product and process?**

### *Alienation as a relation of property*

Marx, in the *Grundrisse*, argues that alienation is a relation of property (1973:157, 196, 295, 306-08). That is, because the products of creative activity are separated from the workers who produce them in order to be thrown into circulation and exchanged for money, workers are alienated from the products of their labor. Moreover, because workers divest themselves of their capacity for work, selling it as a commodity for a predetermined value expressed as the price of their money wage, workers become alienated from their own productive activity.<sup>17</sup> In other words, alienation emerges as a relation of property in a double sense: both from the products of labor, and, because labor capacity is sold as a commodity, from the creative activity of the production process itself.<sup>18</sup>

A general alienation (seen as a relation of property) from the products of labor can hardly be denied. In the capitalist mode, production takes place for exchange, which is to say the production of use values for others. Alienation from the production process is less clear. To be sure, wage laborers sell their labor capacity, a commodity like no other. But what of this on the subjective experience of laboring? In describing labor as a “fictitious commodity,” Karl Polanyi (2001:71-80) argues that a total commodification of labor capacity is actually impossible:

For the alleged commodity ‘labor power’ cannot be shoved about, used indiscriminately, or even left unused, without affecting also the human individual who happens to be the bearer of this peculiar commodity. In disposing of a man’s labor power the system would, incidentally, dispose of the physical, psychological, and moral entity ‘man’ attached to that tag (2001:76).

So, as Marx would have it, the commodification of labor capacity leads to a fundamental alienation of worker from the products of their labor and their labor itself, while according to Polanyi, a total commodification would do away with society.

In the course of my fieldwork, I encountered a variety of attitudes towards construction work. Some people did it literally for one day and never showed up again. Some others, when I asked them what they thought of the work, replied that it was *más o menos* (meaning “more or less”), explaining that while they did not really care for the work one way or another, they at least got paid for it. Others who found the work *más o menos* expressed a sense of camaraderie beyond either the work or the paycheck. One day, for example, Miguel and I were down below preparing the mixes, as usual, though without Ricardo, who was at home recovering from eye surgery after a bucket of mix fell from the *noria* and hit him in the face. Miguel, Ricardo and I, when not preparing mixes, spent a good deal of time hanging out, talking over coffee or *mate*, and sometimes chewing coca leaves, subject to Ricardo’s having them.<sup>19</sup> In Ricardo’s extended absence, Miguel said to me one day that he might quit if Ricardo does not come back soon (though he was still working there when my fieldwork finished, despite Ricardo’s limited presence while continuing to recover). Still others – especially those who had been doing construction work for a long time – indicated that they really liked it. David, for example, told me of how he learned about construction work over the years and his enjoyment for it:

David: Well, the first time I went to work was when I was 14. Which wasn’t just brick-laying (*albañilería*), it was a little bit of everything. First I worked on parquet floors, later as an apprentice (*ayudante*).

Me: And how did you learn when you were 14? Did you learn by helping out family? Or on a site?

David: First with my old man, helping him on the house where we live now. Building our house I learned little by little.

Me: Where do they have a house, your parents?

David: There in Mataderos.

Me: So you learned first there working on your parents' house...?

David: Sure, I would put in the windows and stuff. Then I took any type of job I could get until I came to like *albañilería* the most.

Me: And, it seems like you want to keep working in construction?

David: Yeah, I like it. Because, truth is I really never liked to study. Never. I'd like to keep advancing to *capataz* or *mayor de obra*, that's my goal.

Nicolas, the *capataz* on the office-building site in Núñez, expressed even more forcefully his enjoyment of construction work and the site itself:

Me: And, the work? Do you like to work in construction?

Nicolas: The *obra*? I stop working on the *obra* and I would die.

Me: Really? What is it that you like about the *obra*?

Nicolas: I like all the movement, the action. Being on site is like being at home for me. Home is sometimes...kind of boring. Here on the site you can be a little rebellious, you laugh about everything, you bust each other's balls. You don't get that at home....I love the *obra*.

While such attitudes towards construction work were by no means uniform, those who expressed them were drawn by the action of the construction site – their engagements with materials and instruments of labor, performing the different tasks, and the camaraderie and sense of playful rebellion they shared with their coworkers. Such

experiences, it seems to me, clearly exceed the economistic understanding generally accorded to “labor.”

### *Mediating alienation*

In suggesting that the Andean game of building miniatures finds expression in the labor process in construction, I am trying to embrace a wider understanding of “labor” and “production.” Henri Lefebvre pulled the Marxist concept of alienation beyond its economic limitations, arguing that it belongs to the realm of everyday life and not just the context of labor.<sup>20</sup> This works both ways, and the workplace has greater potential as a locus to assert creativity than often recognized – in spite of the “degradation of work” (Braverman 1998) under monopoly capitalism. Lefebvre (1991) drew a distinction between works as something unique and not exchangeable, and products, which are reproducible by definition. Moreover, according to Lefebvre, products have come to dominate works.<sup>21</sup> Yet, there is nothing final in this vanquishing of works by products, such that they may have a dialectical relationship “in which works are in a sense inherent in products, while products do not press all creativity into the service of repetition” (1991:77).<sup>22</sup>

Lefebvre also argues that play is a fundamental attribute of human beings (2008:180-193). The labor process on the *obra* (again, *obra* meaning both “site” and “work”), as a recontextualized game, a place of playful rebellion and reciprocal feeding and consumption, suggests that there exists in the labor process an opening for creative activity that is not, as Lefebvre puts it, completely pressed into the “service of repetition.”

This is not to argue that there is nothing repetitive about the work, or the products, but that the alienation of workers from their creative activity is not total. The creative activity at play within the space and time of the labor process thus exists in a certain tension with the dictates of capital accumulation. Labor and its game-like quality are inscribed in the capitalist relations of production, which “feed” on it in the labor process, as the workplace emerges as the site of an ongoing dialectic of alienation.

Often through idioms and practices of feeding and consumption, the tensions between the creative activity of the labor process and the capitalist relations of production manifest in myriad ways on-site. The relationships between plans and actions, symbols and icons, camaraderie and conflict, labor and management are not stark dichotomies, but relational positions within social processes of production. The workplace thus emerges as a site of alienation and its mediation. This chapter has focused on the practical and relational aspects of the labor process in the context of a construction site. These two aspects, though analytically separable, are part of the same process of securing and obscuring surplus value in the labor process. Value circulates outside of the workplace, moreover, as surplus value extracted in the labor process is realized as profit within larger systems of exchange and circulation. Thus, the relational aspects of the labor process are not generated strictly within the workplace. There are further complications, as the displacement of class difference onto immigrants in contemporary Argentine society filters into the workplace. The dialectic of alienation in the workplace, therefore, also plays out along the shifting relationships in peoples’ experiences of race, nation, and class.

## **Chapter Five – “Working through” class, race, and nation: Consent and alienation in the workplace**

*Palo, palo, palo!*  
*Palo bonito-o-eh-eh!*

Shovel, shovel, shovel!  
Beautiful shovel (o-eh-eh)!

*Palo, palo, palo!*  
*Somos la OCRA otra vez!*

Shovel, shovel, shovel!  
We are the OCRA once again!

*– Chant of the UOCRA (the Unión Obrera de la Construcción de la República Argentina, or Construction Workers’ Union of the Republic of Argentina) on their way to a march in El Monumental soccer stadium in Buenos Aires, October 2010*

### **Introduction: A resurgence of organized labor?**

Upon first glance, it appears that organized labor is experiencing something of a resurgence in Argentine politics. Under the stewardship of Hugo Moyano, the head of the Argentine CGT (Confederación General de Trabajo, or General Confederation of Labor) and general instigator of union dominated marches, organized labor is more active than at any time since before Argentina’s economic crisis at the beginning of the last decade. In October 2010, for example, the rank and file from sectoral unions converged on El Monumental soccer stadium in Belgrano, blocking traffic and protesting, all resulting in a temporary strike of Buenos Aires’ city garbage collectors and a 26% jump in taxi fares. Sebastián Etchemendy and Ruth Berins Collier argue that such a resurgence of union mobilization in the wake of Argentina’s neoliberal reforms “would have been

unthinkable not only in the 1990s but even just a few years ago in the wake of the 2001–2002 economic/financial crisis and its aftermath. In the 1990s, labor unions were substantially weakened and demobilized as they faced economic adjustment, downsizing, and labor flexibilization” (Etchemendy and Collier 2007:364).

A deeper look reveals a more nuanced picture, both of union resurgence in general and of sectoral unions in particular. The October 2010 march on El Monumental was widely read as political maneuvering by President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in response to Governor of Buenos Aires Province Daniel Scioli indicating his possible challenge (from within the Peronist Party) for the presidency in the scheduled 2011 elections. The garbage collectors strike and steep jump in transport costs were supposedly aimed at sowing discontent in Scioli’s backyard.

On my way the morning of the march to the nearby Núñez site with Franco, we cut a path around buses full of workers from the UOCRA and various other unions as they chanted and banged on the sides of their buses on the way to El Monumental for the march. Curious as I was, I asked Franco what his experiences with the UOCRA had been like over the nearly 20 years he has been in Buenos Aires, and what he thought of that day’s march in particular. Franco responded that he does not care much for the UOCRA, since they would generally come and simply force the workers to march, blocking the entrances to sites to keep materials from getting in and coercing workers into participating: “Un poco de *chori*, un poco de *morci*, un vinito, y te llevan,” he says (“a little *chorizo* [Spanish sausage], a little *morcilla* [blood sausage] and some wine, and they take you along”). Likewise, over our *asado* that day at the site, Franco and a number of



the other workers expressed their cynicism with that they called the clientelism of the unions, saying that Moyano was organizing it all at Fernández de Kirchner's behest.<sup>1</sup>

### **“Working through” class, race, and nationality in Argentina**

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the interrelationships between class, race, and nationality in the process of “manufacturing consent” (Burawoy 1979) in Buenos Aires’ construction industry. The movement of these interrelations is seen as being a process situated in space and time, as the creative actions of living labor are absorbed into the production process and objectified as wage labor. These social relations thus especially play out on the terrain of time – the control, manipulations, and representations of which come to regulate and shape the daily rhythms of work and govern the “everyday civil war” on migrant labor (De Genova 2006) through which surplus value is simultaneously secured and obscured.

My analysis of class, race, and nationality proceeds through the ethnographic context of the daily rhythms and flow of the workday on-site. A comprehensive discussion of all approaches to class in the scholarly literature is clearly out of the scope of my discussion here. Nevertheless, dominant approaches to class, whether of the Marxist distinction between a “class-in-itself” and a “class-for-itself”, the “hidden life of class” in a United States identity discourse dominated by race and ethnicity (Ortner 1998), the supposed subjugation of class within the identity politics of neoliberal multiculturalism (Hale 2005; Hale 2006), or a class-based approach to migration and identities (Kearney and Beserra 2004) tend to elide the actual workplace as a site of

active class formation, and experiencing and its interplays race and nationality.<sup>2</sup> The ethnographic context potentially provides insight into the workday as a site of class formation and the interrelationships between these categories of identity and representation.

Sharad Chari and Vinay Gidwani suggest that a “spatial ethnography of labor” is useful in breaking through class, gender, race (and nation, I would add) as abstractions to engage with these registers in motion, as “relational categories in particular conjunctures which are worked through in simultaneously material, cultural and geographic ways” (Chari and Gidwani 2005:269). In this chapter, I take the context of the workplace as a locus in and through which these dynamic relations emerge and are actively negotiated in the process of securing and obscuring surplus value. Their “working through,” moreover, is caught up in the social reproduction the labor force, which is increasingly redistributed away from the state and individual companies and onto communities (Cravey 2005; Katz 2001).

I frequently heard the racializing discourse of monikers such as “bolita” directed at Bolivians on-site, mainly by Adriano and Enrique, the young Argentines who brought smaller tools and materials in the flatbed truck. This comes from a common Argentine stereotype that all Bolivians are short and round people, thus the nicking of “boliviano” (Bolivian) to “bolita”, which literally refers to a marble.<sup>3</sup> The divisions that I saw on-site, which were often either nationalist, or took on the *idiom* of nationality, are important markers of the limits to the Marxist position that differentiates between a class-in-itself as those individuals and groups which exist in a common relation to the means of

production, and a class-for-itself, implying a political solidarity among such structurally common groups, closely informed by the binding power of class consciousness. There is nothing inevitable about a class-in-itself developing into a class-for-itself. Pierre Bourdieu (1984:102) argued that

...a class or class fraction is defined not only by its position in the relations of production, as identified through indices such as occupation, income or even educational level, but also by a certain sex-ratio, a certain distribution in geographical space (which is never socially neutral) and by a whole set of subsidiary characteristics which may function, in the form of tacit requirements, as real principles of selection or exclusion without ever being formally stated (this is the case with ethnic origin and sex).

Thus spatial location, ethnic origin, gender, and a host of other subsidiary characteristics (nationality, migration, labor markets, etc.) may be smuggled into the conversation, contextually mediating class formation in significant and unpredictable ways. Likewise, working among Bolivian and Paraguayan immigrants in a *villa* of Buenos Aires during Argentina's 2001-2003 crisis, Alejandro Grimson details how participating as *piqueteros* – groups of unemployed, largely female protesters in Buenos Aires – became possible only as a “strategic classism” for Bolivians (Grimson 2006).<sup>4</sup> Grimson found that for Bolivians, being a *piquetero* was not a fixed identity, but something certain people “did” during the crisis. In other words, identification through class was highly situational and dependent upon the extraordinary context of crisis. Grimson contrasted this crisis experience with a march of the construction workers’ union, the UOCRA, in 1998:

...when more than 10,000 construction workers rose up to demand better safety measures at construction sites. This was the result of several accidents where workers were being killed at an average of 85 deaths per month. Bolivian workers also took part in these protests, since security issues have no bearing on nationality. However, they had to march together as a separate group, together

with Peruvians and Paraguayans, all of them victims of discrimination by their fellow workers. Chants arose from within the columns of the unions: ‘We are Argentineans and Peronistas’, and also, ‘We are Argentineans, not *bolitas*’. A worker even declared to the newspaper *Clarín*: ‘They [the foreigners] are responsible for us not earning more.’

What Grimson’s account of the UOCRA march from 1998 illustrates is that, at least before the early 2000’s crisis, class as a structural position was internally mediated and textured by perceived cultural differences, framed as racialized nationality.

### **Time and the workday: Informality, wages, and embeddedness**

#### *Informal practices: Vertical and horizontal*

Time, and the control and representations of it, emerged as the terrain of struggle and of different modes of exchange during my fieldwork, as we saw in the perspectives of workers and management with respect to Friday *asados* in the last chapter. According to Etchemendy and Collier (2007:380), in the first part of 2006 the UOCRA, as well as the railway, bank, airline, metalworker, auto, civil service, steel, food, health, and building maintenance unions (among others) negotiated sectoral agreements with the Argentine state. For Etchemendy and Collier, the resurgence of unions is important because, they argue, it is those representing formal sectors that are pushing their demands (as opposed to informal workers and *piqueteros* who were more active during the 2001-2003 crisis). Moreover, they are “not just trying to retain past gains or defending themselves against downsizing, unemployment, and labor flexibilization but seeking gains in wages, contract coverage, union membership, and profit distribution” (2007:364).

My fieldwork reveals a more uneven picture in the construction industry which, in Buenos Aires, retains specific configurations of formality and informality and a significant reliance on immigrant labor. Dominant approaches to the “informal economy” have argued that the defining characteristic of “informal” economic activities is the total absence of the state.<sup>5</sup> Much recent scholarship has questioned this binary opposition of the presence/absence of the state. In this chapter, I eschew the dichotomy of formal/informal and its subsidiary dualities (i.e. the presence/absence of the state) that together draw a sharp analytical opposition between market and society. Such crude dualisms are rendered untenable by the nexus of state-society connections in Argentina.<sup>6</sup> As the territorial power that seeks to mediate processes of urbanization, the Argentine state is an active agent in the process of value creation, including the institutionalization of informal labor. Thus, I have found that in the case of Buenos Aires’ construction industry, drawing a sharp division between “formal” and “informal” work is too artificial.

I came across two types of informality on-site, which I call “horizontal informality” and “vertical informalization.” I saw examples of horizontal informality in the organization among the workers of a game called *pasanaku* at both Caballito sites. *Pasanaku* (or *pasamano* as it is sometimes called – literally “hand pass”) is the type of rotating credit association most commonly found among market women in the Andes, as well as in a wide variety of cultural contexts the world over (Seligmann 2001). Thus, the gender component of its organization on-site, in an all male context, is noteworthy.<sup>7</sup> It is a system, or game, organized among friends and coworkers as a rotating credit-arrangement in which all participants agree on a weekly amount of money to put into a

communal pot (in the cases I observed, this was generally around 100 Argentine pesos), drawing straws to see the order of the loans. Some guys even “played” two hands, so to speak, upping both the amount of money they had to put in the pot (playing two hands means putting in 200 pesos) and their odds of “winning” the loan.

When I asked people what they were going to do with their loan, many expressed the hope that it would be enough for them to set aside for a trip home sometime in the future, though they generally conceded that they would most likely end up spending it on clothes, shoes, food, and perhaps some special item that a child wanted. From what I saw, the default rate on such loans was effectively zero, which is not surprising, given that everyone involved knew each other personally. This meant that there was no interest charged on the loans and if someone did default they would have been shut out from future participation in *pasanaku* as the least of the social fallout.

What I call “vertical informalization” is that which was imposed on the workers from above, by the combination of construction companies and the Argentine state. While there are certainly laborers in construction who work (at least temporarily) completely *en negro* (informally, literally “in the black”), especially if they have just arrived in Buenos Aires, their *en blanco* (formal, or “in the white”) counterparts remain partially informalized. In short, informal work performed in the construction industry, whether one is officially *en blanco* or *en negro*, does not constitute a discreet economy or sector, separated from the “formal” one. Vertical informalization is instead one tactic that contributes to securing and obscuring surplus value in a flexible accumulation regime.<sup>8</sup> One day in the lunchroom at Caballito One, Miguel clarified some of the practices of the

company and the Argentine state regarding wages, and what it means to work *en blanco* in construction:

Miguel: The company doesn't comply with everything they're supposed to, but at least one has a sure paycheck.

Me: What is it that they don't comply with, the company?

Miguel: Well, because...it's like a fake *en blanco*. It's *en blanco*, but like not legitimate right? I mean...they don't comply with paperwork. Instead of paying the social security for all the hours you work, they give for like half...So they're robbing like half, and the government too, is robbing half. A *blanco*, really legal, they would have to give social security, retirement for all the hours you work, but they make it so that only like half the hours you work show on your pay stub, so that they have to give less money for this.

As we saw in Chapter Two, the 1991 National Employment Law (NEL) intended to discipline wage earners and ease the responsibilities of the Argentine state and individual firms towards social security (Olmedo and Murray 2002). In the construction industry this plays out through manipulated representations of labor-time. According to my informant, the nature of working *en blanco* is not completely separate from working *en negro*, as a significant portion of the hours worked even by those *en blanco* are not formally accounted for.

#### *Wages as manipulated representations of time*

Wages, as we have seen, are set by the UOCRA through negotiations with the state. An *ayudante* [apprentice] made 10.71/hour during the time of my fieldwork. (about U.S. \$2.70) while a *capataz* (foreman) made just two pesos more, 12.71/hour (about U.S. \$3.20). Nevertheless, even formal pay rates and pay stubs do not tell the whole story, as

was explained to me. By law, the workday in Argentina is eight hours, yet construction workers generally work ten hours a day or more. At Caballito One, they worked 7:30–5:30 Monday–Friday, and 7:30–1:30 on Saturdays, making 40 hours basic pay and sixteen of overtime (56 hours total) in a week in which there are no holidays. Their pay stubs are issued every other week, such that they cover a two-week period, but they are paid by the *capataz* at the end of the shift every Saturday. The pay stub for one worker during the 2<sup>nd</sup> two-week period of August 2010, at the level of *oficial* pay of 12.71/hour, read as follows:

			<u>Income</u>	<u>Deductions</u>
101	Basic Normal Hours	56	711.76	
106	Holiday Hours	8	101.68	
401	Retirement 11%			89.48
402	Law 19.032 3%			24.40
403	Ospecon 3%			24.40
404	Uocra 2.5%			20.34
405	Life Insurance			39.12
407	Aporte ext. 1.5%			12.20
			813.44	<u>209.94</u>
				603.50

Note

Ospecon = medical insurance; Uocra = union dues;

Ley 19.032 = retirement pension fund

Aporte = Social Security

This formal pay stub confirms what others had told me about the pay system used by the company and the industry more generally. It indicates that the worker only worked 64 hours in this two-week period, whereas in reality he worked 102 (9 days x 10 hrs/day + 2 days x 6 hrs/day). Normally, he would work 112 hours in a two-week period (10 days



x 10 hrs/day + 2 days x 6hrs/day), though it would still indicate a lesser amount (anywhere from 56 to 72 on the paystubs that people showed me), but because this stretch included one holiday (Monday August 16<sup>th</sup>), they worked only 102. All of the workers assured me that the company did in fact pay the full hours worked (excluding holiday pay, even if it figures on the pay stub; nor are hours past 40 paid as overtime) even though formal pay stubs indicate less. In short, even those who are formally employed and legal workers (*en blanco*) in the construction industry are systematically subjected to vertical informalization; that is, through the paychecks that act as manipulated representations of their labor-time.

As is evident, despite the fact that the UOCRA negotiates wages directly with the Argentine state, the combination of individual firms and the state enforce flexibilized labor patterns in the construction industry. Building companies evade the eight-hour workday law and save on payroll taxes and pension funds by only formally representing a portion of hours worked, while the state saves on its social security obligations. Likewise, there is scant opportunity for pay raise. Even a *capataz*, who may have close to twenty years experience (or more) working in construction, makes only 12.71/hour, while an *ayudante*, on their first paycheck and with no previous experience, make 10.71/hour. Hence, while Etchemendy and Collier note that the dormant Minimum Wage Council was resurrected in 2004 in sectoral union negotiations (2007:380), “formal” workers enjoy neither full formalization of the actual hours they work, nor significant opportunity for pay raise.

In short, instances of (vertical) informalization reflect the active combinations of the Argentine state and individual firms in imposing this subjugation in a top-down manner; contrasted with this is the (horizontal) informality of the voluntary, rotating credit arrangements such as *pasanaku* that are based on trust. Together they represent the rescaling of social reproduction away from the state and employers and onto communities, including those of migrants which provide “subsidies” to wealthier economies across national, regional, and family scales (Cravey 2005:378; Katz 2001:713). Thus, while games such as *pasanaku* clearly articulate with “the ancestral culture of the country” writes H.C.F. Mansilla, “in the Bolivian case” such informal economic activities should be considered “without a doubt, a durable and significant financial flow from the informal sector towards the formal” (Mansilla 1996:16-17, my translation).

#### *Embeddedness and alternative modes of exchange on-site*

Given such relations of time in the construction industry, it initially seemed to me something of a paradox one Friday during our weekly *asado* when the issue of clock-time came up, due to the fact that there was a brand new punch clock, still in the plastic wrap on the table in the lunchroom. Victor had come over around the corner at Caballito Two to fill in as the foreman for Ricardo while he was visiting family in Bolivia. Victor, another worker named Juan Pablo, and I decided to investigate the clock a little more closely. It read as follows:

<u>Mañana (Morning)</u>	<u>Tarde (afternoon)</u>	<u>Extra (overtime)</u>	<u>Borr. (Erase)</u>
+	-	+	-

Juan Pablo wondered what the abbreviation “Borr” meant, to which Victor offered that “It must mean ‘erase’ (*borrar*, in Spanish), no?...Or maybe it means *borracho!*” (the Spanish word for “drunk”), to which we all had a good laugh. Juan Pablo stared at the clock for a few more long seconds, then said “I wonder who the son of a bitch is who invented that thing?” Amid the speculation among the crew that they would begin working “on the clock” as of the following Monday, it became clear that this was an especially distasteful proposition to them. Whatever explained its presence that afternoon, the punch clock was gone the following day and never heard from again.

The ways in which I saw manipulated representations of time imposed on workers from above led me to think that they might actually welcome such a formal control of the time they spent working on the *obra*. The crews’ clear expression of disdain for this formal control of time left me to wonder what explained such antipathy towards a mechanism that could potentially lead to more accurate representation of their labor time. Authors such as Darren Thiel (2010) have detailed the alternative modes of exchange beyond the economic calculus of wages that shape the “moral” and “ethnic” economies of exchange on-site in London’s construction industry.

The crew’s feelings toward the prospect of working on the clock that I observed likewise seem to reflect an extra-economic calculus of time. It is important that in this case the appearance of the clock was on a Friday, the day of the weekly *asado*, which as was explained to me repeatedly, happened *every* Friday on *every* site throughout Buenos

Aires. The *asado* calls for a different allotment of time on Fridays. Various things must be rounded up Friday morning, such as the meat itself (though Ricardo often did this Thursdays after work), bread, wine, potatoes, and anything else that may be needed that particular day. This means that someone has to take time away from the site to go get such things, first of all. Likewise, someone or sometimes more than one person has to start preparing the food, usually around 11:00 AM (an hour before official lunch break starts), and the entire crew routinely extended the Friday *asado* lunch break an extra hour to 2:00 PM in order to finish the wine (thus the appropriateness of Victor's joke about the "drunk time" option on the punch clock that day).

In all, Friday *asados* are the major instance of social bonding and interaction on-site (the organizing of *pasanaku*, for example, also generally took place during *asados*). They also cut into work time, with the understood blind-eye turned by the management. Strict control of time via the punch clock would have reduced the *asado* to a clear 12:00 – 1:00 PM event, rendering it if not impossible, certainly much more difficult to organize and much less enjoyable. Such threats to the *asado*, including alcohol consumption, have the potential to severely undermine the very important and sometimes fragile camaraderie on-site, as we saw in Chapter Four. In this way, the social embeddedness of the workday and its daily and even weekly rhythms trumped the strictly economic calculus of more formally codified wages. Management and workers thus engage in exchanges of time, a portion of the hours worked every week informalized in terms of benefits, in exchange for the flexibility to organize and enjoy such small luxuries as a weekly *asado*.

## **Textures of class: UOCRA and racialized nationality**

### *Nationalism and the asado*

Relatively early on in my fieldwork, I tried to take advantage of what I saw as an opening to discuss the role of the construction workers union, the UOCRA. We were coming up on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July Argentine Independence Day holiday, which fell on a Friday this year. This meant a day off from work, and as the crew explained to me the company routinely decided that they would not work on a Saturday following a holiday, despite the fact they normally work until 1:30 on Saturdays. A number of the guys complained that they wanted to work Saturday, since the holiday would actually then amount to two days without wages. I asked if there was not a union to which they could appeal over such issues. David gave what seemed a somewhat evasive answer, saying that while yes, there is a union, it does not have much presence for them, because membership is low, and anyway they only send a delegate to a site with more than 40 laborers on it, and we only had about ten at that time. Initially deterred then in my attempts to learn more about the crew's experiences with the UOCRA (la OCRA, as they call it), I decided not to press any more on the topic at the time, and sensed a general hesitancy on the part of the crew to really talk about it in any depth in the group setting of lunchtime.

In the meantime, I had a chance to observe a number of interactions that illustrated for me the importance of nationality as a mediating influence on social relations on the *obra*. I am interested here in the way in which nationality has the potential to politically divide a class-in-itself. The protracted conflict over alcohol consumption on the *obra* (see Chapter Four) is in many ways a similar example of this,

but while manifesting itself through the *idiom* of nationality at certain moments, it was not nationalist *per se*. The most striking instance of explicitly nationalist tension I recorded on Bolivia's August 6<sup>th</sup> Independence Day, which happened to fall on a Friday (thus presenting the opportunity for an extra special *asado*). My field notes read as follows for that day:

The *asado* was extra big today because of 6 de agosto – pork ribs, chorizo [sausage], potatoes, salad, hot sauce, bread, wine – Mario manning the grill – electricians set up makeshift grill outside and are roasting an entire pig – when finishing up lunch, I look at the speaker/stereo we use to play music and notice it is not plugged in:

Me: Hey, does this have a rechargeable battery or something?

Ricardo: Yeah, it has a battery. Made of lithium, the future of Bolivia.

Me: Yeah, the future of the world, right?

Ricardo: The future of BOLIVIA, I said!

[David asks what is lithium – I explain that it is a mineral used in batteries for cellular phones, computers, cameras, electric car batteries, etc., and that Bolivia has about half the world's known deposits – sets off a conversation (increasingly fueled by alcohol) and sub-conversations of increasingly nationalist tone]:

Jorge (to me): Bolivians are the biggest idiots, Carlos. Take gas, for example: they send it to Argentina, and Argentina sells it back to Bolivia. How is Argentina gonna sell gas to Bolivia? They (Bolivians) don't know how to refine it, how to do anything with it.

Ricardo: The problem is that the yanquis don't *let* you do anything. They come and steal everything, or the government sells it, like Goni did, your *paisano* [talking to me, referring to ex-president of Bolivia Sánchez de Lozada's nickname as 'the Gringo'], when he wanted to sell the gas. Goddamn fucking yanquis, they don't let you do anything!

Jorge: But Evo is a moron. He wanted to make it so that you [to me, referring to U.S. citizens] would need a visa to get into the country. For a country that depends on tourism as much as Bolivia does, it's stupid! You gotta make it easier to come, so that people leave more.

[Miguel and Mario have broken off into a separate conversation – Miguel saying Bolivia’s problem is that they don’t have sea access; Mario counters that this is why Bolivia wanted to capture the Río Paraguay from them in the Chaco War]:

Miguel: [getting a little angry] SEA, I said, idiot! Who cares about the Río Paraguay? Paraguay has no sea access.

Mario: But the river? Bolivia wanted it, right?

Miguel: No, you jackass! You’re a mental midget (*un chiquito de mente*)! Does Paraguay have sea access or not? Does it or not? NO! Who taught you that stupid shit about the Río Paraguay? Your teachers? They teach you stupid shit (*boludeces*) about Bolivians, and they teach us stupid shit (*boludeces*) about Paraguayans, but nobody teaches us the actual history.

[Meanwhile, Ricardo is still on the ‘imperialist yanquis’ and how the World Bank and IMF take the money of retired people – at this point it’s almost 14:00, so the guys get back to work].

This conversation during the 6<sup>th</sup> of August Bolivian independence day *asado* touched on a range of hot topics in Bolivia, from the Gas War in 2003, to Bolivia’s lithium deposits and natural gas industry, and all the way back to the Chaco War with Paraguay which precipitated Bolivia’s 1952 National Revolution. The conversation also illustrates the wider context in which “nationality” operates. As Mario had previously explained to me, he served in the Paraguayan Navy, patrolling the Paraguay River,<sup>9</sup> before migrating to Buenos Aires. The perceived rivalry with Bolivians and his ideological socialization with respect to the Paraguay River clearly colored his relations with the Bolivians on the crew. This friction was increasingly magnified in the context of alcohol consumption and Mario’s supposed lack of loyalty to the rest of the crew (actually stemming from his supposedly informing the management as to the electricians taking the afternoon off this same Friday), which was often expressed through reference

to his Paraguayan nationality, as we saw in Chapter Four. Such exchanges put into sharp relief the importance that nationality plays in daily interactions on the *obra*, and opened my eyes to how it could mediate Bolivians' experiences on-site with other groups of migrant workers, as well as with Argentines and the UOCRA.

*"Hey, if you don't like it, pack your bags and off to Bolivia": Nationality and exploitation*

Unable to initially broach the topic of the UOCRA during group conversations over lunch, then, I instead tried to flesh it out through individual interviews. David, who seemed the most in tune to the differences between how Bolivians and Argentines are treated on-site, recounted his experience on his first formal (*en blanco*) construction job:

Me: And so your first formal job on a site, how old were you?

David: I was 18. Because only when you're 18 do they let you legally work (*en blanco*). And just my luck, I ended up with a company that exploited people.

Me: They exploited the workers?

David: Especially the Bolivians.

Me: In what sense did they exploit?

David: Well, we were a lot of workers, Argentine and Bolivian. And there was a delegate there from the union (la OCRA). So, suppose there's an *ayudante* [apprentice] there, an Argentine, he made more than the Bolivian *oficial* [official] right? And they made us work overtime and Saturdays. From Monday to Saturday all the Bolivians worked, and they didn't pay us the overtime, just the normal hours. But the Argentines they paid overtime, and if they wanted to work Saturdays they could, if not, then not. And one time I got mad, and I said something to the *capataz* [foreman], like how we're talking now, I said 'Why do you treat the Bolivians like this, and not the Argentines?' I said. Well, he got mad, and he sent me to go work in San Luis, out in the Province of Buenos Aires, far away. And, I didn't want to work out there, so I came back and worked on a job in Moron.



Likewise, not pushing the topic of the UOCRA during lunchtime proved effective in allowing it to come up on its own in the course of conversation. One day it came out during lunch that Jorge had gotten stiffed on his pay when coming to the other site, while Luis had not.<sup>10</sup> Luis, upon changing sites, saw that his liquidation pay was lower than it was supposed to be and so did not sign for it, at which point the company came back and offered him what seemed to be the fair amount for the eight months he had spent there. Jorge, on the other hand, despite what seemed to him to be an obviously lowball offer, signed for it anyway. I recorded the following exchange about the differences between Luis' and Jorge's respective experiences, and the potential role of the union:

Enrique (to Luis): And you didn't go to the union, nothing?

Luis: No, nothing.

Adriano (to Jorge): Did you sign?

Jorge: Yeah.

Ricardo: Well then...the union won't help you now that you signed.

Enrique (to Jorge): You can file a grievance. They'll pay you what they owe you, man.

Adriano: Yeah, they'll pay you what they owe you, but after that the company will never give you work again.

Enrique: Well, Jorge, they screw you on everything...They screw you on the bonus, they screw you on holidays, they screw you on social security...

Jorge: Yeah, that's how your *paisanos* [countrymen] are (to Adriano and Enrique). They're a bunch of bums.

Adriano (to the room in general): Hey, if they're screwing you so much, if you don't like it...pack your bags, and off to Bolivia.

Both situations – David’s first job *en blanco* and Jorge’s liquidation pay – illustrate two important points. The first is the means by which time and its representations become the terrain of conflict, as working as well as receiving wages for variously objectified relations of labor-time – overtime, vacation time, “drunk-time”, and liquidation pay (corresponding to time spent on a site with the construction company) – are subject to an informalization vertically imposed upon workers. Furthermore, these experiences of class are mediated along lines of racialized nationality. David noticed an obvious difference in wages and benefits given to laborers based on their nationality as Argentine or Bolivian, and when he questioned it, he was banished to a site far out in the province of Buenos Aires as a consequence, despite the fact that there was a delegate from the UOCRA on-site, ostensibly charged with ensuring that wages and benefits are secured equitably, regardless of nationality.

Likewise, Enrique and Adriano (both Argentines) occupy the same structural class position as Jorge and other Bolivian construction laborers. Yet as a class-in-itself they are fractured along lines of race and nationality, which prevent them from becoming a class-for-itself. Adriano, joking in his tone while calling Bolivians *bolitas* and saying to the room in general that they can pack their bags and leave if they do not like how things are, is not totally joking. Argentines may blame Bolivians for being “extractive immigrants” (Caggiano 2006) who come and take work from more deserving Argentines, or for keeping the pay rates of construction workers down (despite the fact that it is the UOCRA which negotiates the wages). When people feel like they have been taken

advantage of, such “joking” encounters often carry an undertone of resentment on all sides.<sup>11</sup>

### **Securing consent: The chain, the wheel, and the circle**

The options are limited if a worker wants to press any sort of claim against a company, whether over lost wages or for any other reason. Patricia Vargas (2005:62-69) identifies the mechanisms of “the chain,” “the wheel,” and “the circle” as means of discouraging action against building companies. According to Vargas, construction companies basically discourage workers from pressing claims by making it clear that if they do, the information of their insubordination will be communicated internally as well as around the circle of construction companies, meaning that they will be effectively blackballed within the construction industry in Buenos Aires. As David explained to me in our interview in the lunchroom of Caballito One:

Yeah, it's complicated the thing about the union. I went already to join, right? And tomorrow, if I have a problem with Domingo (the contractor), about pay or whatever, I go to the union (la OCRA), and I demand what's owed by law: bonus, vacations, whatever. But what happens? Domingo takes care of it, according to the law, but I'm not working here anymore. And I don't find work somewhere else the next day, either. That's why a lot of the *paisanos* don't do anything, they don't go to the union with their problems.

In fact, David was speaking from experience, as he went on to tell me in the interview that he had just such an incident previously while working in a cardboard factory. He had gotten a notification of dismissal, he says because of an administrative error, and had initiated action against the company. He elaborated:

And I sent them a letter that I had initiated a claim against them. I won, but not much. And then when I tried to get a job at another factory, I couldn't get one,

because you know...they communicate between the owners, and I didn't get in with another company. So, that's the problem is when someone wants to get what's owed them by law, they can end up losing work altogether.

As David says, the companies communicate between one another, along the chain, wheel, or circle, such that initiating action against a company can get a worker frozen out from a whole industry. David may have had a similar experience in the cardboard factory regardless of his nationality, since the incident appears to have arisen over a clerical error. As he stressed to me, however, Bolivians in the construction industry find themselves put in such positions much more systematically than Argentines, and not because of clerical errors.

David's experience in factory work echoed the cautionary advice given to Jorge when he realized he had been shortchanged on his liquidation pay. That same week Jorge found out that he would need to stay three more months to get his DNI (Documento Nacional de Identidad, National Identity Document) because he had not formally passed through the migration offices on his way into Argentina when he came back after returning home to Cotagaita for Carnaval. Upon finding this out, he quit over being stiffed on his liquidation pay and decided to look for work elsewhere. One afternoon soon after this, while a small group of us sat on the patio at the house of Jorge's uncle, drinking liters of Quilmes beer and getting ready to set up for the Virgen de Urkupiña (see Chapter Six), Jorge came home from the UOCRA offices, informing me that he had initiated a claim against the company to try and get his lost liquidation pay. A few weeks later, however, when I had a chance to chat with him during the soccer games at the

Parque Indoamericano, Jorge said he had dropped his claim; it was too much of a hassle and not worth trying to enforce it, he said.

### **Alienation, consent, and social reproduction**

The combination of two types of informal practices – vertical informalization and horizontal informality – evident in the stories about the relational aspects of the labor process recounted in this chapter, illustrate a number of important points. The first is the arena of time and its various objectifications as the field of conflict and alternative modes of exchange between labor and management. In a wider sense, these stories are indicative of a rescaling of the material bases of social reproduction as part of contemporary processes of neoliberal globalization. State driven restructuring of labor markets in favor of mobile capital in Argentina's neoliberal period have sought to discipline wage earners and lower the costs of social reproduction borne by both the state and individual firms.

In a construction industry that relies heavily on immigrant labor, moreover, immigrant workers may find that they are institutionally discriminated against on the basis of a racialized nationality both in wider Argentine society and in the workplace. The construction workers' union (UOCRA) itself institutionally reinforces such discrimination, as Bolivian migrant workers may receive different wages and benefits than Argentines for the same jobs, and face the threat of being frozen out from the industry altogether if they decide to proceed with a claim against a company over it. Such practices fracture groups with structurally common relations to the means of production

along lines of race and nationality, precluding their formation of a class-in-itself and leaving little choice but to consent or find work elsewhere.

Consent with respect to these processes of securing and obscuring surplus value is constitutive of the neoliberal hegemony I described in Chapter Two. States still set the rules of capital accumulation (which is not to say they are always followed), as evidenced by the vertical informalization through which the 1991 NEL operates in the construction industry. The crew's defense of the Friday *asado*, which I described as the major social event on-site, moreover, indicates how hegemony operates in the cultural sphere. As authors such as Lindsay DuBois have noted (2005:6), the *asado* is a crucial marker of Argentine national identity. It signifies not only the national wealth, but also the ability of individuals and groups to partake of it. The overwhelming importance placed on it by the crew at Caballito One indicates an internalization of this powerful cultural identifier.

In the last chapter, I concluded by describing the workplace as a site of experiencing and mediating alienation. Many of the workers clearly enjoy their time on-site, whether this comes from work they do, the constant action on-site, the camaraderie that arises out of sharing the Friday *asado*, or a combination of these things. Yet, the ethnographic examples from this chapter indicate how even those who enjoy the work and the work group may feel alienated from the exploitative wage structure in which the labor process is embedded. David, for example, expressed what might seem contradictory feelings: he loves the work he started learning as a teenager while helping his father build their home, yet he was keenly aware of his being exploited in the construction industry as a worker, and over-exploited due to his Bolivian nationality. David, as he said, wants to

continue working in construction, and he took very seriously his responsibility of filling in as foreman while Ricardo was recovering from eye surgery. Yet, of all the workers I met, he was most aware of the discrimination directed at him and other Bolivians in the construction industry. Such examples illustrate how alienation is always in flux, and never a fixed state of being. How people reconcile such contradictions is a key ethnographic question.

These processes of securing and obscuring surplus value and consent as to the relations of production operate in dialectical tension with social reproduction, which, according to Cindi Katz, is “the missing figure in current globalization debates” (2001:710). That is, the type of “vagabond capitalism” which manages to free itself from its commitments to places, especially those associated with social reproduction, shifts much of the material burden for it away from territorial states and capitalist enterprises. Migrant labor, as a force of production reproduced in the country of origin, may thus be seen to subsidize wealthier nations in the social reproduction of the labor force. In this light, the social networks and ties of *paisanaje* engaged by Bolivian migrants in securing work and housing, the making and maintaining of contacts and the cash economy surrounding the weekly soccer leagues at the Parque Indoamericano, and the organizing of *pasanaku* on construction sites are all means by which Bolivian migrant communities collectively shoulder the increased material burden of social reproduction in neoliberal Buenos Aires.

Yet, there is more to social reproduction than its material bases. As authors such as Olivia Harris (1989) have detailed, migration to urban areas for the purpose of wage

laboring can be intimately tied to the social reproduction of rural Andean towns, kin and ethnic organizations, and households. Social reproduction thus emerges from the entanglement of a wide range of cultural practices – material and symbolic – on different spatial and temporal horizons. My discussion of the practical and relational aspects of the labor process in construction has touched on a range of topics – the material processes of assembly, its articulation with the Andean game of building miniatures, feeding and consumption, the relationship between plans and actions, alienation, securing and obscuring surplus value, racialized nationality, and the shifting material bases of social reproduction. The final section will consider the wage relation, the nation-state, and the meanings of money as they are represented and circulate on the long-term spatiotemporal horizon of social reproduction in the celebration of the Virgen de Urkupiña in Ciudad Oculta.



## Chapter Six – “We are clients of the Earth”: Work, money, and the nation-state in the Virgen de Urkupiña

### Introduction: “You have to work here”

Every August, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims from all over Bolivia converge on Quillacollo, in the central valleys of Cochabamba, to petition the Virgen de Urkupiña for wealth in the coming year.<sup>1</sup> Pilgrims hack pieces of rock off the mountaintop that houses her shrine as a “loan” from the virgin, to be paid back “at interest” in subsequent years. The cult of Urkupiña has become part of Bolivia’s national consciousness and widely celebrated by migrants in other parts of the world, including Buenos Aires.

The afternoon of the *vispera* (eve) of the 2010 celebration of the Virgen de Urkupiña in Ciudad Oculta was set to begin I met Felipe, Ricardo’s neighbor and the *pasante* (sponsor) for this year, on a corner in the neighborhood of La Tablada, on the outskirts of the Federal Capital. He picked me up and we went to the house of Jorge’s uncle, Teófilo. Teófilo is about 50 years old, with longish, curly and graying hair sticking out from underneath a baseball cap. He has been in Buenos Aires working in construction since 1975, and has participated in many celebrations of the Virgen de Urkupiña here. We spent the afternoon sitting on his patio drinking liters of Quilmes beer, making successive *ch’allas*, and talking about the festival.

Teófilo: Let’s *ch’allar*, so that the festival is a success...You know, people go taking off pieces of rock and making a *ch’alla* of them [pouring beer and/or

chicha on it], and even bringing them here to Buenos Aires for Urkupiña – especially the ‘people who have’ [‘la gente que tiene,’ he says, making the rubbing motion between thumb and fingers to indicate people of means who, presumably, are able to travel by plane]. People have been stopped at customs with huge rocks covered in beer and chicha. The customs guys see it and say ‘What the hell is *this!*’ [laughing]. I know – I’ve done it myself. But now? Argentina doesn’t provide like it did before. If one works, in Bolivia, one can advance the same as here, maybe more. I’m convinced of that. The problem is that nobody wants to work there.

Felipe: Yeah, but you have to have a little capital to get on.

Teófilo: But if you work, you acquire a little capital there just the same. I’m convinced of that. Bolivia today is to exploit...If you really work there, like here, from...from 7 in the morning to 6 in the afternoon, you’ll do well in Bolivia. I’m *convinced* of that! The difference is that nobody dies of hunger in Bolivia, here they do. Nobody gives you anything here; you have to work here.

Felipe: That’s why one always asks the Virgin for a better economic situation. I’ve always asked...that I do ok, you know? Not like, that I become rich and everything, but, ok, right? But you have to have faith!

Teófilo: Yes, that’s the key; one must have faith.

### *Transactional orders: Synecdoche and the elasticity of scale*

This fusion of ritual practice and proclamations of faith with a discourse of money, wage laboring, and the nation (Bolivian and Argentine) is embedded within larger-scale social transformations that stretch across geographical, social, and political borders. The comments of Teófilo and Felipe articulate how changes in the global economy and in state-society relationships connect with ritual practice. Such connections suggest the articulations between the transactional orders of individual gain and social reproduction.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, such a focus on the totality of transactions through which social reproduction is achieved remains largely rooted in an analysis of exchange, without considering “the systems of circulation within which the exchange of money and commodities operates” (Eiss 2002:293).<sup>3</sup> What I wish to call attention to in this chapter are the circulating representations and evaluative discourses of work, money, and the nation as “provider” in the celebration of the Virgen de Urkupiña. This system of circulation suggests the bundling of wage labor with the nation-state as a meaningful symbolic and material order of social reproduction.

In discussing the labor process in construction in Chapter Four, I employed the notion of synecdoche, or the notion that small and large concretely imply one another. My argument, the reader will recall, was that the creative actions of Bolivian migrants in Buenos Aires’ construction industry appeared as a sort of game, akin to the building of stone miniatures. This game-like quality of the labor process, I argued, hedges the alienation of the workers in that it does not have its origins in the capitalist social relations of production, and so projects beyond it. The game of building stone miniatures, such as in the *Qoyllur Rit’i* ritual in southern Peru described by Catherine Allen (1997), is prevalent in the Andes. The symbolism of the cult of Urkupiña, for example, bears similarity, especially in the emphasis on the reproductive powers of stone.<sup>4</sup>

In this chapter, I extend the notion of synecdoche in connecting the creative actions at play in the labor process to the ritual exchanges with the virgins that take place in the circulatory procession of the Virgen de Urkupiña in Ciudad Oculta. As I will explore in this chapter, it is through festival that the Bolivian migrants whom I met, as

members of a larger community of practice, represent the value of their actions as wage laborers to themselves and to a wider audience in a way that obviously articulates social reproduction with capitalist representations of value in the money form, but without being reducible to it.

### **Migration, reciprocity, and festival sponsorship**

#### *Social totalities and reciprocity*

Susan Lobo, in her ethnography of a squatter settlement in Lima, Peru described nearly three decades ago a yearly festival carried out by migrants from the highland community of Corongo in which they celebrated the cleaning of an imaginary irrigation canal that carried no water. The sponsor showed his “exaggerated hospitality toward all who attended, his overseeing of the serving of the meals, his insisting that all of the plates be heaped with food, his exuberant commands that more beer be brought out” (1982:174). While it may seem strange to carry out a lavish and expensive festival in honor of a non-existent irrigation ditch on the urban periphery of Lima, Lobo continues: “The fiesta also activates and stimulates a nexus of reciprocal obligations that continue to be revived throughout the year” (1982:174).

As we saw in Chapter One, value realization occurs in the acts of public recognition through which people constitute themselves as part of some wider social totality – real or imagined. The celebration by migrants from Corongo illustrates plainly how this wider totality can project something of the imaginary. Yet, very much real are

the social networks activated throughout the year, both in order to carry out such a festival and to hedge the difficulties of life in a squatter settlement more generally.

The movements of rural Andeans may be principally motivated by strategies of wage laboring; but as Olivia Harris remarks (1989), these wage laboring movements themselves may be directed towards obtaining the increasingly commodified material goods necessary for festival expenditure. In the urban context of Ciudad Oculta, this relationship between migration and festival expenditure is inverted. Instead of migrating for the purpose of obtaining money with which to buy commodified festival goods, wage-laboring migrants are drafted into sponsoring the celebration of the Virgen de Urkupiña (so they told me) because of their relative success as wage laborers over some previous period of time.

*“It’s as if the virgin sends you people to help with the festival”: the burden of sponsorship*

Thus, the sponsors for 2010, 2011, and 2012 (already in place at the time of my fieldwork) were what I called “long-term migrants” in Chapter One: those who have settled in Buenos Aires, started families there, and make only occasional trips back to their hometowns. Because of their established positions in the community and perceived success over time as wage laborers, such people (including Ricardo and his wife Melissa in 2012) were seen as being capable of sponsoring a good festival. Felipe, for example, a *cotagaitaño* who has been in Buenos Aires for over a decade, works with his girlfriend sewing clothing for Lacoste, and is perceived by many in the community to be doing well for himself, as evidenced by his owning a car. In short, instead of migration aimed

towards festival expenditure, festival sponsorship is gained in response to perceived success over time as a migrant wage laborer.

In the course of hanging out on Teófilo's patio in La Tablada and drinking liters of Quilmes the afternoon of the *víspera*, it became increasingly clear that Felipe was a little bit overwhelmed by the responsibilities that had come with his being *pasante* for the celebration of the Virgen de Urkupiña. He estimated that in total it would cost somewhere around 60,000 pesos (roughly U.S. \$15,000) to put on the festival. Drink alone was going to be 6,000 he said. They had to push back the festival to the weekend of the 22<sup>nd</sup> because the bands were just too expensive for the prime weekend of the 15<sup>th</sup>. He could never have done it, he said, without help from his extended family (many of whom live in the *villa*, as well) and without calling in debts to name people *padrino* and *madrino* (godfather and godmother) of certain aspects of it. "It's as if the virgin sends you people to help with the festival," he said.

While this is an especially faithful way of describing the situation, Felipe's experience as *pasante* indicates the very real networks of reciprocity that people draw upon in the context of festival sponsorship. These, in turn, are reactivated throughout the year in a variety of contexts: the monthly *q'oa*, the organizing of rotating credit associations such as *pasanaku*, and the networking done at the Parque Indoamericano on Sundays. While I did not have a chance to do systematic fieldwork on the distribution of responsibilities for the 2010 celebration, Felipe made it clear that he called in debts (and that he himself incurred debts that will last for years) in sponsoring the celebration. It is these reciprocal debts that in many ways sustain social bonds over time in the *villa*.

## **Urkupiña: conflicting meanings and modes of ritual**

### *Andean ritual and social transformation*

Anthropologists who study Andean rituals have long noted their articulations with wider social transformations.<sup>5</sup> At the level of the festival, the migrations and changing rural-urban connections of recent decades in Bolivia have had a kaleidoscopic effect on ritual practices, inserting explicitly commercial activity and capitalist symbolism into festivals that become framed in terms of “national patrimony” and “folklore” (Crandon-Malamud 1993; Albro 1998; Lagos 1993; Goldstein 2004). Despite this explosion of commercial activity and capitalist ritualization in Andean festivals, numerous authors who have studied the celebration of Urkupiña in Quillacollo, Bolivia and its changes over time have argued that there is more happening than the apparent commodity fetishisms that abound in the festival (Albro 1998; Lagos 1993; Díaz-Barriga 2003).

Authors generally focus on the competing meanings ascribed to Urkupiña by different social groups (the Catholic church, the municipal government, local residents and recently migrated Aymara highlanders, for example), and their conflicting interpretations and versions of the ritual practices themselves (such as the meaning and time-depth of the importance of stones in the festival). It all points to a series of collisions and layered role reversals that engage a range of identity politics – from the meaning of the festival itself, to the development of the town of Quillacollo (and the region as a center of national patrimony), to the shifting meanings of the Bolivian nation itself in an era of political decentralization and economic privatizations.<sup>6</sup>

No longer simply the expression of a rural, civil-religious hierarchy, the inflow of pilgrims, ritual practices, and symbolism from all over Bolivia and the resulting heterogeneity of class and ethnicity in the celebration indicates “the complex interweaving of class and culture and of power and hegemony” in the emergence of the Virgen de Urkupiña as Bolivia’s Patron of National Integration (Lagos 1993:52-53).<sup>7</sup> Thus, the celebration has been transformed from its rural origins in the valleys of Cochabamba into a national (and contested) festival, now embraced as the “migrant virgin” (Giorgis 2000) in various cities of Argentina, North America, and Europe.

The *villa*-wide celebration in Ciudad Oculta evidences similarities to the celebration in Quillacollo – particularly the prominent fetishism of symbols of wealth (fake money, miniatures of llamas, fruit) and its believed source (whether the *Pachamama* or the virgins), as well as the “nationalization” of the festival itself through the performances by folkloric dance groups such as the caporales, tinkuy, and morenada. There is considerably less controversy, however, surrounding the yearly celebration in Ciudad Oculta than in Quillacollo. In large part, this is because there is less at stake beyond the celebration itself than there is in Quillacollo. That is, the celebration of Urkupiña in a *villa* of Buenos Aires is neither caught up in municipal efforts to cash in on an economic bonanza of tourism (there is none), nor in the identity politics of a certain region, nor of the nation (Argentine or Bolivian). It is, for example, presently inconceivable that the president (of any nation) could show up in Ciudad Oculta to thank the virgin for their election, as Bolivian head of state Jaime Paz Zamora did in Quillacollo in 1989 (Lagos 1993:52).



### *Conflicting meanings and modes of ritual*

This is not to gloss over class and other differences among those who borrow or ask from the virgins or *Pachamama*. Teófilo, for one, notes that “those that have” [money] have flown between Buenos Aires and Cochabamba, bringing back pieces of rock (the “Virgin’s money”) from the mountaintop in borrowing from the *Pachamama* – he among them. Moreover, people express different modes of worship in various ways.<sup>8</sup> This is complicated by the heterogeneity in places of origin within urban migrant communities. While (in my experience) residency in the *villa* among Bolivian migrants was highly segmented based on place of origin, this was not total, and is largely superseded both in the workplace and the festival context. Thus, because Andean rituals exhibit almost overwhelming regional variation, migrants even from nearby areas of the same province or department may practice different modes of ritual in the same festival.

For example, some people – both in the monthly *q’oa* and the *villa*-wide celebration, explicitly expressed to me that they were offering to *Pachamama*, others that they were making requests to the Virgin. Robert Albro has noted that in Quillacollo, this is a crucial difference between the *Pachamama* and the Virgin Mary (the two are often conflated) – one can *borrow* only from the *Pachamama*, while one *requests* from the Virgin (1998:139-140). The line between the two is blurry, however. Felipe, for example, commented that he always asks “for a better economic situation” – indicating a *request* that should go to the virgin, though according to Albro, economic success is not a favor to be asked of the virgin, but instead a transaction to be made with the *Pachamama*, who governs the acquisitive character of the celebration (1998:140). In short, even the smaller

and less contested festival in Ciudad Oculta evidences the type of “diverse experiences” and “antagonistic meanings” highlighted by Maria Lagos (1993).<sup>9</sup>

*Work and the “migrant virgin”*

Nevertheless, the celebration in Ciudad Oculta is more localized (there are others even within Buenos Aires) and the class and social condition of those living in Ciudad Oculta is less diverse than among the hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who converge from all corners of Bolivia for the celebration in Quillacollo. Thus, while people may engage in different modes of ritual (borrowing from the *Pachamama* or requesting from the Virgin, for example), the antagonistic meanings so sharply accentuated in Quillacollo are more muted in Ciudad Oculta. The class and social condition of pilgrims is generally that of wage laboring migrants from the Andean highlands and valleys of Bolivia, which is expressed in the attachment of work to Urkupiña, the “migrant virgin.”

Thus, in the embrace of the virgin by Bolivian migrants and the attachment of waged work to her blessings, the sensuous materiality of the celebration and its expression of peoples’ desires for individual acquisitiveness coexists in a less conflictual key with the “pastoral narrative” (Albro 1998) of faith and devotion present in the versions of Urkupiña cultivated by local authorities in Quillacollo. Teófilo and Felipe, for example, saw no conflict between soliciting a “better economic situation” and the declaration that “one must have faith” for this to happen, which seemed to me extensions of the same thought. In Ciudad Oculta, then, the celebration of Urkupiña was framed by appeals for a better economic situation, itself tied to faith and devotion. Almost totally

absent were the *yatiris* (ritual specialists), street vendors, and images of the devil that have led to such ambiguity and role reversals in Quillacollo.<sup>10</sup>

### **Urkupiña in Ciudad Oculta: Exchange within circulation**

As celebrated in Quillacollo, Bolivia, the festival of the Virgen de Urkupiña coincides with the August 15<sup>th</sup> Feast of the Assumption in the Catholic calendar. Marta Giorgis has noted for the celebration in Córdoba, Argentina (2000), however, that the condition of Bolivians as workers shifts it to the weekend closest to the 15<sup>th</sup>. This year, the celebration in Ciudad Oculta was pushed back to the weekend of August 22<sup>nd</sup> because the sponsor could not afford the cost of the band for the weekend of the 15<sup>th</sup>. The community-wide festival lasts three days, from Friday to Sunday: *la vispera* (literally the “eve”), *el día de la fiesta* (day of the festival), and *la despedida* (the goodbye). The second day, the “day of the festival” is the most important because of its public character.

The day of the festival (Saturday) is marked by peoples’ exchanges with the virgins, through means such as ritual libations (the *ch’allas*) and the “investments of faith” made by building arches, all within the context of the procession through the *villa* in which the virgins circulate. The day begins with a Catholic mass on the *cancha* (field) in Ciudad Oculta. I arrive from my hour-long bus ride at about 11:00 in the morning, an hour early, it turns out, for the supposed 10:00 AM mass. People are decorating the *cancha* with streamers alternating between the Bolivian and Argentine national colors, setting up arches that represent plots of land, and decorating Felipe’s car with a large textile and a big stuffed rabbit on top. Many of the arches have miniatures of llamas and

other animals, fruit, and fake money – or *calvarios* (especially \$100 and \$1000 U.S. bills).<sup>11</sup> Felipe and his girlfriend Claudia bring out the two virgins in their glass cases, dressed ornately in new, pink gowns while people throw pink confetti on their heads as they walk into the *cancha*.



Figure 6.1 – The *pasantes* bring out the virgins on the day of the festival.



Figure 6.2 – The Fraternidad Caporalitos de Mataderos performs on the *cancha*, adorned by streamers with alternating Bolivian and Argentine national colors.

After the mass, one of the two bands comes in and plays the national anthems of each country, first Argentina, then Bolivia, as a man shoots off smoke bombs that give the colors of each nation's flags (blue and white during Argentina's anthem, then red, yellow, and green during Bolivia's). Next, one of the *caporales* groups dances on the *cancha* as we prepare for the procession with the virgins through Ciudad Oculta. Felipe invites me to hold the banner with his family's name as the 2010 *pasantes*, putting me at the front of the procession with a small group of others, including Felipe and Claudia directly behind me with the virgin decorated with Bolivian icons, and Javier and Miriam

(next year's *pasantes*) carrying the virgin adorned in Argentine ones. Around us walks a woman burning incense and an old man who goes down the line offering us small shots of wine from an orange cooler, which we use to make *ch'allas* as we circulate through the *villa*. Behind this small group comes the long line of bands and dance groups, including the first band (Real Oruro), the first *caporales* dance group (Fraternidad Caporalitos de Mataderos), the *Tinkuy* dance group (all women), the second band (Espectáculo Imperial Bolivia), a second *caporales* group, and the *Morenada* dance group.



**Figure 6.3 – The virgins on the day of the festival. The one on the left is decorated with national symbols of Bolivia, on the right with those of Argentina.**

We depart from the *cancha* and make our way up Avenida Eva Perón before turning left to enter back into the *villa*. Along the way we make stops at designated

houses, the first of which is that of Javier and Miriam, as they are the sponsors for next year's festival. There is already a table outside set up for the glass-encased virgins. At this house and each time we stop (about ten times total during the procession), the owners of the house bring out many trays full of beer for the pilgrims.



Figure 6.4 – Those who make arches are making an “investment of faith.” Typical “investments” are symbols of wealth such as fruit, fake money, and miniatures of llamas or other animals.



Figure 6.5 – Ricardo (holding beer) joins the procession after his shift at Caballito One ends at 1:30. He has just made a *ch'alla* to the virgins. Ricardo will be the *pasante* in 2012.

The pilgrims kneel before the virgins, reach in the glass case and lightly touch the virgins (or just the glass case), then cross themselves and stand up to make a *ch'alla* with the beer provided by the host. I even see one of the Catholic priests from the mass drink a

glass of beer and make a *ch'alla* to the virgins. At every house Felipe also dances a *cueca* with the female head of household, who also burns incense and blows the smoke into the glass cases of each virgin, which Claudia explains to me is a way of thanking the virgins for their blessings.

As we make our way through the unnamed streets of the *villa*, passing the abandoned hospital around which it has supposedly grown in the last two decades, what seems like thousands of people are out of their houses, either watching the procession as it passes or joining the sprawling line of dance groups, bands, and pilgrims. We stop for what seems like a longer time at each house during our circulation through Ciudad Oculta. Part way through the procession I come across Ricardo and David, who have made it to the festival after their shift at Caballito One ended at 1:30. Ricardo chuckles at me holding the banner for Felipe's family (he is Felipe's neighbor) and leading the procession, then makes a *ch'alla* to the virgins. David is most interested in the *caporales* dance groups, since he danced *caporales* himself for eight years until the costumes became too expensive for him while trying to provide for his two young children.

Roughly four hours after we depart the *cancha*, we arrive there again, completing the circulation through Ciudad Oculta. Post-procession, people hang out in and around the *cancha* and drink while the dance groups finish and make their way to the virgins, taking turns to kneel before them and offer a *ch'alla* after they finish dancing. Meanwhile, food preparation inside the *villa* has been going on for days (mostly done by women in the community) and continues in a final flurry, as hundreds of people will be served food and drink in the event hall next to the *cancha* in Ciudad Oculta.

### **Value, action, representation: The Devil and *Pachamama***

The different money forms that circulate do not explain the changes over time in the celebration of the Virgen de Urkupiña; they merely reflect these changes. The question remains of why the Virgen de Urkupiña has been so widely embraced as the “migrant virgin” (Giorgis 2000). The virgins’ (plural as celebrated in Argentina) role as provider of work seems to me the key to understanding the nexus of relationships between value and action in Bolivian migrants’ celebration of Urkupiña.

Marx (see Chapter One) argues that value has its source in the creative actions of living labor. As Catherine Allen (1997, 2002) discusses, Andean notions of thought, matter, and human action are based on the notion of consubstantiality, or that all beings are linked through a matrix of animated substance. While a child’s first foray into the world of adult reciprocal relationships may come through the type of decontextualized play (or *ayni*) of building miniatures, mastery over a skill during one’s lifetime is connected with saints. Writes Allen, “In Sonqo, for example, every adult skill is said to have been invented by a specific saint; a person who masters a skill – spinning, for example – is said to be *santuyuq* (endowed with the attributes of the saint) for that activity” (Allen 1997:76).

I suggest that in migratory contexts, specific forms of wage laboring are collapsed under the Virgen de Urkupiña who, besides her roles as capitalist and money lender, comes to be seen as the provider of work for migrants. As mastery over skill corresponds to saints, the division of labor in contemporary capitalist contexts potentially leads to a dizzying proliferation of them. The collapsing of productive actions under the umbrella



of Urkupiña articulates with the *condition* of wage laboring instead of multiplying saints for each of the particular skills people master in their wage laboring activities.

The devil figure – so closely associated with commodity fetishism in South America (Taussig 1980) – has become a “floating pivot around which critical discourse can take form” (Albro 1998:159-60) in Quillacollo’s celebration of Urkupiña. Largely stripped of such regionalist metadiscourses, the celebration in Ciudad Oculta is oriented around a different “mode of exploitation” – wage labor – and its symbol of social reproduction the *Pachamama*. “Alliance to the Pachamama,” writes June Nash, “relates the individual to life” (1993:123). In other words, for those who worship the *Pachamama*, it is through ritual exchange that her proper regulation of the transactional orders of production and reproduction is ensured. While the collapsing of skills under Urkupiña tends towards the type of effacement of individual histories characteristic of fetishized money that Marx described in the *Grundrisse*, through the performative acts involved in circulating the virgins each year people attach their names to her. By sponsoring the overall festival, acting as a *padrino* or *madrino* (godparent) of a certain aspect of it, participating in a folkloric dance group, or otherwise entering into the web of reciprocal exchanges activated throughout the year in the celebration of Urkupiña, people etch their individual biographies into that of the virgin.

### **“We are clients of the Earth”: Wage labor and *Pachamama***

Through these ritual practices of circulation, apparently fetishized symbols of wealth enter into dialogue with more abstract notions of value and spacetime. That

representations of money have become so prevalent in projecting a larger social totality in celebrations of Urkupiña is not surprising, given that those who celebrate the cult depend on market transactions for much of the material wherewithal of social reproduction, whatever their “mode of exploitation.”

This is a complex picture, and I will illustrate with an ethnographic example. The articulation between transactional orders (individual gain and social reproduction) was expressed eloquently to me one night during the monthly *q’oa* leading up to the yearly, community-wide celebration in August. I sat next to Eustaquio, a short, 40-ish *orureño* (a Bolivian man from Oruro) with an unruly mustache, and his wife on the other side of him, in Felipe’s living room in Ciudad Oculta. Also in attendance were Ricardo, in quite a state with a patch over his eye after being hit with falling material on-site earlier in the day at Caballito One, and Jorge, who was spending a good deal of time drinking instead of finding work after quitting at Caballito One.

We sat in a circle in Felipe’s living room (about fifteen of us in total), chewing coca leaves and making successive *ch’allas* to the virgins. While people took turns kneeling in front of the virgins (in pairs) and offering a *ch’alla*, Eustaquio told me of his family’s history of dancing the *Tinkuy* in the north of Potosí. The *Tinkuy* (meaning “encounter” in Quechua) is a form of ritualistic combat in praise of *Pachamama*. Any blood spilled, including in fatal battles, is considered a fertilizing gift to her in the hope that she will bring material wealth in the coming year. Eustaquio told me with pride of an uncle’s death in a *Tinkuy* battle in the north of Potosí. “Here [in Buenos Aires] though,” he said, “it’s all a bit watered down, I think. It’s not the same as in the north of Potosí. No

matter. We still do the *ch'alla* and the *q'oa*. It is the *Pachamama* who takes care of us, whether we are here or there. Because, you see, we are clients of the Earth.”

While Teófilo and Felipe spoke in terms of market relations, working to get ahead, and which nation presents the best opportunities to do so, Eustaquio places this drive for personal acquisition within the larger framework of wealth deriving from Mother Earth, the *Pachamama*. Marcel Mauss (1966:12-15) argued that part of the economy and morality of the gift is the idea that one must “buy from the gods.” Prestation, argues Mauss, involves not just men, but also nature and its associated forces. Here emerges a theme “which may be as old as the potlatch itself: the belief that one has to buy from the gods and that the gods know how to repay the price” (Mauss 1966:14). Thus, the individual acquisition of money through wage laboring is tied to the reciprocal exchanges with the virgins and *Pachamama*, through which social reproduction is mediated. As Olivia Harris argues, “Placed in a wider setting, the ritual priority given to money and metals in the month of August forms part of a ritual cycle in which all sources of wellbeing and increase are honoured” (1989:254).

### **Value transformation and orders of spacetime: *Pachamama* and nation-states**

I described the Andean game of building miniatures as a “value template” (Munn 1986) in Chapter Four, which is to say a social potentiality that finds expression in the consumption of one another’s skilled labor on construction sites. The honoring of *Pachamama* and money as sources of increase and well-being effects a transformation in

symbolic value levels, from the source of value in the creative actions of production to its realization in wider systems of exchange and circulation.

Money and its representations emerge as a key agent of symbolic transformation. In circulation, money generically carries the power of an evaluative discourse and representational semiotic through which value receives recognition. Fetishized in religious ritual, along with other symbols of wealth it becomes a transformer between symbolic value levels. That is, between wage laboring and being a “client of the Earth.” Labor, in this framework is also effectively transformed into what Marx called “abstract labor.” This emerges out of the role of money as third party mediator of exchange, one of the achievements of which is to render different proportions of labor-time into a common representation (Turner 2008; Graeber 2001). That is, in capitalist contexts, the content of value – socially necessary labor-time – is represented in its differing proportionalities in the money form. In this way, different proportions of “labor-power” are abstracted via its semiotic commensuration – money.

As authors such as Nancy Munn (1986) have suggested, moreover, such movements between value levels entail spatiotemporal transformations. David Harvey (1996), as we saw in Chapter One, argues that money in circulation articulates both with the different space-times of capitalism and with the so-called “gift economies” described by Mauss (1966). As a representative of wealth, then, money carries synecdochal powers of representing proportionalities of a common content – creative action or labor. Through discursive reference to money and other fetishized symbols of wealth that circulate in the

festival, people can move between the transactional orders of being wage laborers and “clients of the Earth.”

These value levels and spatiotemporal orders refer to the material and historical contexts in which people live. To return to the conversation and drinking session on Teófilo’s patio the afternoon of the *vispera*, it is revealing on numerous levels. While topics of conversation were dominated by money, work, and faith, the specific historical context in which Bolivians in Buenos Aires are living their lives is evident in Teófilo’s claim that “Argentina does not provide like it did before.” Migration to Argentina, and especially Buenos Aires, has intensified since the collapse of Bolivia’s tin-based economy and the neoliberal structural adjustment in 1985 (see Chapter Two). However, in the wake of Argentina’s own 2001-2003 crisis, a process of “pauperization” of large sectors of the population has likewise affected Bolivian migrants. Teófilo’s insistence on the current opportunities in Bolivia and the difficulty of life on the periphery of Buenos Aires reflects the larger trends of the neoliberal period in Argentina.

Registers of “nation” and “state” (which are of course not synonymous) thus take on different meanings here than in the context of Urkupiña’s celebration in Quillacollo, where it is Bolivia’s Patron of National Integration. The duplication of the Virgin and the draping of both figures in the respective national symbols of the Bolivian and Argentine flags is a key point. It clearly suggests a link between the virgins, *Pachamama*, and the nation-state – not in the abstract – but *specific* nation-states, which have substantive realities in physical space, beyond their abstract idea. This duplication and iconic linking of the Virgen de Urkupiña and *Pachamama* with different national spaces indicates how,

at least for some Bolivian migrants, nation-states can become part of a symbolic ordering device of social reproduction.

## **Conclusions**

June Nash (1993), in her classic study of a Bolivian tin-mining community, argued that the miners were alienated from the exploitative system of production on which they depended, but not from the work situation or the mining community. “One reason for this,” writes Nash, “is that there is greater fulfillment of expressive needs” (1993:12). Nash found that such expressive needs are met in the workplace itself and through the ritual offering of the *ch’alla*, the “master key to the life of the mining communities” (Nash 1993:xxxix).

Likewise, in both the workplace of construction sites and in festivals such as the Virgen de Urkupiña I find that some people are able to meet these expressive needs of play and work, recognizing themselves as part of a wider social totality in ways that mediate alienation. Eustaquio, while lamenting that things are not quite the same in Ciudad Oculta as in Oruro and northern Potosí, nevertheless finds resonance in performing the *q’oa* and the *ch’alla*. Social totalities are embedded within larger social totalities, as the Andean notion of synecdoche operates. Whatever peoples’ modes of worship – faith and requests directed to the Virgin or “loans” and work transacted with the *Pachamama* and her nation-state “orders,” as I call them – celebrating the cult of Urkupiña is a vehicle for expressive needs and recognizing oneself as part of a larger social totality.

This is not to romanticize the lives of those Bolivians whom I spent time with in Buenos Aires. They complain of their very well founded fear of crime in the *villa*, being targeted by the police, discriminated against in Argentine society, and exploited in the workplace. They live in a shantytown on the urban periphery, behind a wall built by Argentina's military dictatorship. In this sense, they may be said to be alienated from an exploitative wage system that is reinforced by the racialization of immigrants and manual labor in Argentine society. Despite this, some people, at least, are able to make their actions and desires recognized as part of a meaningful social community that stretches along a rural-urban continuum, beyond the immediate context of Buenos Aires' urban periphery and capitalist exploitation in the workplace.

Circulating between Andean Bolivia and Buenos Aires, these migrants engage the deep Andean practice of subsistence movement. Urkupiña – the “migrant virgin” – articulates their condition. Her mobility reflects theirs. Their creative actions earn them money, but they, in turn, are clients of the Earth, whether here in Argentina, or there in Bolivia.

## Chapter Seven – Conclusions

In telling some of the stories of the Bolivian migrants with whom I spent time in Buenos Aires – at construction sites, in Ciudad Oculta, at the Parque Indoamericano, and even a trip back to Bolivia – I have tried to relate something of how they make sense of and understand the larger political-economic and social processes of which they are a part, but which also largely escape their control. As urbanization proceeds the world over and people migrate along old and new paths and networks, they form and reform the communities of practice through which they mediate the potential alienation that comes with living on urban peripheries.

Bolivian migrants in Buenos Aires confront harsh realities – in the workplace, in the *villa*, and in Argentine society in general. Yet many of them found real meaning in their work in construction, in the camaraderie they enjoyed on-site, and in community fostering contexts such as the weekly soccer leagues, monthly *q'oa*, or *villa*-wide celebration of the Virgen de Urkupiña in August. The central themes that emerged throughout this thesis are intended to shed some light on how processes of value creation become social: the labor process, urbanization and the state, and the larger social totalities through which the value of actions receives recognition.



## **The labor process**

The labor process in construction was intensely material and often chaotic. People constituted themselves as active subjects on-site through the material assembly. Agency was thus an outcome, diffused through the actions and interactions of human and non-human entities. In this way, meaningful action emerged in the very relational sense of the connections between people, machines, and materials at different places and points in time. In this way, the labor process articulated with Andean notions of games, feeding and consumption, and an elasticity of scale. This articulation with culturally constructed notions of thought, substance, and human action as described by authors such as Catherine Allen (1997) and June Nash (1993), in my view helped hedge the feeling of alienation from the means of production and exploitative wage structure in which this creative activity itself is inscribed.

Yet, exploitation and dependency were no less real. In exploring the relational aspects of the labor process, I found that Argentina's neoliberal project is increasingly shifting the material burden of social reproduction onto individuals and communities already at pains to meet the challenge. Impositions such as what I called the "vertical informalization" through which the Argentine state and construction firms shirk a host of responsibilities – the laws over the hourly limit to the workday, pension and retirement contributions, vacation and holiday pay, bonuses, etc., have eroded the social wage in favor of a flexibilized labor regime that facilitates the securing and obscuring of surplus value in the labor process. This exploitation is institutionally reinforced by a union presence that openly and systematically discriminates against Bolivians on the basis of a

racialized nationality. This leaves Bolivian workers scant room to do anything besides consent to the existing situation or face being frozen out from the industry altogether, thereby pushing them into new positions of dependency. In the face of this, what I called “horizontal informality” – manifested as the organization of rotating credit associations such as *Pasanaku* – illustrated just one example of the cultural creativity and cooperation through which people came together to shoulder the increased burden placed on them by neoliberalizing projects. In short, the workplace emerged as the site of an ongoing dialectic of alienation.

### **Neoliberal hegemony: Urbanization and the state in Argentina**

The labor process in Buenos Aires’ construction industry is constitutive of larger processes of urbanization, in which the Argentine state emerges as a principal force. As authors such as Karl Polanyi (2001) and Henri Lefebvre (1991) have argued, the actions of territorial states have historically been vital in the urbanizing process of commodifying land, labor, and capital. Though this plays out in historically contingent and geographically uneven ways, the dynamic interactions between these three elements of the capitalist mode of production have shaped neoliberal urbanization in Argentina, a process in which Bolivian migrants are caught up in and help propel.

Urbanization thus emerges as the overarching material and social process that links the globalizing forces of capitalism, territorial states, and local actions. Structurally similar dynamics of neoliberal urbanization are happening all over the world, yet they play out in specific ways. In Buenos Aires, the state has thus been thrust into the role of

controlling urbanization in the conurbation of Buenos Aires, whether during military dictatorship or democratic rule. This is not to downplay the difference between them, as Lindsay DuBois (2005:207) cautions against in her historical ethnography of Argentina's 1976-1983 military dictatorship. While it would be irresponsible to downplay how much worse things were during military rule, the narrative of a "transition to democracy" – a discourse that often becomes synonymous simply with the procedural act of voting – nevertheless does not itself ensure a culture of democracy.

The neoliberal urbanization of Buenos Aires has thus transformed the social spaces of the city itself into a tool of hegemony, evidenced in the eradication of *villas* in the Federal Capital and erection of a wall around Ciudad Oculta in the run-up to the 1978 World Cup. The ensuing production of the neoliberal cityscape – which depends on the labor of Bolivian migrants and other socially marginalized groups – has superimposed the realm of abstract space as the mask behind which the political power of the state effaces its operations. *Porteños*, meanwhile, aspire to consume these commodified social spaces of the city in striving to grasp the North American-centric modernity that, ironically, is increasingly beyond their grasp as neoliberalism undermines the once large Argentine middle-class.

### **Social totalities: Value creation and the construction of space and time**

While much literature that is self-avowedly "postmodern" emphasizes the partiality of truths (Clifford 1986), there is perhaps a tendency to overdo the fragmenting effects of this. While truths are no doubt partial, this need not have a paralyzing effect on

ethnography. We would do better, writes William Roseberry, to step back and consider what he calls the “conditioned activity” through which “we can see a definite shape and direction in the historical process,” even though such shape and direction are not scientifically predictive (1989:54). From this perspective ethnography can, writes Paul Stoller, “with time, effort, and a degree of methodological innovation...illuminate a complex social reality through the combination of narrative and theoretical exposition” (2002:179).

I have tried to embrace an orientation that disrupts stark dichotomies – such as those between capitalist and gift economies, homelands and hostlands, plans and actions, to name a few examples. In doing so, I am engaging with the work of authors such as William Roseberry (1989), who argued that history provides a way of placing ethnography in wider contexts of change and continuity. Anthropology, he notes, has always been broken up into “theoretical oppositions... – evolutionism and particularism, science and history, explanation and interpretation, materialism and idealism, and so on,” the series extending to “political economy and symbolic anthropology” with “Marxism on the left and culture on the right” (Roseberry 1989:30-32). In moving away from anthropology’s foundational oppositions, Roseberry proposes that culture and power shape one another, such that “the ‘autonomy’ of culture...comes not from its removal from the material circumstances of life but from its connections to it” (1989:42). That is, symbols are both the products of material circumstances and activity and remain subject to them, such that “culture is at once socially constituted...and socially constitutive” (1989:42).

In the course of spending time in Ciudad Oculta, and especially in attending the monthly *q'oa* and the annual celebration of the Virgen de Urkupiña in August, I saw what I would describe as an alternate value field from the “spectacles of modernity” (Guano 2002) embraced by most *porteños*. That is, people represented the value of their own actions to themselves and to a series of wider social totalities, from the community context situationally present in Ciudad Oculta to the idea of nation-states (Bolivian and Argentine) which themselves appeared as nested “orders of *Pachamama*.” This demonstrated to me how wage laboring was mediated at the cultural level to reinforce Andean notions of value and spacetime as springing forth from *Pachamama*. These cultural mediations of value and spacetime illustrate how the short-term, individual gain of wage laboring articulated with the long-term transactional order (Bloch and Parry 1989) of social reproduction.

These cultural mediations, moreover, are linked to wider social transformations in the contemporary world, as people such as Teófilo lamented that Argentina does not “provide” like it used to. Thus, these mediations of social reproduction through what Paul Willis (1977) has called the “semi-autonomous” cultural level suggests that it remains just that – semi-autonomous. While the nation-state appears as an order of *Pachamama*, the proliferation of representations of money and the fact that it in the migratory context the Virgen de Urkupiña is duplicated – with *specific* nation-states attached to each virgin – highlights the interweaving of class, culture, and hegemony described by authors such as Maria Lagos (1993) in the celebration in Quillacollo, Bolivia.

In this thesis, I have attempted to draw out how cultural practices are constitutive of the wider social contexts in which they take place. Writing of the “social totalities” through which value is realized goes against the grain of certain discourses currently popular within anthropology. Yet social totalities are imagined in specific ways by the neoliberal Argentine state and by Bolivian communities of practice in Buenos Aires. The differences in how these social totalities are imagined shape different, but articulated, modes of valuation. The Argentine state has sought to realize value through an accumulation of spectacles, from hosting the 1978 World Cup to the diffusion of spectacle into everyday life in urban Buenos Aires. This has meant the interior exclusion of social groups not envisaged as part of the national body politic. The labor of the Bolivian migrants with whom I did fieldwork in the construction industry produces these spectacular spaces, yet they live in a “Hidden City” on the urban periphery. They represent the value of their actions as wage laborers within overlapping social totalities, from households and rural Andean towns to nation-state “orders of *Pachamama*” and capitalist markets. Bolivian migrants, then, can be both wage laborers and “clients of the Earth.” In the end, I have tried to tell something of their lives, as they try to live them on the urban periphery of Buenos Aires.

## Appendix A

Permits awarded, surface area by square meterage, and type of site. City of Buenos Aires. 1990 – 2009. Source: City of Buenos Aires Yearly Statistics 2008 and 2009 (Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires - Estadística 2009)

Year	Permits (total)	Surface area (total, square meters)	New con- structions	Surface area (square meters)	Additions	Surface area (square meters)
1990	2.531	1.084.277	1.099	891.093	1.432	193.184
1991	3.220	1.719.824	1.813	1.449.297	1.407	270.527
1992	2.911	1.930.304	1.699	1.678.078	1.212	252.226
1993	2.414	1.399.576	1.200	1.112.976	1.214	286.600
1994	3.003	2.228.085	1.583	1.943.844	1.420	284.241
1995	2.131	1.157.746	958	930.306	1.173	227.440
1996	2.177	1.266.305	1.037	965.591	1.140	300.714
1997	2.642	2.154.130	1.427	1.702.877	1.215	451.253
1998	2.727	2.236.126	1.534	1.992.179	1.193	243.947
1999	2.290	1.736.821	1.270	1.525.659	1.020	211.162
2000	2.106	1.636.295	1.128	1.381.962	978	254.333
2001	1.307	1.027.069	666	776.276	641	250.793
2002	690	297.867	354	237.365	336	60.502
2003	1.509	1.284.977	982	1.119.432	527	165.545
2004	1.822	1.382.557	1.175	1.185.240	647	197.317
2005	2.142	2.160.872	1.452	1.954.598	690	206.274
2006	2.779	3.103.450	2.014	2.782.329	765	321.121
2007	2.589	3.088.901	1.800	2.809.535	789	279.366
2008	2.172	2.713.597	1.458	2.319.549	714	394.048
2009	1.768	1.771.652	1.149	1.519.447	619	252.205

## Appendix B: Glossary

albañil(ería)	–	a bricklayer; bricklaying
ayllu	–	the basic Andean unit of kin and ethnic organization
ayni	–	an Andean form of symmetrical reciprocity
asado	–	a barbecue; a powerful marker of national identity in Argentina due to its traditional cattle wealth
ayudante	–	a helper or apprentice; where someone with no experience in construction begins
balancín	–	scaffolding
bolita	–	a derogatory term directed at Bolivians; literally means a “marble”
CGT	–	the Confederación General de Trabajo, or the General Confederation of Labor; Argentina’s umbrella union organization
CMV	–	the Comisión Municipal de la Vivienda, or Municipal Housing Commission; oversaw the eradication of slums during the 1976-1983 military dictatorship
COB	–	Central Obrera Boliviana; Bolivian Workers Union
cacique	–	an Indian lord
cal	–	lime; refers to a cement mix with more lime powder
calvarios	–	fake money that proliferates during the celebration of the Virgen de Urkupiña
cancha	–	a soccer pitch; can also refer to a market
capataz	–	foreman
carpeta	–	the layer applied to floors over the contrapiso, which is normally a 5-6 cm thick layer on top of the losa (base), with ceramic tiling laid on top of the carpeta inside of the apartments, but not in stairwells
carpintería	–	carpentry
carpintero	–	carpenter
ceresita	–	a water-proofing agent added to the cement mix used for the revoque
ch’alla	–	variously refers to the act of sprinkling alcohol or another liquid on the ground in offer to <i>Pachamama</i> (Mother Earth), the actual liquid, the blessing from



		<i>Pachamama</i> , or the gathering of people to bless something (often a new house or other building)
chicha	–	a common type of beer from the Andes fermented from corn
chorizo	–	Spanish sausage
cinta	–	measuring tape
colocadores	–	those who install ceramic tiles
compadrazgo	–	a fictive kin tie of godparent-hood; important as a life-long reciprocal relationship (asymmetrical)
compañero	–	comrade or mate
cuentapropista	–	roughly an “independent contractor”; a common strategy for informalized workers
Documento Nacional de Identidad (DNI)	–	Argentine National Identity Document
en blanco	–	to work “in the white”; means to work formally
en negro	–	to work “in the black”; means to work informally
enchapado	–	the process of pushing flat slabs of brick into soft cement to bring a surface to the proper measurement; literally means “veneer”
encofrados	–	wooden frames into which the hormigón is poured
faja	–	a pair of railroad track-like cement strips used to guide further material assembly; literally means “girdle”
frotacho	–	trowel
hormigón	–	a mix of cement, stone, sand, water, and additives
hormigonada	–	the pouring of bases and columns for a building
huaca	–	locations revered as having sacred powers in the Andes, often rock outcroppings
jefe/mayor de obra	–	roughly means “on-site boss”
laburo	–	work (as in employment)
libretta	–	work papers
madrino/padrino	–	godmother/godfather; also one who takes on a certain aspect of festival expense
malacate	–	winch
manga	–	an odd job
medio-oficial	–	roughly means “assistant”; one step up from ayudante (apprentice)
milanesa con papas	–	country-fried steak with potatoes
mink’a	–	an Andean form of asymmetrical reciprocity
mita	–	the state tribute extracted in labor, first under Inca empire, then adapted during colonial rule
mitimaes	–	ethnic kin migrants who resettled from highlands to

		valleys and lowlands for trade; gave ethnic groups access to non-contiguous land beyond their home villages
morcilla	–	blood sausage
noria	–	the main mechanism of circulating materials on-site; literally means “water wheel”
Núcleo Habitacional Definitivo	–	Definitive Housing Nucleus, or NHD
Núcleo Habitacional Transitorio	–	Transitory Living Nucleus, or NHT
obra	–	means both “work” and “site”; used to refer to construction sites
oficial	–	official; highest pay grade among manual labor on-site
Pachamama	–	The Andean deity symbolizing Mother Earth and spacetime
paisanaje	–	roughly means “compatriot”; a form of nationality-based trust important in social networks
parrilla	–	a barbecue pit
pasanaku	–	a rotating credit association organized on-site
pasante	–	the sponsor of a fiesta
PEVE (Plan de Eradicación de las Villa Emergencias)	–	Plan for the Eradication of Shanty Towns
picante de lengua	–	a spicy tongue dish
picante de pollo	–	a spicy chicken dish
piqueteros	–	groups of unemployed, largely female protesters in Buenos Aires during the 2001-2003 economic/political crisis
plomada	–	a level
porteño	–	a native of Buenos Aires; literally a “port person”
Proceso Nacional de Reorganización	–	National Process of Reorganization; the official term given to Argentina’s 1976-1983 military dictatorship
puna	–	highland
q’oa	–	the monthly gathering to burn incense and make ch’allas to the Virgen de Urkupiña
quilombo	–	Lunfardo slang for a “disaster” or “total mess”; originally refers to a gathering place for slaves in Brazil
reducciones	–	the centralized population resettlements carried out by Spanish viceroy Francisco de Toledo
replanteo	–	the marking of two points on the floor as reference

revoque	–	points in Cartesian space for future tasks translates as “plaster”, though the plaster (yeso) actually went on top of the layer of cal added over the revoque. Revoque referred to the layer of mix with the waterproofing agent (ceresita) applied over the brick surface of the interior walls
salteña	–	a popular mid-morning snack among Bolivians
supermercado	–	the ubiquitous convenience stores in Buenos Aires; generally run by Chinese immigrants
Tío (or supay)	–	the Devil figure who is believed Bolivian miners to control mineral wealth
tucumana	–	a popular pastry snack; similar to a salteña
UOCRA	–	the Unión Obrera de la Construcción de la República Argentina, or Construction Workers’ Union of the Republic of Argentina
villa	–	urban slum or shanty town
yatiri	–	a ritual specialist; usually an Aymara person from the Bolivian highlands
yeso/yesero	–	plaster/one who plasters

## Notes

### Notes to Chapter One

<sup>1</sup> All names are pseudonyms. Nicknames are very common in Latin America, and were the norm on the construction sites where I did participant-observation. However, since the genesis of these nicknames were often obscure – sometimes even to their bearers – I stay with pseudonyms throughout.

<sup>2</sup> For an excellent and much more in-depth theoretical discussion of these topics, see the first chapter of Fernando Coronil's historical ethnography of the Venezuelan state (1997).

<sup>3</sup> Marx makes a key shift in developing the idea of "labor capacity" or "labor power," rendering the activity of labor a dynamic process instead of a relatively static category. Marx variously refers to labor as the "source of wealth" embodied in "subjective activity" (1973:104), to labor time as existing "as such only subjectively, only in the form of activity" (1973:171), and to living labor as "...i.e. subjective existence of labour itself. Labour not as an object, but as activity; not as itself *value*, but as the *living source* of value. [Namely, it is] general wealth (in contrast to capital in which it exists objectively, as reality) as the *general possibility* of the same, which proves itself as such in action" (1973:296). Such creative activity, "not as a use value, but as *the* use value pure and simple" for capital (1973:295), is transformed from mere "possibility of values" into "a really value-positing, productive activity," by entering into contact with capital (in money form) as "labour existing as process and as action," such that "capital itself becomes a process" (1973:297-98).

<sup>4</sup> Mauss, of course, is Durkheim's nephew and intellectual heir. Durkheim merely speculates on the connections between religious ritual and economic value at the end of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. He writes in a footnote: "Only one form of social activity has not yet been expressly attached to religion: that is economic activity. Sometimes processes that are derived from magic have, by that fact alone, an origin that is indirectly religious. Also, economic value is a sort of power or efficacy, and we know the religious origins of the idea of power. Also, richness can confer mana; therefore it has it. Hence it is seen that the ideas of economic value and of religious value are not without connection. But the question of the nature of these connections has not yet been studied" (Durkheim 1976:419). Mauss, in describing the "magical power" of money and impregnation of market exchange with ritual and myth, writes that "[H]ere is the answer to the question already posed by Durkheim about the religious origin of the notion of economic value" (Mauss 1966:70).

<sup>5</sup> Karl Polanyi argued that the subordination of society to the market was a historically unique outcome of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. According to Polanyi, this market pattern "means no less than the running of society as an adjunct to the market. Instead of economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system" (2001:60). Out of this proposition emerged the Formalist/Substantivist debate in economic anthropology. The debate turns on whether the "categories developed in and for modern and industrial society could be applied to non- or pre-capitalist settings" (Sayre 2008:907). For economic formalists, categories such as "markets" (and what are meant by them) are human universals, while for substantivists capitalist market relations are historically unique and cannot be applied wholesale in other contexts. Arjun Appadurai (1986), for example, downplays the differences between Maussian and Marxian notions of value. Yet he proceeds from the Maussian perspective of explaining production in terms of exchange (1986:3), leading him to propose that exchange and value are connected through the politics of what he dubs "regimes of value" (1986:15). Both the focus on exchange and his understanding

of the term “commodity” are fundamentally different from Marxian understandings of the term and the focus on value creation in the process of production. The result is a deep break with Marx’s labor theory of value, rendering Appadurai’s statement that there exists in anthropology an “exaggerated contrast between Marx and Mauss” (1986:11) difficult to reconcile, at least on Appadurai’s terms. Other authors have argued that the English publication of Marx’s *Grundrisse* settled the Formalist/Substantivist debate (Sayre 2008), though it is not clear *how* it supposedly did this. In short, neither Marxian nor Maussian approaches have managed to close the debate. David Graeber (2001) argues that it simply flamed out and has been left unresolved.

<sup>6</sup> Marx, in the *Grundrisse* repeatedly calls attention to the need for this “third thing” or “third entity” to realize value (1973:139-40, 143-44, 151, 163, 172, 211, 217). That the realization of value happens in circulation is the key point. In other words, to mediate the distinction between value (which has its source in production) and price (which expresses exchange values in circulation) a “third thing” is needed to render commodities commensurable. Money does this in capitalist contexts. Mauss, likewise, identifies public recognition as the sphere of representing action as meaningful within a wider social totality. In describing the Maori concept of *hau*, or the “spirit of the thing given,” which becomes attached to *taonga* (some object given), Mauss notes that the *hau* is something that must circulate. For Mauss, this is the “only obscurity: the intervention of a third person” (1966:8-9). Of the armshells and necklaces traded in *kula* exchange, writes Mauss, “In theory these valuables never stop circulating...The gift received is in fact owned, but the ownership is of a particular kind...for it is given only on condition that it will be used on behalf of, or transmitted to, a third person, the remote partner (*murimuri*)” (1966:22). Of the Kwakiutl feasts (or potlatches) commemorating the birth and naming of a chief’s son: “The potlatch – the distribution of goods – is the fundamental act of public recognition in all spheres, military, legal, economic and religious. The chief or his son is recognized and acknowledged by the people” (Mauss 1966:39).

<sup>7</sup> This has emerged as a key orientation in recent ethnographies, especially those that try to integrate any rigorous understanding of the relationships between the globalizing forces of capitalism and local social dynamics. June Nash, for example, whose *Mayan Visions* is a key text in this ethnographic strain, writes that ethnographic attention to these dynamics “takes into account all the places in which people...engage in and interact in the process of social reproduction” (2001:222).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the ethnographies of squatter settlements around Lima, Peru by Billie Jean Isbell (1978) and Susan Lobo (1982).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, June Nash’s study of the dynamics between NAFTA and local subsistence farmers in Chiapas, Mexico (2001), Leslie Gill’s studies of the neoliberal state and “relocated” miners in El Alto, Bolivia, Latin America’s fastest growing city (1997, 2000), and Daniel Goldstein’s study of the interplay between migrants’ performances of “national” culture and the legitimation of state power in Cochabamba, Bolivia.

<sup>10</sup> I am drawing here on the work of Paul Willis and subsequent articles in his journal *Ethnography*. Critical ethnography, according to Willis and Mats Trondman “recognizes how experience is *entrained* in the flow of contemporary history, large and small, partly caught up in its movement, partly itself *creatively* helping to maintain it, *enacting* the uncertainties of the eddies and gathering flows dryly recorded from the outside as ‘structures’ and ‘trends’” (2000:6). In other words, critical ethnography aims to illuminate how material processes of social reproduction within the world capitalist economy are creatively reconfigured through material and symbolic practices in the ‘semi-autonomous’ cultural sphere (Willis 1977). Thus, while ethnographic attention to the labor process at the point of production remains a key to understanding the basic question of why people work (Burawoy 1979), a wider frame of analysis can help expand investigations “from the labor process to a consideration of the ways of belonging to places, nations, families, networks, and other social institutions” (Chari and Gidwani 2005:268).

<sup>11</sup> Movement patterns radiating out from Bolivia have expanded and diversified along different time scales, including intensifying links between sub-regions of Bolivia and the U.S. and Spain. Argentina, in aggregate, has been the primary destination in the nation-state era. The initial 19<sup>th</sup> century movements were seasonal and centered around the cross border areas of southern Bolivia and the demand for labor on the

sugar cane plantations in the northwest Argentine provinces of Jujuy and Salta. As numerous researchers have noted, Bolivian migration to Argentina has intensified and converged on Buenos Aires since about 1960, eight years after Bolivia's 1952 national revolution, and by the mid 1990's about 75% of first time Bolivian migrants to Argentina were going directly to Greater Buenos Aires (Ceva 2005; Benencia and Karasik 1994; Maguid 1997, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Erick Langer, who has written extensively on this geographically and culturally complex cross-border region, argues that while relatively unknown even among Latin Americanists, this frontier region is comparable in its history and importance to the western frontier of the U.S. and its southern border with Mexico (Langer 2002).

<sup>13</sup> The process engaged different historical trajectories, including the global divisions of Cold War politics which saw U.S. backed military dictatorships across Latin America, Argentina's own history of developmentalist and import-substitution industrialization (ISI) state policies, the drive to open Buenos Aires' real estate market, and the nationalist ambitions around Argentina's upcoming role as host the 1978 World Cup (DuBois 2005; Blaustein 2006; Mugarza 1985). These trajectories converge around the 1978 World Cup and the eradication of the *villas* in the Federal Capital of Buenos Aires.

<sup>14</sup> Jason Pribilsky (2007) makes a similar point that simple push/pull economic explanations tell little of the lives of Ecuadorian migrants in New York City.

## Notes to Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup> The popular protests over these rounds of accumulation by dispossession, including the privatizations of water in Cochabamba in 2000, gas in 2003, and water again in La Paz and El Alto in 2005 are of huge historical significance in Bolivia, leading to the ousting of two presidents and the election of Evo Morales in 2005. There is substantial literature on these events (Assies 2003; Albó 2006; Albó 2006; Kohl and Farthing 2006; Spronk and Webber 2007) and Jean Jackson and Kay Warren trace indigenous social movements in Latin America as a region in the period from 1992-2004 (2005).

<sup>2</sup> The Chaco War was instrumental in drumming up the sense of nationalism which, combined with popular dissatisfaction with the Bolivian state over the outcome of the war, was a driving factor in the 1952 National Revolution. According to June Nash, "The net effect of the Chaco War was to discredit military and political leadership" (1993:40).

<sup>3</sup> Numerous anthropologists working in Latin America have built on Abrams' notion of the state as both idea and system. Michael Taussig (1992), for example, draws heavily on Abrams and the concept of the fetish more generally in outlining a "state fetishism." Fernando Coronil chronicles the "magic" performed by the Venezuelan state in its historical constitution of itself as landlord and capitalist through ownership of the subterranean oil in the national territory. According to Coronil, "all national states are constituted as mediators of an order that is simultaneously national and international, political and territorial" (1997:65). Leslie Gill, however, details the "armed retreat of the Bolivian state", arguing that not all states have captured such a magic moment. Writes Gill, "The presence of such tightly organized, efficient, and interconnected state institutions is rare in Latin America" (2000:17). Susanna Sawyer (2004) has explored the neoliberal ironies of the Ecuadorian state's simulations and dissimulations of itself and the power relations of petroleum extraction through the rhetoric and discourse of multicultural democracy. In her historical ethnography of Argentina's 1976-1983 military dictatorship Lindsay DuBois (2005) has described how the Argentine state, though changing in idea from military dictatorship to neoliberal democracy, continues in system as an agent of social polarization in neoliberal Buenos Aires.

<sup>4</sup> "Patria Grande" (meaning "Greater Homeland") is the name of the 2006 legislation aimed at regularizing the status of the millions of undocumented migrants in Argentina. It was passed after a fire in a clandestine textile sweatshop killed a family of six Bolivians locked inside, including four children.

<sup>5</sup> An extensive discussion of this deep cultural practice is out of the scope of this thesis, as the ethnohistorical literature on the Andes and the colonial encounter is huge. The chapters in the edited

volume by Brooke Larson and Olivia Harris (1995) provide a nice introduction. Briefly, regarding the dissolving effects of money and spatiotemporal transformation of pre-Hispanic social formations, certain trends emerge. Thierry Saignes (1995) details how tribute was converted largely to money in areas close to Potosí, mainly due to their proximity to the mines that were Spain's mining and minting center in the Americas. Likewise, the *reducciones* (centralized population resettlements) initiated by Viceroy Toledo in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century which adapted the Incan institution of the *mita*, or state tribute extracted in labor, to extraction in the mines fractured the Andean social geography predicated on highland controlled interregional trade, transforming migration patterns. Carlos Sempat Assadourian, has elaborated on this from the perspective of what he calls the "ethnospatial dimension" of Andean life, as the colonial encounter "changed the very perspectives employed to understand Andean social space" (1995:108, 117).

<sup>6</sup> The agrarian reform did not change the overall exclusive pattern of land tenure, however. While a landholding oligarchy of six percent of the population owned 92% of land under cultivation prior to the revolution (Kohl and Farthing 2006:46), the situation had not changed much by 1980, at which point "40,000 (mostly white) businessmen owned 26,715,000 million hectares while 490,000 indigenous peasants possessed only 2,235,000 million hectares," making land tenure among the population at large one of increasing *minifundia*, or ownership of subsistence based, generationally divided landholdings (Healy and Paulson 2000:8). Nevertheless, while export oriented agro-industry is concentrated in the eastern part of Bolivia, domestic food consumption is still largely supported by Andean highland *campesinos*.

<sup>7</sup> According to Eduardo Domenech and María José Magliano, "until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century Bolivia was an essentially rural country. This condition starts to reverse itself after 1952, moment in which begins a process of internal migration from rural zones to cities and from the occidental region towards the oriental region of the country. This owes to improvements in communications, to the agrarian reform that mobilized a great number of campesinos, and the significant linkage produced between the Altiplano (which was the most populated) and the Bolivian Orient...These internal displacements did not modify the multiple contexts of exclusion and discrimination suffered by wide sectors of Bolivian society. In this framework, emigration to neighboring countries continued to develop, principally to Argentina (2007:11).

<sup>8</sup> There is extensive literature on neoliberal privatizations – what David Harvey (2003) calls "accumulation by dispossession" – in Bolivia (Kohl 2003, 2004; Spronk and Webber 2007; Nash 1992; Kohl and Farthing 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui describes the *ayllu* as "the basic cell of Andean social organisation, dating back to pre-Hispanic times...The internal organisation of the *ayllu* is like a set of Chinese boxes. Each territorial and kinship unit is part of a larger ethnic unit, within a framework that culminates in a large dual organisation whose two moieties relate to one another as complementary opposites: above-below, masculine-feminine, older-younger, etc." (Rivera 1990:100).

<sup>10</sup> Such debates over what Bloch and Parry refer to as "money and the morality of exchange" stem largely from Marx's chapter on money in the *Grundrisse*. Marx argues that the introduction of money into pre- or non-capitalist social formations "transforms all relations into money relations," as "[W]here money is not itself the community [*Gemeinwesen*], it must dissolve the community" (Marx 1973:146, 224, italics in original). Building on this passage from the *Grundrisse*, David Harvey argues (1996) that changing modes of valuation due to the absorption of social formations into an overarching "money community" has proceeded historically and on a global scale, and is inextricably bound up with transformations in the social constructions of space-time. Yet, Marx does not view this power of money towards social dissolution as a unilinear process, but instead adds that "when wage labour is the foundation, money does not have a dissolving effect, but acts *productively*" (Marx 1973:224, italics in original).

<sup>11</sup> Write Bloch and Parry: "That this ideological space should exist is, we believe, inevitable – for the maintenance of the long-term order is both pragmatically and conceptually dependent on individual short-term acquisitive endeavours. Not only do the latter in fact provide much of the material wherewithal necessary for the reproduction of the encompassing order, but it also has to be acknowledged that this order can only perpetuate itself through the biological and economic activities of individuals. What we claim to

be describing then is an extremely general set of ideas about the place of the individual in a social or cosmic order which transcends the individual” (1989:26).

<sup>12</sup> There is extensive ethnographic literature that approaches the movements of rural Andeans to urban areas of Latin and North America, highlighting changing meanings of family and masculinity, the political ramifications of performance in marginal urban communities, the struggle to reformulate cultural identities in urban contexts, and the importance of social and kin networks in squatter settlements, among other topics (Lobo 1982; Isbell 1978; Pribilsky 2007; Skar 1994; Goldstein 2004).

<sup>13</sup> Nicholas de Genova (2002), for example, surveys the everyday forms of stigmatizing migration through the discourses of “illegality” and “deportability.”

<sup>14</sup> For reasons of space, I am basically ignoring migration patterns within Bolivia, though they are not unrelated and have undergone numerous and important changes in both the short and long term.

<sup>15</sup> Jason Pribilsky (2007) tells of similar migrations of Ecuadorians to New York City via Mexico.

<sup>16</sup> For discussions of ‘new ruralization’ patterns that have emerged in the context of transnational networks of migrants and their rural areas of origin in the valleys of Cochabamba, Bolivia, see Yarnall and Price (2010) and in Ecuador, see Pribilsky (2007).

<sup>17</sup> The Parque Indoamericano is the second largest park in Buenos Aires, and migrants from all over Bolivia recreated their provincial soccer leagues on Sundays. According to the Argentine newspaper *Clarín*, the census estimates there are more than 13,000 people living in these apartments, 4,000 of whom are squatting (Clarín 2010a). The confrontations centered around a government plan to offer alternative housing to the squatters, on the condition that they give up their squatting situation. While many have resisted this plan, Argentine residents in the area complained of preferential treatment supposedly being given to ‘los bolivianos okupas’ (the squatter Bolivians) by the Argentine state (Clarín 2010b). Bolivian president Evo Morales spoke out demanding clarification of the events, while international media referred to a “favelización” of Buenos Aires (Clarín 2010b). As was explained to me by a Bolivian friend with whom I stay in contact by e-mail, some of our mutual acquaintances are among the Bolivians in the affected apartment blocks. The “k” in “okupas” (normally spelled “ocupas”) refers to the “k” of *kirchnerista* politics of the last eight years under Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. In my friend’s opinion, Cristina is trying to make herself into the “new Evita” (referring to Eva Perón) by constantly taking up the cause of the poor, as she quickly spoke out against such targeting of immigrant populations, in stark contrast to the mayor of Buenos Aires, Mauricio Macri (Clarín 2010a).

<sup>18</sup> Urbanization in Latin America does not follow the historical trajectory proposed by Dependency Theory, which effectively argues that industrialization in Latin America only accelerated due to ISI (Import Substitution Industrialization) policies in response to the shock of the Great Depression. As Xavier Tafunell (2007) details, the cement industry in the region as a whole, and especially Argentina, developed considerably before the onset of the Depression. Even by 1913, Argentina, Uruguay, and Cuba had higher per capita cement consumption (as a measure of urbanization) than the European average, and internal production accounted for half of consumption in the region as a whole by 1929, at which point Argentina was the largest producer in South America.

<sup>19</sup> Roca had this to say of the Conquest of the Desert: “Our self-respect as a virile people obliges us to put down as soon as possible, by reason or by force, this handful of savages who destroy our wealth and prevent us from definitely occupying, in the name of law, progress and our own security, the richest and most fertile lands of the Republic” (Hinton 2002:45). Now enshrined on the back of all one hundred peso notes in Argentina, the Conquest of the Desert sought to establish, through state violence, a pure substance of the national territory and population, in order that future generations descended from the Europeans arriving on the shores of Buenos Aires might inherit and reproduce this national virility.

<sup>20</sup> Between 1960 and 1970 alone, the percentage of the city’s population living in *villas* tripled from two to six percent (DuBois 2005:49-50).



<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Spanish journalist Eduardo Blaustein's book on the eradication of the *villas* (2006), as well as Lindsay DuBois (2005) for a contextualization of squatter takeovers on the periphery of the Federal Capital in the time leading up to the military dictatorship.

<sup>22</sup> While the Municipal Housing Commission (Comisión Municipal de Vivienda, CMV hereafter) called for slum dwellers to solve their housing situation by returning to their country of origin, if necessary, this process of 'repatriation' of Bolivian nationals was actually a joint effort initiated by Argentine dictator Jorge Videla (1976-1981) with the acquiescence of his Bolivian counterpart Hugo Banzer (1971-1978 as military dictator; 1997-2001 democratically elected), with the promise by Banzer for credits for homebuilding and help finding employment for returned Bolivian nationals going unfulfilled (Domenech and Magliano 2007:12-13).

<sup>23</sup> It is, in fact, because of this wall that the *villa* is known as Ciudad Oculta; it is alternately known as Villa 15 or Barrio General Belgrano.

<sup>24</sup> Lindsay Du Bois details a similar situation close by in the neighborhood of La Tablada: "Although the plan stipulated that participants would live in the *barrios transitorios* for one year, the waiting period later grew to five. This helps explain why so few apartments were finally occupied through the plan... Though this transitional housing was supposed to be destroyed at the end of the plan, most of it is still standing twenty years later" (2005:53).

<sup>25</sup> IMF backed neoliberalization began with immediate loans in 1976 to prop up the dictatorship in exchange for its implementation of neoliberal economic policy (Cooney 2007). The economic policies of privatization and the currency peg that took effect under democratically elected Menem (1989-1999) were a continuation of this institutional arrangement. The common denominator of neoliberal economic policy is Domingo Cavallo, president of Argentina's central bank during the end of the military dictatorship and minister of economy and architect of the Convertibility Plan under Menem.

<sup>26</sup> Carrera, for example, notes that from 1990-2001, "During a time of apparently sustained growth in physical volume, the Argentine economy actually lost a tenth of its value... The annual value product of the Argentine economy has remained stagnant – if not actually shrunk – during the last twenty-five years" (2006:192).

<sup>27</sup> As Fernando Coronil has detailed in his analysis of Venezuela's oil industry, ground rents are an overlooked aspect of the capitalist mode of production, and the shift in rent structures in the oil industry in the 1970's (which favored landed property) "expressed a historical change in power relations between capital and landed property throughout the capitalist world" (1997:52). This shift is also evident in the alliance between the landholding oligarchy and finance capital in Argentina. The import-substitution industrialization (ISI) policies that had nurtured a growing accumulation of capital in manufacturing led to worker unrest in the interior cities of Córdoba and Rosario in the late 1960's. According to Lindsay DuBois (2005:57-59), the *Cordobazo* uprising of students and workers in May 1969 was the harbinger of the return of *Peronismo*, and in 1973, the return of General Juan Perón himself. Undermining capital accumulation in the manufacturing sector was thus an explicit goal of the military dictatorship and landholding oligarchy. This long-standing alliance has become increasingly strained, ironically as a result of neoliberal economic policies which opened the country to the world market and turned Argentina into a major soy exporter at the expense of the traditionally powerful beef and grain interests. The Peronist policies of both Néstor and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner of attempting to shift at least a portion of agricultural wealth towards the urban poor, moreover, has deepened the tension between landholding interests and the central government in recent years (Kusnetz 2009).

<sup>28</sup> According to Lefebvre, the general contradiction of capitalism between the forces of production on the one hand, and the dominant relations and mode of production on the other, has been attenuated (though not resolved) by the capitalist production of space. Urbanization, writes, Lefebvre, "has displaced the problematic of industrialization," but without abolishing the relationships that previously held, such that "the new problem is, precisely, the problem of their *reproduction*" (Lefebvre 1991:89-90). In other words, urbanization does not simply replace industrialization; it is (currently) the means of reproducing its social relations.

<sup>29</sup> By “spatial fix,” Harvey means that one of the contradictions of the circulation of capital is that it must find specific localities for profitable long-run investment, which increasingly means in the fixed capital infrastructures of urban built environments. Investment as measured in gross fixed capital is an estimated 22% of Argentina’s GDP (CIA World Factbook 2011), and since the 2001-03 crisis has been driven by investment in the construction industry (Piris 2010:5).

<sup>30</sup> Argentina’s Andean northwest is geographically and culturally closer to Bolivia than Buenos Aires. *Porteños* attempt to resolve the material contradiction by discursively evicting the northwestern social geography from the idea of the nation, coding people from the cross-border Andean region as *Bolivians* (Grimson 1997; Vargas 2005). “Bolivian” thus becomes something more than national, as the excesses of racism overflow the boundaries of nationalism, rendering visible the putative characteristics of “Bolivians” and “Bolivian-ness” in a metamorphosis of the “material contradictions” of the Argentine national space into the “ideal contradictions” of racist nationalism (Balibar 1991:54).

<sup>31</sup> Such insights are the strength of value theories that focus on exchange, most notably the “social life of things” approach proposed by Appadurai (1986). That fewer and fewer people in Buenos Aires can actually afford to partake of this “modernity behind the looking glass” is a further neoliberal irony. As Emanuela Guano argues, “The seduction of such phantasmagorias is the promise of a progress that benefits only a few but expects to enchant all” (2002:202).

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, the ongoing debate in the journal *Historical Materialism* on the subject, beginning with Ana Dinerstein’s claim that the protests in the Plaza de Mayo represented the ‘reinvention of politics in Argentina’ (2002), the subsequent responses (Bonnet 2006; Carrera 2006; Grigera 2006; Starosta 2006) and Dinerstein’s rejoinder (2008).

<sup>33</sup> There are, of course, historical periodizations of what might be called the state-system in Argentina. Olmedo and Murray (2002:424) have described them, despite changes over time, as an ongoing situation of ‘catastrophic equilibrium’ between three dominant (and competing) interests of business, military, and unions, though this seems to me to leave out the crucial role played by landed interests which have historically (and still) exercise disproportionate influence on Argentina’s productive structure (Carrera 2006:194-96). Lindsay Du Bois describes three main periodizations of Argentina’s post-World War II economy, the 1945-1955 Peronist Strategy of import substitution industrialization (ISI) policies aimed at replacing foreign imports with domestic products, the 1958-1972 Developmentalist Strategy that focused more on medium and heavy industry (aimed more at external markets), and the *Aperturista* (opening) strategy of free markets beginning with the military dictatorship in 1976 (2005:54-55).

<sup>34</sup> Writes Carrera (2006:204): “In brief, the crisis of political representation did not entail any greater levels of awareness than the demand for the reproduction of the specificity of the Argentine economy but without the inescapable consequences of such reproduction.”

<sup>35</sup> Néstor Kirchner’s sudden death in October, 2010 clouds Argentina’s political future, as his widow and current president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner is now unexpectedly the Peronist Party’s likely candidate for the 2011 elections.

<sup>36</sup> See Harvey (2005:105-107) for a macro level analysis of the Argentine crisis as it relates to the global economy. In fact, the devaluation entailed a massive transfer of wealth to Argentina’s political economic elite. According to Harvey: “By 6 January 2002, the new president, Duhalde, had abandoned the dollar peg and devalued the peso. But he also decided to freeze all savings accounts above \$3,000 and eventually to treat the dollar deposits as if they were pesos, thus reducing savings to about one-third of their former value. \$16 billion in purchasing power had been transferred from savers to the banks and through them to a political-economic elite.” Since 2003, as evidenced by the City of Buenos Aires’ statistics, construction activity recovered steadily with annual meterage allotted to construction projects exceeding pre-crisis levels by 2006. Indeed, by this time, the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School of Business was touting “The Real Estate Boom in Argentina.” According to the Wharton School, Argentina saw 14 consecutive quarters of “continuous and meaningful growth in construction activity. During the first of 2006, growth reached 21.2%” (Universia Knowledge @ Wharton 2006). According to Luis Martínez de Virgilio, manager of CB Richard Ellis, the global real-estate conglomerate: “When people were left without a

reliable alternative to depositing their money in banks, they turned their investment toward the construction sector” (Universia Knowledge @ Wharton 2006). More accurately, the political-economic elite that managed to rein in dollars from the crisis, as well as construction companies that have been able to attract investment dollars, have been in a position to build. Real estate in Buenos Aires remains a dollar denominated industry, such that devaluation meant a real drop in construction costs relative to the dollar, in terms of both materials and labor, a situation that has helped fuel a post-crisis construction boom that has more or less continued, despite the global recession of 2008 to late 2009.

<sup>37</sup> One is reminded of Argentine writer César Aira’s short story *Ghosts*, in which an immigrant family squats on an unfinished construction site in Buenos Aires that is haunted by naked, pot-bellied ghosts. The condition of the immigrants mirrors that of the ghosts: only they and their families can see the phantasmagoria of the ghosts’ presence, while the immigrant family languishes on an unfinished construction site, hidden from the view of the rest of the city.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Benencia and Karasik (1994) and Vargas (2005).

<sup>39</sup> Lunfardo is a form of slang local to Buenos Aires that developed around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The main operation is reversing syllables, much like Pig Latin in English, thus café becomes ‘feca’, pizza becomes ‘zapi’ and so on.

<sup>40</sup> This cash economy is of the type that Sassen-Koob (1989:70-72) describes as a ‘neighborhood sub-economy’ which, concentrated in immigrant areas, meets demand for certain goods and services internal to the community that are not necessarily part of the larger economy.

### Notes to Chapter Three

<sup>1</sup> While Karl Polanyi’s (2001) insight into labor as a fictitious commodity has serious implications, there is a gap in that he is not discussing living labor. According to Gerd Spittler: “We can see clearly that Polanyi is not interested so much in work as in the life of the working class in general. A discussion of the conditions of the working class which omits the experience of work is bound to focus on the poor as victims, and this is what we find in Polanyi. However, more goes on in the workplace than just exploitation” (Spittler 2009:162).

<sup>2</sup> Electricity, for example, appears as a kind of magically arriving force. One wonders whether the ‘users’ of space conceive of the massive energy inputs that electricity requires. Where people adorn their front lawns with blinking lights every winter season in the United States, do they conceive of the tremendous amount of coal being burned (augmented by natural gas at times of peak demand) to sustain this energy flow? In the areas of the Third World where people still use generators to have electricity a few hours a night, one can hardly be unaware of having to pour gasoline into the motor powering your television set.

<sup>3</sup> The word *obra* literally means “work,” as in a work of art, and is used to refer to the site.

<sup>4</sup> At the Núñez site, the engineer, a *porteño* man in his 50’s, was on-site as the *jefe de obra*. There was nobody officially filling this role at Caballito One, though one of the architects had an office at Caballito Two, from which he oversaw both sites, eventually moving to Caballito One when Caballito Two was nearly finished.

<sup>5</sup> Patricia Vargas (2005:38) notes a very similar hierarchy and color-coding of helmets.

<sup>6</sup> Vargas (2005) provides more detailed descriptions of each phase.

### Notes to Chapter Four

<sup>1</sup> Henri Lefebvre developed in some detail the notion of the “game,” referencing the aphorism of Heraclitus that eternity (also referred to as “time”, “the world”, or “being”) is a child at play. Lefebvre writes in volume two of his *Critique of Everyday Life*, “Play is part of every human activity. In a sense life in its entirety is play: a risk, a game or match lost or won. From childhood onwards there is a need to play...Everything becomes a pretext for playing, even effort itself; serious games and work are often very similar” (Lefebvre 2008:193). According to David Graber (2001:49-54), this Heraclitean orientation is the “underside of the Western tradition,” the subjugated philosophical view that change and transformation are inherent to seemingly fixed objects. Marx appropriated this Heraclitean orientation in developing the critique of political economy, generating the theory that value emerges from the creative activity of living labor. Lefebvre’s notion of the game (*le jeu*) is developed extensively in volume two of his *Critique of Everyday Life* (2008), as well as in his long intellectual dialogue with Greek émigré Kostas Axelos. The ‘game’, for Lefebvre, is also more than a game, as it is “inscribed in a much more vast framework or horizon; the world of games is part of the play in the world and the game of the world” (Lefebvre 2009b:266). Everyday life in the modern world, according to Lefebvre (what he calls “modernism”), tends towards the destruction of festival-time and the flattening of experience in general. See also Chapters 12-14 in *State, Space, World* (Lefebvre 2009b), as well as the Introduction by Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden (2009) for a contextualization of Lefebvre’s philosophical engagements with Axelos and others.

<sup>2</sup> *Ayni* is a basic form of Andean symmetrical reciprocity, which I will discuss in more detail in a subsequent chapter. See also Enrique Mayer (2002), Catherine Allen (1997, 2002), and Bruce Mannheim (1986).

<sup>3</sup> *Revoque* translates as “plaster,” though the plaster (*yeso*) actually went on top of the layer of *cal* added over the *revoque*. *Revoque*, in my experience, referred to the layer of mix with the waterproofing agent applied over the brick surface of the interior walls preceding the *cal* (over which went plaster, and finally paint), as well the layer applied to the exterior of the building before it was painted. The *carpeta* is applied to floors over the *contrapiso*, which is normally a 5-6 cm thick layer on top of the *losa* (base), with ceramic tiling laid on top of the *carpeta* inside of the apartments, but not in stairwells.

<sup>4</sup> See the glossary (Appendix B) for translation of construction and other Spanish terms. Especially with construction terminology, literal English translations are somewhat misleading. Thus I mostly use the Spanish terms, with reference to more expansive translations I give in the glossary (Appendix B).

<sup>5</sup> Writes Suchman: “This indexicality of instructions means that an instruction’s significance with respect to action does not inhere in the instruction but must be found by the instruction follower with reference to the situation of its use” (2007:80).

<sup>6</sup> In the case of a third mix, we added another identifier, usually a strip of plastic tied around the handle.

<sup>7</sup> As Allen argues, “[M]uch Andean textuality has proved notoriously resistant to interpretation. Attempts to ‘decode’ pre-Columbian communication devices, such as *kipu* (complex knotted strings used for record keeping) and the *toqapu* (abstract geometric designs), have met so far with limited success” (1997:75).

<sup>8</sup> *Faja* literally means “girdle,” and acted as a material guide for subsequent assembly. *Enchapado* literally translates as “veneer.” The workers out on the scaffolding had recently done an *enchapado* on the outside of the entire building, working their way down from the top floor all the way to the bottom, which consisted of fastening pieces of brick broken into long, flat slabs into wet cement on the outside of the building. As was explained to me, this was done to get the exterior surface to measure. A *revoque* was subsequently applied over the *enchapado*.

<sup>9</sup> Though I could draw upon any number of tasks I observed to illustrate the point (as many overall tasks involved material planning – markings on walls, etching of lines into wet concrete, etc. – along the way in order to be completed later on), I think just one will do.

<sup>10</sup> It is easy to forget that plans, as representations of action, are not integral to construction. The Incan empire (nor the whole of pre-Hispanic Andean societies), for example, never invented alphabetic writing, let alone the architectural representation of plans, yet managed to build Machu Picchu. Turnbull (2000),

likewise, details the reconstruction of the Chartres Cathedral between 1194 and 1230, exploring how Gothic architecture could have incorporated flying buttresses with no theory of structural mechanics, and no evidence of architectural plans in western medieval society before about 1225. Plans, in the end, are culturally contingent, and not inherent to meaningful action.

<sup>11</sup> Nancy Munn describes the act of food transmission among the Massim of Papua New Guinea as a “*template* or a *generative schema*” (1986:121-22) upon which the potentiality of subsequent exchange and value creation is based.

<sup>12</sup> Heather Lechtman (1984) describes a similar relation of substance and form in the Andean process of “depletion gilding” items with an extremely thin layer of gold or silver. The important aspect, according to Lechtman, is the *color* of gold or silver, and thus the development of metallurgy around the *surfaces* applied to objects made of neither metal. The surface appearance of gold or silver was seen to imbue and reflect some inner property of gold or silver believed to be inherent to the object beneath the surface.

<sup>13</sup> The task that Luxemburg sets for herself in *The Accumulation of Capital* is to explain how the expanded reproduction of capitalism (which is to say the realization of surplus value) comes to be, as she found Marx’s explanation inadequate. She works from the premise that in a ‘pure’ capitalist economy there is a lack of effective demand; capitalism must thus constantly find (or create) something outside of itself on which to ‘feed’, so to speak. Writes Luxemburg:

Non-capitalist organisations provide a fertile soil for capitalism; more strictly: capital feeds on the ruins of such organisations, and although this non-capitalist milieu is indispensable for accumulation, the latter proceeds at the cost of this medium nevertheless, by eating it up. Historically, the accumulation of capital is a kind of metabolism between capitalist economy and those pre-capitalist methods of production without which it cannot go on and which, in this light, it corrodes and assimilates. Thus capital cannot accumulate without the aid of non-capitalist organisations, nor, on the other hand, can it tolerate their continued existence side by side with itself. Only the continuous and progressive disintegration of non-capitalist organisations makes accumulation of capital possible (2003:436).

See Nash (2001), for a discussion of similar points made by Luxemburg to contextualize the assaults on subsistence farming in Chiapas, Mexico. Harvey (2003) also draws on Luxemburg (though from the perspective of overaccumulation, and so not from Luxemburg’s “lack of effective demand” thesis) in exploring the idea that capitalism creates an “inner dialectic” in order to perpetuate new rounds of imperialist accumulation by dispossession.

<sup>14</sup> As Nash describes this reciprocal consumption: “There is a cannibalistic quality in the relationship between workers and the mine. ‘We eat the mines,’ one man told me at a ch’alla, ‘and the mines eat us’” (Nash 1993:170). According to Nash, this is the central contradiction of life for the miners, who depend on the mines to make a living yet are exploited economically and suffer from the deteriorating health from ailments such as silicosis.

<sup>15</sup> “Paragua”, literally meaning “umbrella”, is a derogatory term directed at Paraguayans.

<sup>16</sup> Despite such incidents, I never witnessed or was told about any accidents or workplace related injuries that resulted from alcohol consumption on the job, though this is not to say they do not happen. Workplace dangers can be either chronic or accidental. The work itself is physically demanding much of the time, which results in chronic health problems. When bags of cement, lime, and plaster arrive, usually some 50 at a time, we unloaded them with one or two people standing on the truck passing them down to the guys below, who carried them slung over one shoulder over to the designated stacking place. As each bag weighed 50 kilos, or 110 pounds, one could inflict serious strain on back and shoulders. Likewise, the repetitive gestures involved with preparing the mixes – bending over to fill buckets with sand, cement, and lime, as well as to shovel the mix into the buckets – led to what people told me was the most common chronic health problem of a bad back. I also noticed that the person in charge of preparing the mixes was subject to probable respiratory problems over the long term due to inhaling dust from both the lime and



cement powders. After watching Miguel dump these mixtures into the cement mixer and trying myself to avoid the inevitable plume that billowed out, I routinely noticed him cough out a cloud of dust a few seconds later.

Injuries also occurred due to accident. While I fortunately never witnessed or heard about a fall from any scaffolding on any of the sites I visited, a number of people recounted stories of sites they had worked on where someone did fall, sometimes fatally. There was one near accident and one serious accident during my fieldwork, one involving the *noria* and the other the *malacate* (winch) at Caballito One. One afternoon Ricardo was lowering corrugated sheet metal and some wooden beams no longer in use via the *malacate* by fastening rebar around them and back through the hook attached to the winch. He started at the ninth floor and was working his way down. Initially I was on the ninth floor with Ricardo while Diego was down at the bottom letting him know when to stop lowering, at which point he would take the stuff off the winch and pile it up beside the front door to be taken back to the company's storage facility. After the ninth floor I went down to see how this process looked from Diego's point of view. Somehow the sheet metal and wooden beams came loose while being lowered from the seventh floor. Diego and I heard a huge commotion coming down the shaft, and we both ran away from the spot, fortunately avoiding any impact as the sheet metal and beams came crashing down.

On another occasion, Ricardo was not so lucky in a situation involving falling materials. I had gone to the office-building site in Núñez that day, and so I saw him later that night at the monthly *q'oa* for the Virgen de Urkupiña (see Chapter Six), drunk and with a patch over his right eye. Ricardo explained to me that a bucket of mix had hit him in the face when it fell from the *noria*. He had heard someone yell something, he said, and when he looked up the shaft of the *noria* to find out what was happening, the mix from the bucket hit him in the eye. Ricardo only came to work for very short periods in the ensuing weeks (which stretched past the end of my fieldwork), and his eye was swollen completely shut and tearing uncontrollably even once the patch was off. In fact, he was not supposed to be at work at all, but when I asked him why he was coming, he said he just did not know what to do with himself all day sitting at home. Ricardo had to have eye surgery, and so he has told me since, has partially lost vision in that eye.

<sup>17</sup> Writes Marx, "the productivity of his labour, his labour in general, in so far as it is not a capacity, but a motion, *real* labour, *comes* to confront the worker as an *alien power*" (1973:308).

<sup>18</sup> To be clear, in writing of a "double sense" of alienation, I am not arguing that Marx identified only two forms of alienation, but that alienation emerges as a relation of property in a double sense: product and labor-power. In developing the concept of alienated (or "estranged") labor, Marx actually identifies four types of alienation: 1) labor from its product; 2) labor from its productive activity; 3) man from his species-being; 4) between men (2000:85-95).

<sup>19</sup> Maté consumption is an important social ritual in many parts of South America, including Argentina. Chewing coca, as Catherine Allen has detailed (2002), has deep cultural roots in the Andes. Because of the distance between the Andes and Buenos Aires, however, it is not as readily available as in Bolivia. As it was explained to me, under Argentine law Bolivians are allowed to bring a small quantity of coca into the country for personal use when crossing the border. In my experience, many Bolivians also knew someone from whom they could acquire coca in Buenos Aires, but at a much higher price than they would pay in Bolivia. People thus often relied on friends or relatives who were making trips back to Bolivia to bring back some coca for them.

<sup>20</sup> Lefebvre's discussions of alienation as a key concept begin with his *Dialectical Materialism* (2009a) and are especially developed in Volume II of the *Critique of Everyday Life* (2008). In his more explicitly spatial work, Lefebvre locates alienation in the realm of abstract space, or the world of commodities, linking it with Marx's notion of the fetishism of commodities (see, for example, Lefebvre 1991: 307-08, 371). See also Stuart Elden (2004:110-126) for a discussion of alienation in the works of Lefebvre, Marx, and Hegel.

<sup>21</sup> Writes Lefebvre, "...products have vanquished works. Repetitious spaces are the outcome of repetitive gestures (those of the workers) associated with instruments which are both duplicatable and designed to duplicate: machines, bulldozers, concrete-mixers, cranes, pneumatic drills, and so on (Lefebvre 1991:75).

<sup>22</sup> Lefebvre considers that the “work” and “product” distinction may be something “subtler...than either identity or opposition”, in that works occupy a space, and products occupy (and circulate within) a space, so that the issue emerges of “what relationship might exist between these two modalities of occupied space” (1991:77).

## Notes to Chapter Five

<sup>1</sup> Such sentiments engage with larger debates over the possible emergence of new forms of political participation in Argentina over the last decade (see also Chapter Three). Ana Dinerstein (Dinerstein 2002, 2008) argues that the emergence of the *piquetero* movement during the 2001-03 economic/political crisis represents a new and important form of decentralized and more spontaneous political action, while Juan Carrera (Carrera 2006) counters that by far the most prevalent political action during the 2001-03 crisis was the widespread looting, often directly organized by politicians who were active during 1976-83 Dirty War and again during the 2001-03 crisis. Hugo Moyano, likewise, has been a prominent political figure since the early 1970's, and the CGT itself was a cornerstone first of *Peronista* and now of *Kirchnerista* politics.

<sup>2</sup> In the Marxist approach, class is a function of structurally common relations of production, such that the *positions* of class are directly tied to the production process proper, while *consciousness of* such class positions is not so inevitable. Immanuel Wallerstein (1991), for example, argues that such “classes-for-themselves” (classes *für sich*) have been historically rare. Sherry Ortner, focusing on identity discourse in the U.S., writes that “[S]ince at least the late nineteenth century, race and ethnicity have been the dominant discourses of social difference in the United States,” while “the discourse of class has tended to be relatively muted,” such that the question emerges of “what is the relationship between race and ethnicity on the one hand and class on the other?” (Ortner 1998:2). Another recent approach, particularly in Latin America, stems from the supposed subjugation of class within the identity politics of neoliberal multiculturalism (Hale 2005; Hale 2006) enshrined in various national constitutions. In this framework, class appears as a largely demobilized political force, subordinated to the seemingly more effective orientation of indigenous social movements. These indigenous-framed movements have pressed claims on the state (though often with transnational networks of support and alliance) via appeals to constitutional provisions calling for greater social inclusion, including the traditional *usos y costumbres* (uses and customs) of natural resources. This has met with varying degrees of success in South American countries such as Colombia and Bolivia (Van Cott 2000; Albro 2006; De Munter and Salman 2009). Michael Kearney and Bernadete Bessera (2004) add to these approaches by employing a class-based approach to migration, and thereby expanding the framework for understanding class across more than one national space as migrants “reposition themselves within transnational class-structured fields of value” (Kearney and Bessera 2004:9).

<sup>3</sup> The concept of a racialized nationality and its relationships to class in Buenos Aires is explored in other contexts, as well (Guano 2003, 2004; Joseph 2000).

<sup>4</sup> In proposing the idea of a “strategic classism,” Grimson is playing on the notion of a “strategic essentialism” that has emerged in discussions of postcolonial identity politics, most notably in the work of Gayatri Spivak. Kay Warren and Jean Jackson, (2002a), along with a number of other contributors to their edited volume (Warren and Jackson 2002b) discuss the concept of ‘strategic essentialism’ in the context of contemporary indigenous movements and identity politics at the state-society interface in Latin America.

<sup>5</sup> This perspective is perhaps best exemplified in the widely cited volume edited Portes, Castells, and Benton (1989).

<sup>6</sup> Numerous authors have formulated similar critiques of this dualistic conception of formal/informal in the context of Buenos Aires and Argentina more generally. See for example, Whitson (2007) and Olmedo and Murray (2002).

<sup>7</sup> There is an extensive literature on such rotating credit associations, which are widespread throughout the world. For a cross-cultural perspective of women traders and their use of the arrangements, see the edited volume by Seligmann (2001). June Nash (1993:111-113) describes the playing of *pasanaku* in a mining community in Oruro, Bolivia. Susan Lobo (1982) details a similar credit arrangement for homebuilding in the squatter settlements of Lima, Peru, and Susana Mugarza (1985) noted a quarter century ago that the Bolivian migrant communities of Buenos Aires activate *pasanaku* and other informal credit arrangements. I did not have an opportunity to see if these types of credit arrangements also operated for homebuilding in the *villa* of Ciudad Oculta in Buenos Aires.

<sup>8</sup> As Marx makes clear in the *Grundrisse* (1973), surplus value is not to be confused with profit. The source of surplus value is labor time past that which is socially necessary for the reproduction of labor power, and is thus generated in the production process. Profit, on the other hand, emerges from circulation as the exchange values of products are realized as prices. Profit is thus the *realization* of surplus value in circulation.

<sup>9</sup> The *Rio Paraguay* is a major river in South America, running for almost 2,000 miles from the interior of Brazil and along a stretch of the border between Bolivia, Paraguay, and Brazil until it feeds into the Paraná. The river effectively bisects Paraguay geographically and socially, as nearly the entire population of the country is east of the river. Bolivia's interest in the river was as a possible shipping line for oil, after having become landlocked since losing its coastline to Chile in the War of the Pacific (1879-83). This was the geopolitical backdrop of the 1932-35 Chaco War between the two countries. Ultimately there was no oil found in the disputed territory.

<sup>10</sup> When Caballito Two was almost finished, a number of the guys came over to Caballito One. Although it was technically a different company at each site, it was the same group of architects and owners that I dealt with at both. The crew told me that in fact they were one company, but split in two and given different names for some tax purposes that were never totally clear to me. What is clear is that changing sites *formally* meant changing companies as well, such that every worker who changed sites received "liquidation pay" which was supposed to correspond to how long they had been with the company at the previous site.

<sup>11</sup> See also Burawoy's description of race relations on the shop floor and his interpretation of "joking" encounters (1979:140-45). While Burawoy sees joking encounters as a reflection of the relations of production and not the external race relations of the larger society, my fieldwork indicates that processes of racializing immigrants in Argentine society are much more constitutive of the relations of production in the case of Buenos Aires' construction industry.

## Notes to Chapter Six

<sup>1</sup> August is an important month in the Andean ritual calendar. While the celebration of Urkupiña coincides with the Feast of the Assumption on the Catholic Calendar, it also coincides with the Andean agricultural cycle. August, at the end of winter, is the time of planting, and lies opposite the time of harvest and abundance, which is celebrated in the yearly Carnival processions in February and March.

<sup>2</sup> Transactional orders, according to Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry, are to be found in "the way the totality of transactions form a general pattern which is part of the reproduction of social and ideological systems concerned with a time-scale far longer than the individual human life" (1989:1).

<sup>3</sup> Continues Eiss: "While quite revealing, such analyses risk reifying the commodity and money forms as



objects of analysis. That is, once conceptually removed from circulation, commodities and money are also removed from the space and time of their genesis” (2002:293).

<sup>4</sup> In Andean cosmology, sacred places, or *huacas*, are locations revered as sites of sacred power, often large rock outcroppings. Stones can thus become important symbols of fertility and reproduction in daily life and ritual practice in the Andes (Lagos 1993:55-56; Harris 1989:257-59; Allen 1997). The hill outside of Quillacollo is one such sacred place, and “Urkupiña” derives from “Orqopiña” – Quechua for “she is already on the hill,” referring to the origin story of the cult of Urkupiña that the image of the woman and child who first appeared to an Indian shepherdess in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was imprinted on a rock on the mountaintop. As symbols of increase and reproduction, and because of their surface level anonymity (like money), the rocks from the mountain have become known as the “virgin’s money.” According to Robert Albro (1998:161) “The motif of powerful stones (*wak’as*) bearing natural or imprinted images is widespread in the Andean highlands. Imprinted images of saints on stones figure in the origin of several regional Andean festivals, including *Qoyllur Rit’i* in nearby southern Peru”, which is also the focus of Catherine Allen’s discussion (1997) of building stone miniatures.

<sup>5</sup> June Nash (1993), for example, details the emergence of a full-blown cult around the Virgin of the Mineshaft among miners in Bolivia’s Oruro department, with relationships between workers and the cosmological force *Tío* (uncle) who owns the mine shifting according to changing patterns of organizing and remunerating labor. The era of privately owned mines, for example, spurred competition between miners, and the *Tío* was seen as the giver of riches, while the wage structure was changed with the post-1952 nationalization of the mines in a way that muted competition, such that *Tío* was seen as the protector against accidents. When René Barrientos took over in a military coup in 1964 and outlawed the *Tío* cult, it shifted to represent resistance to the military regime. See also Sallnow (1989:213-218) for a comparative discussion of mining ideologies. Crandon-Malamud (1993), as well, describes how the influx of urban migrants into a festival in the rural highlands of La Paz articulated with economic crisis in Bolivia and the emergence of a festival-specific form of *compadrazgo* (the fictive kin ties of godparents).

<sup>6</sup> Robert Albro, for instance (1998), argues that the neoliberal strategy of privatizations has pitted the prime victims of this logic – Aymara migrants from the ex-mining localities in the highlands – against local authorities with an interest in cashing in on the potential of the festival through the tourism it attracts. The “pastoral narrative” of faith and devotion that the municipality has developed over decades thus becomes threatened by the presence of Aymara *yatiris* (ritual specialists) and their commerce-oriented activities, always lurking behind the “devil” figure – the *Tío* who owns the mines.

<sup>7</sup> The major changes in the celebration in Quillacollo are the cascading of the market idiom and social relations into the practices and symbolism of the festival, as well as the cultural appropriation of “backward” and “pagan” practices as “modern” and “civilized” ones under the aegis of “national folklore.”

<sup>8</sup> Some people expressed a total lack any faith-based attachment to *Pachamama* or the Virgen de Urkupiña. Daniela (Felipe’s cousin), for example, whenever the topic of any virgin came up, would simply roll her eyes and say something like “Ah, those virgins. So exaggerated with that all the time.” On the day of the festival, however, we spent a good deal of time peeling buckets of potatoes in Felipe’s living room after the procession for the dinner served later that night. Thus, social bonds such as kinship are called in, even for those who are not pilgrims.

<sup>9</sup> David Guss, who has explored the relationships between class, ethnicity, and nationalism in Latin American festivals, argues that festival and ritual are fluid in their meanings: “The same form, therefore, may be used to articulate a number of different ideas and over time can easily oscillate between religious devotion, ethnic solidarity, political resistance, national identity, and even commercial spectacle” (2000:9).

<sup>10</sup> The “Devil” figure is the *Tío* or *supay* who is said to own the mines in Bolivia and who has become associated with the perceived “pagan” debauchery and over-commercialization of the Quillacollo celebration.

<sup>11</sup> These arches engage the notion of synecdoche (see Chapter Four) described by Catherine Allen (1997). As I described the elasticity of the scale in peoples’ creative actions in the labor process in construction, these arches engage similar relationships. As a concrete example of synecdochal thinking, they are not just

“representations” of plots of land, they imply an entire vertical ecology. Synecdochal thinking, according to Allen, means that “the scale of one’s purview can expand or contract endlessly. Every microcosm a macrocosm, and vice versa” (1997:81).

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## **Curriculum Vitae**

Charles R. Dolph graduated from Kenyon College with a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology in 2002. After spending two years in Andean Bolivia as a Peace Corps Volunteer from 2003-2005, he began his Masters work at George Mason University in the spring of 2009. His research interests include value creation and the production of social space, processes of migration and urbanization, the anthropology of labor, and conceptions of democracy and the practices of the state in contemporary societies. He has published (in Spanish) in an edited volume on urbanization in Bolivia, and presented a paper at the annual meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA) on migration policy and the exterior vote in Bolivia's 2009 elections. He will pursue doctoral work in anthropology at the City University of New York.