Apuntes 80, 131-157
ISSN: 0252-1865
eISSN: 2223-1757
doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.21678/apuntes.80.907

Article received on August 14th, 2016
Approved for publication on March 15th, 2017

Formation of a new working class in regions with development poles: Amazonas (Brazil) and Chubut (Patagonia, Argentina), in the 1960s and 1970s

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Abstract: This article analyzes the formation of a new working class in the development poles that were established in Patagonia and Amazonia during the 1960s and 1970s. The growth of industry required the influx of workers to these areas, but this does not imply that there were no workers there initially. However, the scale of the transformation that took place led to the development of what can be called a new class. This class included migrants from various areas who had few traditions and experiences in common and a history conditioned by industrialization dependent on state subsidies. We analyze how each working class grew and the forms of struggle and organization they developed. The study is based on a literature survey, journalistic sources, census data, and interviews with workers. Studying this process contributes to an understanding of similar dynamics in other countries, where experiences of subsidized industrialization were also implemented.

Keywords: development pole; working class; Patagonia; Amazonia.

Acronyms

Aluar	Aluminio Argentino S. A.
AOT	Textile Workers' Association (Asociación Obrera Textil), Argentina
CONICET	National Board of Scientific and Technical Research (Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas), Argentina
COPLADE	Provincial Board of Planning and Action for Development (Consejo Provincial de Planeamiento y Acción para el Desarrollo), Argentina

ESG	Escola Superior de Guerra, Brazil
GDP	Gross domestic product
INSIHS	Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas y Sociales, Trelew, Argentina
IPEA	Institute of Applied Economic Research, Ministry of Planning (Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada), Brazil
MAS	Movement towards Socialism (Movimiento Al Socialismo), Argentina
SUFRAMA	Superintendence of the Manaus Free Trade Zone (Superintendencia de la Zona Franca de Manaus), Brazil
UIP	Patagonian Industrial Union (Unión Industrial Patagónica), Argentina
UNP	Universidad Nacional de la Patagonia, Argentina
UOM	Metallurgical Workers' Union (Unión Obrera Metalúrgica), Argentina
UOCRA	Union of Construction Workers (Unión de Obreros de la Construcción), Argentina
ZFM	Manaos Free Trade Zone (Zona Franca de Manaos), Brazil

This study analyzes the characteristics of the new working class that formed in the 1960s and 1970s around the development poles established by the Argentine and Brazilian governments in Patagonia and Amazonia, respectively.[1] The socioeconomic structure of these territories was radically transformed, changing the lives of their inhabitants. In both cases, new workers' groups were formed with migrants from various areas and influenced by the type of industrialization set in motion.

We seek to understand how these classes were constructed, what their main characteristics were, what relationships they established with subsidized industrialization, what forms of struggle and organization they developed, and what their gender composition was, among other questions. To this end, we draw on an extensive bibliography from both experiences, as well as journalistic sources, censuses, and interviews with workers. Using a comparative approach,[2] we attempt to elucidate the formation of these classes, established around the planes of industrial development promoted by the state in both countries.

1. Some historical elements

Amazonia and Patagonia became enclave economies from the time of their incorporation into the international capitalist system. In an enclave economic structure, production activities have weak or non-existent links with the other local sectors and, as a result, a limited multiplier effect on the production apparatus. The basis of this type of structure is controlled by incentives from outside the region, whether through exportation of the product almost without added value or via contributions from the state. Thus, local inhabitants have limited means of controlling the fundamental determinants that sustain economic activity. This makes enclaves fragile, given their total dependence on external factors: any change will lead to the decline of the projects and the collapse of the growth achieved.

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1 We do not focus here on the multiple debates around developmentalism and its different perspectives in Argentina and Brazil. For that, we recommend Pérez Álvarez (2016a). For a detailed analysis, see Sikkink (1991; a Spanish-language version was published in 2009 by Siglo XXI). In the latter study, one can appreciate that the discourse of "class harmony" was a key part of political construction in both countries, and that developmentalism revisited this perspective. Florestán Fernandes (2015) criticizes this ideology, which proposed that "class" interests be subsumed in favor of supposed "national development."

2 Some general studies on the "labor history" of Latin America that deal with some of the issues addressed in this text include: Bergquist (1988); Drinot (2011); Klubock (1996); Vergara (2013). On the shared history of Brazil and Argentina, the bibliography is extensive and constantly evolving; as a general reference, we recommend Devoto and Fausto (2008).

Fonseca Gadelha (2002) studies early attempts to occupy the vast expanse of the Brazilian Amazonia. Four key ideas are central to this process of occupation, and to the works that analyze the subject: Amazonia as an empty and unchartered territory, Amazonia as a frontier zone, Amazonia as a land to be conquered, and Amazonia as a territory always explored from "outside."

Several authors highlight Amazonia's initial connection to the world market as a supplier dependent on an external metropolis, among them Salazar: "The capitalist mode of production permeates the beginnings of the colonization and settlement of Amazonia, whose process may be generically described as politico-economic colonization and dependence of the metropolis" (1992, p. 14).[3] After the boom period prompted by the extraction of rubber, the state of Amazonas and its capital city, Manaus, entered a spell of stagnation that was only turned around with the creation of the Manaus Free Trade Zone (Zona Franca de Manaos, ZFM) in the capital. For the first time, the fragility of an economic system entirely dependent on external factors became apparent.[4]

In the case of Patagonia, extensive farming to produce sheep's wool was the main, and almost only, production activity before the developmentalist model was imposed. Until the end of the 19th century, most of Patagonia was integrated into the world economic system as a supplier of that product (Martinic, 2011; Bandieri, 2005). Between 1880 and 1920, Argentine and Chilean Patagonia enjoyed a period of splendor both as a supplier of wool to the world market, and due to the Strait of Magellan's position as the only maritime connection between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Because the Argentine and Chilean governments had yet to impose their full authority on the territory, the region took on an autonomous, binational economic dynamic (Harambour, 2016; Barbería, 1995; Ibarra, 1997).

The durability of the model was dependent on factors external to the region and its inhabitants, and when these factors changed, the economic dynamic deteriorated.[5] A similar process occurred in the Amazon region

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3 "[…] o modo de produção capitalista permeia os primórdios da colonização e povoamento do Amazonas, cujo processo pode ser genericamente denominado de colonização e dependência político-econômica da metrópole" (hereafter, all translations from the original Portuguese are by *Apuntes*).

4 There is a vast literature on the rubber exploitation boom, its subsequent collapse, and the economic and social consequences that this had, encompasing Brazil, Peru, Colombia, and Bolivia. As references on some debates, we suggest: Bueno (2012); Weinstein (1993); Chirif & Cornejo Chaparro (2009); Uribe Mosquera (2013); and Stoian (2005), among others.

5 Disparate elements came together to bring about this collapse: the opening of the Panama Canal, the establishment of customs authorities in Chile and Argentina, and the fall of the price of wool following the end of World War I.

with rubber, whose price collapsed when the British began systematic production in their South Asian colonies.[6] In 1920, the international prices of both products plummeted, triggering crises in the regional economies and the start of a lengthy cycle of stagnation, which was again altered by a model imposed from outside.

2. The development poles

Here we make some comparisons between the processes through which state-subsidized industrial poles were created in Brazilian Amazonia[7] and Argentine Patagonia.[8] The policy of creating "industrial poles" involved the establishment of state-subsidized industries in regions deemed "marginal" because they were barely integrated into the national market.

In Argentina, Patagonia was the center of application for this proposal, its sponsors stressing the need to protect the region with its natural resources at a time when attempts were being made to defuse social conflict in the traditional cities, where the labor movement was going through the stage of radicalization (Schvarzer, 1986). In Brazil, one industrialization process led by the federal government was the ZFM, where an assembly center for electronic products was built. The development plans formulated by the Brazilian government for Amazonia make constant reference to the need to protect a region rich in natural resources. The authoritarian basis of these projects was evident: at the heart of their intentions was full occupation of the territory.[9]

The authoritarianism expressed in state planning can also be seen in the scant regard for the populations of the regions for which the industrialization models were devised, during the implementation of these plans. This is why we speak of the "imposition" or "implantation" of these initiatives: the

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6 "In 1919, Brazil, which had enjoyed a virtual monopoly on rubber, only supplied an eighth of world consumption. Half a century later, Brazil bought more than half of the rubber it needed abroad" (Galeano, 2004, p. 120). Translation from Spanish by *Apuntes*.

7 Beyond the various debates around legal Amazonia, international Amazonia, and other possible regionalizations, here we focus specifically on western Amazonia (the states of Amazonas, Acre, Rondônia, and Roraima), making up a territory of 2,185.202.2 km^2, which accounts for 56.7% of the northern region of Brazil and 25.7% of the country's entire land mass.

8 In accordance with the division instituted by law, Argentine Patagonia refers to the provinces of Neuquén, La Pampa, Río Negro, Chubut, Santa Cruz, and Tierra del Fuego. In this article we focus on southern Patagonia, the location of the latter three provinces, which were especially isolated until the implementation of the projects studied here.

9 This aspect of our research is developed in more detail in Pérez Álvarez (2016a).

proposals of local entities, such as planning bodies,[10] regional governments, traditional industry associations[11] or unions, were seldom heard.[12]

On an international level, it was theorized that it was necessary to establish "development poles" based on the implantation of promotional activities in peripheral regions; from these, concentric waves of growth would emanate to generate production linkages and assure the complete formation of an integrated national market (Perroux, 1955). For the case of Brazil and Argentina, these projects had a clearly defined target: those territories considered "underdeveloped" that, in turn, were part of countries classed as underdeveloped as a whole. The cases of Amazonia and Patagonia were configured as genuine "social laboratories" where these policies would be tested.

In both regions, the common conditions of sparse demographic densities, vast expanses, negligible connections with the national market, and an absence of industries also included a wealth of natural resources and their status as territories which, whether in real or symbolic terms, saw their national sovereignty threatened.

In Patagonia, the developmentalist program formally commenced in 1956, under Decree Law N° 10,991 which tax-exempted imports below the 42nd parallel south. The impact of this policy was centered on the northeast of Chubut.[13] In the early 1960s, franchises were replaced by a tax exemption on factories, which lent impetus to the production of synthetic textiles (Ibarra, 1997). During the period 1956-1960, 34 textile plants were established in Chubut, a number only comparable with those that began

10 In the case of Chubut, this was the Provincial Board of Planning and Action for Development (Consejo Provincial de Planeamiento y Acción para el Desarrollo, COPLADE); for Amazonia, it was the Superintendence of Manaus Free Trade Zone (Superintendencia de la Zona Franca de Manaos, SUFRAMA). Both were planning bodies with a regional scope, whose initiatives sought to complement a model that repeated the enclave premises. Their proposals rarely found a hearing, and were limited over the years to attempts to sustain the promotional regimes. COPLADE was dismantled in the early 1990s, when the industrial project fell apart.

11 We refer to the industry associations that brought together the small and medium-sized manufacturers whose presence in the regions predated the implantation of the poles. Afterwards, associations were set up to represent the factories that arrived with the poles, and were generally composed of businessmen from outside the region. We investigate this case with specific reference to the Patagonian Industrial Union (Unión Industrial Patagónica, UIP), whose headquarters were located right in the center of Buenos Aires, and the vast majority of whose members came from this city. The claims of this association received differential treatment by the state (Pérez Álvarez, forthcoming-a).

12 On this, see Pérez Álvarez (forthcoming-b). It can be seen that the regional proposals were barely taken into account in the plans implemented at the national level.

13 In the subregion comprised of the administrative departments of Rawson and Biedma, to the north of Chubut. This was the area targeted for industrial development, in the cities of Trelew, Rawson, and Puerto Madryn, at the points closest to the northern limit of the program. The vast Patagonian expanse was still given over to sheep farming.

operations between 1970 and 1974. The process gained momentum from 1970, with 35 plants starting up between 1970 and 1974 (Altimir, 1970). In 1971, the Trelew Industrial Park was formally established. Infrastructural activities were overseen by various state authorities through the continual transfer of resources to private firms.

Although several factories closed amid competition and constant changes to the laws, in 1974 there were still 45 textile factories in production, employing more than 4,300 people (Beccaria, 1983), and Chubut's textile industry occupied second place nationwide across several categories.[14] In 1971, Aluminio Argentino S. A. (Aluar) won the concession to build and operate a primary aluminum smelter, which was located in Puerto Madryn and began production in 1974; there again, the key investment came from the state.[15]

A number of works summarize the development of the ZFM by the Brazilian state. Araujo Filho (2005) shows that the ZFM has its origins in Law N° 3,173 of July 1957, regulated by Decree N° 47,757 of February 1960; its objective was the storage, stocking, protection, conservation, reception, and exportation of miscellaneous merchandise, articles, and products that came from abroad or were intended for domestic consumption in Amazonia (Ferreira, Puga & Botelho, 2014).

This project did not have the intended impact, giving rise only to a duty-free port. For this reason, the ZFM was restructured by Decree Law N° 288/67 during the dictatorial government, in order to promote the implantation of industries in western Amazonia through the concession of tax exemptions.

The model provided incentives in the form of exemptions from import duties at the federal level, and incentives for the circulation of products and services at the state level, and for services of any type at municipal level. The three levels of government subsidized the industries established under this law, resulting in an industrial park that was chiefly electronic and did not have any prospects of absorbing local, regional, or national raw materials.

This pole was implanted in the framework of the transformations that occurred between 1967 and 1973, during the so-called "economic miracle" and the high rates of growth attained by the Brazilian dictatorship. Sonia Draibe shows that rapid concentration of wealth was instrumental to the

14 Albeit a second place very far behind the traditional textile center: Chubut was ranked second for the production of hosiery (15%, versus 83% in the metropolitan area); knitted fabric (11% versus 81%); and fiber yarns (6.4% versus 76%) (Cimillo, 1985, pp. 12-13).

15 According to Rougier (2011), more than 80% of the investment in this large privately-owned plant was made by the state.

process: the poorest 40% of the population accounted for 15.8% of income in 1960, 13.3% in 1970, and just 1.4% in 1980; in turn, the richest 10% climbed over the same years from 34.6% to 42.3% and then to 46.7% (1994, p. 300). Thus, the equivalence between growth and industrialization with development was now being exposed as false.[16]

In 1970, the industrial district of Manaus was established, just six kilometers from the city center. The land was sold at knockdown prices, with all utilities and infrastructure provided. By 1977, 136 factories had been opened, creating more than 32,000 jobs (Salazar, 1992, p. 20). In 1984, 248 industrial projects were in operation, with 51,990 employees, while 80 new enterprises "wholly dependent on raw materials imported from abroad" were being opened (Salazar, 1985, p. 24).[17] Most were multinational firms seeking to take advantage of low regional labor costs and state subsidies. In 1970, the Amazonas economy amounted to 0.7% of Brazil's gross domestic product (GDP); by 2010, it had reached 1.6% (Bispo, 2009; Ferreira et al., 2014).

One of the consequences of industrial implantation in both cases was rapid demographic growth. In Chubut, the department of Rawson doubled its population between 1960 and 1970, and again between 1970 and 1980. The population of the department of Biedma tripled between 1970 and 1980, and then doubled between 1980 and 1991. The growth was due to the increase in labor supply resulting from industrialization, which caused severe urban problems, especially in relation to the shortage of family homes.

In Amazonas, the dynamics were similar, only with a bigger population and hence more complex impacts in terms of social and urban problems. In 1960, Manaus had a population of 173,000; by 1970, this had risen to 311,000, a growth of 79%; and by 1980, the population had grown by another 104%, totaling 640,000 inhabitants. Here too, the housing problems for migrants attracted by the availability of work were not slow to appear (Souza de, 2003). Just like in Patagonia, the establishment of subsidized industries transformed Manaus, and by 2010 its population neared two million (Ferreira et al., 2014).

Those who moved to the city did so from the interior of Amazonas itself and from other nearby states, settling in the poor outskirts which lacked even the most basic urban infrastructure. In parallel, the implementation of the ZFM dislodged the so-called "Floating City," a cluster of basic dwellings

16 This false equivalence had already been discussed by various intellectuals. See the outstanding work by Caio Prado Jr. (1959).

17 "[…] inteiramente dependentes de matérias-primas importadas do exterior."

built on stilts by the entrance to the port of Manaus (Salazar, 1985). From then on, the city experienced a proliferation of squatting, which brought with it serious problems related to health and housing conditions (Pereira & Oliveira, 2007).

3. The working class in Patagonia

The hypothesis we take as our starting point is that following implementation of the development pole, a new working class formed in Patagonia as a result of the arrival of different migrant contingents: from other provinces of Argentina, from rural parts of Patagonia, and from neighboring countries. We then analyze the composition of this class and its main characteristics, while attempting to understand the influence the type of subsidized industrialization implemented had on these characteristics and on the forms of struggle and organization that this class developed.

The people who arrived and settled in the region in search of work gradually formed this new working class through their struggles and organization. Upon establishing itself as a class, this working collective faced a context of full employment, enabled by the frequent factory openings, and the real prospect of improving their living conditions.

By the mid-1980s, the unions of workers in the subsidized industries had become powerful organizations with the ability to negotiate wages and intervene in the political life of the region. However, these unions were unsuccessful in mounting significant opposition to either the curtailment of benefits for the region or to the factory closures and redundancies that began in the late 1980s and escalated in the 1990s.

As we have seen, industrial development and the creation of jobs attracted migrants to the area, which had an impact on the hitherto sparse population of these urban areas. Most of the migrants came from rural areas and were descendants of the indigenous peoples of Patagonia, while the remainder arrived from other provinces of Argentina and from neighboring countries. The cities underwent rapid change, which affected social life in all its facets; this included the transformation of gender relations, since textile factories hired thousands of female workers, thereby altering the traditional role assigned to women in the province.

The development of this subsidized industrialization created the need to attract people to the region to work in the factories and in ancillary activities that gradually emerged around them. We argue that large-scale immigration allowed the formation of a collective of workers that, through different actions, established itself as a new working class without strong ties to the

prior experiences[18] and traditions of the cadres of workers that previously lived in the region. This is not to say that there was no prior operational organization or conflicts,[19] only that this nascent working class appears not to have developed historical links with those experiences.

It is important to stress that the largest factory in Argentine Patagonia, Aluar, selected most of its local staff from rural workers, to whom they assured housing, assistance with the move to Puerto Madryn, and a well-paid job. This was an attempt to secure the "loyalty" of the workers, who in general did not have much experience with unions or political organizations.

Here, we note a significant difference in the labor component and in how it was constructed by the company: the personnel needed for tasks that did not require training were selected from among individuals without experience in industrial work, and, in many cases, in living in urban areas. In general terms, these new workers had less knowledge of union or political activity than those workers involved in tasks that required technical expertise, who did incorporate forms of resistance and organization that would form the basis for the development of the first internal commissions.

In the case of the textile park, there was no behavior that was obviously homogeneous given that various enterprises existed, but what is clear is that a significant part of the working class was made up of migrants who had no experience in industrial work and urban life - something easier to assure in factories with low levels of mechanization, which required limited prior experience of the tasks to be performed.

This occurred in the framework of a working class in formation, characterized by its heterogeneousness both in terms of its migrant origins, experience, and traditions, as well as the ideological positions it would reproduce. The model for the Argentine state's occupation of Patagonia was part of this process. It was a perspective that proposed a supposed community of interests between workers and bosses in the region, with the aim of ensuring the development of Patagonia and we would argue, this project was supported by a majority of this young working class. The government's position was reinforced by the need to keep the social peace, so as not to jeopardize plans to promote industrial development that underpinned the incipient industrialization of the region.

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18 Here we follow the notions of experience and common traditions formulated by E. P. Thompson (1982, 1989).

19 In fact, we have discussed conflicts starting from the end of the 19th century (see Pérez Álvarez, 2015).

This perspective was powerful because it was predicated on objective facts. Subsidized industrialization depended on state contributions, which by the start of the 1980s began to be canceled. The workers were aware of this problematic, and in many cases planned their struggles around a strategy based on an alliance with the bourgeoisie with interests in the region, in which it was this bourgeoisie that led the process. The aim of this alliance was the "defense of the region" and the demands were for the continuation of benefits for businesses that invested in Patagonia.[20]

We think that these characteristics had a bearing on the forms of conflict and the organization that the workers developed. Thus, the identification of part of their interests with those of their bosses, the construction of alliances with the management,[21] and the alignment in a shared discourse on the need to strengthen Patagonia's development, are key elements throughout their history.

We do not claim that these characteristics were unique to the region, nor that there were no structurally similar regions (one such example is the province of Tierra del Fuego, in the far south of Argentina; see Grigera, 2011) which experienced processes of struggle with different dynamics. However, we think the evidence shows that one of the aims of the development poles in Argentina – to construct cadres of workers with lower levels of conflict[22] than in the traditional centers – was relatively successful in the case of Patagonia.

Nor do we imply that struggles or conflicts did not occur, only that they were of a particular character hue that is central to understanding the dynamics of this new working class, and the type of conflicts that occurred

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20 On this, see the results of my doctoral thesis, partially published in Pérez Álvarez (2013; especially the final section, pp. 287-332).

21 This can be seen in several interviews. Miguel states: "[…] in some way I think that ultimately always, in one way or another, we ended up leading to, or we were headed towards, the defense of the management. When we came out to claim industrial promotion, we were defending the management and not ourselves" (interview held in Trelew, June 15, 2007); Miguel is a leader of the opposition in the Textile Workers' Association (Asociación Obrera Textil, AOT; the union that represents the workers of textile factories).
Meanwhile, Daniel recalls one of the votes he lost during a meeting that took place at the factory where he worked: "[…] the management suggests that industrial promotion has been taken away from them, so a meeting is held, where it is decided that a group of comrades is going to fight for that industrial promotion alongside the management […]. We always said that the workers should never support the management, but well, it was a vote that was lost" (interview held in Trelew, April 4, 2012); Daniel is an activist in the Movement towards Socialism (Movimiento Al Socialismo, MAS), a Trotskyist party that was relatively important in the Argentina of the 1980s, and which was active in the region from the start of that decade. Translations by *Apuntes*.

22 Especially in comparison with what occurred in the industrial centers of Argentina during this period. See Schvarzer (1986) and his hypothesis that these projects sought to "demote" industrial work in the traditional areas in order to defuse existing conflict.

in the context of subsidized industrialization in this region. This was a labor collective that began to formulate its first demands in a highly repressive context, advancing on the way to its formation as a class. The conflicts they engaged in were on a small scale, associated with working conditions in a single plant and the number of daily working hours imposed (Pérez Álvarez, 2015).

During the dictatorship of 1976 to 1983, public demonstrations were obviously few and far between, but careful scrutiny does reveal different forms of struggle. It is this process of resistance that brings to light certain occurrences which call into question the general discourse of social peace, or the idea that workers always followed the path laid out by management.[23]

The most conspicuous of these initiatives was the refusal to work extra hours. We have identified such actions in the textile factories, and at Aluar. The demand for better working conditions was expressed by refusing to work extra hours, which provided security to the workers because it did not go against existing legislation. But this demand did clash with the "customs" of the region where, in the context of developing industrialization, intensive use of the still-limited available workforce was deemed necessary.

During the years of the dictatorship, experience in collective work gradually developed among the workers who came to the region at the beginning of subsidized industrialization, and internal commissions were set up in some textile factories and at Aluar. It was these experiences in self-organization that led to an accumulation of power, which was employed following the return of constitutional rule. These workers had already constructed a common experience based on some of their shared interests, which were pitted (at least in part) against those of other actors. This experience was conditioned by the production relations in which they were bound up, in which the need to sustain the industrial promotion scheme pushed them towards a policy of collaboration with the management.

But even if the experience was conditioned by these relations, this does not mean it was determined by them. Although the tendency toward collaboration was real, so too was the goal of constructing an independent path. Both strategies were disputed following the resumption of constitutional rule, by which point this group of workers had already established themselves as a class, with a disputed consciousness (Pérez Álvarez, 2010).[24]

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23 We have reconstructed parts of these processes through interviews with workers from a range of branches of industry in the region (see Pérez Álvarez, 2011, 2015).

24 We revisit the formulation of Gramsci (1997). This author argues that it is the consciousness of a social group that determines the degree of homogeneity, self-awareness, and organization it achieves through the process of struggles and in the framework of relations of objective forces.

The end of the dictatorship opened up new channels for this class-in-the-making: they felt liberated and emboldened to go after more. It was evident that the more politicized activists played a key role, explaining to the rest of the workers about the new possibilities that constitutional rule presented. These activists served as vehicles for the transmission of traditions and experiences that the working class had constructed on the national level, but which were not yet familiar to the workers in this region.

In the AOT, the Metallurgical Workers' Union (Unión Obrera Metalúrgic, UOM) and the Construction Workers' Union (Unión de Obreros de la Construcción, UOCRA) began to debate who would be on electoral slates to raise disputes with the union leadership. The histories of the AOT and the UOM coincided: in the election of 1985, the winning lists defined themselves as pluralistic and combative but were displaced by their predecessors in the next election. These were significant mobilization processes that did not translate into far-reaching changes to the unions. Although greater internal democracy and a more visible presence in the streets were proposed in the early years, little by little the new leaderships drifted away from this model.

For us, the attempts to construct an alternative form of unionism were limited by the level of consciousness that the bases continued to express, and of which these leaderships were an expression. Breaking with the limits of the corporate perspective of the demands proved impossible, as did the articulation of an alternative project that would sustain other types of strategies in the long term.

By the end of the 1980s, a major industrial conflict arose as a result of the state's curtailment of benefits to the industries established in Patagonia. This impacted the Trelew industrial textile park, where factory closures and layoffs started to become common. But the presence of greater labor and social conflicts did not translate into a change of consciousness, nor an increase in the influence of those groups that proposed a strategy that was independent of management.

Gramsci observes the different levels that collective political consciousness occupies: the first is economic-corporate; the second is the development of consciousness of the solidarity of interests across the entire social group; and the third is the transcendence of the corporate and the development of political consciousness. The dispute is located between the first and second levels; that is, between the defense of the restricted group (where their interests appear to equate to those of their bosses) and that of the wider social group, with a consciousness that demands the need for a distinctive class strategy. The third level of consciousness, which does not feature in our study, forms political consciousness and, for the working class, proposes the need to disrupt the relations of objective forces.

Thus, certain conflicts involving provincial state workers and teachers, who held strikes lasting several months in 1986 and 1987, took on relevance. The provincial government underwent a profound crisis sparked by the imposition of measures at the national level, such as the reduction in oil royalties[25] and the termination of industrial promotion, which stripped funding from the Chubut budget and exacerbated the recession.

The workers of the region were now faced with a new social framework. The forces lined up against them were new, and confronting them with the tools forged by their experience appeared difficult. Their history of struggles included the demand for better working conditions and pay increases from the companies, but they did not have the means to respond to a situation in which the employers did not want to buy their labor power. It was no longer a case of fighting for improvements as part of the same project as the dominant sectors: they were now up against the new project that these sectors imposed on them.

There was a need for the workers themselves to construct an alternative proposal, and for this a consciousness limited to the corporate was no longer enough. The strategy of the majority of workers left the struggle circumscribed to each faction and, amid this tight circle and because of the collapse of the development pole model, their interests appeared to converge with those of their employers: the only way for them to continue working appeared to rest on the owners of "their" factories doing well. The conclusion appeared linear; that is, there was no option but to defend the management in order to keep their jobs.

The unions were incapable of forming links between the different class fractions. This was evident in the muted reaction to the process of mass layoffs and factory closures. At that time, almost all unions restricted their demands to the compensation payments established by law; that is, that "legality" be respected.

The late 1980s, and especially 1989, constituted a historical watershed, and a clear nationwide breaking point that hastened the downfall of the developmentalist project: there was a large number of layoffs in the textile factories and other ancillary activities. The crisis that had beset the industrial park and the remaining small and medium-sized companies was undeniable.

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25 Chubuhas has one of the highest number of oil fields of all Argentine provinces, and much of its budget depended on the contribution that the state made at that time in the form of royalties for the extraction of this resource. When these transfers were withdrawn, the provincial government did not have enough funds to pay the wages of the state workers.

4. The working class in Amazonia

Reis Filho and Salazar also subscribe to the theory that the development of the subsidized industrialization project in Amazonia proposed the creation of a new working class out of the diverse migrant inflows, in which the majority were small rural proprietors of indigenous or mestizo origins, dispossessed from their lands in Amazonas and other Brazilian states (Reis Filho, 2008, 2016, p. 104; Salazar, 1992, p. 27).

The creation of a new working class was indispensable to the development pole model, as the shortage of labor had been regarded as a recurrent problem ever since the integration of Amazonia into capitalism: "The problem was, however, the labor force in that region so underpopulated and so vast"[26] (Kupfer, 2010, p. 192).

Márcio Souza argues that from the very beginnings of the capitalist imposition in the region, Indians were viewed as no more than another raw material. The control and appropriation of the indigenous population is a key factor and one whose realization was complex, in that the indigenous inhabitants escaped by using their ability to find sustenance from the resources guaranteed by the jungle (Souza, 1994, p. 21). Thus, it was difficult to impose a wage relationship on these natives: "The Portuguese and Spanish faced shortages of labor and found great resistance in the indigenous cultures to adapting to the wage economy" (Souza, 1994, p. 45).[27]

The capitalist process needed to ensure this control, since although the natives were considered just another product, it was the only product available that could create new value. The implantation of the industrial model brought with it similar problematics: once again, violence was part of the imposition of the new model. Its origins were marked by two authoritarian measures, befitting a government of the kind that took power in the coup of 1964: the first lay in "eradicating, in a violent way, not a favela, but rather, in the true sense of the word, a city […]; the second when, through a simple decree, pleonastically, the industrialization of Manaus was determined"[28] (Salazar, 1985, p. 11).

Following the crisis of 1920, there began a sizable migration of unemployed rubber workers to Manaus, where they engaged in informal work.

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26 "[…] o problema era, no entanto, a mão de obra nessa região tão pouco povoada e tão vasta."

27 "[…] portugueses e espanhóis enfrentaram a escassez de mão-de-obra e encontraram nas culturas indígenas uma resistência muito grande para se adequar a uma economia de salários".

28 "[…] erradica, de forma violenta, não uma favela, mas na verdadeira acepção da palavra, uma cidade […]. A segunda, através de um simples decreto, pleonasticamente, decretava-se a industrialização de Manaus."

This population "started building what would become known as the 'Floating City'"[29] (Salazar, 1985, p. 45), with "more than two thousand floating houses accommodating, at its peak during the 1960s, more than 12,000 inhabitants"[30] (Barata Souza, 2010, p. 152).

The development of the new industrial city meant evicting the poor from the social territory of the Floating City in the port − their gateway − and relegating them to slums further afield. It meant the demolition of the workers' city to build a new bourgeois and industrial city from its ruins (Pinheiro, 2003; Oliveira, 2003).

The dictatorial government published an urban relocation plan to improve the living conditions of the inhabitants through the construction of 2,000 dwellings, but only 130 were actually built. The evicted families reverted to being precarious occupants, whether on "usurped" land or, again, in stilt houses in the *igarapés* of Manaus (Pereira & Oliveira, 2007).

Souza notes the express contradiction between the conditions guaranteed to big businesses and the treatment of the evicted: "Those industries received land at ridiculous prices, totally urbanized, unlike any residential complex supposedly for people on low incomes"[31] (1994, p. 163).

In any case, as we have already seen, at the beginning of the industrial project the main limiting factor was "[…] the diminutive size of the workforce in the whole region"[32] (Salazar 2006, p. 188). The difficulty in guaranteeing an available workforce is analyzed as a central problematic by numerous authors and in many studies, some related to planning.[33]

Thus, immigration and the incorporation of women into the workplace was fomented: "A great difficulty consisted in supplying the labor […]. Bearing in mind that the work involved the production of small pieces on assembly lines, this was conducive to the inclusion of female labor, for which before there were no work opportunities recorded in the region" [34] (Kupfer,

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29 "[…] começou a construir-se o que viria a ser denominada de 'Cidade Flutuante'."
These dwellings were built on stilts, in the port area of the city. This allowed the workers to be close to the center, where they found their informal work.

30 "[…] mais de duas mil casas flutuantes abrigando, em seu auge na década de 60, mais de 12.000 habitantes."

31 "[…] essas indústrias […] receberam terrenos a preços irrisórios, totalmente urbanizados, como nenhum conjunto habitacional supostamente para pessoas de baixa renda recebeu."

32 "[…] o diminuto tamanho da força de trabalho, em toda a região."

33 See, for example, Wiedemann (1977), a study undertaken by the Escola Superior de Guerra (ESG), the Institute of Applied Economic Research (Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada, IPEA – attached to the Ministry of Planning), and Fundação Getulio Vargas. They argue that the key was to create the conditions to enable a mass transfer of the "excess" population from the northeast to guarantee the labor force that was in demand in Amazonia.

34 "Uma grande dificuldade consistiu, porém, em providenciar a mão-de-obra […]. Tendo em vista que se tratava de produção de pequenas peças em linha de montagem, isso era favorável à mão-de-

2010, p. 202). This strategy enabled the construction of an abundant labor force of rural origins, a female majority, and many minors. "Cheaper labor is employed, because it is unqualified, primarily female and minors"[35] (Salazar, 1985, p. 11).

To make this possible, in parallel to the establishment of the industrial pole, land concentration through the expropriation of small-holders increased. "The land in mid Amazonas went through an accelerated privatization process. The State, in the perception of the holders, appears to be an ally of the big, of the rich and powerful"[36] (Pinto, 1982, p. 72). It was this newly dispossessed population that migrated to Manaus and became "an excess reserve of available labor for the assembly industry implanted in Manaus"[37] (Pinto, 1982, p. 75).

For João Salazar, this project sought to disperse a workers' movement that, in the part of Brazil that was already industrialized, had advanced in its processes of organization, while also taking advantage of the formation of a labor collective that had no experience in the struggle to obtain better wages. Thus, an "unequal duel" would arise between businessmen trained in the class struggle and "new" workers who lacked the traditions that would give them the tools to defend their rights (Salazar, 1985, p. 11).

The process by which new companies and jobs were created was a rapid one. The ZFM boomed "[…] until the end of the 1970s. The beginning of the 1980s marked the start of a crisis that escalated from 1985, reaching critical points in 1989-90 and 1991"[38] (Salazar, 1992, p. 145). SUFRAMA data for 1990 show that there were already 136 industries in place by 1977, with more than 32,000 employees; by the end of the 1980s, Manaus had 312 factories in operation and some 100,000 direct workers, who constituted a working class that was ever expanding and changing.

J. Salazar's studies are faithful to a traditional reading of these processes, in which the new working class was nigh on incapable of forming its own articulations due to its heterogeneity and the absence of common traditions. A labor collective composed of migrants of rural origins, a majority of which were females, appeared not to have the means of mounting an

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obra feminina, que antes não tivera nenhuma oportunidade de trabalho registrado na região».

35 "[…] emprega-se mão-de-obra mais barata, porque desqualificada, principalmente feminina e do menor…."

36 "[…] as terras de médio Amazonas passam por um processo acelerado de privatização. O Estado, na percepção dos posseiros, aparece como aliado dos grandes, dos ricos e poderosos».

37 "[…] uma reserva excedente de mão-de-obra a ser engajada na industrialização de montagem que se implantou em Manaus."

38 "[…] até o final da década de 70. O inicio dos anos 80 marca um principio de crise que vi se agravando a partir de 85, atingindo pontos críticos nos anos 89-90 e 91."

effective opposition to an experienced management class through powerful protest actions.

However, the records of conflict show that the workers of Manaus, male and female alike, organized a number of strikes of considerable importance. More recent works add complexity to Salazar's traditional approach, and find that while organization was difficult, this did not prevent the emergence of class articulations and collective protest actions.

Reis Filho (2010) describes in depth the important strike of 1985,[39] a new conflict in 1986, and another strike, of great nationwide impact, in 1988,[40] and constantly stresses the key role played therein by female workers and the disputes that arose around territoriality in the industrial city. In turn, the thesis project of Santiago (2010) goes into greater depth regarding the strike of 1985,[41] pointing to the formation of an underground network around the assembly lines to resist personal attacks. But also, the author finds evidence of prior networks, at similar times as in Patagonia:

> In Amazonas, the workers of some of the industries established in the ZFM began to strike, in most cases for better dietary, transport, and working conditions, at the end of the 1970s. On August 1, 1985, a general strike was held, paralyzing a great many enterprises.[42] (Santiago, 2010, p. 14)

According to the more traditional interpretations of the process, to which Salazar subscribed, the difficulties faced by the labor collective in articulating class responses had three central causes. The first is the fact that the companies initially hired workers with no prior experience, in order to hamper their possible organization and ensure low wages (Salazar, 1992, p. 210). They formed a labor collective comprised of a female majority (around 70% in total, rising to 95% in the case of assembly jobs) and migrants of rural origins, who underwent a complex transition to the urban and industrial world.

This is also highlighted by Reis Filho (2016, p. 104) and Torres. Both authors argue that the rural origins of the workers caused them to regard their transfer to industrial centers as a kind of social advancement, insofar

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39 See: *Jornal A Crítica* (1985), of the Arquivo Pastoral Operária Manaus.

40 See: *Jornal O Parafuso* (1988).

41 See: *Jornal A Crítica* (1985).

42 "No Amazonas, os trabalhadores das indústrias instaladas na Zona Franca de Manaus começaram com paralisações em determinadas fábricas, na maioria dos casos por melhores condições de alimentação, transporte e de trabalho, ainda no final dos anos de 1970. No primeiro dia do mês de agosto de 1985 realizaram uma greve de caráter geral, envolvendo um grande número de empresas."

as "living in the city means assuming the status of the white man" [43] (Torres, 2005, p. 117). In part, this limited their protest actions, as the hard living conditions they came from meant that they did not see their current situation in an particularly negative light.

Second, a union leadership developed which was connected to the industrialist and pro-management project, and assumed as its own the demands for subsidies for the companies: "As an 'artificial' industrial park was established, there arose, no less artificially, unions manipulated by the State under the guidance of *pelegos*[44] […]. So a capitalist development came about that, apparently, did not generate contradictions"[45] (Salazar, 1992, p. 199).

It would appear that the characteristics of the working class that had formed did not give rise to disruptive movements that questioned the legitimacy of these leaderships. Thus, the structure of the development pole could project this image of capitalism almost without contradictions, at least at certain times and when looked at from a viewpoint that was not particularly problematized.

Santiago again breaks with this monolithic image of the *pelega* leadership: although it existed, there were rebellions against its power, and there were times when it was almost defeated by the workers. This occurred in Manaus in the metallurgical union elections of 1984, when the opposition list resoundingly defeated the establishment list (Santiago, 2010, p. 98-99).[46] For Santiago, this process of forming new worker leaderships was the basis of the transformation that occurred during the early 1980s, when the union became an essential instrument of struggle against the powerful transnational corporations that operated in Manaus (Santiago, 2010, p. 33).

The third factor, and perhaps the most challenging to confront, was the model of industrialization which was totally dependent on state subsidies, with enterprises that threatened closure when faced with workers' demands: "Without permanent economic links with the State and the Region, these companies permitted extreme physical mobility [and] promoted constant

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43 "[…] morar na cidade significava assumir o status do homem branco."

44 According to the definition in Santiago (2010), a*pelego* is an individual who sells out in exchange for personal advantage. In the case of the union movement, it refers to a docile leader who appeases the employer and adapts to state and corporate power. Moreover, the *pelego* usually receives, in exchange for maintaining this stance, personal benefits, especially of an economic kind (Santiago, 2010, p. 38).

45 "[…] à medida que se implantava um parque industrial "artificial", aparecem, de modo não menos artificial, sindicatos manipulados pelo Estado, sob a orientação de pelegos […]. Assistiu-se então um desenvolvimento capitalista que, aparentemente, não gerava contradições."

46 See, reproduced in the quoted text *Jornal Puxirum* (1983; front cover, back cover, and page 4).

threats of factory closures and unemployment"[47] (Salazar, 1992, p. 88). Workers' strikes and demands came under constant attack from the employers, who conducted mass layoffs and even "marked" those who took part, thereby preventing them from finding work at any other factory in the industrial park.

None of these factors is dismissed by the authors of more recent studies, but they have been heavily qualified. These distinctive characteristics may have conditioned and hindered the actions of these workers as a class, but they did not impede or determine them. Both male and female workers exercised their own agency, which established them – markedly during the 1980s – as key subjects in the socio-political dynamic of the region.

Salazar, when studying the actual worker struggles, records testimonies in which the female workers' will to struggle is in evidence, showing that women sought to fight for their rights as workers by joining strikes and formulating specific demands related to their gender and the exploitation they suffered. However, and surprisingly, the author overlooks this data and sticks to his initial hypothesis that the percentage of women implied, per se, a weakness (Salazar, 1992, p. 308).

Reis Filho challenges and dismantles this argument. In the section of his thesis entitled "A participação das mulheres no fazer-se classe" (2013, pp. 60-73), he provides evidence that female workers played a central role in the process of forming the working class in Manaus. Far from the essentialism that appears to dominate Salazar's perspective on the role of the female worker, Reis Filho shows that they played the role of organizers and promoters of industrial conflict and organization.

Salazar constantly stresses that the regional working class was bereft of labor traditions, and concludes that its characteristics were an expression of a new working class, borne of the subsidized industrialization project, in which there was almost no trace of social antagonism (Salazar, 1992, p. 411). For the author, the intention expressed by the workers was to construct citizenship, with good wages and better living conditions in the framework of the continuity of the development pole. (Salazar, 1992, p. 412) This was a working class without experience in union practices or movements, which, when it took its first steps, met with harsh responses in the form of mass layoffs and threats of closure (Salazar, 1992, p. 423). We have seen how this viewpoint, which leaves little room for autonomous class action, has been

47 "Não possuindo quaisquer vínculos econômicos mais conseqüentes com o Estado e a Região, tais empresas permitem-se uma extrema mobilidad física [e] eclodem ameaças constantes de fechamento de fábricas e desemprego."

called into question by a number of recent works that provide evidence of the struggles led by female workers, especially during the 1980s.

Even so, all works point to a climate of fear perpetuated by the employers who threatened the potential loss of work, which was reinforced by the dependence on industrial promotion policies. This conditioning, associated with the type of industrialization implanted, appears to have placed a major constraint on the scope of workers' actions to create an alternative form of development for society in the region as a whole. Thus, a central demand of this working class was that the subsidies to the companies be continued, seeing this as the only viable route to sustaining their jobs.

As in Patagonia, the end of the 1980s was a time of profound change in Amazonia that worsened the living conditions of the working class: "For Manaus, the most pernicious and long-lasting consequence was the emergence of an "army" of 40,000 unemployed people, aggravating social problems and urban violence. In the fight for survival, the most capitalized companies had to invest in their modernization"[48] (Salazar, 2006, p. 259). Unemployment, job insecurity, and outsourcing thus became more prevalent, fragmenting the class and adding to the factors that their organizations had to face.

Only the biggest corporations, most of them transnationals, managed to keep on growing. Unlike in Patagonia, in Manaus the development pole project was maintained, and by the mid-1990s, it recovered its production levels (Salazar, 2006, p. 260); today it remains relatively buoyant.[49] One of the keys to this longevity would appear to be the continuing low cost of the labor force. "The low unit costs of labor operate as a preponderant factor of this articulation with international capital"[50] (Salazar, 2006, p. 87).

5. Final reflections

We carried out a comparative analysis of the formation of two new working classes as part of the implementation of the development poles in two important regions of Latin America: Brazilian Amazonia and Argentine Patagonia. This line of research allows us to advance in our understanding

48 "Para Manaus, a conseqüência mais nefasta e duradoura foi o aparecimento de um "exército" de 40.000 desempregados, agravando os problemas sociais e a violência urbana. Na luta pela sobrevivência, as empresas mais capitalizadas tiveram de investir pesado na modernização."

49 See *Portal do Holanda* (2017), which announces the approval of three new industrial projects in the Manaus Industrial Park. In Patagonia, the latest news is quite different (see: *Diario Jornada*, 2017).

50 "[…] os baixos custos unitários da mão-de-obra operam como fator preponderante dessa articulação com o capital internacional."

of the conditions that particular socio-economic structures created for each working class, imposing characteristics that are relevant to understanding these labor collectives.

We focused on two regions that underwent profound transformations from the 1960s to the 1980s, and where the pace of these changes was the main characteristic of the process. It was this intensity that set apart these experiences of new working class formation from the "classical" dynamics in the traditional industrial centers in both countries.

An overlapping of historical phases occurred, characterized by dynamics of proletarianization, transition from rural to urban life, incorporation of women into manufacturing work, imposition of new production methods, emergence of phenomena such as outsourcing and labor market flexibility, and the transition from a situation of full employment to one of structural unemployment. Thus, processes that played out over several decades or even centuries in regions marked by classic capitalist development took place here in little over 30 years. This hybridization of processes, the complexity of experiences, and the different historical times in which these working classes lived set them apart from the dynamics of the central regions of Brazil and Argentina.

In the regions studied, subsidized industrialization was promoted in territories that had not previously been subject to these dynamics, in the context of repressive regimes and an economic model dependent on state contributions. Patagonia and Amazonia received large investments that transformed their territories based on the growth of their urban cores, mass inward migration, and the formation of new worker groups.

These were labor collectives with limited common experiences, who went through a traumatic process of forced adjustment to new forms and paces of work. In a very short period, their forms of social relations were transformed and subsumed to wage employment. Many of the workers that comprised the class were migrants from other regions and a considerable proportion were rural smallholders, chiefly of indigenous origins, who had been driven from their lands by processes of capitalist expansion.

The overlapping of historical stages in a demarcated territory is what leads us to assert that subsidized industrialization projects can function as "social laboratories" for researchers, in that they allow the analysis, in concentrated form, of processes that in other regions spanned far longer periods.

These working classes tended to restrict their demands to pay and conditions, since the mandate that the development model needed "harmony" between workers and employers for the continuation of state subsidies served as a means of keeping in check those groups that proposed alternative

projects; but this did not preclude other, more direct forms of persecution, such as police repression or layoffs. Another distinctive element of the management practices in an industrialization without local linkages was the threat of closure in response to any worker demand; we have discussed this with regard to Amazonia, and in Patagonia it became so common an occurrence that the expression "factories with skates" became popular.

Nonetheless, these workers developed different forms of struggle. It was at the start of the 1980s, set against the collapse of the Argentine dictatorship and the weakening of the one in Brazil, that the classes began to express a set of common experiences that addressed their needs in the framework of an industrialization process.

Another reason why the experience took place at that particular time was the conditioning imposed by the subsidized industrialization project itself which was being reformed and thereby entered into a crisis. In this context, the workers knew that their source of employment was at risk and consequently, they demanded the continuation of state subsidies for "their" employers. This demonstrates the powerful conditioning undergone by these classes, which was the result of dependence on the model of industrialization in which the workers were involved as operatives. This is central to understanding the difficulties they faced in their attempts to oppose the cancellation of the project in Patagonia and the low wages in Amazonia: if the only option for sustaining the project was to defend employer subsidies, their own claims as a class would have to be subsumed to this central demand. Class interests were relegated to second place, put off until a time that never arrived, in favor of the immediate concern for defending the "development of the region."

We have already described other characteristics of these working classes, especially the considerable female component of both collectives. Another key element was ethnicity: many workers came from the indigenous populations of these regions, or from nearby territories. The intersection between class, gender, and ethnicity, crucial to the study of the working class in Latin America, was perhaps most evident in these cases because of the aforementioned pace of change. The break from the traditional world occurred alongside the implantation of factories with concentrated capital and cutting-edge technology. The new working classes, formed as labor collectives due to the development poles and constructed as classes as part of the struggle and organization of male and female workers, were, and remain, a complex crossroads.

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