Main Project Title: Korean Routes of Migration in Latin America

Crisis and social change: the impact of the 2001 crisis on the life of the 1.5 generation in Argentina

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Introduction

The economic, political and institutional crisis which led to the events of December 2001 in Argentina had a strong impact on society in general and on the Korean community in particular. I will here consider the effects of the December 2001 crisis on the 1.5 generation of that community.

During the last four decades Argentina has experienced a number of economic, political and institutional crises. The Korean community has suffered these crises in a number of ways; these include forced urban clearances during the 1976 – 1983 military dictatorship, reemigration caused by waves of hyperinflation and impoverishment as a result of successive economic recessions. However, in spite of these experiences Korea migrants continued to arrive in Argentina so the impact on the community of reemigration and the successive crises was diminished. The reduction in size of the community was balanced out by the arrival of new members who made their contribution not only in terms of numbers but also qualitatively, in terms of their knowledge, training and capital, which were destined to be invested in community networks in Argentina.

In spite of the ups and downs of Argentine history Korean residents integrated rapidly and successfully into the economy, especially in the areas of light and medium industry and the wholesale and retail textile trade. In the 1990s community networks experienced growth, old people and adults participated in Korean associations while younger people mixed with other Koreans through the associations or the churches and with Argentine friends at school or university. Koreatown reached its apogee in the 1990s and this could be seen in its churches, shops and community activities given life to by the people who had arrived to form part of the Korean community over the course of its existence.

This situation changed after the 2001 crisis and significant social movements occurred. The reason for this was a fall in the number of immigrants arriving combined with the ongoing phenomenon of reemigration continuing unchecked. This article seeks to reflect on the life situation of the 1.5 generation and is based on the premise that the 2001 crisis accelerated the tendency towards reemigration and reinforced the tendency of young people to
abandon their studies and instead go to work in the family textile business, developments which produced changes in community life.

This article begins with methodological and theoretical considerations which explain its structure and the suppositions on which it is based. It then continues with a description of Koreatown, located in the Buenos Aires city district of Flores, and the social networks which grew up there during its period of maximum growth in the 1990s. I then look at question of reemigration throughout the recent history of the community before turning to reflect on some changes to the life of the 1.5 generation arising from the 2001 crisis before drawing some final conclusions.

(1) Theoretical and methodological considerations

This examination of the effects of the December 2001 crisis on the life of the 1.5 generation of the Korean community is based on the results obtained from previous studies1.

The methodological perspective here relied on is interdisciplinary in nature with a strong urban ethnology influence (Althabe, 1990). Priority is given to in depth interviews carried out with community members including university students, their families and community leaders. Interviews were also carried out with a number of members of the 1.5 generation in Buenos Aires. The interviews were structured around the objectives proposed for the article according to the hypothesis set out at its start.

Repeated visits were made to Koreatown in order, among other purposes, to visit churches and talk with youth leaders – key informants – about their perception of the impact of the 2001 crisis. Specifically, these interviews were aimed at inquiring about possible changes undergone by groups in the community with regard to their place in the city and the movement from the district of Flores to Avellaneda as well as the high level of reemigration that occurred between 1999 and 2003.

This study was carried out from an interdisciplinary perspective employing different qualitative approaches with the priority on the in-depth interview as a moment of enunciation in which the subject takes responsibility for the discourse and creates an “I” in the presence of

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the other. I regarded the interview as a communicative situation in which narratives of memory and identity are constructed. As Thompson puts it “the statements of individuals bear the equally revealing marks of the modeling force of memory and of individual and collective consciousness.” (Thompson, 2004:29). When one speaks of oneself in the presence of another one becomes involved in a self-reflective process which tends to externalize the internal visions of the interviewee in the form of a coherent story. Arfuch (2002) holds that the interviewee ceases to be an informant and to some degree becomes a character whose history, memory and experience are relevant to us.

The theoretical concepts on which this study is based are those of diaspora and Bourdieu’s idea of capital. The concept of capital used here follows on from that employed by Bruneau (2004), Brubaker (2005), Choi (2003), Dufoix (2003), Hall, S. (1990) and Clifford, J., (1994). It is a non-essentialist view of diaspora, conceived of as a heterogeneous and diverse experience. I base myself here more on a decentered view of this phenomenon which places its emphasis on its frontiers - always mobile and diffuse - and the diversity of channels of communication between its different centers, rather than on the centrality of the nation state. By doing so I follow what Michael Bruneau (2004) regards as the minimum requirements for a diaspora. These are: 1) the population studied must be present in a number of different places, 2) the selection of the destination country must be made on the basis of a structure of migratory chains which link the migrants to those already settled at the destination, 3) the new arrivals integrate in the destination country without assimilating and preserve a strong sense of identity related to their country of origin. This implies the existence of a strong community life which allows for preservation and reproduction of traditional customs, and 4) the dispersed migrant groups develop multiple relations between each other and their country of origin. The idea of diaspora thus supposes that family structures play a central role in the migratory chain as, along with churches, they constitute places of memory which reestablish an order of transmission between the generations. For present purposes the notion of diaspora provides a general framework for the understanding of the behavior of various community actors.

The concept of the 1.5 generation has been defined by specialists in Korean migration to the United States as consisting of those bilingual and bicultural people who emigrated from Korea in their formative years. As Mary Yu Danico (2004:1) puts it in her work on Hawaii, “Demographically speaking, the notion of a 1.5 generation is impossible; someone born in Korea is first generation while someone born in the United States is second generation.
However, the term 1.5 generation is significant when used in relation to certain sociocultural characteristics and experiences of pre-adult immigrants.” In Argentina those emigrants who arrived in the initial waves (between 1965 and 1970) - many of whom have already reemigrated – and those who arrived between 1985 and 1990 have different characteristics. The existence of the 1.5 generation in communities all over the world is evidence of the existence of the diaspora. People belonging to this group have a feeling of identification between themselves, even when they come from countries with different cultures, such as Argentina and Brazil. They have internalized a set of values which articulates those of their society of origin, the society where they live and the group with whom they live2.

In order to better understand the process of transnational mobility I have had resort to Bourdieu’s (1979) notions of social and cultural capital3. Individuals move across institutions, groups, scenes, fields of force and struggle and condense the social from all this in what Bourdieu describes as habitus, a notion which combines frameworks of action, thought and feeling associated with a social position. It is on the basis of these frameworks that subjects perceive the world and act in it. Habitus orientates actions on the basis of the place occupied by the agent in a specific field, that is, the structure of distribution of a specific capital. For example, the cultural and linguistic patrimony transmitted by the family is incorporated in the form of habitus through a cumulative effort which has a social cost. This cost is measured in terms of the time, effort and sacrifice involved in the acquisition of this patrimony. In this way the family can be seen as being a business that accumulates cultural capital4. This investment of social energy is a characteristic of diaspora communities. The habitus of the 1.5 generation, in terms of frameworks of perception and action, articulates the dispositions produced by the objective structures of the local society and those of the ethnic community.

The notion of cultural capital is supplemented by that of social capital, understood as those social relations based on attitudes of reciprocity, confidence and cooperation in a community which facilitate cooperation and coordination for mutual benefit. Thanks to social capital individuals obtain advantages and opportunities from social community connections.

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2 For example, I have seen how in Korea young people who have lived abroad have a greater degree of affinity between themselves than with those of their age brought up in Korea. Fieldwork carried out in Seoul 1998-1999.
3 In the social world agents mobilize economic resources (money and consumption), cultural resources (educational qualifications and languages), and social resources (networks of social relations). These resources are known as economic, cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1979).
4 Social capital can be transformed into economic capital (a good job obtained by recommendation) as can cultural capital (a degree provides access to well paid jobs).
The mobilization of resources from these networks allows for the obtaining of better results for enterprises and plans than would otherwise have been the case.

(2) From the apogee of the 1990s to the deterioration at the start of the 21st century: the 2001 crisis

The Korean migrants who arrived in Argentina in the 1960s and 1970s expected to settle in rural communities. However, when these failed to take root the new arrivals started to move to the cities. In Buenos Aires they first settled in impoverished districts before eventually establishing themselves in Bajo Flores-Parque Chacabuco district known as Koreatown or Baek-Ku\textsuperscript{5}. The main artery of this district is Avenida Carabobo between Avenida Eva Perón and Castañares. The broad, tree-lined footpaths of this district were the scenes of a vigorous social life during the period of rising Korean immigration from 1989 to 1995. In Baek-Ku there could be found a wide range of businesses and services aimed at providing for the Korean community. These included bakeries, video clubs, clothes shops, beauty salons, hairdressers, dentists, garages, supermarkets, restaurants, fishmongers, real estate agents, computing businesses, accountants, pharmacies, travel agents and much else besides. The bulk of signs on the street, menus etc. were in Korean.\textsuperscript{6} (Mera, 2005b).

The 1990s was the decade of most growth and institutional development for community associations and churches as well as growth in the number of the shops and services mentioned earlier. This process left its mark on the urban environment through cultural signs and the experience of individual lives.

The strengthening of the community allowed old people and adults to live as if they were still in Korea and impose a conservative ideology on the community. This produced certain tensions with the young which I examined in earlier articles.

In the district there was growth in the number of spaces which allowed for the development of an intense associative life. These included bars and karaoke joints aimed at various age groups, churches (Catholic and Protestant as well as two Buddhist temples), associations, newspapers and a radio station. As well as the Argentina-Korea Association there was a great range of others based on a variety of affiliations: province of origin, universities and schools in Korea, work activities in Korea prior to emigrating and sporting and artistic activities. There are also associations related with life in Buenos Aires that

\textsuperscript{5} The name of the district comes from the 109 bus which immigrants would use to travel from the Retiro district, where they had first settled, to their new homes.

\textsuperscript{6} The proliferation of signs in Korea caused some tension with non-Korean residents.
brought together businesses, industries and the professions as well as student associations, golf clubs and old peoples’ groups. There are also calligraphy clubs, a study group on the culture of Korean immigrants and a fine arts group. This broad range of groups played a big role in the way people lead their daily lives and the life of the community in general (Mera, 2005a). Existing associations consolidated themselves and new ones sprang up, such as the Association of Korean professionals (APUC), the University Students Association (AUCA), Integral Korean Medicine (MIK), the Korean Argentine Association (ICA), associations of writers and painters etc.

The 1990s also saw important growth in the presence of the community in the education system with a rise in the presence of Korean students in the best schools and universities in Buenos Aires as well as a growing presence of young graduates and professionals in the private and public spheres. Throughout this process, Baek-ku acted as a reference point for the negotiation and creation of a group identity, associated with the hegemonization of dominant discourses of “Koreanesss” related to education, the Korean language, and food and marrying within the community. The question of territoriality is important here, understood as part of the dialogue between the district and the identifying values of the community and in relation to the presence in Baek-gu of the most important community institutions and associations. The district was an environment of support, confidence and tranquility in an often hostile society. It amounted to the possibility of keeping alive ethnic networks and creating environments of security, belonging and affect. In fact, unlike Once and Avellaneda Avenue, the district acquired a name in Korean which it has kept to this day.

The arrival of the millennium saw significant stagnation in the institutional growth experienced by the community. The inflow of new arrivals from Korea ebbed and the outflow of departures to other countries and especially to the United States, Canada and Mexico increased. There were two separate reasons for these movements: 1) the deepening of the economic crisis which Argentina had been suffering from over recent decades, a factor exacerbated by budget cuts which had a particularly negative impact on the middle class and small businesses, and 2) the tendency of Koreans in Korea to emigrate to other places in Asia such as China.

With regard to the situation in Argentina, the economy began to go into recession in the third quarter of 1998 and by the third quarter of 2001 GDP per capita had contracted by 16%, a fall of 33% in the overall level of investment had occurred, unemployment exceeded
15% and internal consumption had fallen by 10%. This context saw a sharp worsening of the labor market problems that had already existed in the 1990s, leading to the exclusion from it of more than 4.5 million people which in turn led to a fall in the real wage level, an increase in inequality and an increase in the number of the poor, this last by May 2002 a social category which included some 20 million people, an increase of over a third since October 2001. 21.5% of the economically active population was unemployed in May 20027.

It should here be recalled that the economic crisis was accompanied by a severe political and institutional crisis arising from the resignation of President Fernando de la Rúa on December 20th 2001. In the week that followed four different presidents were successively appointed before Eduardo Duhalde eventually took office and managed to stabilize the situation sufficiently to call elections in October of 2002. This period saw violent street demonstrations that included the destruction and looting of businesses.

The situation for young people trying to find work became very difficult and they started to see emigration as an option. According to a survey by Gallup Argentina (2000) 33% of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 would have liked to live in another country. These were urban, middle class, university students and they were later followed by those who had completed secondary school. Spain Italy and the United States were the most sought after locations.

According to the newspaper Clarín of July 14th 2000, “There are a hundred people in the Italian consulate having their applications for dual citizenship processed. Once they receive it they can live and work legally in any country of the European Union (…) The Spanish consulate has reported a 30% increase in the number of inquiries about dual citizenship.”

Korean residents adopted similar strategies. From the year 2000 on there were multiple departures that included families reemigrating to Mexico, Australia, the United States or Korea and young members of the 1.5 generation heading for Korea and the United States. In both cases there were usually families, friends and colleagues at the other end of the journey to provide help with settling into the new location.

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7 Estimates by SIEMPRO, Sistema de Evaluación y Monitoreo de Programas Sociales del Ministerio de Desarrollo Social.
(3) The phenomenon of reemigration in the recent history of the community.

Right from the outset the Korean community in Latin America has seen movement from Paraguay to Argentina, from Argentina to Brazil and vice versa, from Bolivia to Brazil and Argentina and from these latter to Canada and the United States. In fact, the people who make up the communities in Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Peru, the U.S.A., Canada, Korea and Spain have friends and family in other places on this list, forming a network of circulation almost infinite in its pathways and entry points.

Many of these movements were implicit at the moment of leaving Korea but they were also a product of the dynamic nature of the migratory process itself, that is to say, the conditions found in the destination country. The internal situation in many Latin American countries, characterized in the 1970s by violence and economic chaos including hyperinflation, provided incentives for reemigration. In Argentina the economic crisis reached a new peak in 1989 when President Raúl Alfonsín left office. Residents in Brazil had their own moment of economic expulsion in 1981 and another one in 1991 with high rates of inflation and a generally unstable situation. These events intensified movements northwards.

It should also be borne in mind that even if conditions in destination countries encouraged reemigration, for many Korean community members Latin America was always intended solely as the start of a migratory odyssey with a different final destination in mind. These migrants, who mainly arrived during the 1980s and had already experienced the industrialization of their own country and seen it become more urban and westernized and seen the rise of the middle class there.

The possibility of reemigration is, therefore, implicit in the life project of any Korean person living in Argentina or Latin America as multiple movements are a constituent part of the diaspora and this type of behavior is possible due to the existence of Korean communities and their functionality in terms of the processes of dialogue and construction of identity. The production of identity founded on being in a particular place allows for the recognition of a transnational urban territory of identification which facilitates the transnational dimension of...

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8 In the view of Kim Ill Soo (1981) one of the psychological consequences of economic success for Korean society was an increased consciousness of social mobility, something which was particularly intense among those who did not manage to achieve the success they wanted and looked to the United States for an opportunity to achieve it there. This view is developed by Park Kyeyoung (1997) in her study of the Korean community in New York, in which she maintains that Korean migrants had not left Korea because they could not survive there but rather because they had dreams of “America”.

9 Though the Koreatowns of San Paulo, Buenos Aires, Los Angeles, New York and Sydney all have their own characteristics, they all operate as a reference point for all Koreans in the world. The same is true of the 1.5 generation. Though growing up in the United States, Latin America and central Asia are all distinct experiences,
these communities. This transnational characteristic was to have, at the time of the 2001 crisis, various consequences for life in Koreatown as well as on the networks of sociability - the churches and associations – and so strongly condition the life of the 1.5 generation in the following years.

(4) The crisis and post-2001 social changes

As has already been mentioned, the 2001 crisis had a strong impact on all the country’s citizens and on urban spaces which suffered many transformations amounting to a general impoverishment with a darkening of the streets, a worsening in cleanliness and safety, a deterioration of the urban infrastructure and the appearance of new social actors such as the “cartoneros”, initially perceived as dangerous by the middle class.

All of these changes took their toll on Koreatown which also suffered from a decline in the number of businesses as a result of the high level of emigration and the general impoverishment of the Korean community.

The number of Koreans reached its high point of 40/420000 in the year 1990. Half this number had entered the country between 1985 and 1989 and they settled in the province and city of Buenos Aires. In 1999 this figure rose to 31000 and would fall to 25000 in two years and to 15000 in 2001. By 2005 this number had risen to 19000 and is today around the 20000 mark, as can be seen in the following chart10

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10 Based on data obtained from the institutions of the Korean community in Argentina, from Lee Kyo Bom (1990), from the Argentine Immigration Service (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Comercio) (1997) and migration department of the Korean ministry of foreign affairs. (Dirección de Migraciones del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Comercio de Corea) (2005).
The sudden fall in the size of the community had a direct impact on the life of Koreatown in terms of there being fewer people, fewer businesses, less movement and less social life. As can be seen from the following chart, since 1997 the number of Koreans in the country has fallen considerably, and this fall is all the more significant when the fact that there has been no comparable fall in the rest of the continent is taken into account.

Koreans resident in Latin America

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country/Year</th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>98,852</td>
<td>102,806</td>
<td>111,462</td>
<td>105,642</td>
<td>107,161</td>
<td>107,624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>44,201</td>
<td>46,916</td>
<td>48,097</td>
<td>50,250</td>
<td>50,296</td>
<td>50,523</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>32,069</td>
<td>31,248</td>
<td>25,070</td>
<td>15,500</td>
<td>19,171</td>
<td>21,592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>2,168</td>
<td>2,379</td>
<td>19,500</td>
<td>17,200</td>
<td>14,571</td>
<td>12,070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>10,278</td>
<td>10,412</td>
<td>6,190</td>
<td>7,097</td>
<td>5,803</td>
<td>5,431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>2,051</td>
<td>4,128</td>
<td>5,456</td>
<td>7,943</td>
<td>9,943</td>
<td>9,944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>1,470</td>
<td>1,487</td>
<td>1,509</td>
<td>1,870</td>
<td>1,858</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>1,774</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>919</td>
<td>953</td>
<td>788</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>959</td>
<td>762</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>766</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>718</td>
<td>977</td>
<td>709</td>
<td>758</td>
<td>563</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>464</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,157,498</td>
<td>2,087,496</td>
<td>2,016,911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>170,121</td>
<td>198,170</td>
<td>216,628</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Argentina’s economic and social crisis accelerated the reemigration trend. However, given that numbers remained stable in other parts of the continent the relevance of mobility within it must also be borne in mind. The importance of this factor becomes clear when we consider the return of families from Mexico and Guatemala, a movement that began to be visible in 2005 and that was confirmed by community leaders during interviews.

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As has already been noted, this quantitative loss also implied a qualitative one for the community in terms of material and human resources.

In previous studies I have identified two separate moments in the history of Korean migration to Argentina. The first might be called the golden age and ran from the end of the 1980s to the beginning of the 1990s; it was characterized by the institutional consolidation of community organizations. The second is characterized by the situation of the community after the 2001 crisis, in which new scenes appear in community life (Mera, 2007).

Before looking in-depth at the results of the 2001 crisis for young people of the 1.5 and second generations I will first look at some aspects of the process experienced by the community at large.

With respect to settlement patterns, there is evidence of a general decline and impoverishment of Baek-ku. The diminution in the number of shops and services, darkening of the streets and general deterioration of squares, footpaths and streets changed the life of the district. It has become less safe and for this reason there are fewer people on the streets and fewer businesses display their products on the pavement.

The general impoverishment of the community is explained by the fact that the majority of those who reemigrated came from those commercial sectors with the resources to do so, or were professionals who moved on to other countries where they could expect to go into practice or undertake postgraduate studies. This resulted in a loss of qualified and active (in the sense of creative and innovative) human resources and also a loss of investors, an important factor in community life.

In the face of this impoverishment those who remained in Argentina deployed new strategies of solidarity such as providing free food and vaccinations for vulnerable old people. In general these activities are organized from and by the churches and their young, professional congregations. This is interesting as previously most social aid activities had focused on nearby poor communities or had been carried out in the context of Christian missionary activity directed at the poor in other parts of the country.

Another important transformation was the geographic displacement of commercial activity away from Bajo Flores-Parque Chacabuco district towards Avellaneda Avenue as well as that related to places of residence. The concentration of businesses on Avellaneda Avenue became more visible after the 2001 crisis as many of those who owned more than one business decided to maintain the one on the avenue. This movement of businesses from the Once district to Avellaneda Avenue was accompanied by a second movement; from Baek-ku
towards Avellaneda Avenue and its environs due, on the one hand, to the growing crime problem and, on the other, due to the attraction of the presence of a growing number of Korean businesses.

This geographic displacement has been accompanied by young businessmen and professionals moving their activities to the same areas. The same people have also transferred their residential preferences from the districts of Belgrano and Barrio Norte to Caballito and Almagro, the latter two also being middle class areas but with a different cultural and educational profile.

As has already been mentioned, emigration was an option chosen by many young Argentines after the 2001 crisis and 1.5 and second generation Koreans were no different in this respect. For many adult members of the 1.5 generation, already with professional qualifications or small businesses, reemigration was an attractive option. This was preceded by a process of preparation involving language study, revalidation of qualifications, research trips to look for business or professional opportunities and then, with the necessary conditions in place, the move itself was made. Many young families moved to the USA in this way, relying on networks of friends and family to lodge them until they obtained employment or got their business going and were able to establish themselves in their own home.

Another important stimulus for reemigration came from fear of crime, an issue that was already present before the 2001 crisis and became more serious after it. Robberies with violence occurred in Koreatown right from its foundation and to combat them a private security firm was hired to protect the district. The number of robberies declined and for a time the district was considered to be safe. However, for many Koreans the private security service became associated with irregularities and mafia-like behavior. This system stopped functioning some years ago. Agreements were reached with local police stations to assure the safety of the district and the situation was managed on this basis until the end of the 1990s. After the 2002 crisis the question of crime again reared its head as a problem with no visible solution. There were waves of robberies, some of the carried out with great violence against the families who were victims of them. Although the rising level of crime was something being experienced by the city as a whole a particularly worrying feature of these crimes was the suspicion that those who carried them out had inside information about such things as

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12 The prevalence of illegality often led to the need to seek alternative solutions for problems. In this regard something said by Choi Keum Joa (1991) in a thesis on the Korean community in Brazil comes to mind, Complying with the law does not seem to characterize the community. There is a Korean proverb which says that a good person can live without the law.
recent property sales and in some cases there was even talk of some members of the community having themselves participated in the commission of the crimes. The most serious aspect of this crime wave is that investigations produced neither arrests nor convictions and this in spite of the intervention of the Korean Embassy which had discussions with the police.

There was also an increase in less serious crime with car theft becoming more common as well as the robbery of wallets and cell phones in the streets. All of this led to a fall in the number of people going out, fewer people on the streets and the area becoming ever emptier. It can thus be seen that fear of crime after 2001 had as much weight as the economic situation in the decision of many Koreans to reemigrate.

Another weighty factor in this process was the continuing move of businesses and residences away from Baek-ku to Avellaneda Avenue. As this area became more important in the community rents rose steeply, the streets grew brighter and new types of gallery-style shops, similar to the once in the Once district, were built. These allowed for a greater degree of security and control thus benefitting both clients and owners. This movement also involved the consolidation of intra-ethnic networks and a generally more inward looking aspect to the community as a result of the loss of bicultural leaders; businessmen and professionals who occupied positions of intermediation and dialogue.

Regardless of all the questions analyzed above in relation to the aftermath of the 2001 crisis, I believe that the most traumatic and important change in the sociocultural life of the community was less visible and had young people as its most direct protagonists. I refer to the question of education.

An interest in education was always a characteristic of the Korean population resident in Argentina and the fallout from 2001 had its impact here too. Kim Ill Soo (1981:76) states that “the national ideology of education is derived from the social structure of traditional Korean society: in the national culture of Confucianism, a kind of social stigma was imposed upon the uneducated; and in contemporary South Korea society, diplomas from urban schools have become a license for upward economic mobility”, and this “education fever”, as it has been described by Michael Seth, which formed a basic element in the impressive social and economic development of Korea, seems to be losing its role as a guiding force in the social life of the Argentine community in Korea.

In the first place, the reasons for this appear to be related to continuing economic decline. People in the professions earn much less than those involved in the textile trade and so cannot enjoy the same lifestyle or level of consumption. This difference in purchasing
power, combined with the effort required to earn a university degree leads to things like the following being said, “why have a degree if you are going to have to live like the poor?” by young people for whom the definition of success no longer has to do with education and degrees but rather with a certain level of consumption. Their parents have softened their demands with regard to education and allow them to follow different paths. The reigning symbolic model of parents in business with children - at least one of them at any rate – with a university degree and in the professions, has started to change. Today many young people want to abandon their studies and join their parents in the textile trade because it brings greater economic rewards.

When there was no questioning of the value of education the levels of participation in it were very high. By contrast, there is today much worry among community leaders about the reluctance of young people to study, to the extent that it is difficult to get them to finish secondary school. Also, parents who are interested in education are inclined to send their children to the USA where graduate professionals may enjoy better economic prospects. In spite of all this there are still those among the 1.5 and second generations, in general the children of professionals who still live in Argentina, who continue to support the idea of continuing with their university studies basing themselves on a humanist vision committed to knowledge and science.

This transformation has had a big impact on the community as it involves a change in the values which condition the perception and appreciation of the valorative scale of those attributes which form the foundations all social organization. As Bourdieu said, to be aware of the value of a capital (any of them) it is first necessary to recognize it, that is, to possess the categories of perception and valuation of that social field. In the process described above it might be said that economic capital is coming to be more prized that cultural capital. This involves a change in the categories of perception and valuation which allow cultural capital to be perceived, known and recognized. The measure of value imposed by economic capital becomes symbolically efficient as a force which, responding to “collective expectations”, acts on the organizing values of the community. A new consensus is being constructed, amid tension and struggle, in which schools and churches are playing the conservative role of those who want to preserve what was previously unquestionable.

The recognition of a capital requires social consensus as to its value, which is what gives legitimacy to its classificatory power. The social conditions of the community in the wake of the 2001 crisis have led to a questioning of values that were previously untouchable
and education and the exercise of professions are increasingly being seen as valuable only in so far as they can provide access to a certain lifestyle and there is less regard for their intrinsic worth. So, young, university educated professionals end up in the textile trade, their children do not want to study as they see no value to it and finally parents and grandparents abandon attempts to enforce the Confucian ideal.

This development has created tension in community life. Some 1.5 generation professionals and community leaders are trying to rescue the shared historic view of education\(^\text{13}\). However, the newly hegemonic model works ever more firmly against these values. Collective memory is reinterpreted in the new social context. This involves language changes, new social representations and new ways of appreciating and classifying objects and reality. The lives lived by past generations who dominated the community groups become an area of conflict and struggle.

This change also has implications for Koreatown. While it once constituted a territorial reference for the creation and imposition of a hegemonic group identity associated with a “Koreaness” founded on the Korean language, food and the value accorded to education and marriage within the community, in the aftermath of the 2001 crisis this referential role is shifting towards Avellaneda Avenue. The big churches and institutions of Baek-\(\text{ku}\), icons of community history, are giving way to the textile businesses of Avellaneda Avenue. What was once the core of the community with its hegemonic identity is drifting into darkness and abandonment while the Avellaneda district emerges as new, rich and successful but with different affective connotation of “Koreanness”.

**Final Thoughts**

During the last four decades Baek-\(\text{ku}\) was the focal point for residence and ethnic consumption for the community of Koreans in the city of Buenos Aires, marking through its cultural signs and lived histories its presence in the community.

We have seen that while reemigration was always a constant in the community, it was balanced by a flow of new arrivals who made their contribution both in quantitative and qualitative terms through their knowledge and capital, invested over and over again in Argentina. From the end of 2001 the rate of reemigration increased and this was not

\(^{13}\) The community functions as a system of symbolic reference which allows the unification of all the multiple we groups such as the family, the associative group and the diaspora macrocosm. The imagined existence of a community legitimises the affirmation of individual identities in that it confers a history on them. (Hovanessian M., 1989).
compensated for by the arrival of new immigrants, all of which produced a considerable material and human decline in the community combined with a weakening of spaces of sociability. The departure of young professional people, already steeped in the codes of both communities, was particularly damaging for community networks and community dialogue with broader society.

We have also seen how the general impoverishment of the community impacted itself in two specific ways on the 1.5 generation. The first concerned the communities spatial location in the city and the other was the effect on the representation of certain values that had previously been seen as hegemonic and which encouraged reemigration among young professionals, a reemigration carried out with a fair degree of success due to the diaspora network consisting of multiple family and community links while at the same using the nation state as a reference in the construction of the migrant identity at a transnational level. The community’s social and symbolic capital allowed it to make the best of its resources, reproduce itself and deal with local obstacles. We saw how in crisis situations the young tend to reemigrate more towards the north and how intra-regional circulation increases as it makes use of diaspora networks with their accumulated, economic, social and cultural capital.

The life situation of the 1.5 generation has been analyzed on the basis of the tendency towards reemigration and the change in the value assigned to education leading to a rise in the number of those who abandon their studies to work with their families in the textile trade, a trend which is a source of worry for older members of the community.

In the context of this change and also the geographical displacement of commerce and work towards Avellaneda Avenue, a new community reference point, we may ask what this displacement will mean in the future. We may further wonder what effect it will have on those urban spaces that condense the history, sociability, identity and social and cultural capital of the community over a period of some 45 years. What new articulations between forms of settlement, sociability and dialogue with non-Koreans will now arise? The situation is very different from the previous and provides ample scope for further study.

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