If They Touch One of Us, They Touch All of Us: Cooperativism as a Counterlogic to Neoliberal Capitalism

Karen Ann Faulk

Anthropological Quarterly, Volume 81, Number 3, Summer 2008,
pp. 579-614 (Article)

Published by George Washington University Institute for Ethnographic Research

DOI: 10.1353/anq.0.0015

If They Touch One of Us, They Touch All of Us: Cooperativism as a Counterlogic to Neoliberal Capitalism

Karen Ann Faulk
University of Michigan

Abstract

Through an ethnographic examination of the BAUEN, a workers' cooperative and part of the recuperated businesses movement, this article considers the emergence of a logic of cooperativism in Argentina in recent years. In analyzing this idea of cooperativism, I distinguish three different but interrelated aspects: formal cooperativism, affective cooperativism or compañerismo, *and community outreach and support. I show how this logic of cooperativism relies upon a discourse of corruption to delegitimize the cultural conceptions implicit in neoliberalism as applied in Argentina and opens a space for the emergence of new and revitalized conceptions of work and the citizen.* [Keywords: Argentina, corruption, work, citizenship, cooperativism, neoliberalism]

At first glance it could be any large Buenos Aires hotel early on a Sunday morning. A few guests bustle around with their suitcases, the phone rings sporadically behind the reception desk, and sparsely scattered groups of people in the adjoining restaurant sit sleepily sipping the small, espresso-sized cups of coffee that are the standard fare in any *porteño* cafe. Slowly, though, a rising sense of tension begins to infiltrate the air. A barely perceptible disturbance registers somewhere near the entrance. In its wake, movement quickens, as individuals, in ones and twos at first, begin to make their way quickly back and forth across the lobby, calling out to others who scurry off in varying directions. Within a short while, a crowd of people has gathered in front of the main doors. The sound of drums begins to penetrate the walls, and glimpses of tattered homemade banners bearing the emblems of leftist political parties, neighborhood associations, and *piquetero* groups filter through the dark windows, reflected in the strengthening morning sun. For this is no ordinary hotel, but the Hotel Bauen, a once-bankrupt enterprise taken over by its former workers in defense of their source of labor. Controlled and operated by a workers' cooperative, the current Hotel Bauen is the object of an intense legal and political struggle, as the former owners along with their political and economic allies dispute the cooperative's right to manage the hotel. This early Sunday morning in June 2005, a new attempt to have the hotel shut down takes the form of a pair of young police officers who arrive to place a mandatory closure notice on the front door. Within the hour, and in spite of being only shortly past daybreak on a weekend, hundreds of people have rallied in front of the hotel in a show of solidarity for the BAUEN Cooperative and for the worker-controlled recuperated businesses movement.[1]

This show of solidarity with the BAUEN did not emerge spontaneously or in isolation. In this article, I examine how a logic of cooperativism has been steadily established across diverse sectors of Argentine society in recent years. In examining the history and development of cooperativism in Argentina and its emergence in this case, I argue that this recent manifestation of cooperativism has consolidated as a specific challenge to the ideas of the citizen and labor as advanced by the politics of neoliberalism applied in Argentina. I draw on my fieldwork in Buenos Aires from 2004-2006 and focus specifically on the Hotel Bauen as a key site for the exploration of this idea and its development and practice within the recuperated businesses movement. The geographic centrality and functional nature of the hotel, the networks of solidarity cultivated by the cooperative, and

their prolonged struggle for legal definition have made the hotel and cooperative an important symbolic referent and location for the expression of social protest. Here, I show how the logic of cooperativism deployed within and across the recuperated businesses movement works to recreate the notion of the worker as a collective and independent political actor, based on an ethics of solidarity and collaboration. In this way, I see the recuperated businesses movement as enacting a kind of cultural politics that works to "resignify and transform dominant cultural conceptions" and serves as a "crucial arena for understanding how th(e) perhaps precarious yet vital entanglement to the cultural and the political occurs in practice" (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998:13, 5). Furthermore, I show how this resignification relies upon a discourse of corruption that delegitimizes the cultural program of the ruling elite and opens a space for the emergence of new and revitalized conceptions of work and the citizen.

Buenos Aires, Una Empresa Nacional (B.A.U.E.N.)

Cooperative member Gerardo has astutely described the Hotel Bauen as "A twenty story summary of Argentine history from the past thirty years." The building, located at Callao 360 between Corrientes and Juan D. Perón Streets in the very heart of Buenos Aires, was initially constructed under the direction of Marcelo Iurkovich and associates. The five-star installation was built with a credit from the *Banco Nacional de Desarrollo* (BANADE, or National Bank for Development) as part of the dictatorship's efforts to prepare the country for the 1978 Soccer World Cup tournament. Argentina's role as host came on the heels of the most severe period of Dirty War violence, and the dictatorship faced increasingly intense international criticism as information on its heavy-handed methods at crushing opposition and the plight of the disappeared were slowly gaining visibility. The military government tried to use the World Cup to divert local and international attention away from the violence, and to capitalize on the nationalist sentiments that the tournament provoked. While nascent human rights groups like the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, Serpaj (*Servicio para Paz y Justicia*), and the APDH (*Asamblea Permanente de Derechos Humanos*) worked with some success to use the increased media coverage to draw attention to their struggle, the successful transpiring of the events and Argentina's culminating victory as first time World Champions undoubtedly worked, at least temporarily, in the dictatorship's favor. Now, however, the memory of the 1978

Photo 1: Hotel Bauen, corner of Callao and Corrientes, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

World Cup is for many shrouded in a haze of embarrassment for the popular exuberance it provoked, and the Bauen's association with the event inevitably evokes its emblematic status as a repository of the material traces of political machinations.[2]

Throughout the 1980s and 90s, the Bauen continued to serve as a political stage, becoming renowned as a favorite venue for entertainment and business purposes by the political and economic elite. President Menem frequently held personal and political events within its walls, including using it as a campaign headquarters. Not reserved for any one party, but catering across the spectrum of elite actors, it has been cited as also having been home to the many secret meetings between the Duhalde faction of the PJ (Menem's political rivals within his party) and members of the opposition Alianza party. In the era of "pizza and champagne" during Menem's first presidency, so named for consolidation of established fortunes and the rise of a noveau riche able to capitalize on the easy profits of decreased regulation, the Bauen was the iconic space for the closed-door negotiations and public posturing that characterized political practice.

The credit that Iurkovich and his associates received from BANADE in 1976 totaled 37 million USD, and was designed to finance 80% of the construction costs. By 1982, the terms of the loan were being challenged in court. Iurkovich and associates claimed that the credit had only served to finance 40%. BANADE was later absorbed into the Banco Nación, and the legal dispute was not closed until 1994, when the Banco Nación accepted only 6 million USD in exchange for considering the loan cancelled (i.e., paid). By 1997, Iurkovich, having failed to invest in the Hotel Bauen (preferring instead to use profits to build other luxury hotels, including the nearby Bauen Suites), passed its management to a Chilean company, Solari, S.A. The hotel was by this time deeply in debt, largely for non-payment of taxes and other services. By 2000, this group had entered into bankruptcy protection (*concurso de acreedores)*, and claimed to be operating under accumulated debts of over 8 million USD. Under commercial law in Argentina, a business that cannot fulfill its fiscal obligations enters into this preventive status. The intent is to bring together the owners with its creditors, to assure payment of the balances due. However, the law also stipulates that, as a source of jobs, the attempt must be made to save and reactivate the business. To this end, the commercial judiciary intervenes and appoints a *síndico,* typically an accountant who takes control of the business's finances. In this way, the hotel remained open and operat-

ed under a *síndico* until it was finally closed on December 28, 2001. At this time, only days after the tumultuous events of December 19-20 that had led to President De la Rúa's (literal) flight from office, another judicial order instructed that the doors to the hotel be closed and the few remaining personnel abruptly dismissed.[3]

The workers often reflect on the irony of having showed up on that particular day, only to find the business shut down. December 28 in Argentina is the *Día de los Inocentes*, something akin to April Fools' Day in the United States. Many of the workers recount how losing their jobs on that day, with scant possibilities of finding work in the height of an acute economic crisis, made a bitter mockery of the direness of their situation.

The Bauen remained closed for over a year. By early 2003, some former workers had begun to meet with representatives of other recuperated businesses and the umbrella movement the *Movimiento Nacional de Empresas Recuperadas* (National Movement of Recuperated Business, or MNER). The MNER advised them to gather as many former employees as they could and occupy the installation. Finally, on March 20, 2003, a small group of workers decided to enter the hotel.

The practice of factory occupation has historical precedence in Argentina. In 1959, workers occupied the meatpacking plant Lisandro de la Torre in response to its privatization under Frondizi (see James 1988:113-118). Workers facing imminent personnel reductions occupied and took over production within the Ford plant in General Pacheco in 1985. These occupations and others like them were generally part of a defensive strategy designed to apply pressure, and not considered a permanent measure. The more recent occupations differ from these earlier experiences in that their focus is on the idea of workers owning and controlling both the process and the product of their labor. Rather than seeing worker control primarily as a defensive response to a dire situation, in its more recent manifestation "the occupation of the factory is not just a form of protest but itself constitutes an affirmation" (García Allegrone et al. 2004:341).

The Logic of Cooperativism

I met with the María, head of the housecleaning team at the Bauen, one day late in 2005. It was not the first time we had spoken, as I had at that point been accompanying the cooperative for nearly a year. However, this conversation took place in the relative quiet of her office, rather than in the heav-

ily transited lobby or during the heat of a street protest. Parts of her narrative as told to me that particular day appear throughout this article, and the quotes I have selected carry many layers of meaning that the accompanying analysis only begins to unravel. Hers is not the only voice on which I rely in interpreting the events discussed, and though what she says in many ways closely resembles things I heard from many others, I do not mean to indicate that her point of view can be taken as representative of all of the cooperative's members. However, I include her words at length as a way of providing the reader with access to some of the perspectives and interpretations of those most directly involved in the events described.[4]

María described the initial days of the takeover to me this way:

> …and we came to know what hunger was, outside of the home, no? We lived in a different situation but here with the *compañeros* we suffered from cold, because here there wasn't anything, there was no hot water, nothing, the only thing we had was electricity, we didn't have potable water…we began to cook in a giant pot, we used some cardboard and we began to eat out of it because we didn't have, we didn't have anything, because we weren't at home, later when we began to go home sometimes we began to bring, spoons, forks, etc...[5]

She had been one of the original participants in the occupation. Her narrative, as in resonance with those of many of the others, recalls how they quickly learned to rely on one another and to work together. Once inside, these former workers faced the utter desolation that a year of abandonment and pillage had left. The difficulty of their situation, expressed in the quote above, was exacerbated by the workers' fear of leaving the hotel. The precariousness of their situation took its toll. For a time Iurkovich took the stated position that it was to his benefit to have the workers inside, taking care of the hotel for him for free and saving him the cost of a security service. However, the workers, many of whom considered themselves to have no background or previous experience in political action of any kind, felt that they had taken a dangerous step, and lived in constant fear of being forcibly evicted.

> María:…we arranged ourselves near the door to Callao Street, where at that time hung the banners of all the organizations that came to help us, and there was just a piece of metal that we used to

> cover (the opening), and every time someone moved the metal it made a noise, so every time we heard that noise, eh, we though they were coming, that the police were coming to take us out. That was the psychological blow that we had continuously within ourselves.[6]

As she related these events, her face reflected a mixture of fear and resolve, intensified, perhaps, by the freshness of the repression the workers had recently suffered. We were speaking just days after members of the cooperative had been forcibly evicted from the City Legislature while trying to have a law on their behalf advanced. Her body still bore the deep purple bruises left by the police batons. Nonetheless, after the nearly three years of effort that she had at that time put into the cooperative, her commitment showed no signs of wavering.

The workers who occupied the Bauen had organized into and registered as a workers' cooperative soon after the occupation. They named their new cooperative *Cooperativa Buenos Aires Una Empresa Nacional Ltda* (B.A.U.E.N.) (Cooperative Buenos Aires, A National Business).[7] They were given the right to legally guard the building and its installations by the judge handling the bankruptcy case. While this provided a certain reprieve in tension while they labored to fix up and clean sectors of the hotel, once they began to operate (first renting meeting rooms and banquet halls, and later opening 80% of the guest rooms and inaugurating a full bar and restaurant), they were once again on the defensive. The uncertainty of their legal status and the disputes over their right to operate the hotel were of daily concern to the workers, who functioned under constant threat of police or legal action against them, as Iurkovich and certain political sectors sought out new ways to recover the hotel by delegitimizing their actions. Under this atmosphere, the need to rely on one another and what external help they could get was pronounced, and many of the workers relate how these practical concerns overshadowed other considerations. However, cooperative members often convey that as the initial days of tension turned into long years of struggle for their right to operate the hotel, the logic of *autogestión*, or worker-led management, came to hold increased significance for them. As another worker has expressed, "We continue to defend worker-led management because in the time we've been struggling we've seen before our own eyes that we can successfully run a business (*llevar una empresa adelante*) and keep it in the spirit of cooperativism and *compañerismo*."[8]

Before further exploring the details and significance of this notion of cooperativism, I consider some aspects of the specific historical and cultural contexts from and within which the idea has emerged. The actions of these former workers, the meaning and implications of their decisions, and how they themselves interpret their situation are deeply informed by and constructive of these contexts. In what follows, I focus specifically on the particular ideas of citizenship, work, and corruption as circulated, understood, and applied in Argentina and by the BAUEN Cooperative.

The Neoliberal Citizen

"Neoliberalism" is a shorthand term used to denote a particular set of economic and political policy proposals that had widespread adherence among economic elites and the major Washington-based international economic regulatory agencies, such as the IMF and the World Bank, from roughly the late 1970s through the late 1990s. These proposals include what has come to be known as the "Washington Consensus," and advocate a decreased role for states in controlling or regulating economic activity. They encourage free trade, privatization, reduced government spending, and deregulation of capital flows.[9] But neoliberalism entails more than just an economic and political program. Rather, the ideological drive behind programs of neoliberal reform contains cultural conceptions that governments and financial agencies attempt to apply and enforce along with and through economic and political practices (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998; Hale 2002; Rivera Cusicanqui 2007).

Furthermore, neoliberalism has taken on a distinct flavor in each of the places it has been applied. Argentina is no exception to this, and both its practice and public understandings of its effects are inflected in locally specific ways. When applied to Argentina under the Menem administrations through a coordination of international agencies and local elites, the era of neoliberalism entailed vast cuts to the size of state institutions, widespread privatizations of state-controlled resources, and severe reductions in social services like education, health care, and transportation networks. Many of these policies have roots prior to the 1990s; indeed, many trace the beginnings of these patterns back to the dictatorship or even further. However, it was during the 1990s that the national government openly and whole-heartedly embraced and promoted neoliberalist policies as the way to stabilize the nation's economy and

lead the country out of the hyperinflationary spirals that had plagued the previous Alfonsín administration.

Beyond these particular applications of neoliberalist policies, and keeping in mind their cultural underpinnings, I want to explore the inherent ideological predisposition carried within neoliberalism towards the construction of certain notions of citizenship in Argentina (Assies et al. 2000; Hale 2002). Maristella Svampa delineates three figures of citizenship that she argues were developed during the 1990s in Argentina (2005:280-285). The first of these she calls "patrimonial citizenship." This model has as its basis the idea of citizen as owner and controller of their property and resources, with individual autonomy as an overriding principle. The commercialization of social services, such as education, health, and security, led those financially able to provide for themselves to embrace the "improvements" to such services brought about by the increased reliance on options within the private sector. This model, which Svampa argues has seen widespread expansion throughout the upper middle and ascendant classes in recent years, has its ultimate example in the rapidly growing number of gated communities (known as "*countries*" in Argentina), which often function as complete independent neighborhoods, including stores, health services, and schools within their barriers.[10]

The second model identified by Svampa is that of the citizen consumer. The idea of the citizen consumer is based on the inclusion of the individual in terms of their consumption and use of the goods and services provided by the market. In this model, participation in the public sphere was promoted as the ability to partake of the culture of consumption presented by the media (see also Jelin 1996; Sarlo 1994). Citizenship was to be understood in terms of individual integration into the market, where citizens would voice their opinions and exercise their freedoms through the power of consumer choice. The centrality given to this model during the 1990s was so great that the rights of the consumer as social actor and the obligations of the state towards these were included as Article 42 in the 1994 reform of the Constitution.

The third model of citizenship that Svampa sees as operative in Argentina during the era of neoliberalism is that of community assistance/participation. Here, citizens were expected to be self-responsible for social obligations, including the provision of basic and necessary services previously provided by the government (see also Escobar and Álvarez 1992). This model advocated the development of community support networks to

cover the survival needs of those left out of the formal economic system. It was applied to the increasing number of those otherwise largely excluded from the other two models, and consisted of a kind of low-intensity, restricted citizenship, to be operative under the watchful eye of the state and through the constant control of international lending and development agencies. In this way, "…those paradigmatic expressions of Latin American social cooperation (like survival networks and the informal economy) that had for decades been seen as obstacles to modernization…were reinterpreted in terms of 'social capital,'" a term that she says serves as "an ideological nucleus of the neoliberal model" (Svampa 2005:284).

In each of these models, neoliberalism as implemented advanced a new kind of relationship between the state and civil society. A minimalist conception of the state and democracy and the reduction of the political domain and its appropriate participants worked to remove citizens from previously influential modes of participation in political life. The logic of cooperativism that quickly came to be embraced by the BAUEN and other recuperated businesses challenges these notions of citizenship by asserting the rights of workers to play an active role in the public sphere, as actors capable of influencing the political and economic direction of the nation as a whole. In drawing on their identity as workers, the members of the cooperative insist on the right to work as an integral element of citizenship. They center this notion of work on the idea of worker-controlled management, or *trabajo sin patrón*.

Trabajo Sin Patrón

The appearance of the recuperated businesses movement in the late 1990s and early 2000s comes on the heels of a protracted succession of changes in the formal rights and actual possibilities for protected and salaried work in Argentina. Though a series of such rights have been formally guaranteed by the Argentine Constitution since 1949, the second half of the 20th century saw a long decline in the effectiveness of the protection offered to workers legally through formal organization structures such as unions, government ministries and agencies, etc.[11] However, beyond and in conjunction with these concrete changes in the nature and practice of work and the legal and economic forces that influence and regulate it, looking at contemporary forms of social protest in Argentina reveals how the idea of work is being conceptualized and deployed in new ways (Battistini 2004).

Photo 2: Dinner table and beds set up on Callao.

These include the actions of piquetero or unemployed workers movements, informal and organized groups of *cartoneros* or street recyclers, and recuperated businesses, among others.

Built in a weak sense into classical liberalism, the notion of the right to work in Argentina has roots in the socialist, anarchist, and syndicalist movements at the turn of the 20th century, but derives its main force and flavor from classical Peronism and the union structures that emerged in that era.[12] The idea that the state was responsible for assuring access to stable, salaried labor continued to hold force and provide impetus to workers' organizations even as the practical conditions of labor came under continual threat both from state forces and union bureaucracies during the second half of the twentieth century. The adoption of neoliberalism posed new problems for Argentine workers, with the premise of state protection cast away in favor of market control. Labor laws were altered, erased, and ignored, and many workers found themselves increasingly subjected to policies with key words like "labor flexibility," the notion specifically designed to increase profitability by reducing

worker protections. These reforms, which included substantial cuts for government workers and other such structural adjustment measures, were enabled in part by the overturning of the National Employment Law under President Menem. By the end of the 1990s, there was a marked increase in desalaried work, black market work devoid of protection, and under- and unemployment throughout Argentina.

It is within this particular context that the recuperated businesses movement emerged and began to formulate its demands. Argentine anthropologist María Inés Fernández Álvarez elaborates on the notion of work as it is understood and promoted within this movement (2004). She notes that the primary sense of work among the workers is often that of work as daily experience, as the means of social reproduction. This sense is expressed by many workers when they highlight their participation in the cooperatives as a means to "*llevar el pan a nuestras casas*," or the fundamental condition of life that guarantees their subsistence and that of their families.

However, work is also fundamentally asserted and considered as a right that should be available to all.[13] This sense involves a number of interconnected aspects, all of which relate to how the workers are imagining their relationship to the state. One of these contrasts work and unemployment. In this aspect, holding a job is strongly linked to the idea of dignity. The workers insist that they do not want to simply receive their means of subsistence from the state (as was being enacted by the time of my fieldwork through government plans such as *Jefes y Jefas de Hogares*, which provided monthly payments to unemployed heads of households). Within this context, they contend that the state should take responsibility for assuring jobs for those in need, rather than simply providing handouts. In doing so, they further assert their own legitimacy, highlighting the effort (*esfuerzo*) that they have dedicated to creating their own source of jobs while the state remained unwilling and unable to do so. By insisting on the state's responsibility to provide work, they demand that the state treat them as rights-bearing active participants in the life and economy of the nation (*portadores de derechos*), rather than as passive recipients of state programs (*beneficiarios*), i.e., to be treated as active citizens, not passive subjects.

However, within the recuperated businesses movement the idea of work takes on the added dimension of an effort having been realized by the workers themselves. They organize around a principle of worker self-manage-

ment, one that is rooted in an ethics of cooperativism. While there are many issues yet to be resolved around the implementation and practice of worker control, a notion of cooperativism has become a central feature of the recuperated businesses movements. The use of the word cooperativism *(cooperativismo*) by the members of recuperated businesses refers directly to this idea of labor being organized collectively and oriented towards the benefit of all. It also includes a moral sense of cooperation, both between the members of a cooperative and of these to the larger society.

The idea of worker-controlled businesses may seem to have certain similarity to the notion of community assistance/participation as embedded in the neoliberal models of citizenship discussed above. In this way, responsibilities formerly assumed by the state get displaced onto local groups in the name of community autonomy. However, I argue that though the idea of self-management may bear a resemblance in practice to that promoted under neoliberalism, both the intention and the effects are quite different. Rather than being empowering, the kind of community autonomy promoted by neoliberalism generally led either to a dire lack in basic services, and/or restrictive modes of participation, often carried out under the strict guidance of international NGOs.[14] The workers argue that the business class sees trabajo sin patrón, on the other hand, as a threat rather than a way of relieving a burden, and interpret the constant attempts to have the Hotel under their management shut down in this way. As one cooperative member expressed, "They can't leave things as they are, because we are showing the people that we *negros* can also be, not bosses, but create sources of labor."[15] As such, they see their efforts as constituting, first, a rhetorical challenge to the individualism of (neo)liberalist philosophy. In addition, by having demonstrated their capacity, as workers, to run and manage businesses and factories without the managing class or financial backing from banks or other lending institutions, they see their efforts as a practical challenge to the very premise of how work is organized under the current economic system.

This reassertion of the right to work as a fundamental right of all citizens can be seen within the rhetoric and actions of the BAUEN Cooperative. The centrality of the right to work in their struggle was eloquently exhibited during one protest I attended. In visible symbolic demonstration of "work" as a central notion of their struggle, the cooperative decided to bring a representation of their work into the street. To do so, they cut off the several lanes of traffic in the block of Callao Street that

ran in front of the Hotel and set up elaborate dinner tables and beds in the closed lanes. The contrast that this established was striking. The physical evidence of the work of the cooperative was dramatically displayed in front of a generalized public.

The figure of the salaried worker as a social identity, combined with the culturally salient notion of collective good, provide the members of the BAUEN Cooperative and the rest of the recuperated businesses movement with an argument for legitimacy that resonates with previous notions and strongly contradicts the primacy given to highly mobile finance capital and labor "flexibilization" in neoliberalist philosophy. In explaining the contrast between their efforts and the actions of the former owners, members of the recuperated business movement frequently appeal to a notion of corruption. In the next section, I explore the meaning of this notion and how members of the BAUEN Cooperative use it to explain and claim legitimacy for their actions.

On Corruption

Though a critique of the economic effects of neoliberalism is strongly voiced among workers in the recuperated businesses movement, this is not their primary focus. Rather, the perception that the implementation of these economic strategies was accompanied by widespread corruption, understood in a particular way, is most often and harshly mentioned among these workers. While the notion of work that they advance is more specific to their particular situation, a discourse of corruption permeates discussion of contemporary life in Argentina across the social spectrum. "Corruption" here acts particularly as a frame through which the practice of occupying and operating businesses is legitimated.

In considering how the idea of corruption is used and circulates within contemporary Argentina, I build off of the interventions of recent anthropologists in disputing the treatment of corruption as an objective phenomenon, as often assumed or proposed in academic or prescriptive literature (see, for example, Eigen 2002; Goldsmith 1999). Recent ethnographic work from around the world has demonstrated that what is perceived as corruption needs to be itself an object of study, and that such perceptions rely heavily on cultural influences (Hasty 2005; de Sardan 1999). This operates in at least two ways. On one level, what is perceived as "corruption" depends on culturally recognized registers of appropriate behaviors. What

may be considered "corrupt" dealings by an outside observer could be locally interpreted as the appropriate behavior for the actors involved. On another level, the way in which international development agencies and their promoters use the word corruption, or, more specifically, the kinds of actions these agencies define as corrupt and the way the word "corruption" becomes a signal for the inability of local institutions to properly behave according to international standards of modern bureaucratic statehood, is locally applied and interpreted by different groups in different ways. Along these lines, Ahkil Gupta has argued that, in India, "the discourse of corruption turns out to be a key arena through which the state, citizens, and other organizations and aggregations come to be imagined." Arguing against those who would treat corruption as "a dysfunctional aspect of state organizations," Gupta sees corruption as "a mechanism through which 'the state' is discursively constituted" (1995:376).

Despite a number of important differences, in Argentina "corruption" has similarly come to serve as a lens through which the proper role and ethical basis for governance comes to be asserted. Used nearly ubiquitously to describe the era of neoliberalist politics, the idea of corruption as permeating Argentine society has gained a powerful interpretive force. Not only are the politicians who held power during the 1990s widely seen as having engaged in multifarious "corrupt" practices, but the actions of community leaders, state workers, union bureaucrats, judges, businesspeople (*empresarios*) and many others are all considered to have been complicit in this "era of corruption."[16]

Haller and Shore have noted how the discourse of corruption emanating from the Global North rests on an inherent public/private dichotomy, which is clearly delineated in the definition of corruption by the World Bank as "the abuse of public office for private gain" (Haller and Shore 2005:2-5). In Argentina, I argue, the emphasis is placed not on a public/private dichotomy, but on the difference between individual and collective benefit. In appealing to this notion of corruption, the workers contrast the logic of capitalism and the primacy given to an ethics of (individual) fiscal gain to what they see as the owners' ethical obligation to have acted for the benefit of the business as a productive unit, one that includes the workers.

In addition, for members of the recuperated businesses movement, their right to the occupation of their factory or business fundamentally includes the argument that many of the factory and business closures that

plagued the second half of the 1990s were fraudulent. The rewriting of the Bankruptcy Law under Menem facilitated owners' ability to evade debt payment, particularly to workers, and installed the notion of the "cram-down" which allowed interested parties a favorable position from which to buy the business under protection and renegotiate its debts. This led to many cases of "phantom associations" controlled surreptitiously by the former owners, and allowed business owners the possibility of authoring fraudulent bankruptcies as a method of debt evasion, a route many are seen as having taken (Fajn et al. 2003; lavaca 2004; Rebón 2006). The prevailing ethics of profit maximization was considered so complete as to lead some to speak of a "habitus of impunity."

> Within the business sector was installed the idea of legal and moral deregulation, forming a kind of "habitus of impunity," in which many businesspeople placed little value in the most elemental aspects of following the law. Only by taking into consideration this supposed social climate of *immunity* in which they were inserted and a profound anomie, can we understand the set of fraudulent practices that many developed (Fajn et al. 2003:35, emphasis in original).

For a significant number of cooperative members, their occupation of the factory or business comes not out of a preconceived ideological adherence to the notions of cooperativism, but in direct response to the dire economic and social conditions that accompanied the closure of their source of labor, and the perception that the closure was itself fraudulent or corrupt. It was this perception of corruption across the business sector, in ways that directly affected the workers and their families, that galvanized many into action. This is visible in the way one member explains her decision to leave Bauen Suites and join the cooperative:

> When the Bauen closed, I kept working for Iurkovich in Bauen Suites; later I had to choose between continuing to work there or recuperate the hotel. It was a difficult decision because I had four children to care for and who was going to provide for my household?…[I decided to come because] my compañeros were there. But beyond that, while I was in the Bauen Suites, which is connected to the Bauen hotel across the back, I saw that the Iurkovich family was taking things from here [Bauen] to use there [Suites]. I am a maid,

> and when I cleaned the rooms I recognized the stolen furniture. They had left us without work and now they were stealing even the night tables. That, which is what made me feel more powerless, was what made me decide to change.[17]

Her narrative demonstrates how feelings of solidarity with her co-workers are accompanied by an accumulated anger and sense of indignation over the perceived behavior of the former owners.

While the assessment of the former owner's practices as corrupt is claimed as a major motivating factor for many in breaking out of the employer-employee relationship mold, and also a key component in the way the cooperative legitimized their occupation of the hotel, it is the idea of solidarity with one another that is most commonly invoked as the element that has allowed the BAUEN workers to continue fighting for their right to operate the hotel over the years. For the remainder of this article, I consider the emergence of the current logic of cooperativism in Argentina and how the elements it entails form an integral part of understanding the demands, actions, and implications of the recuperated businesses movement.

Understanding Cooperativism in Practice

Cooperativism itself in various forms has a long history in Argentina, beginning with the mutual aid societies created by immigrant groups around the turn of the 20th century (Munck 1998; Sábato 1998). In the second half of the 20th century cooperativist groups produced a number of important institutions, including cooperative credit unions and educational institutes.[18] These went through numerous manifestations as they contended with a string of military dictatorships, which often imposed restrictive laws reducing their possibilities for action. The formation of a workers' cooperative was also used as a union strategy for placing pressure on owners during the 1980s, most notably in the metalworkers union (see Rebón 2004:29-30; Fajn et al. 2003:185-219).

Though this history undeniably had an effect on the form of cooperativism expressed within the recuperated businesses movement, the relationship between these earlier or already established supportive organizations around cooperativism and the recuperated businesses movement is not direct. The impulse behind the current recuperated businesses move-

ment comes from a mixture of political ideologies, with its principal promoters coming from traditional Peronist, militant unionist, and a number of different organized leftist political backgrounds. Some of these promoters came from or initially worked with the existing organizations devoted to cooperatives, but these organizations were ultimately unable to adapt to the needs and realities of those workers now recuperating businesses. In an important way, the adoption of both formal and affective cooperativism by these recuperated businesses developed in response to the particular historical moment at the time of their emergence. It is the lived situations experienced by these workers that has been key in the formation of a discourse of cooperativism and work as a right, more so than the influence of political ideologies. The history of these workers, and the cooperativism they have embraced, cannot be separated from the era that produced them and come directly as a challenge to the neoliberalist ideas that led to the dissolution of their source of salaried labor.

In what follows, I discuss what I see as three different though complementary aspects of the logic of cooperativism being expressed in the BAUEN Cooperative and the broader recuperated businesses movement. In doing so, I distinguish analytically between what I call formal cooperativism and affective cooperativism, or compañerismo. By formal cooperativism, I refer to the association of workers into legal or otherwise formalized cooperatives, as a means of organization of management and production within the workplace. This differs from what is generally called compañerismo, which carries a sense of working together for the benefit of a group. In addition to these two aspects, I consider the importance of the ways in which the BAUEN Cooperative has effectively garnered community support, largely through its self-definition as a community resource dedicated to protecting and promoting "culture" as an essential feature of community life.

Compañerismo

I. The Other Bauen

The importance that a sense of compañerismo, or affective cooperativism, had taken on among the workers of the BAUEN was clearly expressed one October day, immediately following a protest march against a city judge who had ordered the hotel's closure. This order accused the cooperative of

failing to have the proper safety authorizations to operate a business in the city, and were based on formal complaints *(denuncias*) filed by individuals directly connected to, and acting in the interests of, the former owner of the Bauen. While technically true, cooperative members argue that this position overlooked the numerous papers that they had filed attempting to address the problems cited and regularize their situation. The protest march, which had noisily installed itself outside the judge's office for more than an hour, was heading back to the Bauen when a few of those in the lead decided not to stop in front of the doors of the Hotel. Instead, they continued to lead the march up Callao Street to Corrientes, where they turned left and stopped in front of the doors to Bauen Suites, formerly the partner hotel to the Bauen, which had not been closed at the same time and which remained in the hands of the Iurkovich family.

This decision was spontaneous as far as I was able to discern, and was suggested and led by a few of the core male members of the cooperative (though none of those that held office, nor among those typically responsible for designing the cooperative's political strategy). Initially the idea of taking the march in front of Bauen Suites seemed to center on the figure of the former owner, who was considered responsible for the current dilemma that had precipitated the day's activities. Indeed, other marches had paused briefly in front of a restaurant that Iurkovich owned only a few blocks away. However, once in front of the Suites and directly facing the workers of that hotel, many of whom had been former coworkers of those now organized into the cooperative, emotions ran higher than in any of the many marches that came before or after. One member of the cooperative, the head chef, whose rotund figure was encased as always in his entirely white work clothes, took hold of the megaphone. In an increasingly impassioned manner called out against those inside, asking them why they had not had the courage to join in their struggle, nor had demonstrated solidarity with them when the hotel had been closed and their jobs liquidated. His words seemed to give voice to feelings of rage and pain embedded in many of his compañeros. For the first and only time in any of the many marches I accompanied, some members became violent and began to break minor exterior features of the Suites, including smashing a standing sign and ripping out the plants that decorated the entranceway. The doors had been locked upon our arrival, though I doubt any would have tried to enter, and the confused and frightened faces of hotel guests were visible from behind several layers

of glass. (Later the story circulated that one Suites guest, afraid to leave the hotel while the marchers were outside, had missed his flight out of Buenos Aires. The workers' response was to offer him a room in the Bauen ["*Y bueno, lo podemos poner acá*"]). More poignant, though, was the observant but pained expression of one Suites security guard, who faced unflinchingly but with obvious distress the accusations ardently hurled from the other side of the glass.

I see this event as revealing the utmost importance that compañerismo had taken on for the members of the BAUEN Cooperative. Though their struggle for survival was directed against the institutions of the state and members of the business elite, emotions ran highest when confronting what was seen as a betrayal of their cause by other workers who could have but chose not to either take the same risks as they had or to renounce their posts in solidarity with those who had lost them. It was the failure to act in concert with the group, and to join in their struggle and sacrifice, that produced the strongest and least controlled or calculated emotion.

II. Singing for Solidarity

The emphasis on compañerismo also rings out clearly in the chants that the workers improvise and sing during the marches. Chants have a long history of use during public manifestations throughout Latin America, and are famously employed as rallying cries and points of enjoyment during soccer matches, with fans of opposing teams competing to outdo each other with the volume and creativity of their songs.[19] The chants taken up during these protest marches are generally patterned of a standard set of rhythmic tunes, and often draw on traditional forms in their construction, changing only a few words to fit the situation. For example, *El BAUEN/unido/jamás será vencido* (the BAUEN/united/will never be defeated) is a simple modification of the widespread *el pueblo/unido/jamás será vencido* (the people/united/will never be defeated). Another particularly telling example has excited chanters calling upon the observer to participate: *borom bom bom/borom bom bom/el que no salta/tiene un patrón* (borom bom bom/borom bom bom/whoever doesn't jump/has a boss). This chant has a simple elegance in encapsulating the essence of trabajo sin patrón. It serves as a powerful interpolation to those accompanying the marchers from other organizations, whether from political parties, neighborhood assemblies, or even unemployed workers, to truly join in their movement and embrace this new logic of organizing production. For this reason, though frequently used, it often

produced a moment of tension, with only a core group of workers joining in the circle of jumping chanters. At one of these marches a member of an alternative press organization covering the march looked around a little sheepishly and jokingly explained, "Well, I do have a boss." He jumped anyway, in solidarity, but that particular chant served to potently mark and remind everyone of the essential nature of these workers' struggle.

The sense of play and creative invention that often accompanies these marches comes through in the way these songs are crafted and transmitted. Many times I walked alongside groups of two or three workers as they bantered back and forth, and suggested lyrics, which would then quickly be taught to and carried on by the marchers as a whole. This process gave rise to another popular example: *vamos compañeros/hay que poner un poco más de huevo/estamos todos juntos nuevamente/la dignidad del BAUEN no se vende, se defiende* (come on, compañeros, we've got to try a little harder (lit., put our balls into it)/we're all together again/the dignity of the BAUEN is not to be sold, but defended). By calling on those assembled to work together, and work harder, this chant expresses the essential role accorded to compañerismo.

III. Affective Kinship

For many members of the cooperative, this idea of compañerismo and the sense of solidarity with other workers are both literally and figuratively expressed through the idea of the family. In the BAUEN, as in a number of the recuperated businesses, once the hotel began functioning, the original small group of workers who had occupied the hotel began to incorporate others into the cooperative. Many of these were former coworkers, but as the need for more hands increased, the offer of work was frequently extended to family members of the workers. The presence of actual family members within the cooperative added another dimension to the way compañerismo was felt and expressed among many in the cooperative. To return to María's words:

> Here, really with all that we've done, all the sacrifices, together with our compañeros, here we have practically the entire family of each compañero. If one doesn't have a child here, they have a sibling, and if not, a cousin. Here we are, practically the whole family, and so when, it's for that reason perhaps that we're more united than ever because when they touch one of us it's as if they touch all of

> us. When the compañeros saw that they were hitting us women it nearly turned into a massacre, but we tried to stop those compañeros (who turned on the police who were hitting us) because there weren't many of us there. How were we going to let them, with all the assault vehicles there, when there were like 500 police officers and only 10 of us? (emphasis added).[20]

Here, she slips between talking about actual family members and the way the members of the cooperative would see each other as family. This focus on real and figurative family also adds another dimension to the need expressed above to account for the cultural context in considering corruption. I have never heard of the idea of giving preference to family in incorporating new cooperative members expressed in terms of corruption. Though the decision to incorporate family members was contentious, the debate centered over whether or not the cooperative would be better served by adding the most qualified personnel available, rather than those most in need of work or already implicated in the struggle, as family members were seen to be.

Formal Cooperativism

> A cooperative is "an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise" (ILO R193, art. 2A)
>
> —From the 1995 International Cooperative Alliance, Declaration on Identity and Cooperative Principles, Manchester, England, adopted by INAES

The affective cooperativism discussed above has its counterpart in the formal cooperativism that serves as the mode of organization for the majority of the recuperated businesses. While the idea of compañerismo is strongly expressed throughout the recuperated businesses movement, the level of formal cooperativism varies widely and in practice takes on numerous manifestations. These differences typically correspond to the history and specific circumstances of the factory or business and to the internal organization and political stance that, given these factors, the factory or business has chosen to adopt.

Though the procedure and some details vary according to provincial laws, presently the formation of a workers' cooperative in Argentina requires registration with the *Instituto Nacional de Asociativismo y Economía Social* (National Institute of Associations and Social Economics, or INAES). Created by presidential decree in 2000, the INAES centralized the laws concerning cooperatives.[21] The formation of a legally registered cooperative provides the workers with certain rights and protections, and allows them the ability to act in legal matters. For this reason, many of those involved in recuperating their source of labor chose to formally organize and register as a cooperative.[22] However, not everybody looks at the adoption of this legal status in the same way, and even amongst those businesses that subscribe to one or the other of these visions, there are significant differences in their plans of action and internal organization. Considering these differences and the reasons cooperative members give for their choices reveals some of the fundamental contradictions that lie at the heart of the recuperated business movement, the BAUEN included.

There are two main visions for the ideal solution to the legal uncertainty that surrounds the majority of the recuperated businesses. For the BAUEN, the formation of a workers' cooperative was an essential and desirable step in designing the internal organization of the hotel under worker control. They ultimately seek the expropriation of the hotel by the state, which they argue is the principal creditor of the millions of dollars of debt the former owners left upon its closure. The state would then either cede or concession the building and its installations to the cooperative. Thus, for the BAUEN and many other recuperated businesses, the workers' cooperative is a medium that not only provides them a certain legal status during the period of uncertainty and a method of formal internal organization, but is also desirable as a permanent institution.

For other recuperated businesses, however, their organization as formal cooperatives is intended as a temporary means, rather than a desired permanent outcome. The largest and most well recognized of the recuperated businesses that fall into this category is the ceramic factory formerly called and still widely referred to as Zanon, now operated by the cooperative FaSinPat (*Fábrica Sin Patrón*). For the workers of Zanon, the formation of a workers' cooperative was designed to be a temporary means of operating. In contrast to their allies at the BAUEN, they demand that the state expropriate and maintain the titles to the factory, which would be run under worker control but remain public property, not owned by the cooperative.

The underlying current in this debate revolves around one of the central contradictions faced by workers in recuperated businesses: how the organization of production based on cooperation can fit into (and can survive within) a capitalist market. For FaSinPat, this contradiction is one more reason to ultimately demand state control of the factory, as a means of protection. FaSinPat member Raúl Godoy, at the time also secretary general of the Ceramics Workers Union of Neuquén, explains:

> For us, the cooperative isn't the end solution, because one has to compete against enormous conglomerates that set prices, like San Lorenzo or Alberdi, groups that export, have foreign capital, international credits, they lobby…We are vulnerable. If they lower prices for four months to kill us, they take us out of the game.[23]

While the danger to cooperatives is real, nonetheless most have managed not only to prove their business viable but even to expand production and create additional jobs. Therefore, these debates over desired final solutions often take a backseat to the more urgent questions of day-to-day operation and survival.

These more immediate questions over how to interpret and adhere to cooperativist principles within a neoliberal capitalist climate cover a number of aspects. One of these concerns the way in which new members are incorporated into the cooperatives, as production resumes and the need for additional labor increases. In the case of the BAUEN, the need for additional labor grew quickly, and the cooperative prides itself on having created some 150 jobs. The initial expansion from the 32 people who entered the hotel in 2003 to the creation of a stable workforce was not without debate, however. Both within the BAUEN and in other recuperated businesses, there are some who believe that it is more important to select those most skilled at the job in question, in order to preserve and enhance the productivity and profitability of the business. Others argue for the importance of offering those jobs to those who most need them. As shown above, within the BAUEN the decision was eventually made to first offer positions to family members, as they "are the ones already paying the price of our being here." This demonstrates how the idea of work is also seen in ways not purely rationalistic, but rather highlights the affective dimensions and lived experiences of workers as whole beings. In other cooperatives, members of local unemployed organizations were given the first opportunities.

Debates over remuneration and distribution of profits have also arisen within the recuperated businesses. The laws of cooperatives under INAES stipulate only that, rather than salaries (s*alarios*), the cooperative members deal in the distribution of earnings among members (*reparto*). Many of the recuperated businesses follow an ethic of equal distribution among all members, without gradations for position or seniority. In these cases, an agreed upon amount is usually also set aside for further investment in the business. However, in the early and difficult days of many cooperatives, the scant earnings would be either entirely dedicated to putting the business in operation again or given to those workers whose need was perceived as greatest, due to their personal circumstances. Within the BAUEN, during the initial days of operation the distribution of pay was equal, but as the need for labor increased and new workers were incorporated into the cooperative or hired on a temporary basis some members began to feel the need to distribute earnings on a gradated scale, one that included a recognition of time with the cooperative.

In all of these debates, the resolution in practice is rarely fixed and unchanging, nor devoid of internal contradictions. The legal uncertainty that surrounds many of these recuperated businesses, including the BAUEN, has in many cases had the effect of allowing the construction of an internally coherent practice to be to some degree postponed, with attention focused squarely on the sheer survival of their efforts.

One way of mitigating the contradictions has been through the direction of the efforts of production or the provision of service towards the benefit of the community. While some businesses have, through either choice or necessity, focused more directly on the mercantile aspects of production, others have decided and been able to direct more effort towards benefitting the community. One way of doing so has been the donation of produced goods or services to local community organizations or the establishment of community programs, including secondary schools and health clinics. Cooperatives such as FaSinPat emphasize the need to put the factory in the service of the community, as part of an ultimate goal of turning the installations into a state-owned, worker-operated enterprise devoted exclusively to the needs of society as a whole. As I explore in the next section, the BAUEN differs from FaSinPat in that it embraces formal cooperativism as a permanent solution, but it shares in the core idea that the hotel should serve the community.

Building a Community: Trabajo Lucha Cultura

The final aspect of the logic of cooperativism that I discuss as having particular relevance for the BAUEN is the nature and extent of the collaboration among recuperated businesses, and the relationship of these businesses with the broader community. As a large hotel with nearly 200 functioning rooms and ample meeting space, the Bauen is able to comfortably host conferences, workshops, and exhibitions, as well as events such as wedding receptions or parties. This feature has allowed the cooperative to develop as a central player and referent within the recuperated businesses movement, as well as among the broader community of people and organizations concerned with social justice from a variety of perspectives.

From the beginning, the cooperative counted on the support it received from neighbors, university groups, and other individuals and organizations sympathetic with their cause.

> María:…Then, when we began to go to the neighborhood assemblies to tell what was happening, what was really (happening), that we were fighting for our source of work, that we were (in) here, they came from the university, they helped us, they decided to bring yerba, sugar, so we could drink mate, eh, they brought a bit of rice, and they came from over there, from the food bank, they helped us a lot, so after that we began to move a little, we began to learn from this, what it is, what work is…[24]

Here, her narrative relates not only how the cooperative both cultivated and received support from numerous groups, but also how she sees the change in the concept of work emerging from the possibilities opened to them through this support.

Collaboration between recuperated businesses has also been important, and has taken on a variety of forms. These have included the organization of umbrella movements,[25] individual mutual aid or trade relationships between recuperated businesses, and the staging of recuperated businesses expositions. The BAUEN has played a central role in this collaboration, whether through lending event space or by providing material and other forms of support to many other cooperatives. They also helped organize and hosted one of the expositions, designed to promote cooperation between and publicize the recuperated businesses and their products/services.

Photo 3: Members of the BAUEN Cooperative marching during a street demonstration. The banner reads B.A.U.E.N. Work, Struggle, Culture

From the time it re-opened its doors, the BAUEN has also provided meeting space, often free of charge, to a wide variety of groups beyond the recuperated businesses movement. A few of the many examples of this include its use by subway workers on strike, workers from Garrahan State Hospital during their extended conflict with the government over salary and working conditions, international anarchist groups, piqueteros, H.I.J.O.S., and those concerned over the Dirty War-style disappearance of a man who was to testify against a former repressor.[26]

In providing a space for the issues and agendas of other groups, those of the BAUEN Cooperative profess to the idea of the hotel as a space for build-

ing community, belonging, first and foremost, to the people. The cooperative recognizes the need to disseminate the idea of work based on cooperation as elaborated above, and as such insists that all workers are welcome in the Bauen, those from the recuperated businesses movement and those "in relationships of dependence" (*recuperados o en relación de dependencia*). They also provide assistance to individuals and groups in need, such as offering free lodging to patients from the interior provinces who come to Buenos Aires to receive operations at state hospitals. In this way, as the president of the cooperative has asserted, the workers of the BAUEN have transformed the space "*de cuna de la burocracia a cuna de la sociedad,"* from the cradle of the bureaucracy into the cradle of society.[27]

The BAUEN cooperative also highlights the importance of artistic expression as a fundamental element in the construction and expression of citizenship. The hotel has a constant run of movies and theater productions, and their marches and protests are frequently accompanied by performances from major cultural figures, such as the director of the Teatro Colón, or popular countercultural rock bands, who offer their support on a voluntary basis. They adopted *Trabajo Lucha Cultura* (Work, Struggle, and Culture) as their motto, brandished on the enormous banners that proclaim their identity in their street protests. The focus on artistic expression integrates an element of playfulness into their struggle, with their protests often being as full of festiveness as they are of determination. The interweaving of the idea of work with artistic expression at once serves to draw in further support for their cause, especially among the youth, and adds another dimension to this reconfigured idea of work based on ideas of social wellness and cooperation rather than giving primacy to profitability.

The articulation of the Bauen as a space of popular cultural expression establishes links with a broader set of struggles within contemporary Argentina over the use of public spaces and the asserted need to recuperate these areas from private hands. This reappropriation and resignification of public space encompasses a wide set of interests, including human rights and memory activists and street artisans (see Tandeciarz 2007 for a discussion of some examples of this). As one group expressed it, as part of their struggle to keep their community center open in spite of official attempts to close it down:

> The refusal to recognize that cultural and social spaces fulfill the function of articulating the participation of neighbors with the pro-

> duction of our local artists within a context of values of solidarity and of collective work is to refuse to recognize that cultural spaces are the builders of citizenship and of social, collective, and democratic participation.[28]

In the same way, the emphasis on Work, Struggle, and Culture within the BAUEN insists that the opening of a space where events can be planned and held fulfills an important function within society, one that goes beyond the articulation of the interests of any one group or faction within the movement or the community as a whole. This adds another element to the concept of citizenship being advanced and practiced (and advanced through practice) by the BAUEN Cooperative. Such alternative practices of citizenship differ strongly from the models discussed above that were made available and promoted under the era of neoliberalism.

Conclusion

> María: We, around 1997 when the owners changed business on us [when management of the hotel passed to Solari, S.A.], in the moment Iurkovich told us, I was one of the ones who didn't want to sign, so he said to me, if you want to sue me go ahead, if you're going to get something you'll get it three years from now, and during those three years you won't have work. So I signed the paper in front of the public notary and lost all my rights. Now, yes, I fight for my rights, because now I know that as a citizen I have to fight for my children and their future, so that Argentina keeps growing.[29]

María's words point to the way her participation in the BAUEN Cooperative goes beyond the protection of her source of labor. Rather, through its emphasis on cooperation, solidarity, and community partnership, the idea of cooperativism embraced by the cooperative operates as a counterlogic to the individualized and materialist conception of citizenship promoted by neoliberal capitalism. Employing a discourse of corruption that itself seeks to challenge the "socially corrupting influence of corruption" (Muir 2008), the BAUEN Cooperative selectively utilizes established legal channels in order to articulate and fight for the right to continue to operate the Hotel. The interweaving of a delegitimizing discourse of corruption with newly conceived

forms of worker-organized action in places like the BAUEN has implications for understanding post-neoliberal politics of work throughout Latin America. Recuperated business such as the BAUEN and FaSinPat have become international referents for rethinking working class organization outside of traditional union structures, in ways that have counterparts throughout the Global South. In this article, I have endeavored to show how detailed ethnographic research and historically sensitive analysis of the context of contemporary forms of social protest like the recuperated businesses movement can shed light on the way these processes emerge out of a dialogue between the lived experiences of the actors involved and the cultural and historical forms of practice that structure the context of their actions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank above all the members of the BAUEN Cooperative for the time shared. Kairos Marquardt and Mollie Callahan kindly provided insightful and timely feedback on an earlier version of this article, as well as much moral support. The article also benefitted greatly from the comments and suggestions of Jennifer Robertson, Fernando Coronil, Javier Auyero, and three anonymous reviewers. Whether or not the final version does honor to their efforts is the sole responsibility of the author. The research on which this article is based was generously funded by a Fulbright-Hays Award from the US Department of Education, and by research grants from the Rackham School of Graduate Studies, the International Institute, and the Department of Anthropology, all at the University of Michigan.

ENDNOTES

[1]For the sake of accuracy and clarity, I refer to the building itself as the Hotel Bauen, and the workers' cooperative that operates it by their legal name, BAUEN (Buenos Aires, Una Empresa National).

[2]For more information on the 1978 World Cup, see Gilbert and Vitagliano 1998; Llonto 2005; Mason 1995.

[3]Information on the history of the hotel comes from author's interviews with hotel workers and was corroborated by archival sources, especially coverage from local mainstream and alternative media including *Clarín, ANRED, Página 12,* and *lavaca.* Information on the takeover and early days of the cooperative come primarily from the author's interviews with members and others that closely accompanied the process.

[4]With this in mind, I have included the original version of her words in the endnotes. All translations throughout the article are mine, unless otherwise noted. My thanks go to Cynthia Golzman for her careful transcriptions.

[5]*…y supimos lo que es el hambre, más allá de que en las casas también, no? vivíamos otra situación pero acá con los compañeros pasamos frío, porque acá no había nada, no había agua caliente, no, lo único que teníamos era electricidad, agua potable no teníamos…nosotros nos empezamos a cocinar en una olla gigante, hicimos un cartón y*

empezamos a comer del cartón porque no, porque no, no teníamos nada, porque no estábamos en la casa, y después cuando ya empezamos a ir a las casas empezamos a traer una cuchara, un tenedor.

[6]*..hicimos un, una parte como un, una puerta la parte de Callao entonces eran todo banderas de todas las organizaciones que nos vinieron a ayudar y, eh, había una chapa que nos lo tapaba nada más entonces cada vez que cuando corría la chapa hacía un ruido, entonces cada vez cuando hacía ese ruido, eh, nosotros pensábamos que venía, no sé, venía la policía y nos venía a sacar. Ese era el golpe psicológico que teníamos continuamente siempre teníamos en sí.*

[7]The initial registration took place under a different name, but following a reorganization the cooperative took on this name soon after.

[8]This quote comes from an interview recorded by the alternative filmmakers' group Alavío, website www.alavio.org. Their video coverage of the BAUEN and numerous other topics is freely available at www.agoratv.org.

[9]On neoliberalism, see Harvey 2005, Saad-Filho and Johnson 2005, Touraine 2001.

[10]For more on gated communities, see Caldeira 2000, Low 2003, Svampa 2001.

[11]For more information on the status of workers' rights and the history of workers' unions throughout the 1960s and 1970s, see James 1988 and Robben 2005. For the 1980s, see Tedesco 1999.

[12]Guillermo O'Donnell's classic article "*Y a mí, qué mierda me importa?"* playfully and effectively details the notion of the right to work as commonly expressed in Argentina. See O'Donnell 1997.

[13]In this paragraph, I differ from Fernández Álvarez in considering a number of aspects of the notion of work as falling within the frame of work as a right. She prefers to make an analytical distinction between them, isolating this as one sense on level with the others. While not disputing the existence of these different senses, I find it more useful to see how each ties into and relates to the overall notion of work as a right, as my research indicated that this was the way it was understood and talked about by the workers themselves.

[14]As Charles Hale has noted in a Central American context, "If, under classic liberalism, the quintessential agent of discipline is the Panoptic state penitentiary, under neoliberalism it is the professionalized NGO" (2002:17). For more on this issue of autonomy, see Thwaites Rey 2004.

[15]*No puede quedar así, porque estamos demostrando al pueblo de que los negros también podemos ser, no patrones, sino crear fuentes de trabajo*. Her use of the word "negros" (blacks) should be understood within the context of how this term circulates in Argentina. Though a full discussion of the racial and class implications such designations mark lies beyond the scope of this article, it is important to note that its usage in Argentina differs from that in other places, including even other parts of Latin America.

[16]This perception of widespread corruption was also intimately connected to the issue of privatizations. Neoliberal policies demanded the deregulation and privatization of the industries that had remained under state control, and these new contracts, most often to foreign bidders, have been severely criticized for operating under a logic of profit for the principal players and unrelated to concerns for the public good. In addition, the ways the contracts were settled and the terms included have been shown to also follow this pattern. The companies that were given these contracts have frequently failed to fulfill even the minimum requirements of investment in things like infrastructure, provoking serious crises in many cases. For more on privatizations, see Vilas 2004; Azpiazu 2002.

[17]*Cuando esto [el Bauen] cerró, yo seguí trabajando para Iurkovich en el Suite Bauen; después tuve que elegir entre seguir allá o recuperar el hotel. Fue una decisión conflictiva porque tenía cuatro hijos a cargo, ¿quién iba a parar la olla en mi casa?…Pero mis chicos*

más grandes, que ya trabajan, me apoyaron y me ayudaron económicamente el primer tiempo. [Decidí venir porque] estaban mis compañeros. Pero además, mientras estaba en el Bauen Suite, que está comunicado con este hotel por la parte de atrás, veía que los Iurkovich se estaban llevando cosas de acá para usarlas allá. Soy mucama, y cuando limpiaba los cuartos reconocía los muebles robados. Nos habían dejado sin trabajo y ahora se estaban robando hasta la mesita de luz. Eso, que es lo que me hacía sentir más impotencia, fue lo que me decidió a cambiar. From an interview published in *Página 12*, August 21, 2007.

[18]Current manifestations include the Instituto Movilizador de Fondos Cooperativos (IMFC), founded in 1958, and the related Instituto de la Cooperación (IDELCOOP), created by an earlier version of the IMFC in 1973.

[19]For an analysis of the gendered connotations of chants within the soccer stadium, see Archetti 1997.

[20]*Acá, realmente, con todo lo que hicimos, con todo el sacrificio, con todos los compañeros que, que, acá están prácticamente casi toda la familia, eh, de cada compañero. Si uno no tiene un hijo, tiene un hermano y si no tiene un, un primo y así. Estamos, eh, prácticamente, eh, casi toda la familia, y entonces cuando, por eso es que tal vez estamos más unidos que nunca porque cuando nos tocan a uno es como que nos tocan a todos nosotros. Los compañeros cuando vieron que las mujeres fuimos golpeadas casi se arma un, ahí, un, una masacre pero nosotros tratamos de pararlos a esos compañeros porque eran poquitos los compañeros que estábamos. Entonces, ¿cómo íbamos a permitir, que estaban todos los carros de asalto ahí, eran como 500 policías y nosotros éramos 10..?*

[21]For more information on the INAES, see www.inaes.gov.ar; lavaca 2004:22-24. INAES replaced in practice the need for cooperatives to pass through older manifestations of such institutions, such as the National Institute of Cooperatives (*Instituto Nacional de Cooperativas*), which had become increasingly restrictive, expensive, and bureaucratic.

[22]A few recuperated businesses have chosen to register as *Sociedades Anónimas*, or corporations. While also providing a legal status, this method is both more expensive to form and ineligible for the tax benefits afforded to cooperatives. In practice it has perhaps afforded these businesses a more stable and lucrative place within the capitalist market than that held by cooperatives. However, legal organization within a structure that highlights the values of cooperation has been a powerful discursive tool for the recuperated businesses movement.

[23]*Para nosotros la cooperativa no es una solución de fondo, porque uno tiene que competir con conglomerados enormes que forman precios, como San Lorenzo o Alberdi, que son grupos que exportan, tienen capitales extranjeros, créditos internacionales, hacen lobby…Nosotros somos una cáscara de nuez. Si ellos bajan los precios cuatro meses para matarnos, nos sacan del camino.* Cited in "*El strip-tease de los reyes: ¿Cuenta regresiva para Zanón*?," published by lavaca at www.lavaca.org, November 20, 2007. Godoy made similar statements in conversations we shared during my fieldwork. *Lavaca* is an alternative media cooperative, and their high-quality reporting provides an important counterbalance to the increasing consolidation of major media sources into fewer and fewer hands in Argentina (and elsewhere).

[24]*…entonces, nosotros cuando empezamos a ir a asambleas barriales a comentar lo que estaba pasando, eh, lo que realmente, eh, que nosotros estábamos luchando por nuestra fuente de trabajo, que estábamos acá, venían de la facultad nos ayudaban, decidían traer yerba, azúcar, para tomar un mate, eh, nos traían un poco de arroz, y bueno, venía por ahí la, eh, la caja de los merenderos que nos ayudaban muchísimo, entonces ahí es como que empezamos a, a movernos un poquito más, empezamos a aprender de esto, lo que es, el trabajo…*

[25]The major umbrella movements are the *Movimiento Nacional de Empresas Recuperadas* (MNER) and a similar though antagonistic movement, the *Movimiento Nacional de Fábricas*

Recuperadas por sus trabajadores (MNFR). Contrary to what their names seem to suggest, it is not the case that the MNER is comprised of businesses and the MNFR of factories; rather, each movement encompasses both. For more on these movements, see Fernández Álvarez 2004:349-350; lavaca 2004; Magnani 2003; Rebon 2004, 2006.

[26]At the time of this writing, Jorge Julio López remains missing. This event, widely publicized as "disappearance 30,001," has once again brought into the spotlight the continuity of mafia-style hierarchies and relationships among the security forces, particularly in the Province of Buenos Aires.

[27]Spoken during a street demonstration, May 22, 2006.

[28]*Desconocer que los espacios culturales y sociales cumplen con la función de articular la participación de los vecinos con la producción de nuestros artistas locales en un contexto de valores solidarios y de trabajo en conjunto es desconocer que los espacios culturales son constructores de ciudadanía y de participación social, colectiva y democrática. Basta de clausuras*, press release from Red de Cultura Boedo, November 24, 2006.

[29]*Nosotros, de ahí que nosotros en el '97 cuando, eh, se hizo cambio de, de empresa a nosotros el dueño, en su momento, Iurkovich nos dijo, bueno, yo era una que no quería firmar, entonces me dijo, bueno, si me vas a hacer juicio haceme, si vas a cobrar por ahí cobrás de aquí a 3 años pero mientras esos 3 años no vas a tener trabajo. Entonces yo firmé un papel ante el escribano público que perdía todos mis derechos. Ahora sí, yo lo peleo por mis derechos, porque ahora yo sé que realmente como ciudadana lo tengo que pelear por mis hijos y por el día de mañana esto para que la Argentina siga creciendo.*

REFERENCES

Alvarez, Sonia, Evelina Dagnino, and Arturo Escobar, eds. 1998. *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures: Re-visioning Latin American Social Movements*. Boulder, Co: Westview Press.

Archetti, Eduardo P. 1997. "Multiple Masculinities: The Worlds of Tango and Football in Argentina." In Daniel Balderston and Donna J. Guy, eds. *Sex and Sexuality in Latin America*, pp. 200-216. New York: New York University Press.

Assies, Willem, Gemma van der Haar, and Andre Hoekema, eds. 2000. *The Challenge of Diversity: Indigenous Peoples and Reform of the State in Latin America*. Amsterdam: Thela Thesis.

Azpiazu, Daniel. 2002. *Las privatizaciones en Argentina*. Buenos Aires: CIEPP/Fundación OSDE.

Battistini, Osvaldo R., ed. 2004. *El trabajo frente al espejo: continuidades y rupturas en los procesos de construcción identitaria de los trabajadores*. Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros.

Caldeira, Teresa P. R. 2000. *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

de Sardan, J.P. Olivier. 1999. "A Moral Economy of Corruption in Africa?" *Journal of African Studies* 37(1):25-52.

Eigen, Peter. 2002. "Corruption in a Globalized World." *SAIS Review* 22(1):45-59.

Escobar, Arturo and Sonia Alvarez. 1992. "Introduction: Theory and Protest in Latin America Today." In Arturo Escobar and Sonia Alvarez, eds., *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy, and Democracy,* pp. 1-15. Boulder: Westview Press.

Fajn, Gabriel (coord.), et. al. 2003. *Fábricas y empresas recuperadas: protesta social, autogestión y rupturas en la subjectividad*. Buenos Aires: Centro Cultural de la Cooperación.

Fernández Álvarez, María Inés. 2004. "Sentidos asociados al trabajo y procesos de construcción identitaria en torno a las ocupaciones y recuperaciones de fábricas de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires: un análisis a partir de un caso en particular." In Osvaldo. R. Battistini, ed. *El trabajo frente al espejo: continuidades y rupturas en los procesos de construcción identitaria de los trabajadores*, pp. 345-365. Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros.

García Allegrone, Verónica, Florencia Partenio, and María Inés Fernández Álvarez. 2004. Los procesos de recuperación de fábricas: una mirada retrospectiva. In Osvaldo R. Battistini, ed. *El trabajo frente al espejo: continuidades y rupturas en los procesos de construcción identitaria de los trabajadores*, pp. 329-343. Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros.

Gilbert, Abel and Miguel Vitagliano. 1998. *El terror y la gloria: la vida, el fútbol, y la política en la Argentina del Mundial 78*. Buenos Aires: Norma.

Goldsmith, Arthur A. 1999. "Slapping the Grasping Hand: Correlates of Political Corruption in Emerging Markets." *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 58(4):865-883.

Gupta, Akhil. 1995. "Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State." *American Ethnologist* 22(2):375-402.

Hale, Charles. 2002. "Does Multiculturalism Menace?: Governance, Cultural Rights and the Politics of Identity in Guatemala." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34(3):485-525.

Haller, Dieter and Cris Shore. 2005. "Introduction—Sharp Practice: Anthropology and the Study of Corruption." In Dieter Haller and Cris Shore, eds. *Corruption: Anthropological Perspectives*, pp. 1-26. London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press.

Harvey, David. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hasty, Jennifer. 2005. "The Pleasures of Corruption: Desire and Discipline In Ghanian Political Culture." *Cultural Anthropology* 20(2):271-301.

James, Daniel. 1988. *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946-1976*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Jelin, Elizabeth and Eric Hershberg, eds. 1996. *Constructing Democracy: Human Rights, Citizenship, and Society in Latin America*. Boulder: Westview Press.

lavaca, Cooperativa de trabajo. 2004. *Sin patrón: fábricas y empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores. Una historia, una guía*. Buenos Aires: Cooperativa de trabajo lavaca.

Llonto, Pablo. 2005. *La vergüenza de todos: el dedo en la llaga del Mundial 78*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Madres de Plaza de Mayo.

Low, Setha M. 2003. *Behind the Gates: Life, Security, and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America*. New York: Routledge.

Magnani, Esteban. 2003. *El cambio silencioso: Empresas y fábricas recuperadas por sus trabajadores en la Argentina*. Buenos Aires: Prometeo libros.

Mason, Tony. 1995. *Passion of the People?: Football in South America*. London: Verso.

Muir, Sarah. 2008. "Theorizing Crisis: Psychoanalysis and Conspiracy among the Buenos Aires Middle Class." Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Chicago.

Munck, Ronaldo. 1998. "Mutual Benefit Societies in Argentina: Workers, Nationality, Social Security and Trade Unionism." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30(3):573-590.

O'Donnell, Guillermo. 1997. "¿Y a mí, qué mierda me importa? Notas sobre sociabilidad y política en la Argentina y Brasil." In Guillermo O'Donnell, ed. *Contrapuntos: ensayos escogidos sobre autoritarismo y democratización*, pp. 165-193. Buenos Aires: Paidós. Original edition, 1983.

Rebón, Julián. 2004. *Desobedeciendo al desempleo: la experiencia de las empresas recuperadas*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones P.ica.so/La Rosa Blindada.

Rebón, Julián and Ignacio Saavedra. 2006. *Empresas recuperadas: la autogestión de los trabajadores*. Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual.

Rivera Cusicanqui, Silvia. 2007. "Everything is Up for Discussion." *NACLA* 40(4):4-9.

Robben, Antonius C.G.M. 2005. *Political Violence and Trauma in Argentina*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Saad-Filho, Alfredo and Deborah Johnson, eds. 2005. *Neoliberalism—A Critical Reader*. London: Pluto Press.

Sábato, Hilda. 2004. *La política en las calles: entre el voto y la movilización, Buenos Aires, 1862-1880*. Bernal, Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes. Original edition, Editorial Sudamericana, 1998.

Sarlo, Beatriz. 1994. *Escenas de la vida posmoderna*. Buenos Aires: Compañía Editora Espasa Calpe.

Svampa, Maristella. 2001. *Los que ganaron. La vida en los countries y barrios privados*. Buenos Aires: Biblos.

_____. 2005. "Ciudadanía, estado y globalización: una mirada desde la Argentina contemporánea." In José Nun, ed. *Debates de mayo: nación, cultura y política*, pp. 263-290. Buenos Aires: Gedisa Editorial.

Tandeciarz, Silvia R. 2007. "Citizens of Memory: Refiguring the Past in Post-Dictatorship Argentina." *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 122(1):151-169.

Tedesco, Laura. 1999. *Democracy in Argentina: Hope and Disillusion*. London: Frank Cass.

Thwaites Rey, Mabel. 2004. *La autonomía como búsqueda, el Estado como contradicción*. Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros.

Touraine, Alain. 2001. *Beyond Neoliberalism*. Cambridge: Polity.

Vilas, Carlos M. 2004. "Water Privatization in Buenos Aires." *NACLA* 38(1):34-40.