Working Identity Vicissitudes: Difficulties in Symmetrical Relationships – A case study*

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Yo tengo sangre roja y cerebro igual a los patrones, y si ellos administran, yo también puedo hacerlo.
M., Obrero de la Cooperativa Z.

Where the worker is subject to bureaucratic discipline from his infancy and believes in officialdom and higher authority, it is above all a question of teaching him to walk by himself.
Karl Marx

Abstract. *Our goal is to analyze the new identity dilemmas faced by female workers in the Cooperative Z collective. Identity is socially defined from the outset. As stated by the theory of value, while individual identity refers to use value, collective identity refers to exchange value. This paper constitutes a preliminary case study. We have adopted a psychosocial/dialectical framework to carry out an analysis of the cognitions, beliefs and values of this workers' collective. The corpus consisted of primary data taken from four interviews conducted in locus. The data was organized into different categories of dilemma such as dichotomous pairs and pivot representations; both of which extend through the text implicitly and express the dynamics of identity. The results showed the narrative axes to be related to three different aspects; namely, production ("Our work makes us autonomous, independent and complete"), rules ("Solidarity and equality should not be transgressed") and generational turnover ("Watch out! Our identity is in jeopardy!"). As additional staff becomes a necessity, the moral dilemma of whether hiring or not hiring family relatives arises. If the decision is for non-relatives, the question becomes whether they should be added as full partners or workers?*

Keywords: Social identity; Self-management; Values; Moral Dilemmas

Introduction

The Recovered Factories Movement (RFM), emerging in Argentina in the first decade of this century, had a major international impact and nowadays it involves approximately 20,000 workers spread across the country**.** This spontaneous movement has occupied more than 200 factories that were either abandoned or declared bankrupt. According to the Fajn report, in 90% of cases the occupation, or more suitably called recovery, occurred after employers had filed for bankruptcy. While 80% of the factories are considered small, the remaining 20% can be regarded as large, as they have more than 100 workers (Fajn, 2003).

The factory analyzed in this case study (Cooperative Z) belongs to the textile sector. Though it can be currently classified as a medium-sized company, in its heyday it employed 350 workers, 90% of which

were women. Most of them had extensive experience in the field and were middle-aged. Within the production market, the factory specialized in fine clothes, having among its customers the most renowned domestic and foreign clothing brands and upmarket boutiques in the most exclusive neighborhoods of Buenos Aires. Nowadays its staff amounts to 70 employees.

The workers' collective this paper analyses has earned international visibility due to the self-managed nature of their claims and achievements, and to the fact that it is a cooperative made up mostly of women who have fought tirelessly to fulfill their aspiration (and necessity) towards avoiding unemployment and continuing with production. *The main relevance of this group lies in the fact that it can be held as an example of how a new collective identity emerges out a specific socio-political situation; and how, as new solutions are found, new dilemmas arise which the social actors have to confront and find a solution to.*

As we mentioned in our first paper (Mendoza, 2013), the Cooperative Z workers unwittingly introduced some of the most novel management principles in the business world. To begin with, these principles state that unnecessary hierarchical levels are to be eliminated. Secondly, the workers' creativity and involvement have to be encouraged and stimulated; and finally, the employees' empirical knowledge should be taken advantage of to increase the company's competitiveness.

With one single stroke, then, these workers demystified the managerial ideology of democracy and worker participation, from Elton Mayo to Toyotism/Volvism and the latest *Theories of Knowledge Management and Organizational Commitment*, which extolled (and still do) the organizational strategy of the subsuming of labor, not only physically, but also emotionally and cognitively (Zangaro, 2011). From this perspective, qualified workers would be those who are *trusting of, involved with, committed to* or *integrated with* the company's values. Employees would no longer be just workers, but collaborators, internal customers or self-managers committed to their own work (Empowerment). *Involvement* was transformed into a feature and an attitudinal quality needed for the qualification of workers, where each

one, individually, would become his/her "own boss" and would become involved with the company by "wearing the colors of the company".[8] A good employee would now not only imply a given "know-how" (the necessary technical expertise required by the company) but also a certain "know-how to be", that is, he or she would know how to regulate his or her emotional nature and his or her intimate self in order to define his or her collective/corporate identity on the basis of the aims that characterize the organization the worker is immersed in. In this manner, the identification becomes complete; the worker is the organization. His or her uniqueness consists in being a "corporate citizen". This would be the best social identity possible and the most effective path toward the integration of employees (Gurgel, 2003; Zangaro, 2011).

In practice, the cooperative workers avoided all senior positions and became true self-managers committed to their work (*Involvement*). Filled with this new confidence, they created a new identity and new values for the organization. They became *empowered*, to use a common expression of the business jargon, and "wore the colors of the company", but not until they had abolished the figure of the employer. The "colors" and the company itself came to be legally in their hands. The organization evolved from a traditional *heterogeneously managed* company to an egalitarian, self-managed one, free from employers and run by the very same work collective, after a heroic and arduous socio-political struggle.[9] This was not an individual decision made by each employee; rather, it was a collective one, arrived at and emerged from the particular socio-political crisis of a given country at a specific historical moment. Under these circumstances, the workers assumed a new socio-collective and individual identity. They fought for and reclaimed their social, economic and political rights. They experienced, through their socio-political activity, a new mode of doing, seeing, feeling and knowing. Marx (1976) identified this as arising from the doings and practices of real individuals. These innovative experiences had already been acknowledged by Marx[10] in the Inaugural Address of the International Working Men's Association. While referring to cooperatives, he stated:

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[2] This idiomatic expression means to be loyal to the company.

[3] See the film documentary *Las mujeres de la Brukman*, winner of honourable mentions in several international festivals.

[10] The 1st international conference in 1864 asked Marx and Engels to write the inaugural manifesto. Their attitude was to support the cooperatives as a practical experience by the

workers in their social and political struggles, though they criticised the theoretical and political proposals that considered that they might achieve a communist society. In *Capital* Marx states that cannot abolish capitalism, but violate the law of capitalist ownership. Lenin voiced the same idea in the socialist congress in Copenhagen in 1910. As this is a practical problem, however, we have tried to study some of their internal contradictions.

This is one of the "changing forces of present society". We speak of the co-operative movement, especially the co-operative factories raised by the unassisted efforts of a few bold "hands". The value of these great social experiments cannot be overrated. By deed instead of by argument, they have shown that production on a large scale, and in accord with the behests of modern science, may be carried on without the existence of a class of masters employing a class of hands; that to bear fruit, the means of labour need not be monopolized as a means of dominion over, and of extortion against, the labouring man himself; and that, like slave labour, like serf labour, hired labour is but a transitory and inferior form, destined to disappear before associated labour plying its toil with a willing hand, a ready mind, and a joyous heart. (Marx, 1976, p. 5)

The theoretical framework adopted here aims at exploring, without excluding other socio-historical factors, the almost material force of social cognitions, especially if they are deeply rooted in social identity, both collective and individual, and have been operating with the tenacity and secular strength of prototype matrices.

Social Movements and Identity Games

Social identity can be defined in different ways depending on the philosophical, political and epistemological stance that a given research team adopts.

Our position is that the study of identity within a socio-psychological framework has to do more with political and practical issues, because identity is produced and reproduced among the tensions arising from the interactions between the different social actors/authors and as such it is always an on-going process. Lenin, while ratifying Hegel's claim, used to state that the only absolute thing is change, movement. This is a movement which does not flow in a smooth, straight line but rather with jumps and starts and is full of the internal contradictions typical of any real phenomena or any given society or group (Lenin, 1960).

In that sense, social movements which do not spring up from institutions search for a new social identity that habitually goes beyond a mere economic claim and which in order to consolidate itself as such, depends upon their doings as a new movement, that is, on their capacity to reveal an innovative alternative of change and to become the center of debate, on their internal consistency and their ability to relate to other groups, movements and political institutions and civil society. Melucci (1994) concludes by stating that the importance of the role played by affective aspects should not be underestimated, especially the commitment individuals evidence as new identities and new values are being forged.

Touraine (1981), on the other hand, considers that "a social movement is constituted by the organized collective behavior of a class actor that fights against a class antagonist to seize the control of the historicity of a given community" (p. 177). To this author, then, any movement that does not constitute a class actor or establishes itself as such cannot be defined as a social movement. Diani (1992), in turn, in an effort to integrate these theoretical positions, states that social movements are characterized by a specific social dynamics "by means of which the different social actors, either individuals, informal and/or formal groups are able to elaborate through joint action or communication, a collective identity; that is they have a shared definition of themselves, the perception that they stand on the same side in the face of a social conflict". Social behavior can also be analyzed at the level of individual relations and relations among groups (Tajfel, 1998). The first refers to situations in which the relationships between two or more individuals are mainly determined by the unique characteristics of the people interacting and the history of their relationship. The second refers to types of social behavior which is determined by the social categories people belong to (professional groups, gender, social class, etc.). In that sense, social identity is constructed through an emotional, cognitive and evaluative identification process of the individual with the membership group he or she belongs to. This "in-group" identity enables the group member to compare himself or herself with individuals of other groups, "outgroups", which might be similar, opposite, inferior, superior, and in so doing he or she maintains his or her individual self-esteem and a positive collective identity of himself/herself and his or her group.

Rouhana (1997), however, believes collective identity is something that lies more in the group than in the individuals that make it up. This identity becomes more salient or it is more socially visible in a given historical period, because its centrality is based on a positive or negative value which is a product of intergroup conflicts. The collective identity integrates cognitive and affective aspects. Different levels are to be distinguished within the cognitive aspect; namely, formal-legal, political and socio-cultural. Within the affective aspect, we have to differentiate between group loyalty, affective attachment and common destiny certainty. The cognitive aspect is elaborated by the group, while the affective aspect serves to provide unity and cohesion to the collective identity structure.

For Simon (1997), however, the conceptualization of identity has to go beyond the initial dualism that considers individual identity as opposite and prior to collective identity. This author believes that the collective self would be centered upon a single dominant aspect of the self; while the individual self would be centered upon a single configuration of the several, not redundant, aspects of the self.

It is our view that it is not enough to assert either that collective identity resides more with the group than with the individual, or that both the collective and individual identity are social, as the previous authors claim. We believe that one contains the other; they constitute in fact an inseparable contradictory unity. That means that the relevance of one of them can vary depending on the concrete sociocultural and historical form present (such as the individual mode of being in the modern liberal capitalist society or the individuality mode of the Xabante aboriginal community from the Amazon region where the concept of "me" does not exist).[11] It also means that in all the circumstances of social life, one is constantly producing the other. Both create and re-create each other and exchange positions within a given socio-cognitive script depending on the tasks the person/group has to resolve; the dilemmas they have to face in a historically concrete community.

Besides, we think the objective causes that foster the emergence of social conflicts should not be separated from the subjective ones that enable cognitive-affective-evaluative identity change. The former can act as such only through the latter and vice versa. We consider, in contrast to what Simon (1997) states, that singular identity can encompass the whole of the collective identity. In other words, the latter is more comprehensive, complete, complex, rich and multilateral than the former though this might not be immediately obvious to the individual.

From an historical-dialectical point of view, we consider that social identity is shaped by the indissoluble and lasting bond between the singular aspect (the idiosyncratic aspect of individual identity) and the multiple, richly diverse aspect of the collective identity. Since the conception of the fetus, both phases are social. They constitute and interpenetrate each other, as it is demonstrated by research in the field of child psychology.[12] However, it should be pointed out that children are sociocentric in the early stages of their cognitive development (Spirkin, 1965; Tran Duc Tao,

1974; Vygotsky, 1996; Iannaccone & Mendoza, 2009).

By paraphrasing Marx's theory of value (Marx, 1985), we consider that the part of the identity that has needs, projects and aspirations, that spends body energy – emotional and mental – for multiple uses in life, is the *singular identity*. The *collective identity*, or the "inner group" that is found within that singularity as part of *the self* and without which there wouldn't be any singularity at all, is the set of internalized social relationships – both symmetrical and asymmetrical – of a given collective that forms or deforms us, and gives account of our belonging to a specific group and not another, gears us towards the exchange of practices, ways of thinking, feelings, senses and meanings, in one way and not in another.

Thus, the worker's personal identity can in this case only be configured as such insofar as it acquires multiple collective identities in the course of its real life – in a continuous and contradictory process of observance/disobedience and qualification/disqualification. Correspondingly, collective identity can only exist if it is expressed by the unique actions of each individual (Mendoza, 2013).

In other words, in order to give shape to a social and labor identity, one must acquire the technical, affective-cognitive and moral skills needed to observe or disobey the prevailing social norms and values, the notions of right and wrong, of the desirable and the undesirable, of authority, etc., which are generally hybrid and contradictory. Only in this manner can a person have a social identity which is at the same time individual/collective, singular, unique and yet multiple and plural (Therborn, 1989).

Our goal is to analyze what new problems the now recovered cooperatively self-managed companies have to deal with once they have overcome the stage of their struggle for *appropriation and consolidation of their new identity and employment status*. In other words, we aim at exploring what dilemmas the workers currently have within those internal conditions of *self-managed egalitarianism*, how these dilemmas are perceived by them and what type of strategies they are considering to overcome them.

For the purposes of this article we will first discuss only those difficulties related to forms of production. Secondly, we will consider normative dilemmas; and finally, the dilemma of generational turnover.

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[11] This means, in short, that the way in which we think, not just the cognitive content of our thoughts, depends on social and historical conditions and it changes with them (see Iannaccone & Mendoza, 2009).

[12] See the "Vygotsky-Piaget" debate on the concept of "egocentrism", a central tenet of Piaget's theory criticized by Vygotsky.

Although other controversial categories were identified in the interviews we carried out, such as assembly democracy, economic dilemmas, public policies, family, occupational health and technological upgrade, they will not be dealt with in this paper due to space limitations.

Methodology

This article constitutes a preliminary case study by means of which we intend to obtain an account of the sense the workers ascribe to the problems they have to face at this stage of the cooperative life.

For the analysis, we resorted basically to a corpus of raw data gathered from a set of four interviews to female workers as well as from our own impressions and the notes taken during two visits to their workplace. The first visit was in 2003 at the time when the workers were struggling to achieve ownership and legal recognition, and at that moment we looked into the mutation process of the social identity of this work collective. The second visit was recently conducted, nine years after the first one, in May of 2012, and then we studied the problem of factory self-management. We will also be analyzing, as secondary data, some reports from different delegates attending the 2nd Conference of Cooperatives, held a few days before our visit in the city of Buenos Aires, and the film documentary mentioned above.

It should be pointed out that the interviews were carried out at the interviewees' workplace, specifically in the sewing sector located on the 2nd floor of the factory, while workers were performing their productive tasks. The workers agreed to the interview because we had an introduction letter from the University Professors Association (ADUF-CG; acronym in Spanish).

On the basis of a historical-dialectical and psychosocial framework (Lenin, 1960; Viana, 2007; Dunayevskaya, 2010; Reicher, 1987), we conducted an analysis of the cognitions, beliefs and values of the social and labor identity of the workers of Cooperative Z.

We believe the speakers' argumentative strategies reveal a series of oppositions (real/possible, affirmative/negative, etc.) that refer to the perception of the self as a collective identity of the in-group, and to the perception of *the other* as a collective identity of the out-group. For the analysis, categories are organized as dichotomous pairs which extend through the text and express the dynamics of identity. The first term of each dichotomous unity is the manifest part of identity, that which is publicly expressed for others

and for oneself. The second term of the dichotomous unity is, in most instances, the implicit part of the identity, that which remains unspoken or omitted to others and to one self. These dichotomous pairs are the constituents of a primary category totality. Starting from these dichotomous elements, we highlight pivot representations of collective identity, which arise as narrative axes of the experiences lived (Pêcheux, 2006, Adams, 2011).

We understand these axes or representations as narrative paradigms that delimit the different ways in which social actors (operators-speakers) shape both their own social identity (collective/individual) and the social identities of the different groups they relate to within the social topography.

Dilemmas Present

According to the principles of social psychology, every intergroup dispute has extraordinary implications for the intra-group life and vice versa (Mendoza, 2011). In the case of the group case studied, once the stage of the socio-legal and political dispute against former employers and managers had been overcome, internal cohesion came out strengthened since the fundamental values of cooperation and solidarity, in the form of self-management, became hegemonic as intra-group principles and practices. On the other hand, differences latent within the group tend to come to light, given that the inner activity and its dynamics have come to the fore and gained visibility for its members.

Let's analyse this further:

a) The Productive Dilemmas

Within the production process we see a major transformation in relation to the previous period, i.e. from the moment when they were a heteronomously managed corporation and their work was alienated, in the sense that they didn't own the instruments and means of production, their time or pace of work, and not the final product. This is evidenced in what one of the workers, Macario, observed nine years ago:

> We used to work 9 hours per day... We worked in the production line: a jacket was made by 45 people. I used to make the front part, 220 pockets per hour. In total, we produced 60 jackets per hour. The woman in charge demanded us to produce 1000 jackets a week...

The same worker voices a different reality nowadays:

> We have redesigned the factory; we have placed all the machines on the same floor to save energy and to be all together... Here we work with a mutual agreement to do everything we need to do, to be able to deliver our products and get the money to pay our wages. We all receive the same salary.

The workers redesigned the layout according to their knowledge and experience of more than 10 or 15 years of production. They have now become a collective of workers/partners/managers of an egalitarian cooperative in the textile sector.

Within the new internal conditions of production, labor is also cooperative. The whole process of manual and intellectual work lies in the hands of the workers and the same goes for the capital gain produced by them. It is a kind of objective cooperation but re-appropriated in their practical, legal and psychosocial aspects.[13]

What is the dynamics of such cooperation like? According to Alba:

> (...) let's say that... here you cannot say 'no'... since we do not have bosses or supervisors, it is each one's own responsibility to make things work out (…)

> Here we must work…work the whole 9 hours…

> You don't see difference in the final amount of production, because besides getting your job done, you have to replace the ones who are absent…

> When you are in a situation like this, in a cooperative, you have to be over here and over there, covering tasks, you have to hurry up and deal with all the work (...) If there's a partner who has less work to do or if I'm faster in some other task, then I say to my partner "you go over there, and you come over here so I can get that done for you"… let's say… we organize ourselves… here you must run against time to reach the end, this way, step by step. In the past, our employer came, assigned you a task and you knew how much work you had to do per hour and nothing more.

The workers are now doubly cooperative: objectively, by the running of the productive process replanned by them, each worker makes some part of the pieces of the final product and, subjectively, because now they cooperate voluntarily, according to the needs and challenges of a given situation, carrying out a partner's tasks if she is absent or if she is slower.

> We don't have fixed positions [on the production line]. In my case, for example, right now I'm here because I'm finishing details, but after I finish I'm going to sit by a machine. I keep working [in every task needed] to make sure the production line never stops… because (…) it's not like when the employer was around anymore, as I said, you don't carry out one single task. (Alba)

> We also rotate positions at the workplace, although each one already knows her job ... but this way the function of work gets multiplied. (Yuri)

They have now diversified their tasks in an attempt to overcome their extreme division together with the work monotony imposed by the Taylorist/Fordist model. Not only have they reclaimed the machines, but they have also attempted to appropriate ways or methods of production. The worker's rationality reveals itself to be much more effective than the instrumental rationality of the employer. However, we observe that nowadays, even after nine years of self-managed production, they still work 9 hours daily.

That means that the appropriation of their working time is relative because this does not depend only on the before mentioned factors, but on an external factor, the market. The cooperatives end up subsumed in a financial/capitalist context that is beyond their power.

We can observe that the dichotomous categories appearing in this narrative are: *more responsibility, reciprocity and multilateralism vs. irresponsibility, negligence, unilateralism.*

Respondents were aware and conscious of the first term whereas the second remained more or less implicit, its likelihood being reflected in the concern and the unavoidable extra commitment expressed in the sentence "*here you cannot say 'no'* ".

Actually, workers could not say "no", that is, refuse to work, when they were employed either, because it entailed risking their jobs. The difference resides in the type of authority the individual worker confronts and the consequences that a negative response like that might have for the rest of her partners.

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[7] Before, under the yoke of the boss-employee relation, work was also cooperative, since everyone worked in an organized way to achieve a common goal, the manufacturing of a particular product, but the appropriation of surplus value was private. It was an alienated, objectified cooperation imposed by the work-capital relationship.

The pivot representation acting as axis at this stage of the identity process is: "We are autonomous, responsible and develop our full potential in our jobs".

That is to say, in the situation of egalitarian self-management, tasks are more complex and everyone has more responsibilities. However, though they are now autonomous, they have more tasks and assignments than before. This fact, which is indeed a very positive change, creates nonetheless a number of new dilemmas, not only in production and management practices, but also in the perception and interpretation of those problems. The reclaiming and control of working time issue is barely hinted at in the interviewees' narratives "*Here we must work... work the whole 9 hours... You don't see the difference in the final amount of production*". This is still indeed implicit. After nine years of the workers' self-management, they have not been able to include the issue of working time in their agenda.

b) Normative dilemmas.

> For the time being, you have doubled the responsibility. You have the responsibility to produce and the responsibility to organize the tasks, bringing some order to the work. That's the difference… The benefits under an employer's management are that when you finish your working hours, you go home and you forget about it. 15 days later you receive your pay and that's it. (Alba)

It should be pointed out that in former times, under the employer's management, if anyone was absent or lingered in the bathroom – absenteeism and resistance strategies to intense work were high under Taylorism in general – these were considered acts of irresponsibility by the peers. Now, however, in the new situation, the same act is interpreted differently, for it means that tasks are not done and someone else has to do them, at the expense of her very own time.

> The more internal problems [are], the issue of attendance and the restrictions to the time schedule. It is not habitual, but there are partners who have problems of one type or another… But they have to adapt to the rules of the factory. There's no alternative, because there should be an internal regulation for places where people work together, and that sets many guidelines; sets the limits of respect towards your partners. (Yuri)

Matilde said in the film documentary: "Some partners want to take advantage and miss work too often!" Sanctions had to be imposed since, according to Matilde, transgressions were too frequent.

> [There's] a new reorganization of production, the production depends on our partners… you see… [Depends] on discipline, there must be a working discipline, attendance, punctuality; respect among all. (Yuri)

> Yes, for example, people who are late get suspended. If you are late three times, you have a one-day suspension. That's the discipline we have and has already been applied. The workforce here is so much needed. (Alba)

One of the reasons why they had to implement the full-time 9-hour work day was because when they had their lunch break at noon, the workers went to bars or parks near the area and took too long to return to work. An assembly of all of them decided to implement the full-time scheme again.

The reasons most frequently cited for tardiness or absenteeism were personal issues and health problems:

> As it happens everywhere, you know, problems always arise and well... This fellow couldn't come because he had some errands to run… or because he is feeling sick... and well… all of us cover him. (Alba)

Workers have to clock in when they arrive to the workplace. That way, at the end of the fortnight or at the end of month, the committee monitors tardiness and deducts it from the salaries of those who were late.

We don't know whether the system of sanctions (and the absenteeism) is similar to the ones existing in the previous period or not, but even so, we do know what is at stake. These sanctions are related more to the values and feelings that justify them than to compliance with a given norm, which is cold and equally imperative for all (Livet, 2009).

The requirement of compliance with regulations imposed from within the group of workers is much more imperative and stronger than one produced by an external authority. The weight and moral authority of the group is much greater, especially in the consolidation stage of a new collective identity which was forged in major scale inter-group/class conflict**.** The demand to work at a certain pace and to produce a given number of pieces does not come from a supervisor or an employer. That role and its demands have been internalized and adopted by the workers, assimilated by the moral conscience of each worker. The employer figure, in this case, has "been diluted" or "evaporated", now it is "abstract" or generalized.

We observe that the dichotomous categories appearing in this narrative are: *acceptance of the new values of self-management vs. transgression of these values.* "They must adapt to the rules of the factory… That's the discipline we have and has already been applied. The workforce here is so much needed". Although they are conscious and aware of the first term, the second is implicit and its presence arouses anger and affects the collective as a whole.

The pivot representation acting as axis at this stage of the identity process is: *solidarity, equality and compassion are core values.*

According to research in the field of social psychology, when an in-group member breaks or transgresses group norms, it causes major moral indignation, shame, disgust and anger. Consequently, there is a tendency to brand the transgressor as the black sheep. This insistence on justice and universal rules characterizes more those groups and cultures that stress equal norms, i.e., that assign little value to hierarchy and emphasize universal benevolent values (Mendoza, 2011, Petrovsky, 1984).

For the concrete situation of the workers' collective under study, transgressions are mainly related to the working hours. In that sense, we observe that they only dominate their working time externally. This evidences that this dimension is essential to understand whether a self-managed social movement in a given situation can overcome (or deny) within itself the nature of work as a commodity. We can see how the values of solidarity and equality are conditioned by the dominance, or lack of it, over factory working time.

We don't know who the ones who cause more absenteeism are. Are they either the junior or the senior workers? Are they the youngest or the eldest ones? Are they those who participated in the struggles during the consolidation period of the cooperative or those who did not? However, what we were able to find out is how workers perceive or try to confront the dilemma of generational turnover which is also related to discipline.

c) Generational dilemmas

Most of the workers are middle-aged and several are already close to retirement. This poses the problem of generational turnover which means nothing less than the need to select new partners to replace the older ones. Celia states that at least 40% of the staff has been replaced in the last seven years for various reasons, although some of the workers have been re-hired. The dilemma is what criteria should be followed to carry out this renewal.

> Other people left, other people died. We have middle-aged and older people (...) they [new workers] join because workforce is needed. (Celia)

> Frequently, new workers are selected because they are family relatives and have learned the trade; others are hired because they already know the trade. (Alba)

> Yes, we are more like the "founding members" (...) Perhaps, if work doesn't go well, it may be our fault, because we have incorporated too many new workers. Some of them still have a lot to learn and not everyone has the same availability or the same willingness to work. Perhaps not hiring experienced workers didn't turn out so well. [People hired] are relatives and first they just come to learn the trade. Our motto is that we are all equals, and sometimes that plays against us. (Celia)

Clearly, the most logical course of action, from the point of view of production needs, would be to hire experienced workers. However, the prevailing criterion has been to hire relatives "*that first just come to learn the trade*". In other words, between the logic of instrumental rationality and the logic of affections, it seems that the latter prevails. There is, however, a very important detail in Celia's response, who is perhaps the most recognized leader of the cooperative: "Our motto – she says – is that we are all equals, and sometimes that plays against us".

Why could a value so fundamental to a self-managed cooperative "play against them"? Although neither Celia nor the other respondents have said it explicitly, what plays against them is that, since most of them are founding members (by the time being), new incorporations to the staff based solely on the criterion of experience, without having a deeper knowledge of the workers (who, logically, besides being younger, have not shared with them the experience of recovering the factory), would jeopardize the foundational collective identity, forged by them in such a heroic struggle. Therefore, they would rather hire relatives with no previous experience than risk the possibility of ending up as the minority if they incorporate new and unknown partners. Moreover, Celia adds:

> As sometimes we talk with other cooperatives and ask them how they pay the new staff and they tell us that 'new people are hired employees, not partners. Only founder members are considered as partners and we are doing well with that...

We never wanted that methodology of work... though I'm not saying it's wrong, doing some analysis, we don't say it's wrong, because sometimes it may happen that people come for a month and then stops coming, may be those people are not responsible enough, and that interrupts the production chain. That happened to us, it happens to us, and is happening right now…

This narrative unmasks the problem or essential dilemma faced by the founding members of the cooperative, namely: Do we preserve our collective identity, won with so much sacrifice throughout the past decade in defense of our source of work; or do we let it become blurred by incorporating new workers who are unfamiliar to us? Are we willing to transgress an essential principle of cooperative values such as the principle of equality between partners to preserve that identity? What Celia is saying, if we consider her actual words above ("We never wanted that methodology of work... though I'm not saying it is wrong") is in fact: "I don't know" or "we don't know; we have doubts".

Besides, the incorporation of relatives has another substantial implication as the cooperative belongs to the founding members and their families. This could probably lead to the hiring of salaried workers who would not have the same rights and duties as founder members have, and clearly would not receive the same salary. In other words, the cooperative and its partners/relatives will become the new employers, that is to say, the "abstract capitalist".

We find that the implied dichotomous categories appearing in this narrative are: *Preservation of hard-won values vs. transgression of these values to "preserve them".*

Obviously this dilemma refers to the values of egalitarian management and wage policies, which in order to be preserved should be, as contradictory as that may sound, transgressed; for instead of being universal, those egalitarian values would only be valid for former members and their families.

The pivot representation acting as axis at this stage of the identity process is: *Either equality among us or inequality towards others.*

Our collective identity (assessed as positive by the group and recognized as such by the others) must not change.

Although the demands of the market require that specialized labor be hired in some areas, which Celia calls "experienced people", they opted for hiring inexperienced relatives because these would be more responsible than non-relatives and could eventually be added as partners, which appears to us as a clear endogamous attitude. In other words, they contemplate the possibility of keeping the collective identity of equal partners unmoved, even though this might only be true for the founding partners.

Conclusion

Firstly, we presented the qualitative differences between two forms adopted by the identity of the group of workers at a time of extraordinary economical and socio-political instability. Their collective social identity went from being perceived as a group of helpless women abandoned by their employer, to standing as a social movement with a common destiny and collective universal interests and in so doing leading a movement that stands for the self- management of work and society and upholding the political slogan of grass-roots democracy.[14]

Secondly, this research shows how, in a time of relative economic stability, the cooperative workers of the case study analyzed had to face specific dilemmas as an egalitarian work collective which were qualitatively and intrinsically different from the ones they had to confront under their employer's management, when they were exploited as workers. These dilemmas as such were also confirmed by other case studies such as those by Cornforth (2007), Lima (2007), Novaes and Sardá de Farias (2011), and Wyczykier (2009).

Currently, these workers face dynamics that are new to them and to productive agents in general. On the one hand, they confront the internal dynamics of the collective itself; namely, self-managing the productive process under symmetrical/horizontal conditions. They have to encourage and strengthen the anti-hegemonic counter values of equality, solidarity and autonomy. It is no doubt a whole new experience for them since it is a place "without place", with no hierarchies, which Marx refers to as "*abstract capitalism*" (Marx, 1985). On the other hand, the other dynamic is external and has to do with competing with other traditional heteronomously managed companies of the sector, both domestic and foreign; i.e., it entails

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[14] In the first study we observed how the workers defined themselves as helpless girls left to themselves by their employer when, at the beginning of the conflict, he abandoned the factory without any explanation and without paying

their last weekly wages. During the last phase of the conflict they defined themselves as a workers' collective indispensable to the struggle against capital in Argentina (see Mendoza, 2013).

surviving as corporation in a capitalist or market context where the hegemonic values are exactly the opposite (competence, heteronomy, inequality, submission, etc.) and which requests from and depends on the State for its incentive policies, which vary with the different governments.

Under these conditions, the way problems are perceived is characterized, as psychosocial studies suggest (Mendoza, 2011), by a tendency from its members to be more demanding with their peers, co-workers/partners, since they all have the same duties towards themselves and the group in order to preserve the new values acquired with so much effort.

For this study, only internal dynamics were considered. For example, when faced with productive dilemmas, the workers acquired more responsibility, reciprocity and multilateralism, which can lead to anxiety and an inescapable extra commitment: "*here you cannot say 'no'*". The narrative axes at this stage of the identity process were: "we are autonomous, responsible and fulfill our potential in our jobs, but we have more tasks and assignments".

With regard to the normative dilemmas, the workers had to reschedule from double shift to fulltime workday since many workers delayed returning after lunch. Likewise, whenever possible, they hold the assembly meetings during working hours because many workers don't want to stay overtime. However, this creates another problem: the decline of weekly productivity or absenteeism on assembly day.

The dilemma faced is the *acceptance of the new values of self-management*. Here the lack of acceptance is perceived as transgression: "*they have to adapt to the rules of the factory*". Such transgression would not be a sign of non-compliance with an unfair situation, but rather a transgression of values considered positive and the rejection of a brand new revolutionary situation, namely egalitarian self-management. In other words, a complete change in values can be observed. Lack of acceptance and transgression are now equivalent to embracing the values of bourgeois society.

The transgression of these values by the members of the group produces moral indignation, disgust and all kinds of negative emotions, which end up affecting the collective group as a whole. This is particularly characteristic of groups that stress egalitarian norms rather than hierarchy, emphasizing universal and benevolent values.

The productive and normative dilemmas have as a background the impossibility of controlling a fundamental aspect of the work process, the working hours needed to produce goods. In that sense, we observe that the workers only own their working hours externally and this shows that this dimension is essential to understand whether a self-managed social movement, in a given situation, is able to go beyond (overcome or deny) the nature of work as commodity.

We observe thus how the values of solidarity and equality enunciated as central values, depend on the dominance, or lack of it, of factory working time now controlled by an "employer" re-embodied by the market, that is, the corporate and capitalists clients, and the central and provincial state.

In other words, though the figure of the employer as the owner has disappeared, its function of regulating the use of working time has not. Formerly imposed by the company's private owner, regulations have now become self-imposed. It does not matter that this self-imposition coincides with the demands of the market, that is, with other invisible employers present in the generic abstraction of the market or the state.

Another dilemma concerning the generational turnover they are facing is, what should be the right criterion to select new workers? Should they be considered full partners or not? Or, on the contrary, should they simply hire a salaried workforce or employees? How can new members be trusted if they have not participated in the struggle for the cooperative? An alternative was to invite relatives to work, as these would be more reliable than total strangers. "*Better the devil you know than the devil you don't*"; so goes an old proverb. On the other hand, shouldn't new members "pay their dues"? How should new members be integrated into the cooperative?

In conclusion, this dilemma has a central axis that extends through the entire narrative discourse: *Watch out! Our identity is in jeopardy! We want to preserve the values of cooperation, solidarity and egalitarianism so hard won forever, but we are not sure about which shortcut we should choose to continue our walk.*

"The worst enemy, after opting for a cooperative organization is the mindset of each partner", said a delegate to the 2nd Meeting of Cooperatives. However, we must not consider this just as a subjective problem.

Dilemmas related to the context of capitalist practices and values (which we couldn't present in this article, such as the diverse relations with the State, the market, the family, etc.) frequently put into question the social identity (collective/individual) of the workers of the cooperative and have a powerful

influence on each and every one of the possible choices. *Old values*, which are still a present burden, are also in force and remain a part of the social identity, as we have observed the workers ask themselves at every time during the productive activity of the factory.

Brecht (1985) beautifully expresses this dilemma when he says in a poem:

> I stood on a hill and I saw the Old approaching, but it came as the New. It hobbled up on new crutches which no one had ever seen before (…). Round about stood such as inspired terror, shouting: Here comes the New, it's all new, salute the new, be new like us! And those who heard, heard nothing but their shouts, but those who saw, saw such as were not shouting. So the Old strode in disguised as the New, but it brought the New with it in its triumphal procession and presented it as the Old. The New went fettered and in rags; they revealed its splendid limbs.

What new social identities will be assumed by this group of workers? The new one, which was born out of a heroic struggle, or the old one which disguised as new pushes them back into the past? An egalitarian and direct democracy is much more demanding than a representative democracy and does not stand on its own. Identity is thus questioned from multiple angles. It is paradoxical that its success as self-managed economic collective is dependent upon the success of a society based on the capitalist free market. Simultaneously, that success jeopardized the continuity of the egalitarian experience,[15] especially if this experience remains isolated from other similar experiences in the country or the region (Cruz Reyes, 2013).

As we understand it, social identity in its two aspects, collective/singular, remains dynamic and in state of permanent metamorphosis although the workers might tend to deny these dynamics as inherent to the identity of the self-managed movement itself.

As Marx, Lenin and Dunayevskaya would state it, the only absolutes are change and motion.

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[15] It should be reminded that we have studied this experience from a social movement perspective. In this way, it is observed that several networks of self-managed companies or confederations have emerged, some more politicized and progressive, both in Argentina and the rest of Latin America.

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