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# *The Social Legitimacy of Recuperated Enterprises in Argentina*

*Julián Rebón, Denise Kasparian and Candela Hernández*

## **Introduction**

The recuperation of enterprises by their workers in Argentina has achieved ample social legitimacy despite its disruptive characteristics. What are the logics that sustain this legitimacy? Does this legitimacy extend to all aspects of the recuperation process, even the most disruptive ones? How do the logics that sustain the legitimacy of the recuperated enterprises interact with the hegemonic values of capitalist society?

*Enterprise recuperation* refers here to a set of processes in which workers of enterprises in critical situations collectively take on production management, generally through the use of work cooperatives. Faced with violation of the wage relationship, workers alter their occupational status to defend their jobs by undertaking the challenge of ownerless production (Rebón 2007; Ranis 2005; Vieta and Ruggeri 2009).

Enterprise recuperation in Argentina began to take place in the late 1990s, and became even more common following the unprecedented general crisis in 2001, which brought about the end of the financial accumulation model (Fajn et al. 2003; Rebón 2007). Today, more than a decade later, new recuperations continue to take place, although at a slower pace compared to that of the early 2000s (Salgado 2012). However, in spite of their spread and development, such occupations remain a limited phenomenon: there are approximately 300 businesses that have been taken over in the country (Ministry of Work, Employment, and Social Security 2013; Programa Facultad Abierta 2014).

Despite being a limited phenomenon, its innovative and transgressive characteristics were able to achieve a broad public impact. The novelty of these experiences lies both in their constituting process and in their outcomes. Firstly, the recuperation's emblematic, although not exclusive, form – the occupation – of defending the source of

employment implies a form of collective action that exceeds the formal channels of conflict resolution. Secondly, the resulting productive process entails a broad array of transformations to the original capitalist enterprise, outstanding among them being the transfer of managerial function from capital to the self-managed group of workers and the modification of ownership relations (Rebón and Salgado 2010). Paradoxically, despite the disruptive and controversial nature of the occupation as a form of collective action, the experience of enterprise recuperation has been positively valued by society at large.<sup>1</sup>

In this study we measure the social legitimacy (Johnson et al. 2006) of the process of enterprise recuperation in its different dimensions, and we examine the cultural configuration that allows it to be understood (Grimson 2012). We argue that the high social legitimacy that the process has achieved is founded on the value that labor enjoys in Argentine society at large as a form of social, material, and symbolic reproduction. Drawing on E.P. Thompson's work *The Moral Economy of the English Crowd* (1971), as well as subsequent developments (Scott 1976; Edelman 2005; Arnold 2001), we find a cultural system surrounding labor that sets limits to its commodification. Thus, under certain conditions, ownership of the means of production can become relativized and subordinated as a social value.

In this study, we analyze a household survey representative of the adult population of the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires<sup>2</sup> (AMBA). Survey questions included perceptions and valuations of the process of enterprise recuperation. The survey was carried out by our research team between 6 and 27 August 2012 within the framework of the UBACyT project "The Culture of Enterprise Recuperation: Workers' Representations and Valuations of the Process," with headquarters in the Gino Germani Institute of Research at the University of Buenos Aires, and the Center of Studies for the Development of Social Economy in Latin America. It consisted of a semi-structured

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1. The repercussion and valuation of the recuperation of enterprises can be seen in the reform of the Argentine Bankruptcy Law, introduced by the Executive Branch and enacted in 2011. This reform institutionalized the recuperation process, establishing that workers organized in cooperatives could use the debts owed to them to purchase a bankrupt enterprise. In March 2010, President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner presented her plan for the modification of the law in the recuperated "Envases Flexibles Mataderos" factory. In her speech at this time, she said: "I feel that Argentina is a giant recuperated factory" (*La Argentina*, 18 March 2010).
  2. The Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires comprises the autonomous city of Buenos Aires and the suburban belt around the city, composed of 24 municipalities or districts. At the end of 2012 the population estimate of the area carried out by the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses was 13,234,000.

questionnaire made up of closed-ended questions and opinion scales, in addition to questions regarding the classification of those interviewed and their households.<sup>3</sup> The restriction of the sample to the metropolitan population doesn't allow us to generalize the results to the entire country. However, the AMBA constitutes a highly relevant region due equally to its demographic weight and to its centrality in Argentine political processes. Additionally, this region concentrates about half of the recuperated enterprises in the country (Programa Facultad Abierta, 2014).

The text is organized as follows. In the first section, we suggest that elements of a moral economy of labor in Argentine society may account for the social legitimacy of the recuperated enterprises. Next, we analyze the results of the survey. We first investigate the knowledge and valuation of the process of enterprise recuperation in its general characteristics; the moral economy of labor emerges as the explanatory key to widespread positive social valuation. We then explore the efficiency of this element of legitimation as it applies to one of the most disruptive aspects of recuperation: the occupation of the workplace as a form of struggle. Finally, we review the findings of the study and suggest new lines of investigations based on them.

### **The recuperation of enterprises from the perspective of the moral economy of labor**

Historically in Argentina, labor has had a strong presence. Linked to the emergence and consolidation of the political movement known as Peronism, labor as a value achieved an important degree of institutionalization.<sup>4</sup> The social protection structured around the figure of the formal wage-earning worker led to workers being perceived as full citizens (Torre 2010), which in turn helped build a culture of social rights (Danani and Hintze 2011). A specific form of labor – salaried and full-

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3. The sample design was multistage, stratified, and probabilistic. The sample is of 599 cases with a margin of error of  $\pm 4$  percent, with a confidence level of 95 percent for the maximum dispersion ( $p=q=0.5$ ).

4. Peronism is a political movement that emerged around the figure of President Juan Domingo Perón (1946–1955 and 1973–1974). In his first terms he promoted a broad process of social integration of the working class. Prior to Peronism, the working class had already had significant experience of struggle and organization related to different left-wing traditions – anarchism, revolutionary trade unionism, communism and socialism. Peronism represented a process of massification and institutionalization of trade unionism promoted from the State, which until then had tended to repressive behavior and non-recognition towards workers' organizations (Murmis and Portantiero 2004).

time, stable and with social benefits – became a key element of identity. Pride in work and pride in being a worker are two expressions of this culture (Danani and Grassi 2009). Labor as a source of rights and of corresponding responsibilities set limits to the form that labor relations would assume, in their recurrent negotiation and conflict, channeled principally through trade union organizations.<sup>5</sup>

With the regressive restructuring of Argentine capitalism in the 1990s, the social role of work underwent significant modifications. A set of reforms fostered by neoliberal ideology consolidated a model of accumulation of capital centered in financial valuation (Basualdo 2006). Precariousness, and increasing levels of unemployment marked these transformations in the workforce (Beccaria et al. 2009; Damill and Frenkel 2006; Salvia 2007). As in other societies, these changes resulted in a widely perceived “loss of the centrality of labor” (Castel 2012; Sennett 2006).

Despite these transformations, labor as an identity structuring social life continued to have a strong impact on the culture of workers in Argentina, even in the moments where unemployment and precarity achieved their highest levels. Workers in some cases stopped identifying their work as real work, due to its precarious characteristics (Danani and Grassi 2009).

And yet at the same time workers resisted becoming dependent on welfare payments and were often critical of those who accepted them (Dávalos and Perelman 2004). Furthermore, in this culture, one becomes an object of criticism through begging or earning a living through illegal means. In this same way, traces in popular memory of the social role of the salaried worker are found in the origins of the unemployed workers’ movements that spread at the end of the 1990s (Maneiro 2012). In short, “decent work” – work associated with effort and responsibility – is the identifying key that, even in unfavorable conditions, allows for labor to represent an organizing element of life in opposition to other alternatives which are codified as indecent and irresponsible (Fernández Álvarez 2007).

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5. In Peronism’s original project, this progressive institutionalization of workers’ interests – related to its starting point – in theory didn’t necessarily imply an antagonism with capital and private property as a value, but rather was presented as a form of incorporation of the workers into a national capitalist project (James 1990). The worker’s responsibility in production and his or her labor protections were the ideological mortar in the intended class reconciliation, with capital posited as the element necessary for production that would turn private property and labor into two values that were plausibly complementary.

Specifically, as many researchers suggest, the recuperation of enterprises recreated this culture in the context of the general crisis at the beginning of this century (Dávalos and Perelman 2004; Fernández Álvarez 2007; Itzigsohn and Rebón 2015; Rebón 2007). This crisis, one of an unprecedented magnitude in Argentine society, expressed the exhaustion of the economic model that had emerged from neoliberal reforms.

This crisis favored the emergence of enterprise recuperation in two senses. First, in economic-labor terms, the period was marked by an increase in the closing and bankruptcy of productive units, and in the levels of unemployment and precariousness,<sup>6</sup> as well as by the weakening of compensatory mechanisms for those laid off (severance pay). Workers' alternatives for confronting unemployment were therefore quite limited, thus making their resort to unconventional forms of action less "costly."

Second, at the political-cultural level, the crisis unleashed an unprecedented wave of demonstrations and social protest<sup>7</sup> (Fajn et al. 2003), with distinctive actors in the public space autonomously defending their own identity while generating multiple solidarities and empathies (Schuster 2011; Thwaites Rey 2011). The collective action of recovering enterprises expresses a social alliance structured upon the way the crisis modifies the multiple identities.

Labor as an element of identity played a key role as a legitimizing notion with which to confront enterprise closing. Defending the source of employment in conditions of generalized closing of firms and growing unemployment establishes as fair and legitimate the modification of property relations and employment status in favor of the worker. Let's look at how this selective recreation of the culture of the worker develops. The stable wage-earner, having a work ethic, finds his or her material conditions of reproduction in crisis. For such workers, therefore, reproducing their social identity implies redefining it. If the pre-existing rules obstruct their lives, their only alternative is to transgress them. The work ethic is able to break adherence to the established order, clashing with the ethic of ownership. Beginning as complementary, they become contradictory. Before, working presupposed respect for the property of the owner and his or her

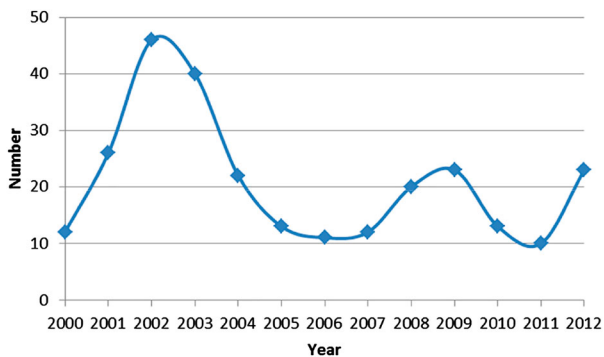
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6. In 2002 alone, the GDP fell by a staggering 10.9 percent. The rate of poverty grew from 15.9 percent in 1992 to 45.5 percent in 2002. Moreover, in 2001 the rate of unemployment was 18.4 percent in context of a decline of the economically active population (INDEC).

7. The political crisis shocked the Argentine state; between 20 December 2001 and 1 January 2002 there was a succession of several ephemeral presidents.

authority. Now, as capital infringes on the wage relationship, it saps the legitimacy of its authority. Working now presupposes modifying the relations of possession in the productive space. Legitimacy and legality grow apart, and collective action emerges as the mechanism that will resolve the tension. Occupation emerges as the efficient form of practically appropriating the factory space, avoiding its emptying, allowing production to begin again and defining new power relations (Rebón 2007). The legitimacy emanated by work as a social value promotes the existence of diverse solidarities and acceptance for different actors. Recuperation emerges from these articulations that allow passage from the *necessity* of defending the source of employment to the *possibility* of restoring the enterprise's productive activity under self-managed forms.

Once the economic, social, and political crisis was reversed, there was a general conviction among certain analysts that the experiences of recuperated enterprises would be condemned to oblivion in the face of a growing economy. However, the installation of enterprise recuperation in workers' culture constituted one of the central elements that allowed the process to continue expanding (Rebón and Salgado 2010). As can be seen in Figure 1, although the number of new recoveries peaked in 2002, these processes have remained at



**Figure 1.** Annual number of new enterprise recuperations. Argentina. 2000–2012. Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of Programa Facultad Abierta. 2014. *Informe del IV relevamiento de Empresas Recuperadas en la Argentina. Las empresas recuperadas en el período 2010–2013*. Buenos Aires: Secretaría de Extensión Universitaria y Bienestar Estudiantil, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires.

significant levels despite the country's economic and political recovery. According to the available data, in 2013, there were 311 recuperated enterprises that employed 13,462 workers, mostly small and medium businesses (SMEs) in the metallurgical, graphic, textile, and gastronomic sectors (Programa Facultad Abierta 2014). Despite the fact that they originated in a defensive attitude, these undertakings have implemented – in varying degrees and with limitations – the principal attributes of a work cooperative: democracy, voluntary association, and collective property (Rebón and Salgado 2010). In this way, these processes define a limit to the commodification of labor and promote the radical transformation of the relations of exploitation in productive units.

The characteristics of enterprise recuperation in Argentina allow us to suggest that a moral economy of labor is key to *the* process of recuperation and its ensuing development, as well as to the social construction of its legitimacy. Since more than a decade has passed since the beginning of the process, we decided to measure its social valuation. This measurement represents the first of its kind to be carried out in Argentina. As we will see later, the results confirm the existence of a widespread recognition of work as a social value.

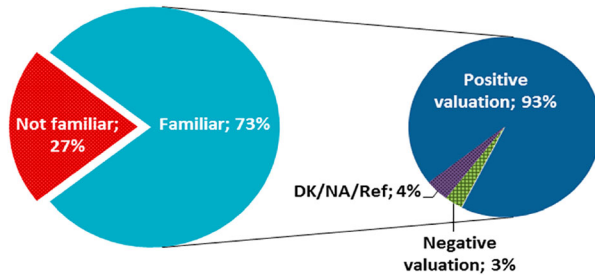
## **Analysis of the results**

### *The social valuation of recuperated enterprises*

Investigating the social valuation of enterprise recuperation and its rationale requires that we first analyze to what extent the process is familiar to the population. Familiarity refers here to its dissemination in terms of identifying its existence and its principal attributes. Despite being a limited phenomenon, that is to say, neither a mass nor a generalized one, the recuperation of enterprises is familiar to the population. Eighty-three percent of those surveyed said they have heard of it and 87 percent identified that this concept refers to an enterprise in crisis that is brought back into production by its workers. In this way, almost three quarters of all those surveyed demonstrated familiarity with the process, identifying the concept as well as its principal attributes. Social knowledge of the process tends to imply a positive valuation of it. Almost all of those who express knowledge consider it positively (93 percent).

The legitimacy of the processes of enterprise recuperation is strong among all work statuses, and comes to encompass even the totality of all the unemployed workers surveyed. Although the legitimacy is slightly more intense among working classes, it is also widely





**Figure 2.** Percentage distribution of knowledge of the process of enterprise recuperation and valuation of it. AMBA 2012. Source: “Alternative Economic Forms” Survey, UBACyT *The Culture of Enterprise Recuperation. Workers’ Representations and Valuations of the Process* and CEDESAL.

dominant among the middle classes.<sup>8</sup> This socially diverse composition of legitimacy is a typical characteristic of processes of resistance to the effects of social dislocation associated with commodification (Polanyi 2007, Burawoy 2008).

Let’s look into the basis for such widespread legitimacy. The favorable attitude toward these experiences of self-management derives fundamentally from seeing them more as a way of preserving the source of work than as a move toward democratizing the workspace. Eighty percent of those surveyed cite the preservation of the source of employment as the principal criterion for their positive valuation. “Decent work” – labor as a core element of positive social regard – is the key that allows us to get at the heart of the social support for enterprise recuperation. In a country marked by the culture of labor, reopening businesses and conserving sources of employment – even when there existed a marked recovery of the levels of employment – produces a strong social legitimacy. On the other hand, only a fifth of the population values the experience because of the democratic management of the productive unit in the hands of the workers.

8. The social approach to class position was carried out by adapting Dalle’s (2012) classificatory schema to our data. Owners, highly skilled wage-workers and/or workers with managerial functions in the productive process, and self-employed workers with jobs that required high qualifications were classified as middle class. On the other hand, wage-workers without occupational hierarchy, without many qualifications, along with self-employed workers without many qualifications, were classified as working-class.

**Table 1.** Valuation of the process of enterprise recuperation according to social class and activity status. AMBA 2012.

	Class Position		Activity Status			Total
	Middle Class	Working Class	Employed	Unemployed	Inactive	
Positive	89	94	91	100	94	93
Negative	4	2	3	-	4	3
No Comment	7	4	6	-	2	4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: “Alternative Economic Forms” Survey, UBACyT *The Culture of Enterprise Recuperation. Workers’ Representations and Valuations of the Process* and CEDESAL.

If labor is the value that underlies the legitimacy of the process, private property is the value that underlies opposition to it. The small number among those surveyed who have a negative valuation of the recuperated businesses cite violation of private property, on the assumption that “You can’t work without a boss”.

Thus, valuation of work legitimizes enterprise recuperation while valuation of property delegitimizes it. We see a theoretical confrontation between work and property. Do the process’s high levels of legitimacy show that labor relativizes and even surpasses property as a social value? Or do they simply show, rather, that those surveyed focus their attention on the observable characteristics in the logic of the process without knowing or keeping in mind that in many

**Table 2.** Percentages ascribing alternative criteria for the valuation of enterprise recuperation. AMBA 2012.

Positive Valuation		Negative Valuation	
Preserving the source of work	80	Violation of private property/is illegal	52
Allows the democratic self-management by workers	20	Nothing can be produced without a boss	44
DK/NA/Ref	-	DK/NA/Ref	4
Total	100	Total	100

Source: “Alternative Economic Forms” Survey, UBACyT *The Culture of Enterprise Recuperation. Workers’ Representations and Valuations of the Process* and CEDESAL.

instances this process infringes on property relations? Let's look at property and labor in greater detail, approaching the process from its most disruptive aspect. To that end, let's consider the social perception of the process's emblematic form of collective action: the factory occupation.

*The legitimacy of occupation.* Occupation as a form of collective action implies impinging upon a territory that is under the control of another individual, thereby altering legal property relations. Given that it exceeds the dominant institutional mechanisms for conflict processing, occupation falls under the category of actions that are prohibited by the social order and may be punished (Rebón 2007; Pérez and Rebón 2012). This form of action is intensely disruptive; occupation produces uncertainty and modifies the social order. At the same time, it differs from other forms of action because of its modular nature; that is to say, it can be used by diverse actors for various goals (Tilly 2008; Tarrow 1994).

If we look back at the history of this form of action in Argentine society, various spaces have been the object of occupations: factories, lands, housing, universities, radio stations, schools, and government agencies, among others. The social identities of those who carry out the action and the goals pursued have also varied. In the field of labor conflict, the occupation of productive establishments has been a strategy habitually used in Argentina since the mid-twentieth century. Generally, the occupation of work environments has been associated with defensive disputes to preserve the wage relation, among them, grievances due to layoffs and plant-closings. In the specific case of the processes of enterprise recuperation, occupation has been the emblematic form of collective action. It has fulfilled a central role as an effective way of appropriating the space of the factory (to avoid its emptying) and restarting production in a self-managed form (Fajn et al. 2003; Rebón 2007).

Despite its extensive social history and its modular nature, occupation is used relatively infrequently. In the first six months of 2012 less than 2 percent of social protest in Argentina used this contentious form of action (PIMSA 2012). We found that only 4 percent of those surveyed participated at some point in that form of action, making it the least frequent of all the kinds of collective action investigated. At the same time, occupation has low social legitimacy: according to our survey, only 18 percent of the population of AMBA shows a positive attitude towards the use of this form of action in contemporary Argentina.

Considering the low frequency and the scant legitimacy that occupation as a strategy holds, it is worth wondering whether it is possible that the utilization of this form of action for enterprise recuperation might achieve high levels of social legitimacy. It must be pointed out that the response to this question is not trivial. Insofar as direct action permanently runs the risk of repression, one of the ways to block the resultant punitive processes is to justify it in moral terms. To this end, the protagonists of direct action tend to personalize the situation in contrast to the intrinsically impersonal nature of the transgressed norm or law.

Moralizing the act of protest implies presenting the particularities of the situation that justify violation of the law. With such an objective in mind, the promotional and organizational teams employ diverse tactics with the twofold purpose of mobilizing the social grass roots of the action and achieving comprehension and a positive valuation of public opinion. The personal characteristics of those who carry out the action, the history of mistreatment, the intensity of the injustices, the goals that the action intends to satisfy; in sum, a set of attributes makes the action and its participants distinctive. This process of making the situation unique, when linked to widely accepted moral values, grants the committed action the possibility of moral recognition by a third party, despite the transgression that it introduces into the social order and the difficulties that the action may cause for individuals who are not directly involved in the conflict. The less legitimacy that such an action is able to achieve, the easier it will be to criminalize and prosecute it. Thus, its legitimacy will depend on its ability – based on the form it takes, its goal, and the identity of its participants – to activate shared or complementary moral values between the claimants and third parties, or even with the adversaries themselves (Pérez and Rebón 2012).

Having clarified these points, we return to our question: to what extent is an act of enterprise recuperation able to build a singular narrative legitimizing the process? And when it is able to do so, to what extent is such singularity associated with the constitution of a moral economy of labor?

Unlike the valuation of occupation as a generic form of struggle, the occupation of the particular productive unit with the goal of putting it back into production is considered a legitimate form of action: 84 percent of the population considers it fair and just that workers in a factory that is about to close occupy it in order to put it back into production. In this sense, the positive valuation of the process of enterprise recuperation extends to the kind of action that makes it possible despite the disruption to property relations.

Keeping in mind the scant utilization of this form of action and its low societal acceptance, it is notable that such high legitimacy is accorded to the occupation of a productive establishment by its workers before its imminent closing. Upon what elements is such a positive valuation founded? Once again, the defense of the source of jobs is the criterion that validates the direct action (65 percent). The workers are recipients of a social solidarity that legitimizes the modification of property relations if this is necessary to defend the source of employment.

To a lesser extent, the lack of other alternatives and hence of any moral dilemma legitimizes the action (20 percent). As the respondents point out: "They don't do it because they want to; they do it because they have no other choice." In such a case, employment appears as the implicit element upon which the valuation is founded, as losing it is not an option. Another response turns work itself into a source of property: the occupation of the factory is fair and just because "it belongs to them because it is the fruit of their own labor" (15 percent). Thus, workers' effort and the stake they have in their jobs blur the boundaries between established ownership and deserved ownership, thus making the occupation of the factory legitimate.

The reasons cited for viewing the occupation of a productive unit by its workers as legitimate allow us to hypothesize that this valuation is founded on the ability of the process of enterprise recuperation to distinguish its action on the basis of four elements.

The first element is the aforementioned fact that work itself is endowed with social value. As we have shown, labor as a social good unites various values, meanings, and ideas that impose limits to its own commodification, justifying a contentious response to deprivation. Defense of the source of employment acquires sufficient moral force to relativize the value of private property.

Secondly, the space affected by occupation is the factory or business; that is to say, a for-profit and non-generalized good. It is non-generalized insofar as only a minority of the population owns productive establishments. For these reasons, those affected by the occupation do not immediately identify with the owners. At a symbolic level, fear of unemployment is more widespread than is fear of a profit-driven enterprise becoming occupied.

A third legitimating factor is the defensive and restorative nature of the goal pursued by the workers. All defense aims for the preservation of a previous condition or relation. In the case of recuperated enterprises, the participants aim to maintain the condition of worker, representing work as an acquired or institutionalized right. The

occupation pursues a principle of reestablishment or restoration of a situation. If in the case analyzed by E.P. Thompson the “fair price” of bread was what the participants hoped to restore, here it is the source of employment.

Finally, the produced legitimacy is sustained by the fact that the action is not random or arbitrary. In the case of enterprise recuperation there are links between the space that is occupied, the actors who carry out the action, and the source of the conflict. That is to say, there is a causal and specific connection between the source of the grievance and those affected by the action. Just as the bakers, hoarders, and millers – who were seen to be responsible for the bread price – were the object of attack in the riots that Thompson describes, here the occupied factory belongs or belonged to someone who is seen to be responsible for the loss of a work source. But unlike the subsistence riots studied by Thompson, those aggrieved are not a generic group, neither the masses nor workers in general, but rather the employees of a specific business that is closing or in crisis. This makes the mechanism of connection quite consistent. Given that the worker affected by the business crisis productively supported that establishment, legitimacy is strengthened. Habitually in the processes of recuperation, this productive support has not been remunerated in the terms established by law; there may exist labor debts such as owed salaries or dismissal pay. Specifically, the 2011 reform to the Argentine Bankruptcy Law responds to this situation, making it possible that, *when facing* bankruptcy, workers organized into cooperatives may use the *wages* owed to them to buy the enterprise.

In short, the gap in terms of perception of justice between the generalized illegitimacy of a form of action – occupation – and the high legitimacy granted to a specific form assumed by it – enterprise recuperation – is explained by the successful process of singularizing the specific situation. The occupation of the productive establishment in the case of enterprise recuperation bases its legitimacy in the work ethic. But this doesn’t mean to say that all legitimation based on this ethic would be successful. In our hypothesis, the legitimating process is possible because it combines with the principles of non-randomness and of restoration of a situation defined in terms of rights, as well as with the characteristics of the good affected. In this way, the singularization or moralizing of the process of enterprise recuperation, based on the particularities of the situation, justifies the violation of private property, allowing moral values to be activated among the claimants and third parties, granting widespread social legitimacy to the action.

**Table 3.** Percentages citing various reasons for their views on occupation aimed at productive recuperation. AMBA 2012.

Reasons for Perceiving it as Just	Reasons for Perceiving it as Unjust		
They are defending their source of labor.	65	There are other forms of protest.	56
It's the only option they have.	20	It's against the law.	23
It belongs to them because it is the fruit of their labor.	15	It doesn't belong to them.	18
DK/NA/Ref	-	DK/NA/Ref	3
Total	100	Total	100

Source: "Alternative Economic Forms" Survey, UBACyT *The Culture of Enterprise Recuperation. Workers' Representations and Valuations of the Process* and CEDESAL.

On the other hand, most of those surveyed who did not consider this form of action to be legitimate emphasized the existence of other possible avenues for protest. A smaller number stressed the sanctity of private property. Thus, if the value of work and the lack of alternatives function as legitimizing elements for the action, the logic of delegitimation is totally the opposite: another value, that of ownership, and another framework of action, in which there exist alternatives to occupation which make the participants responsible for any negative consequences, form the nucleus of the criticism.

In short, the deprivation of work due to the closing of a productive unit is socially defined as a significant grievance that raises the moral stature of the protestors and turns them into individuals meriting diverse solidarities. In the case of enterprise recuperation, the singularity of the use of occupation gives it moral force and hence legitimacy even when it transgresses the dominant norms and values of Argentine society.

## Conclusion

The recuperation of an enterprise by its workers, despite its transgressive characteristics, has strong social legitimacy. As we have shown, this paradox can be understood through a key element of the Argentine social system that we have referred to as the moral economy of labor. This moral principle is the central element that allows for comprehension of the legitimacy of this process, even in

its most disruptive aspects. In this way, the paradox we have laid out is explained precisely by the fact that the high degree of consensus achieved is founded in a moral principle with a long tradition in Argentine society, in particular among the working classes.

The culture of labor forms part of the set of dominant ideas in Argentine society and in the working classes. In our cultural configuration it has fulfilled an ambivalent function. In the first place, it favors the reproduction of a capitalist social order. The internalizing of work as a basis of personal dignity is part of a long and complex process to construct a salaried, disciplined, and docile workforce (Foucault 1989; Marx 2002). However, the unique way in which this process developed in Argentina generated a set of moral limits to its own commodification. As such, it has operated as a legitimizing notion in the struggle of workers with regard to the sale and consumption of labor power.

Thus, the culture of work is not equivalent to docility; it expresses the acceptance of a productive order in which the workforce represents a subordinated element, but it also imposes limits to the form that such subordination assumes and to its corresponding relations of exploitation. In the context of the general crisis at the beginning of this century, a process of autonomization and radicalization of the moral economy of labor took place. The defense of work even came to relativize the principle of private property as it relates to the means of production, provoking and legitimating social innovation. Like the case analyzed by E.P. Thompson, it is the autonomization of an element present in the reproduction of a social order that generates the cultural framework for the defense of the working class. But the result isn't only to establish a limit to commodification; it also introduces a socio-productive innovation. That is to say, it helps legitimize social change in the area of the relations of production, in the area of capitalist accumulation.

The high legitimacy granted to this process, grounded in the moral economy of work, creates cultural conditions for its expansion. In this sense, it shouldn't be surprising that even when the social conditions of crisis abated, new recuperated enterprises continued to emerge—although at a slower pace. This allows us to understand the wide parliamentary consensus that accompanied the modification of Argentine Bankruptcy Law to facilitate new recoveries. Furthermore, it implies that in the event of future situations of general crisis, the cultural framework exists to give space to new waves of recoveries at magnitudes that would be difficult to anticipate.

Finally, given the increasing heterogeneity of the social formation, we would like to promote a wider reflection on the degree of capitalist



hegemony in the socio-productive field. How are self-managed socio-productive forms perceived? Is capitalist production naturalized as the only form of social production possible? To what degree is there social consensus about capitalism as a productive form?

The crisis of neoliberal hegemony that we see today in Argentina demonstrates the need to further investigate this topic. As there emerges a greater drive toward state regulation of the economy, including the recuperation of business functions, and as we see a proliferation of work cooperatives – based partly on an impulse from below but increasingly also on public policy promotion – these questions become significant. The construction of a post-neoliberal Argentina that is able to deal with an increasingly heterogeneous social formation, generating different forms of production that involve an advance in social control, undoubtedly proves the necessity of understanding, and if necessary challenging, the symbolic dimension of the ways in which we produce our living conditions.

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