

PEASANT IDENTITY: CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARDS A RURAL PSYCHOLOGY FROM AN ARGENTINEAN CASE STUDY

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Within the field of psychology, little attention has been paid to studying the identity of rural people, in particular the peasantry. To explore this issue, a case study was undertaken in a community located in Argentina. The research identified three different dimensions of peasants' identity. The first one, positive identity, is based on peasants' view of themselves as hardworking people well versed in rural work. The second dimension, the pragmatic identity, is one that encompasses peasants' view of themselves as poor and in need of assistance, which in turn legitimizes efforts to obtain public assistance. Finally, a third dimension, of scant quantitative importance, revealed a negative identity at its core. Furthermore, it's worth mentioning that different dimensions of their identity were activated depending on the particular context within which they were set and favored the development of either passive or active positioning on the part of the peasants. © 2012 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

INTRODUCTION

Identity, as well as the way in which it is constructed, has become one of the central areas of reflection and debate within contemporary social sciences (Pereira, 2002). However, it is undoubtedly true that certain conceptual frameworks, as well as certain populations,

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have been the focus of this attention, in detriment of others. For example, although considerable research has been dedicated to studying the identities of disadvantaged populations (e.g., Guareschi et al., 2007; Howarth, 2011; Jelin & Vila, 1993; Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2003; Vidal Pollarolo, 2002), not much of this attention has been placed on peasants, social actors of particular importance in developing countries. However, one could argue that a significant amount of research has been dedicated to the study of farmers' identity (e.g., de Weerd & Klandermans, 1996; Klandermans, Sabucedo & Rodríguez, 2004; Klandermans, Sabucedo, Rodríguez, & de Weerd, 2004; Klandermans & de Weerd, 1988). Nevertheless, the focus of the latter was the study of specific elements of European farmers' identities (particularly Spanish and Dutch), a population that is significantly different than that of peasants, for several reasons.

First, if we accept that "small farmers" is a synonym for "peasants," then the latter would be a particular subtype of farmers, which would mean that those studies could not have tackled the specificities of the peasants' identities. But second, and more importantly, the intention behind the use of the word peasants (*campesinos* in Spanish) is not merely to make an exclusively productive reference, as in the case of the small farmers. This is because peasants is a category that highlights not only the size of the area farmed but also social, economic, political, and historical factors, such as the use of family labor in peasant production (Manzanal, 2000), their restricted access to land and capital associated to their state of poverty (Tsakoumagkos, Soverna, & Craviotti, 2000), the difficulties they face when attempting to systematically accumulate capital (Manzanal, 2000), and this productive systems' subordinate position with respects to agribusinesses (Nazif, 2007). Thus, the choice to study peasant identity rather than the small farmers' identity is in line with this article's ideological positioning, which is in turn related to the socially engaged approach that characterizes community psychology.

With the objective of studying peasant identity, a case study was undertaken in the province of Formosa, located in the northeastern region of Argentina. Specifically, the case study took place in Misión Tacaaglé, a village characterized by a high percentage of peasants dedicated to cotton, fruit, and vegetable production. It's important to mention that the historical development of the Argentine peasantry differs from that of other Latin American countries, in that in Argentina, there was no existence of a traditional peasantry, but instead the category emerged in the 1930s out of a need to supply agricultural raw materials to the national market (Manzanal, 2000). As a result, historically, peasants' capacity for subsistence has depended on the price of income products. Currently, although the sector's situation has improved with respects to the 1990s (a decade characterized by the proliferation of neoliberal politics), the agribusinesses' expansion due to the harvesting of soy and the use of pesticides is posing a threat to the peasantry's way of life. Nonetheless, because of the particularities of Misión Tacaaglé's soil, soy expansion does not pose, at least for the moment, a problem for the area.

The existing inequalities in the power structure between small farmers and intermediaries, who control the access of goods to the principal cities of the country, as well as the increased support received by farmers from the government (price support for cotton and many rural extension projects) since 2003, however, are processes occurring at a national level that are essential to understanding this case study's dynamics, and will thus be taken into account. These factors, which are usually analyzed as "context," will not be considered here as external to the case study. In fact, they will be referenced when appropriate, so as to demonstrate that processes occurring at a national or provincial level are relevant to understand the peasant identity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of “identity” has been broached from a variety of approaches and perspectives (Fierro, 1973). Despite this diversity, it is of general consensus that identity refers to a group of qualities, characteristics, properties, or particularities through which an individual subject or group describes, comprehends, and recognizes themselves or differentiates themselves from other individuals or groups. In an effort to organize this array of approaches, I propose the arrangement of identity theory into three main conceptual frameworks. The first, tied to the theory of social constructionism, considers individual and collective identities to be discursive means through which to comprehend one’s self, means that are developed through dialogue and social interactions (Amigot Leache, 2007; Revilla, 2003; Sandoval Álvarez, 2000). The second, based on a behavioral and cognitive framework, focuses on self-referential behavior, representations, and psychic processes (Fierro, 1973), particularly on the notion of self-concept, understood as the collection of knowledge people have of themselves (Páez, Zubieta, Mayordomo, Jiménez, & Ruiz, 1997). A third and final framework, influenced by psychoanalysis, utilizes the notion of subjectivity and looks to challenge the concept of identity, studying the relationships between power and the process of construction and homogenization of subjectivities (Prado Filho, & Martins, 1971). In the case of this article, the theories that proved to be most useful were social constructionism and the behavioral/cognitive approaches.

Several conceptual premises are particularly important to the ends of this research. First, it is important to mention that the identity of an individual or group does not constitute a singular unit, but rather refers to a plurality of dimensions (Castells, 2004), narrations (Fierro, 1973), and senses of belonging (Pereira, 2002). This implies that different components of an identity can be activated or highlighted in relation to specific contexts (Marco & Ramírez, 1998, quoted in De La Torre, 2001; Páez et al., 1997; Pereira, 2002).

Second, it is important to highlight that identities are constructed and reconstructed through dialogue, negotiation, and social interactions (Duveen & Lloyd, 1970; Pereira, 2002), and thus must constantly be subjected to processes of validation and recognition from others to be considered as objective realities by those who possess them (Cardoso de Oliveira, 2000; Cinnirella, 2001). This is of particular relevance when studying the identities of disadvantaged populations or stigmatized minorities because these tend to be immersed in contexts where complex processes of negotiation, acceptance, resistance, and rejection of identities can clearly be observed. Similarly, the process of identity formation involves not only the construction of a self, but also implies a process of differentiation and opposition in relation to others (Bolaños, 2007; Sandoval Álvarez, 2000). This is because in the very act of differentiating oneself from others, one necessarily outlines what one is (Guareschi et al., 2007; Jelin & Vila, 1993). Consequently, a subject’s sense of identity can be found both in his description of what he is as well as in the description of what he is not.

In fourth place, a person’s identity and the means through which they perceive and comprehend the world are interdependent. On the one hand, a person’s beliefs about himself or herself clearly influence the way in which they interpret reality (Bolaños, 2007; Fierro, 1973). On the other hand, it is reasonable to suppose that a person’s identity will be affected by the place he allocates for himself in the world because of a particular worldview. Thus, studying the ways in which people comprehend the world, as well as the place that they assign for themselves in that world, can be a means towards accessing their identity.

Additionally, it is also necessary to highlight this article's particular interest in the theory of social identity (Tajfel, 1981), which focuses on the part of self-concept that derives from a person's sense of belonging to a particular group or social category. A fundamental point of this theory is the affirmation that all individuals seek to obtain and conserve a positive image of themselves, to which end they employ a variety of strategies. The following three strategies are of particular interest to this article. The first is the tendency that people have to identify themselves with social groups that carry a positive connotation (De La Torre & Marrero, 2003). Another is the predisposition to favor the ingroup versus the outgroup when having to carry out inter-group comparisons (Páez, 2000). Finally, the third is the reinterpretation of negatively connoted elements of the social identity as if they were positive (Tajfel, 1981).

On a final note, it is important to mention that because the way in which people present themselves has an effect on others (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1971), it is logical to expect that they tend to modify this presentation in anticipation of the effects they hope to obtain (Duveen & Lloyd, 1970). This is done not only in a cynical and calculated manner, but it also occurs spontaneously and intuitively (Auyero, 2001; Goffman, 1987).

METHODOLOGY

The results presented in this article are part of a larger investigation that had as its objective the identification, description, and analysis of the psychosocial factors linked to processes of rural development in peasant populations. The way in which the peasants represented themselves was a key element of said investigation. To the ends of this research, a case study was undertaken in Misión Tacaaglé located in Formosa, a province of Argentina.

Several different techniques were employed to gather information. In the first place, participant observation and ethnographic records were carried out within the context of several fieldwork trips during which I lived with a peasant family, for almost 6 months, for the period between 2003 and 2007. The relationship with the community was established in 2002 when I travelled to the area along with other students from different Schools of the University of Buenos Aires to support a cotton cooperative created by the Peasant Movement of Formosa. During that trip, I met the peasant family who later invited and received me as a friend in their home for the duration of my field work. Second, between 2005 and 2007, I conducted 71 interviews with peasants and 11 with other social actors such as agents of development, community leaders, and medium farmers. The interviewees were contacted on the basis of the recommendations of families with whom I had established a relationship (snowball sampling) or by visiting families with whom there had been no previous contact, but who usually had obtained some information about the researcher from neighbors' comments. Finally, secondary sources such as government reports and census on the economy and public policies were also analyzed.

To work with the information collected, the records of participant observations and the interviews, most of which had been recorded, were typed. The material transcribed was analyzed with the support of Atlas Ti software, creating categories of analysis that were further developed through successive fieldwork, all of which allowed for progressively more in-depth work in the different areas of interest. Said categories correspond with the three areas of analysis presented in what follows in this article. Furthermore, the specific subtitles and topics of each section comprise the subcategories used to analyze the material.

RESULTS

The reconstruction of the Misión Tacaaglé peasants' identity was carried out on the basis of three main areas of focus. The first, that of their social identity, was composed on the basis of the interviewee's sense of belonging to various groups and social categories. The second, their personal identity, was gathered from the peasants' characterizations of themselves and the ways in which they compared themselves with members of their ingroup. A third type of category was the identity derived from the manner in which the peasants' worldview lends them, and the social groups of which they are a part, a particular place in that world.

Social Identities Derived From Comparisons: Peasants, Small Farmers, and Poor

In general, both the participant observations undertaken and the interviews conducted showed that the local population described themselves mostly as peasants, small farmers, and poor, with no description taking on a particular preference. In fact, no relevant, additional reference was identified as being used by these farmers to describe themselves. Thus, in this section, I propose to analyze the meaning and ideas behind these three categories to describe peasant identity.

But before starting, I have to tackle a potential critique, which is that, it could be argued, peasants describing themselves as peasants is not a reference that could provide additional information about the identity of this social group. They are peasants, so there is nothing new in them describing themselves in these terms. Nonetheless, when the interviewees employ this word to refer to themselves, they are not using it, as we do when working as researchers or policy makers, as an analytical concept or tool in which what prevails is the sociological characterization of peasant provided earlier. On the contrary, when peasants describe themselves as peasants, they are using the same word to talk about something completely different: their own life experience and practices, stated in their own words. Thus, the self-description of being peasants, as well as those in which they refer to themselves as small farmers and as poor are terms worthy of being analyzed so as to describe the peasant's social identity.

According to those interviewed, the term peasant' is used to designate someone who lives in the country, an image outlined in contrast to people from the cities and towns. Another manner in which the interviewees' define themselves is that of being small farmers, which means to work on a small farm, a term that is used in opposition to large farmers. Finally, to be poor is linked to the idea of themselves as "small" and means having limited access to productive and economic resources, particularly land and money. Additionally, it's worth mentioning that these three ways of categorizing the ingroup can, in turn, be juxtaposed with its opposite and, in consequence, be imbued with meaning. In the following section, each term will be analyzed together with their respective opposite.

The peasant and the city. Both the context and surroundings of a person's life, as well as their work or profession, should be taken into consideration as potential sources of their identity. Valera (1997) sustains that "a social identity . . . can be derived from the sense of belonging to or the affiliation with a significant, concrete environment" (p. 18),¹ which, in this case, would be "the country." Tolfo and Piccini (2007) add that a person's work should also be considered one of the main sources of their personal identity. Both of

¹The translation to English of the original text is my own.

these affirmations have been corroborated in rural contexts by Gullifer and Thompson (2010), who found that both the land, as well as working the land, were focal points of identity for Australian farmers.

A wide range of interviewees, who manifested being pleased and satisfied to be living there and doing what they do, corroborated the experience of identifying themselves as being from the country and working the land. This includes not only a sense of satisfaction from living in the country, but is also coupled with a certain disregard for life in the city. As one peasant stated, "There are many people here who are at home in the country . . . they go and try in the cities but come back again because they can't get used to it."² The phrase "are at home" is often repeated using similar forms of expression. *When a peasant goes to live in a city, he doesn't feel at home, at ease with himself, because the space, the place, is not in consonance with his subjectivity, as is the country.*

Several factors differentiate the country and the city and, in turn, those who live in each context. Those who endow the country with positive connotations describe it with a profound sense of pride, as a place that produces food and natural resources necessary for urban centers. In this sense, the country takes on an important and indispensable function. Another point of comparison between the city and country is the level of hardship or effort that characterizes life in each place. Those interviewed argued that in the county people have to work "from sunrise to sunset," under adverse climates and particularly in intense heat. As one peasant states, "Working on the farm is difficult work." In this way, life in the country is characterized by sacrifice, making suffering a part of day-to-day life for the peasants. In contrast, city work is perceived as being lighter and easier, because of the characteristics and conditions in which it is carried out.

This apparently negative description of life in the country appears to have a positive impact on peasants' self-esteem through a process of reinterpretation of their unfavorable connotations (Tajfel, 1981). This is because of the fact that the characterization of the rural environment as being one of suffering and struggle allows the interviewees to consider themselves as being strong and capable of facing and overcoming the difficult conditions that are commonplace to their environments, in contrast to those who live in the cities, who are perceived as being weak. Thus, it is this sense of pride that often leads peasants to highlight the hardships of agricultural labor, in an effort to maximize the image of themselves as strong that they obtain from this description.

Finally, there are also those negative characterizations of life in the country that the peasants consider as undesirable. In this case, a series of descriptions make up what could be considered as a negative social identity, being that they are not resignified in a way that could change their value. In the first place, the country is defined as a place with no future, with no opportunities for social ascent. As one interviewee states, "Agricultural labor is work that only a poor person can do . . . a person can grow, they can harvest for their own consumption . . . but only that, that is as far as they can go."

Second, those who live in the country are, on some occasions, described as lacking in knowledge, culture, and education. Some even as illiterate, as one interviewee states, "Here, there are those who don't read and, here, there are those who read . . . little." It is in this sense that studying becomes a means towards "being someone" in life, whereas, implicitly, being a peasant implies, in terms of social prestige, "being a nobody." In contrast to the sense of pride transmitted when the peasants refer to the hardships of life in the country, these descriptions seem to state that living there is undesirable, something to overcome, a situation spoken about with a certain severity and even sadness. It is in this

²All the peasants' quotes are translated from textual phrases taken from recorded interviews.

sense that a woman interviewed states, “Agricultural labor is work that only a poor person can do . . . to be a small farmer is the worst a person can be.”

The poor and the rich. From peasants’ perspective, being poor means having needs, opportunities, and desires that cannot be fulfilled because of insufficient economic means. This is exemplified by an interviewee who said, “I had two sisters that were studying and, as you see, the monetary income is not much when you have a small farm, so I couldn’t study and had to stay working on the farm, thinking about their well-being.” In juxtaposition, being rich implies having only more money or capital than a small farmer, but not necessarily having much more, a category that often includes small merchants as well as teachers.

The main difference between being rich and poor is based on a moral distinction that implies that poor people are good whereas the rich are not. The interviewees often stated that poor people are always there in times of need because they are familiar with the sacrifice and suffering caused by not having enough, versus the idea that those who have more money only look to take advantage of poor people’s misfortune. A peasant states, “[Rich people] make you work for a kilo of pasta, a bit of fat. Because you are poor and you have to suffer.” Whether or not this characterization can be upheld by objective facts, it is clear that it reinforces peasants’ self-esteem, being that it allows them to resignify their poverty, a negative element related to their social identities, as something positive. This is because being poor, in the end, means being an honest and full person, it means having ethical standing. Consequently, being poor becomes a source of pride as a result of the peasants’ capacity to reinterpret its original meaning in a positive manner through a process of cognitive creativity (Tajfel, 1981).

Small and large farmers. The first main difference between the small and large farmers, from the perspective of the peasants, is that of having access to resources, a characteristic that allows the latter to manage their agricultural activity with more ease. In fact, large producers use agrochemicals and improved seeds and have the necessary machinery to prepare their land. In contrast, because of a lack of resources, small farmers use less agricultural inputs as well as seeds of lesser quality and prepare their land using ox or tractors on loan from the municipal government. Consequently, large farmers have the capacity to increment their harvest and overcome climactic conditions in a more effective manner than small farmers.

Another fundamental difference is that large farmers are able to place their products in the market with greater ease than their smaller counterparts, because they have contact with potential buyers as well as greater power of negotiation. This is because “he who has 1 hectare and he who has 100 . . . are not the same.” In contrast, small farmers must wait for interested buyers to come to their land or their village. The sense these farmers are left with is that of being swept aside by the large farmers, who first place their product in the market and buy only from the small farmers when they need to supplement an order. Furthermore, being that large farmers who function as brokers pay a worse price than what the buyers pay, the interviewees feel they are abused and are victims of illegitimate appropriation. As stated by a peasant, “Large farmers buy at the price that they want . . . and you have to sell. They use us, that’s why it’s difficult to improve.” Overall, the peasants feel taken advantage of because they perceive that those who have the most (and who consequently have a less immediate need to sell what they have) not only profit from their own work but also gain an extra benefit from the efforts of the peasants.

On a superficial level, it would seem that, in general, the significance of small farmers contributes negatively to the peasants’ identity. However, a more careful analysis shows

that the opposite effect is most likely obtained. In truth, the descriptions that make up the category of being a small farmer allows peasants to attribute their poverty to external causes, thus avoiding feeling responsible for the situation. Furthermore, it leads them to characterize the large farmers as morally unsound, reinforcing their perception of themselves as being ethically superior.

Other comparisons with outgroups: Rural extensionists and the researcher. In terms of the comparison between peasants and rural extensionists, the former tend to describe themselves as having practical know-how that allows them to effectively carry out their productive activity, often rejecting technical knowledge on the basis of it being too theoretical or decontextualized (Landini & Murtagh, 2003): “A technician comes and explains everything, but then goes to the field and knows nothing, he doesn’t even know how to use a hoe.” In this way, peasants often strengthen their positive identities by highlighting their know-how in contrast to that of the professionals they meet. Nevertheless, there are cases in which this relationship is inverted, where peasants reject their own know-how in light of the supposed superiority of the rural extensionists’ knowledge.

On the other hand, during the investigation, there emerged a tendency to compare themselves with the researcher, who had become a person known by almost all of the local community. In this case, the researcher was perceived as being a person with money, because of the fact that he had stable employment. Additionally, there was a tendency to undervalue their own know-how in respects to that of the researcher, a predisposition that became explicit during a situation in which the investigator became ill and was kilometers away from the town. Faced with this problem, he asked the peasants what he should do and received the following answer: “How am I going to tell you what you should do when you are the professor?” Evidently, the fact that the researcher was a university professor had the effect of causing the peasants to perceive their own knowledge as irrelevant.

Components of peasants’ social identities. In the preceding section, three categories were identified as a means to organize the interviewees’ social identities: peasant, poor, and small farmer. In what follows, the elements that were previously identified as constituting peasant identity will be summarized. For this reason, this section will focus on naming the areas of meaning and not on providing their justification, being that these were already developed above.

On the basis of the analysis undertaken of what it means for the interviewees to be peasants as well as the country-city contrast that was established, one could argue that they perceive themselves in the following ways: (a) as hard workers; (b) as tough people, capable of overcoming and successfully facing the hardships that characterize life in the country as well as rural labor in general, a situation that allows them to take pride in themselves; (c) as valuable people, because of the fact that their farms provide the food and raw materials needed by those who live in the cities; (d) as people with no future, in terms of a lack of opportunity for social ascent (as small farmers this is perceived as being impossible); (e) as sufferers (a characteristic tainted with a negative connotation) in that they have to work hard and struggle without any real alternatives of obtaining a better future or any type of social ascent; and (f) as lacking in education, intelligence an culture, in as much as developing one’s intelligence and education are considered to be characteristic of life in the city, not in the country.

Other observations were obtained on the basis of the poor-rich opposition, where the peasants described themselves as (g) poor people lacking in money and sufficient economic resources and (h) honest, trustworthy people, willing to help whoever is in

need. Finally, the small farmer category not only reinforced the idea of being poor, but also characterized the interviewees as (i) abused and left aside by intermediaries and buyers.

Furthermore, we can add to this analysis the comparison with both rural extension workers and the researcher, which lends itself to a new sense of identity that refers to the small farmer as (j) having the know-how and practical knowledge linked to managing peasant activity. Additionally, there are also cases in which the peasants undervalue their own knowledge with respects to that which comes from external sources (be it the professional or the researcher), cases that reinforce the idea of the small farmer as lacking in intelligence and formal education. Finally, an image of the small farmer as being poor is reaffirmed through the comparison between themselves and the researcher.

Positive Identities and Inter-Group Comparisons

The previous section “Social identities derived from comparisons” focused on the dimensions of peasant identity that are based on the comparisons between the ingroup and outgroup. What follows is an analysis of the descriptions that the interviewees made of themselves and the ways in which they distinguish themselves from members of their own social group, an alternative that Páez et al. (1997) recognized as a means to maintaining a positive identity. Three central ideas emerge from the characteristics the interviewees employed when describing themselves as individuals or as part of a particular subgroup within the peasantry. The first repeats, in general terms, one of the descriptions derived from the hardship of life in the country, which portrays peasants as (a) hardworking.³ However, the difference between the two is that, in this case, the description applies only to the speaker and a small group with whom he identifies, not all peasants. Moreover, these appreciations often are based on a process of contrasting themselves with other individuals or subgroups that are in turn designated as either not having the desired characteristic (“not being hard workers”) or being its opposite (“being lazy”). In the following quote, both strategies can be appreciated: “We want to farm the land, we want to have something . . . I like to farm the land [meaning, I’m hardworking], but some people don’t, we know how peasants are [meaning, many peasants are not hardworking].”

The second area of comparison between the interviewees and their peers studied refers to the representation of themselves as (k) independent people, which is tied to the idea of not having to depend on anyone for subsistence. One interviewee states, “I work . . . , I never go to the municipality to cry to anyone for a kilo of sugar or anything . . . and you know that I make my whole family study with only this little farm.” To be independent, thus, means make a living on one’s own terms, without depending on bosses or landowners or welfare assistance based on systems dictated by clientelism. A third area of intra-group comparison is related to the interviewees’ description of themselves as honest, upright, loyal, and trustworthy people who worry about those in need of help and who are true to their word. These descriptions comprise a heterogeneous group of characteristics based around people’s morality. Consequently, the interviewees describe themselves as (h) honest, trustworthy, and willing to help anyone in need, a description that also came up when contrasting the differences between the rich and the poor. The dissimilarity here is that the characterization is based on a comparison between the

³The letters used to systematize the elements that compose peasant identity are repeated when the characteristic to which it refers has previously been identified with said letter.

interviewee and other members of his ingroup, instead of on a contrast with the outgroup comprised of rich people.

Collective Identities Implicit in the Peasants' Worldviews

This part of the article explores the contents of peasants' identities that result from the way they comprehend reality. Thus, the objective of this section is to identify and describe the manner in which the interviewees perceive themselves, through the lens of how they signify their place in the world and their relationships with others.

Before I commence, and with the objective that the analysis presented be understood in the way it is intended, I would like to clarify that some of the descriptions that follow could be perceived, to a certain point, as rude or insensitive. This is because, methodologically, I have chosen to take a certain distance from the content of the comments made by the interviewees, with the objective of fully understanding their meaning, context, and practical implications. This does not imply taking an insensitive attitude with respects to the suffering of those people with whom I shared months of my life, but rather it is an effort to create a distance with not only the comments proffered by the interviewees, but also with my own emotions, so as to reflect upon them.

Impossibility of progress and the need for help. The fact that peasants consider themselves hardworking people results in the reasonable expectation that they obtain some sort of fruit from their labor. However, despite the fact that they know they perform the important task of providing food for the rest of society, they understand that they are to receive minimal economic benefits for their work and thus consider it very difficult to ascend socially by means of their labor and effort.

The interviewees gave several reasons for the difficulty or even impossibility of getting ahead based solely on their effort. The first is related to climatic issues, specifically the lack of rainfall, frost, and other conditions that taint agricultural activity with a high level of unpredictability, for example, "now we are planting watermelon and pumpkin [but] if the drought continues, there is going to be nothing." Another issue is the unavailability of resources and economic means needed for working, in particular, insufficient land, supplies, tools, and machinery necessary for carrying out production in an adequate manner and with a high level of productivity. As one interviewee states, "The peasants who have land are hard workers, but they often don't farm much land because plowing, planting, and hoeing cost money, farming costs money." Finally, peasants also explain their inability to get ahead through the difficulties they experience when commercializing their products, because of the fact that intermediaries and big farmers monopolize the market, limiting the peasants' access to it. An interviewee explains, "The big farmers grab all the buyers . . . while they still haven't sold everything, you won't be selling your pumpkin . . . now they are buying but at a lesser price."

The first of the reasons mentioned above, that of climatic conditions, places the focus on destiny or god's will. The second, insufficient material resources due to being in a state of poverty, is conceptualized as being the result of the third, which highlights the lack of sufficient sales and the low price at which their products are commercialized, all of which can largely be explained by the lack of scruples and the abusive nature and greed of the intermediaries. Consequently, two main reasons for the peasants' inability to get ahead can be identified as being: God and destiny, on the one hand, and large farmers and intermediaries, on the other.

It appears, then, that because peasants consider themselves to be hard workers and strugglers, they tend to explain their difficulty getting ahead as having to do with external factors that are relatively out of their control: forces of nature and intermediaries. As a peasant says, "If you are poor you don't have a solution, you plant seed, it's expensive, you plant, it doesn't rain, it grows, then the birds come. If the product grows, it doesn't sell, it rots . . . If it doesn't rain it's God's fault . . . but if you harvest and then don't sell, that's the boss' fault, the ones who buy." Thus, because they do not feel responsible for the situation, the "failure" to obtain the expected benefits of their labor does not influence the peasants' self-esteem in a negative manner, a situation that could be different where they to blame their lack of progress on internal causes.

In terms of their problems in the area of commercializing their products, the peasants believe that if they had enough economic resources to allow them to raise their production volume and to transport their products to the market in a direct manner, they would be able to avoid using intermediaries and increase their income. The peasants consider themselves as dedicated to their work and thus deserving of a better life and, being that they do not feel they are responsible for their poverty, perceiving themselves as having the right to receive the necessary aid from the government and from those people who have more economic resources than they do. In conclusion, they consider themselves to be people in need and thus deserving of assistance.

Taken advantage of, mistreated and left aside. However, despite the fact that they consider themselves as in need and legitimately deserving of assistance, the peasants also feel taken advantage of, forgotten, and left aside by those who should help them, specifically politicians and intermediaries, among others. On their end, government officials, and all politicians, in general, are considered as having both public and personal resources that endow them with the opportunity (and the responsibility) to help others in need. However, the peasants feel that politicians do not live up to their promises and remember the plight of the peasants only during election time, when they need their vote, leaving their interests aside the rest of the year. Thus, they feel cheated by false promises, forgotten outside of election season and used during electoral periods when they are taken into consideration only as a means for politicians to get into office. In this sense, the interviewees comment that "before elections . . . if you come even 20 meters close to a politician, they greet you, they might even hug you . . . once the elections are over . . . no one says 'hi' anymore" and "they wait in their offices . . . for you to go to them to talk."

The peasants' relationship with intermediaries and buyers has similar qualities as those stated above. Peasants claim that they buy their produce at low cost to then gain enormous profit in a short period of time without assuming any risk. Furthermore, they prioritize their own production and buy only from the peasants when they need to supplement their load, always at a lower price than it should be. This exchange is based on a system characterized by unequal distribution of power that feeds off of the situation of poverty that the peasants are in. Consequently, the small farmer feels abused, taken advantage of, and expropriated by the intermediaries, who they perceive to be getting rich off of their own work: "If the market price is 1000 pesos, the intermediary will be buying it here at 200 . . . And he gets the profit, he even exploits you because he just takes away the nicest and leaves the rest" and "they earn . . . when the harvest finishes, right away they buy 2 or 3 new vans and we can't even buy a bicycle."

The interviewees also spoke in this manner of their bosses who employ them as day laborers, stating that they tend to impose unjust labor conditions, low salaries, and extenuatingly long working hours. They also tend to suspect that community leaders

and organizations will eventually betray and take advantage of them (Landini, 2002). Finally, they consider rural extension workers as people who often look to usurp, in a fraudulent manner, the public resources destined to helping the peasants (Landini, 2007). In conclusion, the peasants, in terms of their social relationships, understand themselves as being exploited, abandoned, and left aside by people with whom they have relationships sustained by an unequal distribution of power. This means that even if they consider themselves as deserving of help, they are instead faced with a reality that offers them oblivion, abuse, and exploitation. Consequently, to be a peasant, then, also means to be mistreated.

Being “poor, little ones” and its contextual and pragmatic meaning. When the peasants describe themselves as being taken advantage of, mistreated, and left aside, they tend to do so in light of considering themselves to be subjects who have the right to receive assistance from those who have sufficient economic resources to offer that assistance. Given that the people they expect assistance from often don't provide it and, worse yet, regularly take advantage of them, the interviewees tend to take on an accusatory attitude (when talking to the interviewer) that denounces (or at least makes public), which they consider to be unjust. This is the case of when they say that intermediaries obtain big profits at their expense or when they point out that politicians forget about them after electoral periods. In this way, although they describe and comprehend themselves as being objectified by those who have more power, the peasants take on an active role in this situation through the means of complaints and demands for fair treatment.

However, amidst this indignant discourse, there are moments when the strength of their arguments falter and give way to an account of the suffering, poverty, mistreatment, and lack of resources that they must constantly endure. In these cases, the figure of the accused enemy tends to fade and in its place comes the image of desperate sacrifice tied to the ideas of suffering, pain, and sadness. For example, phrases like, you can't live in luxury here, you will live but miserably, you can't have nice clothes, you can't have a nice house, there are years when you can't buy anything, you don't have extra for anything, barely enough to eat. These are generally descriptions and comments that generate, in the interviewer, a sense of pity and the desire to help rather than feelings of indignation against those who oppress and exclude them, feelings that were predominant when the peasants accused different people of taking advantage of them.

All in all, however, there is no defining line separating both of these discourses but rather they appear to exist in a somewhat diffuse, intermediate zone, making their placement in one or another category, in some cases, to be a matter of interpretation. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the difference between the two discourses should be blurred (rather they seem to be two extremes within a continuum), because they both speak of different experiences and possibilities for positioning. One focuses on the abuse and mistreatment, accusing those responsible of this state of affairs. The other emphasizes their suffering and their feeling of powerlessness using self-descriptions that position them as being “poor, little ones.” Certainly, the peasants do not describe themselves directly as poor, little ones. However, this idea summarizes a set of self-descriptions that refers to their suffering and powerlessness, the meaning of which can only be properly understood if analyzed within the context in which they appear.

In fact, this reference to the peasants as poor, little ones has a pragmatic meaning that must be clarified. The peasants used the interviews as opportunities to accuse and denounce the people they perceive as responsible for their mistreatment. However, they

were also utilized as a means to communicate their need for assistance as well as to describe the state of poverty that explains and justifies this need. This can be observed in the following quote:

My name is Raúl. We are working but the people of this area need help . . . because we often start something and can't finish it because we don't have the money. We want to work, but as I said, help is what we need.

In light of the peasants' view of the researcher as a potential source of resources, presenting themselves as poor, in suffering, and in need of assistance takes on pragmatic value. Thus, apart from being a mere description of their reality, it also appears to be a strategy to maximize the interviewee's chances of obtaining assistance and support. Consequently, their accounts not only present the situation as one of impoverishment and hardship, but also include that which justifies the assistance: being hard workers. In this manner, perhaps they try to place the researcher, through inspiring him to feel pity, in the position of providing assistance. The structure of this strategy can be seen clearly in the following quote:

There are some [politicians] that are good. You go to them and say, 'OK, can you help me with this?' 'Yes,' they say. . . . You go to them and ask them to help with self-consumption, that you don't have anything, that you have many children, and if he can help with the self-consumption or give you seed . . . Let's say that, that he helps you with seed. And they help quite a bit.

Using the theoretical framework developed above, this article will attempt to arrive at an integral interpretation of the information previously presented. Given that identities (or at least a subject's references to his identity) carry with them a strong situational component, it is logical to think that the situation and the dynamic of the interviews provide contextual elements that highlight both the peasant's condition of poverty as well as the interviewer's ability to lend them assistance (or any other person who fulfills the necessary requirements, for that matter). Concretely, the representation of the interviewer as a person who has money, as a potential source of assistance, and the fact that his methodology includes visiting the farmers (a practice he shares with others who provide assistance to peasants) lay the foundation for one type of possible relationship between peasants and interviewer: one of assistance between actors of unequal social standing. This results in the activation of those representations of self, brought out by this type of context or relationship, which, in this case, are those of the impoverished situation and the peasants' need for assistance. The effect of this situation is that other elements of their self-representation are unwittingly omitted or neglected.

In an effort to generate in others the impressions that correspond to the dimensions of the peasants' identities activated in this context, and taking into consideration the pragmatic intention to obtain assistance (intention legitimized by the fact that the interviewer is "wealthy"), certain facts are overly stressed while others are omitted (Auyero, 2001). As Goffman (1987) states, "Wherever there is an evaluation of peoples' economic capacity, it's probable that you will find an exhibition of poverty" (p. 51). This can be observed in the peasants' self-references that emphasize their suffering and their feeling of powerlessness, which were previously summarized through the idea of being poor, little ones; in this case, there is a noted insistence in communicating their experiences as small farmers (an experience characterized by suffering) and no mention of others that are related to

their abilities and resources. However, this is not done intentionally or manipulatively but rather it is merely an expression of the specific elements of their self highlighted in this particular type of situation and an attempt to confirm this image of themselves by means of their self-descriptions.

Summary of the collective identities implicit in the peasants' worldviews. The Collective Identities Implicit in the Peasants' Worldviews section further developed the analysis of peasants' identity. Within this analysis, two fundamental reasons were identified as explanations for the peasants' experience of not being able to get ahead, despite all of their hard work and effort: the unpredictability of nature and the intermediaries' behavior, the people who are primarily responsible, in the eyes of the small farmers, for their commercialization problems. In consequence, and so as to continue the list of characteristics that make up the interviewees' identity, the following terms apply as descriptions of how the peasants perceive themselves: (l) people who cannot forge ahead due to causes that are out of their range of control; (m) individuals who are at the mercy of nature's unpredictability; and (n) people in need of assistance, assistance considered to be a given right because of the fact that they understand themselves to be hard working and not responsible for their own poverty.

On the other hand, the representation that the peasants have of themselves as (i) mistreated, abused, and left aside by intermediaries, buyers, and others that was mentioned above is reinforced by the results presented in this section of the article. Finally, as previously stated was the idea that despite the peasants' criticism and denouncement of the injustice they perceive as part of their reality, there exists, simultaneously, a fulfillment of a different subjective positioning, one transmitted through an account that stresses their own poverty and suffering. The interviewer observed that, in these accounts, the small farmers tended to describe themselves as defenseless and unable to overcome their hardships, a description which left them with the only alternative of merely accepting their own suffering. In this sense, peasants end up being described as (o) poor, little ones, defenseless, particularly in certain relationships where their interlocutor is perceived as being a potential source of assistance.

FINAL COMMENTS AND REFLECTIONS

This article provides multiple contributions in reference to peasants' identity. Three main groups of characteristics resulted from the process of reconstructing peasant identity. The first corresponds to what was recognized as the positive elements of peasants' identity, elements that take on meaning when contextualized in a need that people have, in general, to sustain a positive identity (Tajfel, 1981). The descriptions that fall into this category are of the peasants as being (h) honest and trustworthy people who (a) work and struggle to get ahead and obtain a better future for themselves, (k) without having to depend on anyone's assistance for survival. Furthermore, their perception of themselves as hardworking lends them the ability to (b) overcome the hardships of country life, an ability made possible by their (j) knowledge of how to manage their productive activity, which, in turn, allows them to (c) feel pride over the fact that they are the providers of food and natural resources for the people living in cities.

A second group of characteristics could be considered as negative, yet they play a fundamental role in the construction of a self-representation that allows the peasants to both facilitate and legitimize their efforts to obtain different types of assistance. If the

first group of characteristics is to be considered the nucleus for the peasants' positive identity, then this second group could be considered as the pragmatic dimension of their identity, in as much as it takes on meaning in relation to its usefulness as a survival strategy in contexts where poverty prevails and where different types of assistance are available. This second group references the experience that interviewees have of (m) being subjected to the unpredictability of nature and of (i) being abused, mistreated, and left aside by those who have more power than them, which appears to lead the peasants to the profound perception that, throughout their lives, they are constantly objectified. Furthermore, the interviewees also perceive themselves as people who (l) despite their hard work and struggle, find it impossible to progress and move forward in their lives, as a result of (g) being poor, a condition that keeps them from acquiring the necessary resources for production. Because of all of this, they consider themselves to be (n) in need of the assistance that could be provided by those who have more economic resources than they do. When dealing with these privileged people, it would appear that the peasants tend towards positioning themselves as passive, highlighting their own suffering and defenselessness. In other words, in these situations, they comprehend themselves as being (o) poor, little ones.

As mentioned previously, although, in many cases, these descriptions carry with them negative connotations, they allow the peasants to explain, by way of external causes, their inability to progress or ascend socially, explanations that help them to protect their self-esteem. That poverty is undesirable is an undeniable fact; however, this does not necessarily mean that the peasants are responsible for this state of affairs, it being something that occurs against their will. Additionally, the peasants' self-descriptions as being mistreated and left aside could also be considered as a mere account of the suffering they endure. However, it also allows them to position themselves actively, enabling them to place demands on those who oppress them, a positioning that is oftentimes lived with a sense of pride. Moreover, their description of themselves as poor, little ones takes on a highly functional role in that it maximizes their chances of obtaining assistance. Even though the peasants are grateful for the assistance that they receive, they are also of the perception that they have the right to the assistance provided by those in privileged positions, which, in turn, allows them to denounce those who can but don't provide this assistance, portraying them as morally unsound, thus elevating their own ethical status and allowing them to characterize themselves as trustworthy, caring and proud.

Finally, an alternate, albeit small and of lesser quantitative importance, group of characteristics emerged that lent themselves towards the peasants' construction of a negative identity, based mostly on the comparison between city and country life. This comprises the experience of (e) suffering (with a negative connotation), of (f) lacking education and intelligence, and of (d) not having any future. In this case, these descriptions are not used for the construction of a survival strategy destined towards obtaining assistance. In conclusion, although there does exist a small, negative focal point of peasants' identities, there appears to be a predominance of positive elements or negative elements that are reinterpreted or reutilized in a positive or a pragmatic manner.

Certain contradictory, or at least dissonant, elements of peasants' identities emerged in the context of this research. For example, one could ask: Are the peasants independent or do they need assistance? Must they endure their hardship with suffering and sadness or are they able to face and overcome the difficulties of life in the country? Finally, do they have sufficient resources, capabilities, knowledge, and work ethic to move forward or are they "poor, little" people who lack the means to get ahead? Objections to the apparently

inconclusive nature of this article could be raised in light of the contradictions presented in peasants' identity. However, as mentioned in the theoretical framework, people tend to activate different elements or characteristics of their representations of themselves in specific contexts, a situation that allows for the coexistence of contradictory or dissonant dimensions of the identities at hand.

In this particular case, it would seem as though the contradictory elements of peasants' identity result from the ways in which the interviewee's position themselves in different contexts and situations. One of these is an active positioning, tied to the image of the small farmer as a hard worker, independent, knowledgeable, a fighter headed towards progress. The other, the passive positioning, refers their perception of themselves as being poor, little ones in need of assistance, simultaneously mistreated and left aside by those who should be providing them with help. In this way, we are presented with two contradictory ways in which the peasants position themselves, each activated in different material and communicational and interpersonal contexts. Perhaps the most important contribution of this article is the proposal to consider identities and people's representations of self because of the activation of different dimensions of the self in relation to specific contexts. Furthermore, it is of utmost importance to be attentive to the attitudes, the varied ways of positioning and the worldviews that arise as a result of the differential activation of certain elements of the self.

In an effort to search for alternatives as well as for contributions that favor processes of social change, it is of importance to explore, in these final reflections, the articulation between peasant identity and social determinations. First, I think it is clear that a significant portion of peasants' self-understanding is derived from the subordinate social position that this group holds with respects to other, more powerful social actors such as large farmers, agricultural intermediaries, and politicians who, in one way or another, take advantage of this unequal relationship so as to benefit economically or accumulate power. In this sense, the peasants understand themselves as being abused and mistreated by different social actors as well as being unable to progress economically. Likewise, the peasants' tendency to internalize the negative representation that the oppressing social system has of them became apparent, internalization that leads them to underestimate themselves (Freire, 1971). Thus, the interviewees describe themselves as lacking in education and intelligence, as being people who have no future.

Now, it is not sound to comprehend peasant identity without taking into account its cultural particularities as well as the strategies employed by this social group to rework the psychosocial impact that social determinations have on their subjectivity. In terms of their cultural particularities, it is possible to discern the presence of a set of beliefs that lead peasants to see themselves as honest, hardworking and trustworthy people who are knowledgeable of rural life and proud to be living in the country and providing food to the cities. Additionally, and in relation to the reworking of the psychosocial impact of social determinants on peasant identity, certain active strategies geared towards coping with the descriptions of themselves as poor, oppressed, and mistreated can be observed, strategies that are directed at denouncing the moral turpitude of the oppressor as well as at the practice of utilizing these unequal relationships as survival strategies, as a means of obtaining help or social aid.

This last point is important in that it ends up becoming solidified in new forms of identity, in this case, in the perception of being in need of help and of being poor, little ones, perceptions that do not build alternatives based on social equality but rather focus on the demand for social assistance in the context of personalistic and hierarchical relationships. Thus, practices such as political clientelism emerge from this context,

taking advantage of these peasants' strategies so as to perpetuate an unequal distribution of power while providing a response, however minimal, to these demands for assistance and thus avoiding having to debate fundamental aspects of the existing social structure, a response that generally takes the form of public policy based on assistance and not on promoting development. In summary, the argument presented here is that the peasants' subordinate social standing generates forms of self-understanding that favor the development of survival strategies directed at obtaining a type of help characterized by assistencialism, which then becomes a functional means through which to reproduce the unequal social structure.

This last point brings forth the unavoidable question as to the potential of this article's contributions in terms of developing alternatives directed at promoting social change. In this sense, it is pertinent to revisit this investigation's initial interests when taking on this research, interests that are focused on the study of the psychosocial factors related to processes of rural development in peasant populations. This is because the results of this work are relevant to those involved in rural development projects destined for small farmers. The idea behind this effort is that development strategies with better probabilities for success can be obtained by achieving a greater understanding of peasants' conduct and attitudes in relation to processes of development. As previously stated in this article, peasants (as well as people in general) tend to activate different components of their self-concept depending on the context they are in, some favoring the activation of passive forms of positioning and others encouraging more active attitudes. It follows logically, then, that to maximize their effect, rural development and extension projects should attempt to induce the emergence of those components of the peasants' representation of self that refer to the capabilities and personal abilities linked to productive activity and associated with active and dynamic attitudes and actions. Within this process, rural extension workers should try to avoid taking on the role of the protector and giver, a role often offered by the peasants because of their perception of themselves as poor, little ones in need of assistance, because this encourages passive attitudes that are lacking in entrepreneurship. Moreover, they could implement dialogic and participatory rural extension methodologies based on Freire's proposals (2003), methodologies that favor processes of awareness, a key element in promoting grassroots dynamics for social change.

Before closing, it is necessary to highlight, once again that "identity" is a construct that is defined within a structure of interrelationships and, as such, is trying to understand identity in essentialist or reified terms is a senseless enterprise. Thus, the concept of peasant identity that emerges from this work should not be understood as a substance, but rather as a complex emergent that depends not only on the macro and micro context of this case study, but also on the methodology utilized for the investigation. Thus, on a macrosocial level, several factors can be identified as influential: the general rules that the capitalistic market dictates in terms of the commercialization of agricultural products, the difference in power between those who are more capitalized (in this case the intermediaries) and those who are less (the peasants), and the existence of varied public policies directed at assisting and supporting small producers. In this case, when analyzing the influence of macrosocial factors, the focus must be on its implications on a local level, avoiding a mere description of external dynamics. On a local level, one could recognize the influence of the exchange dynamics between the peasants and different social actors such as politicians, rural extension workers, and large producers (including this investigator), as well as the particular characteristics of the environment and local climate (land, rainfall, frosts, etc.) Finally, it is interesting to note that modifications taking place on both, microsocial and macrosocial levels (due to sociohistorical changes),

or different case studies implemented in other territories, would lead us to reconstruct different contents pertaining to peasant identities as well as to identify different points of emphasis within them.

In conclusion, as was suggested in the introduction, although psychology has contributed to the study of multiple subject matters and social groups, it has made almost no contribution to the study of the peasantry, a social group of particular importance in developing countries. Consequently, I hope that by means of this article, I have been able to demonstrate that this type of research is not only possible but desirable, being that a better understanding of peasant rationality is a fundamental contribution to strengthening and consolidating the implementation of public policies in rural settings.

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