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Articles

Living the border: Social and cultural practices from the sidelines

Vivir la frontera. Prácticas sociales y culturales desde los márgenes

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Abstract

Migrants, while in a position of subordination and vulnerability in the host society, can be defined as subjects of analysis of cultural studies. It is from this theoretical framework, which will investigate the social and cultural practices of Brazilian migrants settled in the northeast of the province of Misiones, Argentina. We focus our attention on analyzing whether these practices are truly ways to resist the dominant culture or simply constitute forms of reproduction and naturalization of them. Through four concrete practices (portuñol, el brique, the buying and selling of improvements and spontaneous occupation of private land) will reach the conclusion that the same evidence loans, grants, amalgams, conflicts, subordination and yet interstices creativity with the dominant culture. It shows the relational character that owns the popular culture with the dominant culture and its position of subordination and domination.

Keywords: border, practices, migrants, popular culture, hegemony.

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Resumen

Los migrantes, en tanto ocupan una posición de subalternidad y vulnerabilidad en la sociedad de destino, pueden ser definidos como sujetos de análisis de los estudios culturales. Es desde este marco teórico, que indagaremos las prácticas sociales y culturales de los migrantes brasileños asentados en el nordeste de la provincia de Misiones, Argentina. Enfocaremos nuestra atención en analizar si estas prácticas son verdaderamente formas de resistir a la cultura dominante o simplemente constituyen formas de reproducción y naturalización de las mismas. A través de cuatro prácticas concretas (el portuñol, el brique, la compra-venta de mejoras y la ocupación espontánea de tierras privadas) llegare-

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mos a la conclusión de que las mismas evidencian préstamos, concesiones, amalgamas, conflictos, subordinación y a la vez intersticios de creatividad con la cultura dominante. Al mismo tiempo, demuestra el carácter relacional que posee la cultura popular con respecto a la cultura hegemónica y su posición de subalternidad y de dominación.

Palabras clave: frontera, prácticas, migrantes, cultura popular, hegemonía.

Introduction

In this paper, we focus on the analysis of certain cultural practices of Brazilian migrants settled in El Soberbio, a border town in the northeast of the province of Misiones (Argentina). Defined by their subaltern status in that they occupy a dominated position in the host society, migrants comprise the so-called *popular classes*, allowing us to place this study within the framework of cultural studies.

We describe some typical practices of small farmers and analyze them in relation to their position via the hegemonic culture. Are these practices methods of resisting the dominant culture, or do they simply constitute forms of reproduction and naturalization? Can they be interpreted as symbolic autonomous production? These questions frame some of the themes discussed in this article.

The first section presents the introduction. Next, we explain the methodology used; then, we approach the existing academic debates in cultural studies that have developed in Argentina, allowing us to understand what we mean by *popular culture* and what is meant by *cultural studies*. In the fourth part of the work, we explain why migrants can be subject to the analysis of studies on popular culture. In the fifth section, we briefly characterize the locality analyzed and then develop the analysis of four cultural practices that are characteristic of the Brazilian migrants settled in the border area: the use of *Portuñol*, *brique*, buying and selling improvements, and the spontaneous occupation of private lands. We end with the contribution of our final thoughts.

Methodology

The data and results presented here were the result of a research process developed by applying qualitative techniques and methods of a socio-anthropological character. We combine the analysis of primary sources collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and field notes with a qualitative analysis of secondary sources from authors who have previously studied the border area analyzed.

Fieldwork was conducted in 2015 in Colonia Monteagudo and the suburban town of El Soberbio, where small producers of Brazilian origin reside. We chose Colonia Monteagudo, as it is a historic neighborhood in the area because of its early settlement by Brazilian migrants. For this reason, Monteagudo was the first municipality with the presence of the national State, which led it to be the head of the Department of Guaraní. In 1946, as a result of the arrival of small producers in the urban and periurban areas of the town, El Soberbio took this position.

Eleven in-depth interviews with producers, teachers, migrants, and people from El Soberbio[2] in general were conducted, in addition to three participant observations of families of small producers, in which we were able to analyze the social and cultural practices that are developed in this paper.

Debates about popular culture

Inquiring into popular culture necessarily implies defining certain concepts that are still under debate in the academic field of cultural studies. Reflecting on what is popular and what we mean by popular culture is thus indispensable.

Studying what is popular means questioning relations of power and domination, exclusion and social inequality; it means investigating the practices used by popular sectors to address their subaltern situation, leading to practices of resistance—the goal of which is to clarify the relationship of domination or change it—naturalization, or reproduction of domination, as appropriate; it means investigating the symbolic dimension of the practices of popular sectors (Rodríguez, 2011). *The popular* must be understood in Gramscian terms from a relational perspective that interrogates the relationship of the popular classes with the remaining social sectors in the struggle for hegemony (Aliano, 2010).

In Argentina, popular culture studies define "the popular understood as subaltern" (Alabarces and Añón, 2008, pp. 282) or, as Albarces, Añón, and Conde (2008, p. 8) would say, "conflicted and displaced subalternity." They arise from a political need of the time period to make the popular a topic, to rescue objects of peripheral study that are not central within the legitimate field of culture. Ford, Romano, and Rivera paved the way for what the academy would later rename *cultural studies*, asking what is beyond the visible and the expressible, in short, doomed to oblivion (Alabarces et al., 2008).

We define popular culture as the set of experiences, practices, and representations of popular sectors that are in constant debate over meaning, which are specific to their way of perceiving and living reality. It is convenient to refer to *popular cultures* in plural to account for the heterogeneity of experiences that belong to popular sectors, contradicting the legitimate view given to homogeneous features (Rodríguez, 2011).[3]

Within this theme, there are several lines of approach within the theoretical field of popular cultures in our country. On the one hand, there are perspectives that aim at analyzing in a relational manner the condition of subordination, the forms of resistance, or the reproduction of the subaltern classes, which are aimed at demonstrating the effects of domination; on the other hand, there are approaches that emphasize the positivity of popular cultures, showing the ability of these sectors to produce a coherent and autonomous symbolic system without denying the effects of symbolic domination (Aliano, 2010).

[2] Adjective referring to the people who were born in El Soberbio.

[3] It is essential to clarify that cultural studies are not exclusive to the popular classes. Middle and upper-middle sectors are also subjects of analysis given to the frequent process of *plebeianization* of culture. Therefore, it is not a class issue but instead a position against the dominant culture.

We find ourselves in an intermediate position because although we believe in the agency capacity of the popular sectors and in the interstices of creative "autonomy," we believe that the analysis of these practices, values, and cultural representations should always be conceived in relational terms, recognizing the permanent symbolic struggle of the popular classes for hegemony (Alabarces and Añón, 2008). According to Hal (as cited in Aliano, 2010, p. 189) to define popular culture it is essential to note tension relationships, influences and antagonism with the dominant culture.[4] We believe that culture in general (and popular culture in particular) has no autonomous existence because the cultural fabric is formed via negotiations, appropriations, and multiple rejections with the official culture. The study of popular culture is marked by its subalternity and asymmetry within the social field; thus, it is essential to analyze whether these practices involve certain operations of resistance in the symbolic struggle or simply seek to reproduce certain official practices. Here, we analyze the actions of the popular classes in political terms, in relation to their position of dominance that involves conflict and the struggle for meaning.

The academic tendency, in highly mediated societies, to assimilate popular culture to mass culture and to believe that popular experience cannot be conceived outside of this framework precludes addressing specific local, *rural*, and *marginal* subaltern practices found outside of the market and culture industry. Not every culture is mediated by the culture industry. We believe that the culture industry approach aims to analyze strictly urban experiences[5] (we could classify this as *urban-centric*), hindering the treatment of practices that lie outside the *mass* influence of the media. As Aliano (2010) states, the heterogeneity of what we understand as popular culture cannot be dissolved into that which is massified. Rural popular culture acquires the category of the "subaltern of the subaltern," given that it is directly outside the analysis of cultural studies. The practices and experiences that are addressed in this work are not mass but local (and border); however, they belong to what Gramsci (2004) calls the *pueblo*, as a set of subaltern classes. We acknowledge the cracks that exist within what we define as *popular classes* because there is no way we can think of them as a homogeneous whole; therefore, we propose to expand the focus and address certain objects that are excluded by several academics in the matter. Therefore, we have decided to analyze certain social and cultural practices of Brazilian migrants settled in rural colonies[6] in the northeast border of Misiones to articulate and give space in the field of cultural studies to these social actors, their experiences, and their practices on the border.

[4] For this author, popular culture is framed in certain relations of production, permeable to disputes over meaning.

[5] Although we affirm the treatment of folklore and gauchezca within cultural studies in our country, this approach was due to the existing political interests within the ruling class, which gave space to these topics—the need to form a national identity, to homogenize mass immigration from overseas, and to impose a dominant against the "barbarism" of the inside. However, the analysis of rural culture as popular culture was unattended and permanently out of focus.

[6] *Colonies* are rural settlements resulting from the settlement established by official, private, and spontaneous colonization programs.

Migration as subaltern

The popular implies the existence of multiple hierarchical forms that support the situation of subalternity, which will depend on the historical specificities of the case analyzed: caste, gender, class, occupation, ethnicity, or any other possible form of domination (Guha, cited in Alabarces and Añón, 2008) that can give rise to an asymmetrical relationship. Next, we question whether migration can lead to a relationship of this type.

The migration process places migrants in a situation of vulnerability in the host society for various reasons. On the one hand, there is the mere fact of being far from their community and culture of origin, in a foreign and strange context, and the precarious immigration legal situation in which many migrants are found (which involves joining the informal labor market, characterized by low wages and poor working conditions—often characterized by labor exploitation and conditions that resemble slavery);[7] furthermore, there are family strategies in play when migrating (which, depending on the mode "chosen," involves the separation of migrants from their primary nuclear family); and finally, depending on the host country, the rights granted to the migrant population differ. On the other hand, there is the existence of a native society that often reinforces these power relations by operating a machine based on social discriminatory practices and discipline toward certain communities of migrants. These manifestations are exercised as a method of keeping the national identity and social structure alive and intact in circumstances that may threaten them, allowing certain dominant groups (in this case, natives) to be perpetuated, both ideologically and socially (Winikor, 2013). As stated by Cohen (2009), a discourse of tolerance for cultural diversity is adopted based on relations of power and domination that, although recognizing the migrant, set limits and obstacles for the migrant's integration. It is a social space based on asymmetric social relations of inequality and exclusion, which gives the migrant the place of a stranger instead of a peer, accentuating the border between migrants and natives.

The passage in our country of Migration Act No. 25.781 (2004) in 2003 aims to make explicit the rights of migrants who reside in Argentina (emphasizing rights related to access to health, education, family reunification, etc.) and to promote the social integration thereof, equating the rights of migrants with nationals. The need to create this type of law demonstrates the unequal treatment of foreigners in Argentine society, making visible migrants' situation of vulnerability in their capacity as migrants. A law does not emerge if it is not necessary to claim certain rights and obligations.

Therefore, we define migrants within the group that Gramsci (2004) refers to as the *group of the subaltern classes* due to this double condition of vulnerability and subalternity[8] (the intrinsic condition related to the migration process itself and the process imposed by the host society), and we add a third closely related to these

[7] These are practices carried forward not only by the host society but also by members of their own community who were settled earlier in the host society and develop so-called *ethnic enclaves*.

[8] It is necessary to explain that not all migrants occupy a subordinate position in society, and not all social representations of natives are homogenous in relation to immigrants. Through the discursive analysis of natives (Winikor, 2013), we were able to identify the existence of "desirable" migrants, related to those from rich nations, and "undesirable" migrants, related to those from poor countries. In the context of migration studies, this phenomenon is known as the *hierarchization of nations* (Pottilli, Silberstein, and Tavernelli, 2009).

two: the socioeconomic conditions in which various migrant groups are found in the host country (which, in many cases, is worse than the conditions that they faced in their countries of origin) and that reinforce the power relations and discriminatory representations put in place by the native society. The natives' rejection of the lower classes through racialized discourses, what is known as the *racialization of class conditions*, is invisible. Often, what is bothersome is that migrants are poor, leading to the operationalization of a differential administration of tolerance depending on the national origin of the migrants.

For all of the above, the characteristics that migrants take on would enable the definition of their cultural practices in terms of popular culture.

Living on the margins

El Soberbio is a border town located to the northeast of the Province of Misiones, which borders the Federative Republic of Brazil across from the Uruguay River. Although it has an official International Border Pass that communicates with its twin town of Porto Soberbo, most *soberbianos* frequently cross the border for reasons of economics, family, work, and trade through *Porto Capivaras,*[9] given that the method of crossing the border and entering the country through illegal ports along the river is known. Thus, the border cannot be defined as a political-administrative boundary, as a line, but instead as a region of continuous mobility, allowing the emergence of a *border culture* that tends to obscure the territorial political division and displays the mismatch between state boundaries and the nation. *Portuñol* is used by the community living on each side of the river, which pervades the mode of working the land and referring to work techniques, the music that plays on the radio with its Brazilian character, the typical foods that do not allow us to identify which side of the river from which they come, the existence of families scattered on both margins—among other things—demonstrating a shared culture that exceeds state boundaries.

According to the 2010 Census, El Soberbio has a total population of 22,898 inhabitants, with 77.9% being from rural areas (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos [Indec], 2012). The oxcarts travel through the everyday landscape of the town and invite us to reflect on this predominance of the rural population. These carts are currently used by many settlers as the only means of transport that brings them from the farms[10] to the village to stock up on the goods necessary for life, and simultaneously, they tell us much about the difficulty of communication in the settlements and places in the municipality.

The population of El Soberbio is mostly immigrants and the descendants of immigrants from Brazil (many Brazilians of German origin known as *teutobrasileños*) from rural colonies in southern Brazil and missionaries from historic settlements to the south and center of the province. In the area, there are also several *Mbya Guarani* communities, mostly settled in the vicinity of Ruta Provincial No 15.

[9] The local expression refers to: *puerto de carpinchos* (Schiavoni, 1998).

[10] It is the name adopted in Misiones la Explotación Agrícola Familiar, which includes domestic space, the space of farming, and natural areas.

Economic activity in El Soberbio began in the mid-nineteenth century with the installation of timber mills in areas near the Uruguay River owned by large landowners. At present, the main economic activities are geared toward agricultural production: mainly industrial crops such as tobacco (to a lesser extent, yerba mate and tea) and the production of fodder, citronella, citrus, corn, and tung.

Between the decades of 1960 and 1990, countless immigrants from the colonies of the southern states of Brazil (especially Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, bordering Misiones) arrived in the town. As a consequence of the advance of large estates, agribusiness, and science applied to agriculture and because of the demographic saturation of rural colonies in the south of Brazil, many family farmers were forced to migrate as a reproduction strategy for their family unit in the face of the loss of their lands. The settlement of El Soberbio was performed through the spontaneous occupation of land in private property abandoned by its owners[11] (Reboratti, 1979; Schiavoni, 1994), without planned intervention by the State; this circumstance explains the high incidence of occupants who lack titles to property. These residents, mostly Brazilian immigrants, are landless small farmers who settled in the province and organized the territorial space into colonies. Despite the difficulty of defining the term *colonist*, it remains the most appropriate term for the conceptualization of these social actors (Bartolomé, 1982).[12]

Border practices

Portuñol

As stated by Camblong (2005), along the border with Brazil, the hegemonic force of Portuguese-Brazilian with Spanish crosslinks prevails, a typical result of language contact. *Portuñol*, as it is known, is a type of hybrid, mixed language composed of Portuguese and Spanish and used by Brazilian settlers who inhabit the border analyzed. Among the rural population, it is the only language known by children until their schooling, and in the case of adults without schooling, it is the only language known. The border is a space of complex intercultural processes and the blending and assembly of language, customs, and practices.

However, reality trumps fiction and is much more complex than it seems. In practice, children are traversed by different languages according to their areas of socialization:

[11] Companies geared toward native wood extraction. As they deforest a specific area, they abandoned the land, a fact which promoted the occupation of private land.

[12] *Colonist* refers to a social agrarian related to the expansion of rural capitalism in areas marginalized until now, constituting the specific type of agricultural producer in the province. Although we decided to include small farmers in the border area within the typology proposed by Bartolomé (1975), the colonists analyzed in this work are characterized more by performing a reproduction system that gives expanded production with access to capitalization, which likens them more to the category of farmer than to colonist due to the use of strictly manual labor from the family and production oriented toward self-consumption (despite devoting most of their time to cultivating tobacco). However, we decided to define them as colonists because this is the manner in which they are recognized, with native categories dominated beyond the theoretical categories. Pure types do not exist. They are simply ideal types with impurities and imperfections in defining them.

several speak *Portuñol* or some variation of German at home;[13] they speak *Portuñol* with their neighbors and learn Spanish in school, with the addition of English as a foreign language, which leads children to not properly speak either Portuguese or Spanish (much less English).

In many schools in the area, children are prohibited from talking among themselves in *Portuñol*, although during recreation (recess, physical education, fighting), it emerges as their mother tongue, and although avoided, it unfailingly structures relationships and everyday social ties. "When I was young, Fernando [the teacher] yelled at us because we spoke in Portuguese[14] [*sic*], but he also spoke this way" (Wolski, 2015). This shows the struggle among languages for hegemony: although everyone speaks *Portuñol* (not only the rural population but also the urban population), Spanish is imposed as the "official, legitimate, and authentic" language. *Portuñol* becomes a dominated language that, after children enter school, is attempted to be silenced and suppressed, although the attempts are in vain. "Prejudices and disqualifications toward this linguistic hybrid result from grammatical abstractions of normalized official languages" (Camblong, 2014, p. 9). A set of enshrined grammatical rules is institutionalized to disqualify those who do not know or master them. Teachers are responsible for imposing a repressive apparatus on what and how to say something and what not to say (Romano, 1973). Camblong believes that the colonists do not speak poorly or well; instead they "speak *Portuñol*," and he proposes educational policies that aim to respect the border culture and take into account the idiosyncrasies of rural border populations and promote intercultural bilingual education. However, how can we do this without attempting to standardize the language, without imposing fixed schedules where the sound of a bell determines when Portuguese and Spanish are spoken? Imposing the use of the dominant language while attempting to erase "vulgar" expressions is not an unknown process in Argentina, which changed the aesthetics of tango in the late twentieth century and limited broadcasters from the interior of the country from working in the media, among other actions. It is difficult not to describe any policy of this type as conservative and totalitarian.

Language is not only a means of reproduction to express ideas but also shapes ideas, and it symbolically organizes the lives of individuals (Cicourel, 1982); there are footprints of *Portuñol* in work tools, in the form of working the land, in the form of relationships between family members, in the method of cooking, and so on. As a structure of the everyday life of rural families, *Portuñol* could be interpreted as an autonomous gap by these popular sectors where their cultural practices are perpetuated beyond taboos and social conditions. The use of *Portuñol* would demonstrate, in a sense, the capacity of the popular sectors' agency to impose their own rules of sociability. As Romano (1973) would say, attitudes toward language come to clarify collaboration, complicity, or the rupture of certain groups with the system's apparatus.

However, it is important to inquire as to whether difficulties communicating in Spanish—which involves thinking about the future difficulty of eventually working in jobs other than family farming, for example—and having *Portuñol* as one's only fluent language do not strengthen the domination imposed on these classes rather than showing their capacity for agency. Is it possible that a situation that reinforces domination is a

[13] Many Brazilians who arrived in the area are of German origin, having migrated to Brazil first and to Argentina second.

[14] Referring to *Portuñol*.

liberating submission by allowing the permanence of local rural and border customs? Here, there is a famous paradox that even further entangles state intervention in this particular place in the world. The paradox of the dominated (Bourdieu, 2000), in this space, is intertwined with another paradox: one cannot resolve the tension between cultural universalism and particularism. Paradoxes that we know have no solution only require reflection.

However, in addition to agency capacity, these practices correspond to specific historical conditions of inhabiting the border. In the words of Camblong:

> A spatiality of transits that enter into interactions between official languages (Spanish, Guarani and Portuguese), currencies, national symbols, identity documents, double or triple citizenships, tensions and historical, athletic, and political rivalries, emotions and ancestral fights, relatives and lifelong neighbors, factions and smuggling that maintain an erratic, loose, and informal economy that differentiates the area from the rest of each of the countries (n.d.).

In these circumstances, *Portuñol* as the language of Brazilian settlers is determined by the historical, economic, and social conditions that challenge it and the relations between different social sectors in the struggle for linguistic hegemony in the area. It is the result of loans, complicities, and functional interdependencies of power (Alabarces and Añón, 2008) and of interaction processes that are characteristic of border areas, as stated by Camblong, but, simultaneously, the result of permanent exclusion processes.

Brique

Brique is a Brazilian word that refers to the exchange of objects without the intervention of money, what is known elsewhere as *barter*. "*Briques* are informal transactions conducted between acquaintances, friends, and relatives and may involve land, animals, cars, and household goods" (Schiavoni, 2008b, p. 171), a definition to which, because of my fieldwork in the area, I will add foods. The author claims that although the "taboo of calculation" is broken between the actors who produce the exchange, the ultimate convenience of the trade derives from the situation and opportunity. That one of the parties has an urgency with regard to acquiring a particular good is involved in the formation of value.

The absence of money in the transaction does not mean ignorance of monetary value because money is used as a reference. The appropriate role of money in this type of transaction is abstract and becomes a reference measurement even though it is not used as payment. Money has been taken out of the exchanges—as European society did at one time with gold; however, the forms of money (in this case, the goods) have value because they represent money, which is why it is still used as a reference measurement. *Brique* is a means of obtaining another good; thus, it has a role that is similar to money. Because it is performed in a circle of acquaintances and in an atmosphere of mutual understanding, it reduces transaction costs. The relationship between the seller and the buyer is personal and may even be defined as a practice that preferentially occurs between acquaintances and relatives, as Schiavoni (2008b) states, where cunning negotiation is put into play to fix the amount to be exchanged (which is variable), or rather, the amount of the assets that will allow barter. In such transactions, the closeness of the ties is one more variable that shapes the price.

This form of the movement of goods, where the essential characteristic is the absence of money, coexists with the commercial form of buying and selling products. That is, two modes of transaction are articulated, one traditional and the other modern. *Brique* should not be treated in evolutionary terms, meaning it does "not necessarily lead to the market" (Schiavoni, 2008b, p. 179); instead, both forms of sale temporarily coexist. This coexistence of modes of the movement of goods may seem contradictory and can mitigate and compensate for the low monetization of the populations who reside in the border area. "For the holidays, we had to exchange goods in Brazil to buy food for Christmas, for example, we had almost no cash" (Wolsky, 2015). As this statement shows, *brique* is a tool that arises precisely in a context where the money supply is virtually nil. Small family production provides most of the goods needed for domestic consumption, making the use of money scarce and enabling the exchange of surpluses among the families of producers.

Having money as a reference of exchange (even though it is not in circulation) demonstrates the use of dominant practices that are transformed and adapted to popular classes. Culture is composed of negotiations and concessions within power relations where certain key practices are used, transforming and adapting them to the particular needs of the context.

As Alabarces, Moreira, and Garriga (2012) state, the emergence of cultural patterns is closely related to the economic and structural conditions of the society analyzed. In the case of the social and cultural practices studied in this work, they initially appear to be manifestations of resistance; however, the close relationship that they have with hegemonic practices is quickly observed. Faced with certain conditions of existence, these practices can be interpreted as alternative survival mechanisms of the rural populations on the border, corroborating the link between cultural patterns and structural conditions claimed by these authors. These practices do not attempt to change the position of domination but instead name it, make it visible, and in a sense "dodge" it: if those on the border cannot buy goods through money, alternative practices that have the same purpose (purchasing goods) are created without changing the structural situation. There is no attempt to dispute hegemony but instead to achieve the desired good (or at least make domination more enjoyable). If we analyze these practices in terms of dominance, as alternative forms of exchange that contribute to the creation of an informal market (which does not pay taxes, for example), we could say that the strong character of these forms of trade could be reinforced.

We should then ask ourselves whether *brique* could be analyzed as a practice of resistance or as a mere reproduction of a dominant form of exchange that, although it does not use money, uses money as a reference for the calculation. It seems to be an ambiguous and complex practice—and could be defined as dialectical—where resistance and reproduction are simultaneously shown.

The sale of improvements: The land market in the northeast of Misiones

The *sale of improvements* is one of the main forms of acquisition of plots of land on the northeast border of Misiones, where the occupation of the territory was spontaneously performed on private land. As Schiavoni (2008a) states, this mode is implemented in

the absence of standardized assessment systems of goods—without an institutionalized market and without the presence of the State; and it is the result of private agreements made between the seller and the potential buyer, especially between first and second occupants. It responds to commercial transactions that are disconnected from the others, where the price depends on the relationship between the seller and the buyer, forming a completely personal market, where land is not a commodity understood as others subject to the free play of supply and demand but flows depending on mutual convenience and opportunity. What is marketed is the work built on the plots "for sale," although no objective system is followed (Schiavoni, 2008a). The work incorporated in the plots and the existence of previous measurements are two mechanisms that generate a valuation process of the land.

Given the impossibility of accessing land in their country of origin and the inability to access the (bourgeois) private property rights in the country of destination, migrants operationalize certain practices that allow them access to a particular market of land. The lack of title to the land prevents the sale of plots through an institutionalized market; thus, they sell the work performed on the occupied lands because the only ("legitimate") good that they possess is the sale of their labor. Often, the sale of improvements requires a sustained contract over time, where, in exchange for work done on a given plot of land (for example, the existence of citronella production in the property intended for sale), the buyer, for a prearranged amount of time, must give some amount of payment. However, as reflected in the following testimony, the buy-sell transaction of improvement is not without problems:

> Once I was an intermediary in a conflict between two neighbors who had entered into a sale and purchase of farms [improvements]. One had agreed for many weeks to deliver a certain amount of citronella. He did not do it. I arranged it so that every Friday, from 8 to 10 am, he had to leave the citronella in the school and another neighbor had to go get it from 10 to 12 for about 20 weeks. Everything worked out smoothly, and they remained good neighbors (Swinter, 2015).

These conflicts show the personal nature of the transactions. In today's market, one is unable to access the person who is responsible for the product (because there is not one person responsible but many, as many as determined by the division of labor). Hopefully, one can appeal to the person who is responsible for the exchange or a consumer protection agency. One can observe how the buying and selling of improvements intermingles with *brique* whereas other times with payment mediated by money.

The situation is similar to the case previously analyzed. These cultural practices on the border involve modification and negotiation with certain official experiences to make them viable and to adapt them to the possibilities of the social actors analyzed. They not only show both the resistance to and the reproduction of certain bourgeois practices but also demonstrate their repositioning based on the needs of the settlers.

The occupation of private lands

In the northeast of the province of Misiones between 1960 and 1990, a process of occupation of private land was performed in the form of *spontaneous settlement*. Countless Brazilian immigrants arrived in the country who were unable to access land in Brazil due

to the agricultural modernization process, leaving large masses of the rural population marginalized as a result of this process. The socioeconomic effects on peasant populations were dramatic: a concentration of land ownership, a regression in income distribution, rural migration and exodus, and the exploitation of the labor force, enhancing the process of expropriation from peasants, among others (Alentejano and Pereira, 2014). This situation corresponded to a strong population imbalance in the border area; there was simultaneously a demographic saturation in the colonies in southern Brazil and a situation in which the northeast border of the province of Misiones, circa 1960, was uninhabited, with large areas of open mountains, as reflected by a respondent: "over there, there are a lot of people, and here, it is all mountains" (Unterhaun, 2015). The rural area became an attractive factor for some neighboring immigrants who were stripped of their land; rural-rural migration became a strategy of life (Hughes, Sassone, and Owen, 2007) and social reproduction, understood, in the terms of Baudel (1996), as a re-peasantization maneuver as a result of certain processes that tended to displace the peasants in rural areas.

"The Brazilians came for the land. There, there was not any, and it was expensive; they got here and occupied it. They did a *rozadito* (slash and burn) and claimed the land. This is how they began to populate the area. Afterwards, their relatives and acquaintances began to come" (Herter, 2015). The arrival of migrants is in the form of *silent* occupation (Schiavoni, 2005) or *as a chain*, as shown by a member of the Movimiento Agrario Misionero (MAM),[15] based on kinship and friendship. Some family members arrive first, and then, once settled, they bring their *relatives* and *acquaintances*. Families enter and perform the occupation through informal domestic networks without an organized plan of action, where they stake social capital that circulates and produces unique knowledge (*knowing how to migrate*).

The practice of "slash and burn" determines the spontaneous occupation in this area of the province. The occupation is an alternative to acquiring plots of land, given the impossibility of this sector of buying land in the formal market. It is a strategy that allows them to negotiate the value of the land and play with payment deadlines and methods (Schiavoni, 2005).

The occupations of private land in Misiones can be interpreted as a strategy for achieving immediate acquisitions (in this case, domestic-production units where small family production is performed), avoiding any direct confrontation with the authorities or landowners. These practices do not tend to achieve a structural improvement of the conditions of peasant life but instead achieve access to partial improvements that make poverty and oppression more bearable. They create interstices in spaces to obtain specific demands, in this case, land.

The practice of spontaneous occupation is formed based on the structural conditions of a sector of the rural population excluded from access to land. The settlers do not oppose the right of land ownership because after many of them occupy it, they aim to obtain first permission to occupy it and then the title. It is not a social practice that opposes the (bourgeois) right of land ownership; instead, it is a strategy to access it, such as the buying and selling of improvements.

The exchange practices described in this article (*brique*, the buying and selling of improvements, occupations) are not always performed in a fragmented manner. Most often, they intermingle with each other:

[15] Created in August 1971, an organization that composes the Ligas Agrarias del Nordeste.

> I went, and near a spring water, I did a *rozadito* of half a hectare and sold it to Blanca. Blanca brought her relatives and said, hey, there's very good land. I didn't buy it, I came and occupied it. And so, in 2, 3 years, it was filled with people, and it had no space for anyone. My brothers and in-laws did it this way. Some lands had some improvement, and they would buy it; others exchanged it for other animals, there was barter, *brique* ... Here, there is typically a lot of barter, *brique*. Here were Mariana, Blanca, Elio who were keen to sell the farm; they made a little farm and sold it. Back then, I did not know the company Soberbio S. A., but Mariana knew and told me, you have to occupy it, and I'll sell you the farm (Queirós, 2015).

This situation demonstrates the accessibility of the *informal* land market in the northeast of Misiones, understanding that there are practices for all possible socioeconomic situations. Those who have neither assets nor a certain amount of money perform occupations; a person with goods who finds a vendor interested in exchanging a plot of land for goods available engages in *brique*; those who have a dollar amount but not enough to buy the entire lot combine *brique* and buying improvements; and those who have money conduct only the latter transaction. Finally, for those who have economic means, the *formal* land market allows access to the corresponding property title, a form of unusual exchange among Brazilian migrants in the area analyzed.

Final reflections

Popular culture cannot escape a relational reading with dominant culture because it refers to a conception of the world and life in opposition to official conceptions. As discussed in this paper, the cultural practices of Brazilian migrants in the border zone demonstrate loans, concessions, amalgams, conflicts, subordination, and, simultaneously, creativity with the hegemonic culture, which, although they cannot access it, they make use of through re-appropriations and rearrangements.

None of the practices analyzed can be interpreted as "purely resistant," but they all make visible the domination found in the studied social sectors. In the case of *brique* and the sale of improvements, these forms of exchange can confront the structural conditions of existence at the border, which makes them a form of practices of resistance even though they use exchange arrangements from the dominant sectors. Bourgeois experiences are appropriated and transformed into the possibilities of settlers. The same applies to occupations. This practice is not intended to modify the agrarian structure of the area and does not aim to expropriate land owners; instead, the goal is to access a plot of land to reproduce the mode of peasant life. Once occupied, the producers crave access to permitted occupancy and title. *Brique*, the buying and selling of improvements, and occupations resemble the *everyday forms of resistance* defined by Scott (2014) because although they do not tend to achieve a structural improvement, they allow access to partial improvements to living conditions in the border. In the words of Stern (1990), they are *forms of adaptation in resistance*, the result of continuous experimentation and the accumulation of experience in addressing the State and non-peasant sectors (landowners).

The case of *Portuñol* is much more complex and ambiguous and even generated a deep ideological conflict in the authors. Although the use of the language implies the accentuation of conditions of domination—given that it limits rural people to working within their community due to their lack of knowledge of the "official" language, more precisely in family farming, "on the farm," or, regardless, in unskilled and poorly paid jobs in the market—*Portuñol* represents the interstices of genuine, autonomous practices for the settlers to maintain their customs and culture. However, it is impossible to deny that the presence of this language, as the only language known and used by settlers, is a result of permanent exclusion.

This impossibility of defining the cultural practices of the border as purely resistant or autonomous demonstrates the relational character of popular culture with the dominant culture, which precludes the isolated analysis of the phenomenon. The tension in attempting to unravel resistance or reproduction is characteristic of cultural studies. Conducting a relational analysis that emphasizes the relationships of power and domination does not mean denying the ability of the sectors analyzed to avoid this situation of domination. The re-appropriation of exchange "*to its image and likeness*" in a sense could be defined as a liberating practice that manifests the creative capacity of these sectors and the ability to generate a coherent symbolic system. No cultural practice is autonomous, and it would be illusory to think so; all have—to a greater or lesser extent—*contact* with Western and Christian culture. The power of this culture is so immense, there are so many resources at its disposal, and subaltern culture has such a disadvantageous position that it is impossible for the experiences of the popular classes to not be mediated by the relationship with the dominant culture. It becomes imperative to articulate both perspectives of analysis. The condition of domination of popular culture is unquestioned, and the ability of these sectors to evade it is as well. Concessions, moments of autonomy, and creativity can be generated, but they never lose their condition of subordination and domination. As Camblong says (n.d.), "inhabiting the border means being immersed in a constant movement of mixtures, amalgams, landslides, substitutions, twists, and changes that move between languages, customs, and imaginations without interruption," the same mixtures, amalgams, and interdependencies that characterize popular culture. The analysis of a border culture can only attempt to further explain these intermixings, interactions, and transitions between languages, experiences, and everyday practices.

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