

Research Article

“This Is Not a Parade, It’s a Protest March”: Intertextuality, Citation, and Political Action on the Streets of Bolivia and Argentina

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Lazar “This Is Not a Parade, It’s a Protest March”

**ABSTRACT** Street demonstrations are a common form of political action across Latin America and globally. In this article, I explore some aspects of their symbolic and experiential power, with a focus on ideas of physical and visual intertextuality and their importance in the construction of political agency. I do so through an examination of the symbolic and aesthetic experiential politics of dances, parades, and demonstrations in Bolivia, suggesting that similarities between these practices constitute a kind of citation, which enables each to partake of the symbolic power and resonance of the others. I then investigate the similar political and symbolic work done in Argentine demonstrations by visual (and auditory) intertextuality—but in this case across practices separated by time. I argue that the concept of intertextuality enables an understanding of agency that is not confined to conscious human intentionality and that acknowledges readers as much as actors.

*[political ritual, street protests, intertextuality, citation, political agency, Bolivia, Argentina, Latin America]*

The Torchlight Parade happens on July 15 each year in El Alto and La Paz, Bolivia, to commemorate La Paz’s uprising against Spanish rule in 1809. In 2003, the Federation of Street Vendors in El Alto organized their participation by sending out a *convocatoria* to member associations. *Convocatoria* was the name for the piece of paper advertising the parade. Once they had received it, the associations’ general secretaries came to the central office to collect a number denoting their place

in the parade. The federation leaders noted which association had which number in order to take attendance at the end, just as they did with street demonstrations and political meetings. As darkness fell on the day itself, we set off to march along the main streets of the city. Leaders of the federation and of individual associations shouted slogans to which participants responded in a manner very familiar to me from street demonstrations. For example, leaders shouted “Viva el 16 de Julio!” [Long live the 16<sup>th</sup> of July!], which demanded the response, “Que viva!” [Long life!]; other leaders called out, “Gremiales de pie!” [Street vendors (lit. guildsmen and women) on their feet!], to which the appropriate response was “Nunca de rodillas!” [Never on their knees!; this call-and-response mimicking one of the slogans of El Alto: “El Alto de pie, nunca de rodillas” [El Alto on its feet, never on its knees]). Once, participants even chanted, “This is not a parade, it’s a protest march.”

Some years later, I was in Buenos Aires at the time of a series of *cacerolazos* (pots and pans demonstrations). On the evening of September 13, 2012, residents of some city neighborhoods had gathered on street corners and in squares to bang empty pots and pans in protest at some of the government’s recent economic policies. Soon after, posters and graffiti began appearing around the city calling for a massive *cacerolazo* on November 8, 2012, to congregate at the obelisk in the center of Buenos Aires. Websites and Facebook groups appeared, and the hashtag #8N began to circulate. By 8:00 p.m. on the day itself, a huge crowd had gathered at the obelisk, the majority carrying national flags and empty pots and implements to bang against them. Unusually for a mass demonstration, very few held posters, and there were no banners advertising belonging to any political groups. After spending some time experiencing the crush of people and the noise of whistles, klaxons, the banging of pots, and the national anthem, I went home to watch the demonstration on TV. I learned that at about 10:00 p.m. the crowds made their way to the iconic Plaza de Mayo, location of most of the key protest events in Argentine history. Then, gradually, they dispersed.

Like other forms of political ritual, street demonstrations vary cross-culturally and develop dynamically through time, mixing recurring elements with innovation. They are political acts that signify. In this article, I explore the significations contained in the physical action of street mobilizations in the cities of El Alto, Bolivia, and Buenos Aires, Argentina. Specifically, I focus on similarities in physical and symbolic form. These similarities stretch across time and space and are experienced and performed visually, aurally, and physically. I begin with a discussion of three Bolivian practices of festival, parade, and demonstration, as I experienced in the early 2000s. As well as being organized in much the same way, these practices share similarities in feel, look, and experience, which interact in the creation of particular kinds of political agency and symbolic politics. These similarities constitute a kind of citation between different practices, wherein each practice mimics or references the other. As a result, each practice can participate in the symbolic politics of the others. One illustrative example of this outside of my specific case study is when protesters at one demonstration use symbolic citation to make connections between themselves and protesters in other parts of the world. So, in June 2013 demonstrators in Sao Paulo carried signs saying, “We Are All Taksim” while those in Istanbul carried signs saying, “We Are All Sao Paulo” (Caldeira 2013).<sup>1</sup>

Here I will suggest that this referencing is a physical and visual “intertextuality” that is crucial to the broader symbolic economy of protest and political action. I describe the notion of intertextuality in more detail in the following section, but in brief it is a concept from literary theory that refers to the ways that different texts borrow from each other, whether due to the conscious intention of the author or through a less conscious process. The borrowing creates a relationship between the texts, which then has a particular effect. This is where the concept of intertextuality can be useful for ethnography: anthropologists often engage in ethnographic “readings” of cultural “texts” like ritual, as advocated most famously by Clifford Geertz (1973). They usually emphasize the communicative aspect of symbolic action and seek to translate those symbols. In this article, I explore how this symbolic aspect shapes political action.

In Argentina, political demonstrations of many kinds use citation across time to strengthen their symbolic power and political force. However, the problem with citation is that, although it can strengthen symbolic power, it can also lead to multiple and often contested readings of demonstration events. What becomes crucial is the relationship between demonstrators' (multiple) intentionalities and the interpretations made by different audiences—an interaction that itself is constitutive of political agency and symbolic power. Precisely because of this interaction, symbolic citation can fail, as different audiences read the citation differently, in ways that may not coincide with the intentions of the protagonists. One of the contrasts between the two cases that I discuss here lies precisely along the fault line of intentionality. While participants in the practices I consider here are conscious of their actions as performance, they may not be consciously performing the full range of meanings that might subsequently be attributed to them by others. Those others might include those watching them on the streets during a parade or dance procession, the government agents to whom they are addressing their demands during a street protest, or the media, and so on. Nonetheless, as especially indicated in the second of my cases, this multiplicity affects the political power of the protest demonstration, not quite regardless of the intentions of the protesters but also not in a way that they can control. In the first case, although all three practices are explicitly intentional, one might argue that the citational borrowing between practices is merely the result of them coming out of a shared cultural field of practice. However, this would be an impoverished view of political agency. Even if we did accept such a proposition, the symbolic power of citation retains importance and is at times explicitly recognized by participants, as in the quote in the title of this article (which comes from a chant I heard during the Torchlight Parade of 2003). The central question of this article, then, is how might anthropologists understand and represent the interactions between the different kinds of intentionality and agency experienced by the actors and the multiple interpretations made by their audiences?

## **INTERTEXTUALITY, POLITICAL RITUAL, AND POLITICAL ACTION**

As I mentioned above, one fruitful analytical term for this process of borrowing might be *intertextuality*, an idea that has been a staple of literary theory since Julia Kristeva first developed it in 1967, as an extension of Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas of dialogism and intersubjectivity (Allen 2000; Kristeva 1980). The linguistic anthropologist and folklorist Richard Bauman (2004:4) defines *intertextuality* as the "relational orientation of a text to other texts"—a definition expanded on usefully by the artist and art historian Frank Vigneron (2010:41):

To put it very simply ... the principle of intertextuality is that any text—and "text" can be any kind of cultural product, in reality—is intertwined with the assimilation and transformation of other texts. Every text is therefore informed by other texts which the readers or viewers have read or seen, and by their own cultural context. Although the simple use of references and quotations is also a kind of intertextuality, i.e., the conscious use of the ideas of preceding artists or writers within one's own artwork, it should be made clear however that Kristeva is not really talking about that kind of active borrowing on behalf of the author.

In this quote, Vigneron both summarizes effectively what he rightly notes is a complex concept, and, importantly, he makes a distinction between two kinds of intertextuality: a restricted notion of authorial borrowing and a more expansive definition in which all texts are intertwined with other texts.

As a concept, intertextuality has been much more popular in literary theory than in anthropology (aside from linguistic anthropology), despite the importance of symbolic readings of culture in mid- to late-20th-century structuralist and interpretive approaches.<sup>2</sup> The latter are perhaps best represented by Geertz (1973:10), who argued that

Once human behavior is seen as ... symbolic action which, like phonation in speech, pigment in painting, line in writing, or sonance in music, signifies, the question as to whether culture is patterned conduct or a frame of mind, or even the two somehow mixed together, loses

sense. The thing to ask about a burlesqued wink or a mock sheep raid [the examples he uses in *The Interpretation of Cultures*] is not what their ontological status is ... The thing to ask is what their import is: what it is, ridicule or challenge, irony or anger, snobbery or pride, that in their occurrence and through their agency, is getting said.

Of course, as is well known, the problem with such approaches was the singularity of interpretation that often emerged in the practice of this kind of ethnography. Yet, the possibility of semiotic interpretation as one potential reading among several available to anthropologists remains useful today. For some cultural “texts” like street protests, a semiotic reading may even be required—as in cases when conflicts arise over the interpretations of symbols, which affect how protests are viewed by the general public. At the very least, ethnographies of protests could benefit from combining symbolic analysis with other analyses that focus on political economy or on the relationship between protesters and the city or ideas of democracy, and so forth. In this article, I use the conceptual language of intertextuality—in the two senses given by Vigneron—to present one such symbolic interpretation.

Visual intertextuality is a crucial element of the protest repertoire (Tilly 1993) available to social movements, and conscious citation of other protests can work across both space and time (Werbner et al. 2014). Examples of the former are the repetition of the image, practice, and organization of the tents at the various Occupy movements worldwide in 2011, as well as, of course, the movement’s name itself. It seems reasonable to assume that this is entirely conscious—one way of creating a community of protest that crosses continents, a kind of collective authorial borrowing. As well as citation of contemporaneous practices across space, *intertextuality* can also refer further back in time (see also Agha 2005; Manoukian 2011). An example is the equivalence made by some between the 2011 Tahrir Square occupation and the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. Such equivalences were a fairly common part of media commentary at the time, but one particular incident stands out. In January of 2011, a video of a lone man facing down a water cannon vehicle in

Egypt appeared on YouTube, and commentators quickly noticed the image's similarity to that of the lone person in front of the tanks in China in 1989. Bloggers asked whether the Tahrir Square demonstrations would go the way of Tiananmen; two even edited the two images side by side to emphasize the connection.<sup>3</sup> As these examples show, intertextuality is a process of interaction between conscious or almost conscious re-enactment of key historical moments and the hailing of such by one or several audiences, including the media. What I am calling "hailing" is similar to Bauman and Charles Briggs describe as "recontextualization" in their discussion of genre (Bauman 2004; Briggs and Bauman 1992).

Furthermore, intertextuality is not necessarily only visual or symbolic but may be extended to other understandings of physical action; protests are, indeed, intensely physical and sensual experiences, mobilizing bodies and their senses in space (Fabricant and Postero 2013; Sutton 2010). Scholars have approached street demonstrations and other similar political rituals in several ways. One of the most prominent is precisely to focus on the ritual aspect, although this theoretical optic has more often been used for parades and the like than for protests. As with ritual more broadly defined, political rituals can be seen as functional (Casquete 2006; Durkheim 1965; Kertzer 1988) or communicative (Abeles 1988; Leach 1976)—as "public events" that model, present, or re-present society to itself (Handelman 1990). In a recent survey article, Rupert Stasch (2011:169) suggested that theory of ritual is converging on a model of ritual as condensing larger ideas, structures, and contexts into a particular moment of time. He points out that ritual does not only make present these "macrocosmic orders" by signifying them but also constructs them.

Anthropologists have not usually explored street protests as rituals, *per se*, but have responded to the recent upsurge in street- and square-based protests in multiple ways, underlining just how rich protests are as cultural products as well as political action. They have examined protests' relation to urban space (e.g., Corsín Jiménez and Estalella 2013) and to the economy (Collins 2012); described the experience of protesting (Taussig 2013); discussed the democratic

practices internal to the protests and their implications for democracy more broadly (Graeber 2013; Maeckelbergh 2009); highlighted the importance of the “ordinary” in moments of upheaval (Ahmad 2014); and considered the possibilities for participation (Winegar 2012). A recently published collection explores the performative aesthetics of global protests since 2011 (Werbner et al. 2014). The emphasis on practice, aesthetics, and experience has been an important corrective to the more sociological tendency to catalogue the “contentious politics” of different social movements (Tarrow 1998; Tilly 1993; Tilly and Wood 2012) or to explore the framing of protest and the political opportunities leading to protest events (Johnston and Noakes 2005).

By examining street protests in particular as cultural products or texts, my analysis is inspired by symbolic analyses of performance and political ritual. However, I do not analyze these rituals as revealing (or creating) underlying or formative aspects of a given culture or society: ritual as structuring structure or revelatory of forms of social order or macrocosmic orders (Handelman 1990; Kapferer 1986; Leach 1976; Stasch 2011). My aim is more modest. I examine one subtechnique—citation—in the context of a more loosely defined symbolic economy of protest and political action. I do so because citation strengthens the resonance and symbolic power of any given political protest and because recognition of citation enriches ethnographic analysis of protests and related ritual events.

Bolivia and Argentina have rich traditions of street mobilization, deriving in both places from indigenous, labor-based, and neighborhood-based organization. In both, mass demonstrations have altered the course of history, including in recent years. They have led to the resignation of presidents (Argentina 2001–02, Bolivia 2003), the fall and rise of dictatorships, and the emergence of new political and economic regimes (Robben 2007). In the cities of El Alto and Buenos Aires, street protests at a small scale are almost a daily occurrence, part of the political landscape. I have chosen the two cases here in part because of these similarities but also because of contrasting forms of physical, visual, and auditory intertextualities in political action. Put simply, they cite different things



across different axes. I use the Bolivian case to show how citation can work across space and practices and how it can be physical and not just visual; meanwhile I use the Argentine case to illustrate citation across time. I also contrast the two cases in terms of the intentionality of the participants in the rituals and protests, as well as in the explicitness of the interpretations made by their audiences. Of course, neither case is exclusively one way or another, but by drawing out the differences I hope to articulate what cultural and political work is being done through citation in each case.<sup>4</sup>

### **POLITICAL AGENCY EXPRESSED IN PHYSICAL FORM**

On or around September 14 each year, the neighborhood of Rosas Pampa, El Alto, Bolivia, holds its anniversary fiesta. The first days of the fiestas of 1999 and 2000 began on the Friday morning when the zone held a civic parade (*desfile*), led by the neighborhood council, the school parents' association, and the local schoolchildren. Then, in the afternoon, dance groups followed the same route, proceeding through the zone in full costume in what is known as the *Entrada*—the “entrance” to the festival (hereafter, simply “festival”). The following morning, there was an early mass at the church, followed by the “*Diana*,” when the dancers danced the same route as the previous day but not in costume. On the Sunday afternoon, a bullfight was held in the football field.

In Bolivia, festivals usually happen on the occasion of the anniversary of the neighborhood or village, which is celebrated on the day of the local patron saint. Civic parades happen on similarly important dates, such as the anniversary of a neighborhood, the city, the department, and the country, or May 1st. They are often the secular counterpart to the local religious festival. Festivals and parades are organized in similar fashion, through the *convocatoria* described in the opening paragraph of this article. The *convocatoria* is not merely the name for the piece of paper that invites participation; it also names one of the most important powers that organizes social forces such as trade unions or neighbor associations in El Alto hold and refers to the power to convene large numbers of people. The civic parade is an important way to show to state authorities the “power of

convocatoria” wielded by specific organizations or individual leaders, but another means of demonstrating this power is street demonstrations, also organized by paper convocatorias. Often (particularly on the first of May), civic parades shade into or become protest marches, sharing physical form and—very occasionally—recognizing explicitly the overlap, as in the chant, “this is not a parade, it is a protest march.”

Well before hearing that chant, I had been struck by the physical similarities between the festivals, parades, and demonstrations, especially in the aesthetics involved. The similarities highlight the physicality of political agency and enable the three practices (dance, parade, demonstration) to interact with each other, in the process becoming more than the sum of their parts. In all three practices, corporate groupings move through space in a unified way with banners at the front identifying them (for a video clip, see <http://sianlazar.wordpress.com/video-clips/d-p-d-ii/>). Dance groups (called *comparsas*) are organized on the basis of kin or occupational group. In parades, schoolchildren march as their school, and within that as their year group, with boys and girls separate (as in some of the dances); while adults march in blocks of union affiliation or as members of a neighborhood council or school parents’ association. This is also how adults organize themselves in street demonstrations.

In the early 2000s, El Alto was at the center of a wave of street protests in Bolivia that some have characterized as a “revolutionary cycle” (Hylton and Thomson 2007), culminating in 2005 with the election of Bolivia’s first indigenous president, Evo Morales. With hindsight, those demonstrations are often explained as antineoliberal, mostly about who controls the country’s natural resources, especially gas and water. Although that is a crucial aspect, it is not the only one, and they were in fact often as much about local concerns—for example, taxation or autonomy for the El Alto public university—as they were about national and international concerns about the control over gas extraction, the extent of democracy in the country, and the nature of the state itself (exclusionary, corrupt, and murderous or inclusionary and based in social movements). Some

protests in which I participated prior to the fall of the old regime in 2005 felt like part of an almost routinized way that organized social forces in El Alto demonstrated their strength and negotiated their demands with the local government (Lazar 2008). Others, such as those of October 2003, had more profound effects; in that instance, they led to the resignation of the hated neoliberal president and the inauguration of a new political era. In this article, I focus mostly on the small-scale protests that took place on a day-to-day basis in 1999–2000 and in 2003 before El Alto moved so dramatically to the center stage of national Bolivian political debates. This focus is not least because I was able to conduct ethnographic research in these kinds of spaces. However, I would suggest that ordinary people's day-to-day engagement in protest was a crucial foundation to the much-larger protests that managed to overturn history. Subsequently, El Alto's prominence as a national political arena has grown, and it has moved from a situation wherein local protests, parades, and so on were commentaries on the national events that took place in dominant spaces like La Paz and Oruro toward one where the direction of gaze has reversed and the opposite is now the case.

Parades and festivals celebrate belonging to neighborhood, city, or nation, and demonstrations usually address their demands to the national or city government. They are therefore all practices of citizenship—ways that individuals relate to the state (Lazar 2008). The physical organization into small corporate groupings underlines the fact that, for all three, citizenship of the “imagined community” of the neighborhood or city is dependent upon insertion into smaller “face-to-face” communities (Anderson 1991), organized on the basis of residence, kinship, or occupation. Those smaller communities are marked out in the festival by sound, movement, and costume; for the parade by the sign at the front of the group and schoolchildren's uniforms; and for the demonstration by the banner or sign at the front of the collectivity.

Festivals, parades, and demonstrations are a means for individuals to define and physically experience the collectivity, creating a shared sense of identity through movement. The movement is strictly choreographed and acted out for the benefit of an audience lining the streets in the case of

festivals and parades. Both culminate in a show for distinguished guests at a stage at the end of the route. In festivals, dancers dance in lines, either in single-sex groups or in couples. At the head of the lines are the “guides,” who keep everyone disciplined. They dictate which steps those behind them will dance and when they will change from the basic forward motion step to one of four to six well-rehearsed movements. The dancers dance the basic step until the guides make a sign to indicate which special step they want next and whistle to prompt the group to move into that step. The end result is usually extremely impressive. Much effort goes into creating the costumes and into rehearsing so that everybody in the group does the correct movement at the correct times (see Figures 1a and 1b).

**[FIGURES 1A and 1B ABOUT HERE]**

The focus on discipline, neat lines, and the organization into corporate blocs delineated by banners is the same in demonstrations as it is in festivals and parades. Demonstrators may have a long banner at the front (see Figure 2a) or a sign in the form of a standard that is usually red, yellow, and green and that names their group (e.g., the neighborhood council of a particular area or the trade union association; see Figure 2b). When neighborhood councils or parents’ associations participate in a demonstration, the standard bearer at the front of the group carries the same one that is used for festivals and civic parades. Demonstrators shout slogans together, often in the form of a call-and-response. They usually march in lines. It may be that people simply fall into the learned bodily discipline of the civic parade and dance and enact that during the demonstration. Nevertheless, it is also explicitly enforced or encouraged by those in charge. For example, during one demonstration of El Alto University students, the director of the sociology department frequently exhorted us to keep to our lines, especially when we proceeded down the main street of La Paz.

**[FIGURES 2A AND 2B ABOUT HERE]**

The aesthetics and physical experience of uniformity within the group promote a collective vision of political agency. The uniformity requires considerable discipline to achieve, as evidenced in the dance rehearsals and actions of the guides at the front of the dance group or in the shouts of the sociology director for us to keep in line. We should therefore not take that collective vision for granted, and instead recognize the work it takes to enforce. Nonetheless, within the three practices we can identify the expression of a political agency that is principally constituted by disciplined collectivity. It is a kind of agency that is in fact expressed in multiple political arenas (Lazar 2008). This is ritual as communicative event—ordering, presenting, and re-presenting forms of political agency to participants and audience members (Handelman 1990; Kertzer 1988; Leach 1976). However, a closer examination of the symbolic politics of the practices reveals also how they interact with each other, an effect achieved through visual and physical citation across the three.

One example is how the aesthetics of each of these practices are about national belonging of the nested kind, a formation I have discussed at length elsewhere (Lazar 2008). This way of organizing political belonging is evident in the fact that parades and festivals are held on important national and local civic dates and in the shared symbolic language of nationalism that is mobilized. For example, and very simply, the national flag and colors of red, green, and yellow predominate, especially in the standards that announce group affiliation. During demonstrations and, increasingly, civic parades, the rainbow-colored wiphala or indigenous flag balances out the Bolivian national flag. The group belonging indexed by the signs and banners combines with national belonging emphasized by the languages of color, date, and so on. As in political life more generally, disciplined

collectivity and national belonging is of a nested kind—that is, face-to-face communities nest within allegiance to neighborhood, city, and nation.

Given their physical and also symbolic similarities, we might even propose that these three practices lie on a continuum from the highly stylized festival to the street demonstration, with the parade somewhere in the middle. They reveal common notions of political agency that operate across different political practices but are not solely an outcome of an inherent sensibility or even of a particular historical development. They are—or may be—all of these things. A historical reading might, for example, see how such practices have come into being through the relationship between religious processions, dances, and civic parades (see Barragan 2009; Guss 2006); another might point to contextual elements influencing patterns of movement, such as military service. These would be further “texts” to consider in a discussion of the intertextuality of protests, festivals, and parades. In addition to these explanations for the development of a common language, my contention is that the aesthetic and physical similarities combine to create a citation between all three practices, and my aim is to explore the particular cultural-political work done by that combination.

The combination enables a dialectic whereby through citation each practice can perform features that are more prominent in the others. So, for example, the protest march can, through citation, make a claim to the civic parade’s celebration of mainstream national belonging, as well as to the nested belonging that is part of both the parade and the festival. Thus, protesters can assert that they are not protesting against the Bolivian nation itself—even when they demand the resignation of the country’s president, as they did in October of 2003. By stressing national belonging, they claimed legitimacy for their protests and consequently delegitimized the (corrupt) guardians of the nation at the time, whom they accused of “selling off” the country. Also, with the use of both the national flag and the wiphala in demonstrations, marchers stress both their indigeneity and their belonging to the Bolivian nation; through the presence of such symbolic markers, they demand the recognition of that dual identity. Daniel Goldstein (2004:4) has pointed

out how festivals are spectacular presentations of the community to the national state, a “demand for inclusion in the national bodies politic and social.” Nicole Fabricant and Nancy Postero (2013) show how mestizo groups from the Eastern regions of Bolivia used spectacular ritual performances to protest what they saw as their exclusion from the post-2006 national state, newly associated with highland indigeneity.<sup>5</sup> The demand for recognition is made not only through the mobilization of symbolic language of nationalism but also through the physical citation of parades and festivals. The citation works the other way, too, meaning that parades and festivals can participate in the subversive potential of political demonstrations, as is recognized explicitly by the phrase in my title. Hence, the use of the word *convocatoria* both for the process of getting people to participate and to index a political grouping’s ability to gain (and keep and demonstrate) large numbers of people.

The interplay of citation across practices and the consequent deepening of symbolic power was only very rarely explicitly articulated by residents of El Alto as intentional strategy—the “authorial borrowing” type of intertextuality identified earlier. It may better be understood as the other type of intertextuality that so appealed to poststructuralists: the constitution of symbolic practices through the assimilation of readily available cultural texts or symbolic productions. This is a process familiar to anthropologists, but attributing it merely to my own reading of these texts or conversely to some naturalized—or even historically produced—common way of doing things in El Alto would be a thin reading of the political agency and symbolic politics at play. Instead, I would suggest that citation is a significant symbolic technology that is deployed by participants in political rituals (including protests) within the circulation of symbols that are so central to political action. We could imagine this circulation as a symbolic economy of political action. As practices cite each other, they become more than the sum of their parts, in this case injecting subversive potential into mainstream modes of action and conversely claiming that more subversive modes of action are in fact part of mainstream performances of national belonging. Thus, intertextuality becomes a form of political construction, and festivals, parades, and protests not only are performative practices in

their own right but also come to have a different sense and effect as a result of their intertextual relation to each other.

### **(SENSORIAL) INTERTEXTUALITY AND THE PROTEST REPERTOIRE**

The Argentine forms of citation that are my second case study are much more explicitly understood as such. They are a combination of innovation and citation across time that has significance for how ordinary people understand politics. In November 2012, I was working with public sector trade unionists who identified closely with president Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (whom they called “Cristina”).<sup>6</sup> Despite having won the presidential election of October of 2011 by a respectable margin, Cristina was facing growing opposition. By 2012, the Argentine economy had begun to slow down after a sustained period of growth since the 2001–02 crisis. The effects of very high inflation over recent years has led the government to impose controls on the purchase of dollars, among other policy measures. In parallel, crime rates and the fear of crime have increased, and in many parts of the country there is a growing and pervasive sense of insecurity. According to Cristina’s opponents, she had not been able to address these problems largely because of what they perceived to be a style of government that brooks no opposition and consults with only a very small inner circle. In what had by late 2012 become a highly polarized debate, her supporters argued that she was following through on a national-popular political project begun when her husband became president in 2003. This project, they say, is one of national economic recovery and support for the poor. Some scholars have characterized it as “post-neoliberal” (e.g. Grugel and Riggirozzi 2012). Fears about insecurity, the economy, and inflation as well as accusations of corruption are, her supporters say, stoked up by the mainstream media, largely because of Cristina’s attempts to implement the Media Law of 2010. This includes provisions that reduce the market share that can be owned by one media corporation. They particularly affect the Grupo Clarín, whose newspaper has moved into increasingly fierce opposition to Cristina since 2008.<sup>7</sup> For her supporters, the Media Law



is an example of Cristina's willingness to stand up to large corporate interests and to espouse an antineoliberal political agenda.

The protest of November 8, 2012, thus took place in the context of an increasingly polarized and tense political environment. By the day itself, anticipation had built to a remarkable level. That evening, much of the central avenue was eerily quiet because people had gone home before the planned starting time to avoid the road closures. Small groups of protesters made their way to the obelisk at its northern end. By 8:00 p.m., a huge crowd had gathered with their pots and pans and national flags. I saw the odd poster demanding "liberty" and "democracy"; some slogans protesting Cristina's supposed plans to seek "re-re-election"; but mostly I saw Argentine flags.<sup>8</sup> The dominant sensory experience for me was the noise—not only of the pots and pans but also of whistles, klaxons, and the national anthem (see <http://sianlazar.wordpress.com/video-clips/8n-cacerolazo/> for a video clip that gives some sense of this experience). At the obelisk, the crowd milled about slowly, taking photos on their phones, making noises, and passing overhead a model of a ship. This was the *Fragata Libertad*, a Navy ship at the time impounded in a port in Ghana at the behest of vulture funds holding out for repayment of government bonds.<sup>9</sup> New people joined at the edge of the square while others left on foot and via the nearby subway stations; it felt like a pop concert without the shared focus on a central stage. The organizers had deliberately not scheduled speakers, in contrast to usual practice at demonstrations and political rallies in Argentina.

When I went home, I switched on the TV to watch the news channels that devoted the whole evening's programming to the *cacerolazos* at the obelisk and elsewhere. The demonstrations lasted until after 10:30 p.m. The somewhat-aimless gathering I experienced had stayed by the obelisk for a while and then moved to the Plaza de Mayo, the traditional congregation point for large street demonstrations. There were *cacerolazos* in the city's wealthy suburbs and some other main city squares across the country. The TV coverage switched from place to place, showing images of squares and junctions full of people, with commentary describing the different gatherings,

punctuated by occasional interviews with individual protesters. The #8N cacerolazos were a media event as much as they were about the experience of being on the streets, and the TV audience was clearly one of the most important audiences for the protests (cf. Ahmad 2014; Winegar 2012).

Although most of the demonstrators seemed to be protesting about insecurity and Cristina's style of government, actual demands remained weakly articulated and somewhat diffuse. At the time of the mobilization, the government refrained from direct and public engagement with the demonstrators and their demands, appearing mostly to ignore them. To the annoyance of some, in a speech the following day Cristina said that the two most important political events of that week were the elections in the United States and in the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>10</sup>

As with the Bolivian case, processes of citation deepened and complicated the power of symbolic political agency as enacted in this embodied and sensual event, but in the #8N cacerolazos, citation mostly worked across time rather than across space or practices. It drew out multiple and contradictory interpretations of the nature of the government and of popular discontent with its actions among both ordinary people and media commentators. This put the interplay between demonstrator–performer and audience–interpreter into question and introduced tension between alternative local interpreters, whose readings depended to a great extent on their political positioning with respect to Cristina.

The #8N cacerolazos were a conscious re-enactment of the demonstrations held two months previously, and a subsequent cacerolazo held in April of 2013 was part of the same thread. Although the gatherings were particularly large, the fact of holding a mass demonstration was not in itself unusual. It brought in a number of intertextual citations in complex and contested ways. The most prominent in the conversations of the unionists I knew was the citation of the events of December of 2001, when people took to the streets in opposition to controls placed on withdrawals from bank accounts. This culminated on December 19–20, when widespread protests including cacerolazos, food riots, and street marches led to President De la Rúa's resignation and that of his four successors

in the space of ten days. Those protests famously demanded “Que Se Vayan Todos!” [They all must go]—referring to the whole political class (Auyero 2007; Robben 2007). The connection with 2001 was very much in the minds of my interlocutors when they spoke about the #8N cacerolazo in its immediate aftermath. During a later discussion during a workshop on leadership run by the union, one union delegate said that the difference between the two was that in 2001 “the people” had been on the streets, whereas in 2012 it was only “people” on the streets.<sup>11</sup> In Spanish, the distinction is not merely one of the definite article as in my translation because the speaker had used two different words: *el pueblo* (the people) and *la gente* (people). He was making the distinction between a mere crowd and a mass that constituted the Argentine people as a united national entity, a point I return to below. He was also contesting one of the organizers’ hoped-for interpretations of the cacerolazo’s intertextuality, because for #8N to be fully successful as opposition to the government it needed to evoke through citation the chain of associations that linked it to 2001 and thereby to “que se vayan todos” and that sense of a definitive political crisis.

The #8N cacerolazo provoked debate about various political topics, such as the nature of democratic government in Argentina today, the lack of a credible opposition, media representations of the president’s words, gender, and so on. But two issues were particularly important. One that bothered many of my interlocutors and featured heavily in media reports was the extent of the protests’ spontaneity. Spontaneity was a very important criterion in large part because of the importance of spontaneity in the famous mobilizations that the cacerolazos had been attempting to cite. Most people appeared to agree that the September cacerolazos had been fairly spontaneous, and their extent had even surprised those organizers who had called for them on social media. By November 8, spontaneity had become more contested, and when I arrived at the office of the unionists at the Ministry of Health the following day, they were animatedly discussing an issue of the newspaper *El Argentino*, which purported to detail the connections between the organizers of #8N, oppositional parties, and the media corporation, Grupo Clarín. By painting the protests as not quite spontaneous, this very progovernment newspaper had reduced their power in the eyes of the

government supporters I knew, who were of course predisposed to accept such a narrative. Most of them blamed the media for stoking up opposition to Cristina.

The second issue of crucial importance for the unionists I knew and for many commentators was the class composition of the protesters. The *cacerola* as technique is particularly associated with the middle and wealthy classes (Sutton 2010). Indeed, it is thought to have started in Chile in the early 1970s, when middle-class women banged pots and pans in their houses in protest at food shortages during Salvador Allende's government. It is therefore also closely associated with the right-wing Pinochet coup, and so this citation by means of the repetition of the pots and pans protest technique potentially rather undermines the claims of some of the #8N demonstrators that Cristina's government was dictatorial; indeed, this was the criticism of Cristina's regime that was most keenly felt by many of her supporters that I knew. In Argentina, the most famous *cacerolazos* of 2001 also provoked regime change and appeared to have occurred to a similar pattern to the Chilean ones (Sitrin 2006:22). The citation of previous *cacerolazos* in Argentina and the present ghost or subtext of the Chilean ones contributed to contradictory readings about class and democracy after the event. In combination with the reading of visual clues, such as the clothing, color of skin, and hairstyles of the protesters, these presences through citation meant that many progovernment interpreters saw the #8N *cacerolazos* as "middle class." This undoubtedly enabled the government to feel confident about not changing its policies significantly because, they argued, their "national popular" project is supported by the popular classes, who had not taken to the streets.

If we grant that the protesters were on the whole "middle class," as they were understood to be by the unionists with whom I worked (and this is actually contested), another layer of interpretation comes into play. The gatherings at the obelisk and the progression to the Plaza de Mayo also visually and physically cite previous mass protests of working-class people, the most celebrated of which is the demonstration of October 17, 1945, led by Eva Perón in protest at the

imprisonment of Juan Domingo Perón. Antonius Robben (2007) has argued that mass, often violent, street demonstrations have punctuated Argentine political history and changed its course at several significant moments. The archetypal example of this is October 17 but also crucial were the following: the cordobazo of May 17, 1969; the demonstrations greeting Perón's return from exile at Ezeiza airport in June 20, 1973 (which became a massacre); the protests against the Falklands war in 1983, which toppled the military dictatorship of the time; and the riots of December 2001.<sup>12</sup> I would argue that the protagonists of the #8N demonstration and the other related cacerolazos were attempting to recreate the sense of regime crisis that is symbolized so powerfully by these previous mass demonstrations.

Although many of these key events were actually multiclass demonstrations, the celebrated and more obviously working-class mobilizations of the mid-20th century retain an immensely important imaginative pull. Through mass gatherings in the center of the city of Buenos Aires, different groups of Argentines claim the status of "the people," as revealed in the comment about "the people" versus just "people" taking to the streets. In so doing, they refer to large demonstrations that looked something like the #8N demonstration in the sense of the massing of bodies and the occupation of space (see Figures 3a and 3b; see also Sutton 2010 on the politics of massed bodies in Argentina). But it was very important for many that the #8N mobilization was fundamentally different, because on the whole it consisted of people who were rather wealthier and whiter than the earlier protesters. In contrast, antigovernment readings of the mobilization were more available in the mainstream media, such as the media outlets of the Grupo Clarín, who focused on the unhappiness felt by many Argentine residents at insecurity and fear of crime and at economic policies that restricted the purchase of dollars. They emphasized the widespread nature of participation across the country and suggested that the demonstrations convened a broad cross-section of Argentine society. Thus, contrasting interpretations of events were provoked in part through struggles over the contested meanings conveyed by citation.

### **[FIGURES 3A AND 3B ABOUT HERE]**

The intertextual cues make evident the complexity of the politics of the 2012–13 cacerolazos, especially in the eyes of the progovernment activists I knew. Without the ability to read these cues, one might imagine that the president was very simply on the verge of being toppled by a mass uprising, as had happened in 2001. It would be difficult to imagine that she enjoyed any support at all, and her subsequent survival in office would be inexplicable. Yet it was important for government supporters at least to figure out exactly who was opposing her, how they were represented in institutional politics, and what was in fact the role of the media beyond reportage, especially given the particular politics of the opposition between the president and the Grupo Clarín media conglomerate.<sup>13</sup>

That said, this is not merely a story of media manipulation: very large numbers of people were present at the obelisk on #8N, and their presence underlined the strength of opposition to Cristina, at least in the city of Buenos Aires. Although just after #8N some of my progovernment friends argued that the problem was that official political opposition parties did not adequately represent those people who opposed Cristina's government, the #8N protests were part of a performative chain that has brought an opposition into being in the current cycle—albeit one that, at the time of this writing, still lacks effective representation in the party political system. And Cristina has, it appears, given up any ambition she might have had for a third successive term, while problems with economic policy, corruption, and crime have multiplied. All this means that the 2015 Presidential elections look more open than they had seemed to be in mid-2012.

### **CITATION, INTERTEXTUALITY, AND THE CO-CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING**

As the Argentine case in particular shows, the media is a crucial actor in the intertextuality of protest events. Intertextuality is an interaction between conscious or almost-conscious performance of key historical moments or tropes and the hailing or recontextualization (Bauman 2004; Briggs and Bauman 1992) of such by various audiences, including the media. This raises a question of agency and its relation to intentionality within the intertextual play of political action. It is easier to find political agency in the case of conscious citation, while the place of agency in almost-conscious citation is rather more difficult to locate. In part it lies in the interpretation of those acts, since citation requires of the audience a cultural competence that enables people to “read” the visual or experiential texts. But the relationship between citation and political action is more complex. Employing the concept of intertextuality highlights the intentionality of the actors without restricting the analysis only to the study of that which is obviously (self)conscious on the part of the participants (Allen 2000). It also means that, as anthropologists, we are required to pay attention to the different and often contradictory readings of such processes that then ensue.

This dual play has been recognized within classical literary theory: soon after Julia Kristeva first defined the term, Roland Barthes argued that intertextuality implied the death of the Author (capital A) in favor of the figure of the writer, that

a text does not consist of a line of words, releasing a single “theological” meaning (the “message” of the Author-God) but is a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various kinds of writing, no one of which is original ... Succeeding the Author, the writer no longer contains within himself passions, humors, sentiments, impressions, but rather that enormous dictionary from which he draws a writing which can know no end or halt. [Barthes 1967]

His point is, of course, that a single authoritative version—and, therefore, also interpretation—of a given text is impossible, and the reader is born at the expense of the Author as much as the writer is. Barthes’s vision of the reader is not an especially agentive one: for him,

the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is only that someone who holds gathered into a single field all the paths of which the text is constituted.

[Barthes 1967]

Yet his shift in focus from actor–author to reader–interpreter is important. The political agency of street demonstrations is as much about the audience for any particular demonstration as it is about the demonstrators themselves. That audience—by which I mean the general public, the media, specific politicians being addressed by the demonstrators, or researchers and commentators after the event—“reads” the cultural texts of demonstrations. It is possible for a reader to see an intertextual reference that may or may not have been intended by the author (the protesters). As I hope to have demonstrated, especially with the analysis of the Argentine *cacerolazos*, readings on the ground and in the media can be multiple and contested. Understandings of political agency should not be reduced only to instances of conscious intentionality, whether as actors–demonstrators or readers–interpreters.

An intertextual reading of the cultural product of mass street demonstrations in Argentina and of parades, dances, and demonstrations in Bolivia requires an expansive notion of cultural text or cultural product, because the “product” in this case is a set of practices—albeit ones that are all consciously staged. As Bruce Kapferer (1986) has argued, the performances of these practices are constitutive of meaning; the text is only available through performance and is not revealed by it. Such a reading of performance as text also requires that our analysis of the semiotic include not only visual cues but also physical action and sound. The banging of the pots and pans in an Argentine *cacerolazo* and the chants in the Bolivian parades and demonstrations create an auditory intertextuality, and physical movement can also be a channel for connections and intertextualities in the experience and discipline of the festival, parade, or demonstration in Bolivia. Together they show political agency in Bolivia as constituted by—in my reading—collective discipline and national belonging understood as a set of nested affiliations. But the citation itself also plays with the



subversive potential of mainstream practices as it legitimizes subversive ones. In Argentina, the intertextuality of the #8N protests evoked for some interpreters the sense of political crisis so associated with 2001, but this citation was contested by enough people to become ultimately unsuccessful, at least among those I knew well.

In both settings, street protests are especially salient forms of political action that relate to past protests and to other practices of political ritual in complicated ways. In this article, I have used the two cases as points of contrast, drawing out the different ways that citation works in each. Yet in practice all the elements that I have identified are present in both but to different extents. Thus, it would be possible to identify citation across different practices in Argentine street protests just as we can find citation across time in Bolivian ones—as Fabricant and Postero (2013) show dramatically for hunger strikes—and multiple interpretations are a feature of Bolivian protests as well as in Argentina. Still, I have proposed that citation across time and multiple interpretations of protest are relatively more important in the Argentine case than the Bolivian one. Potential explanations for this contrast might include the difference in class composition of the protesters and the differences in political context. Members of the middle classes in 2012 Buenos Aires interacted with the media in a much more self-conscious way than the El Alto popular sectors did in 2003, not least because of the proliferation of social media in the intervening years. Another difference is that the mostly popular and indigenous protesters of 2000–05 in Bolivia were able to produce a much more straightforward discourse against neoliberalism and for democracy and inclusive citizenship than the recent protesters in Argentina have managed. The latter must position themselves in opposition to a president who styles herself as antineoliberal and who continues to have many vocal supporters. Yet in both spaces, protesters use similar strategies of citation to enact their political agency and to deepen the symbolic power of their mobilization, and different audiences interpret those symbolic actions to contest or support them.

In this article, I have examined some examples of the mixing of different kinds of physical, visual, and auditory intertextualities in political action, and I have sought to articulate what cultural and political work the process of citation itself does within that action. I hope to have combined a semiotic reading of this political-cultural action with an appreciation of its physicality. Analyzing visual, physical, and auditory experience in this way expands the definition of intertextuality and citation beyond the usual focus on texts as traditionally understood. This is made possible by the recognition that protests and other forms of ritualized political action are cultural products: a set of practices that are consciously staged and that have meanings that can be read and contested as much as those of literary texts. The two cases described here show that physical and symbolic politics are a complex process of co-construction of meaning between performers and audience—or, otherwise put, between authors and readers.

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## NOTES

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in Cambridge.

1. In further citations, one website used this image to illustrate a letter from Subcomandante Marcos to the Gezi Park demonstrators. A headline at the bottom of the page asks, "If Taksim is not Tahrir, what is it?" See [http://muftah.org/global-solidarity-with-gezi/#.U\\_XQEvldXTo](http://muftah.org/global-solidarity-with-gezi/#.U_XQEvldXTo), accessed October 9, 2014.

2. The discussion of intertextuality within linguistic anthropology tends to focus on speech or performance as text in quite a strict sense, such as in the case of stories (Bauman 2004) and scholarly texts (Briggs 1993). Broader concepts of interdiscursivity (see Silverstein 2005) perhaps imply a return to Bakhtin's original notions of dialogue and utterance, which Bauman (2005) suggests had changed to become very textual in Kristeva's reworking of Bakhtin. Bauman argues that intertextuality should properly only be reserved for texts and that the concepts of discourse and interdiscursivity are more properly used to speak about communicative acts outside of the text (Bauman 2005:146). Other analyses take as their object overtly textual processes, such as work on citationality that closely analyzes particular citation practices in the case of brands (Nakassis 2012) or in the intertextual use of particular phrases in talk and written text, such as Hill 2005 on Mock Spanish or Verschueren 2013 on diplomatic speeches and treaties. As will be evident, I am not a linguistic anthropologist, and my argument here is for a somewhat more fluid notion of text. This, I argue, allows for analysis of protests, parades, and festivals as ritual performances that are collective utterances simultaneously existing in a specific moment (e.g., a single protest) and across time in relation to other performances and as repeated practices.

3. See

[http://therealnews.com/t2/index.php?Itemid=74&id=31&jumival=6207&option=com\\_cont](http://therealnews.com/t2/index.php?Itemid=74&id=31&jumival=6207&option=com_cont)

nt&task=view, accessed January 6, 2015. Also see

<http://affendina.blogspot.com/2011/07/among-tiananmen-square-in-beijing-and.html>, accessed January 6, 2015.

4. Note that in both cases, street protesters also cite discourses of protest that circulate transnationally or even globally (as in the example of Sao Paulo and Istanbul described earlier). See the collection edited by Werbner and colleagues (2014) for a comprehensive discussion of this citational and intertextual travelling across the Arab Spring, Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America. In this article, I focus on more local traditions and citations, but I do not wish to imply that these exhaust the possibilities available to protesters and their audiences.

5. The specific intertextuality Goldstein analyzes is between festivals and lynchings, while Fabricant and Postero trace a history of hunger strikes as protest forms (among others).

6. My field research was conducted with members of two public sector trade unions in Argentina. During October–November 2012, I was working with a delegation in the Ministry of Health.

7. For a summary, see <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/20/argentina-supreme-court-media-law>, accessed July 16, 2014.

8. The Argentine constitution allows presidents to serve two successive terms. At the time, there were rumours that Cristina was planning to seek a constitutional amendment that would allow her to stand for election for a third term.

9. See Council on Hemispheric Affairs report: *Fragata Libertad: a "Vulture Fund" Prey*. 7 November 2012. See <http://www.coha.org/fragata-libertad-a-vulture-fun-prey/>, accessed July 1, 2014.

10. See <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1525197-la-presidenta-descalifico-la-protesta-y-ratifico-el-rumbo-de-su-gestion>, accessed September 10, 2014.

11. The workshop facilitator had asked, "What happens when there is no leadership?", and a female delegate responded, "cacerolazos." This led to a discussion of the cacerolazos of 2001 and those of 2012, during which time the delegate made this distinction between "the people" and "people" on the streets.

12. The Cordobazo of May 17, 1969 was a series of street demonstrations and strikes in Cordoba against the military leadership of Onganía that was associated very strongly with oppositional unionist currents (see Brennan and Gordillo 1994).

13. No one knows the true extent of the media companies' involvement in the mobilizations, but cases of media participation in antigovernment actions elsewhere on the continent—famously in Venezuela—mean that we cannot dismiss the accusation as mere conspiracy theory.

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#### **FIGURE CAPTIONS**

**Figure 1.** Morenada, Rosas Pampa, 2000. (Photos courtesy of Cleto Gutierrez)

**Figure 2.** (a) Demonstration by Federation of Street Vendors, 2003; (b) Parade for Independence Day in El Alto, 2003. (Photos courtesy of author)

Figure 3. (a) #8N demonstration at the Obelisco, Avenida 9 de Julio. (Photo courtesy of author); (b) Peronist demonstration in the Plaza de Mayo, 1940s. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)