

The Missionaries of Francis

The Theology of the People and the Unification of the Argentine *Piquetero* Movement (2014–2018)

by
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Founded in 2014, the Missionaries of Francis is a small social movement organization made up of activists from several other social movement organizations representing informal workers and the unemployed. Its goal was to promote the message of the newly appointed Pope Francis among the poor and excluded. Drawing inspiration from the theology of the people, the movement is contributing new repertoires of contention based on popular religious images and icons to Argentine social movements. Starting in 2016, it has occupied a key role, bringing together ideologically and politically heterogeneous social movement organizations to resist the neoliberal social policies of President Mauricio Macri.

Fundados en 2014, los Misioneros de Francisco son una pequeña organización formada por activistas de varios movimientos sociales que representan a los trabajadores informales y a los desempleados. Su objetivo fue promover el mensaje del recién nombrado Papa Francisco entre los pobres y excluidos. Inspirado en la teología del pueblo, el movimiento está aportando nuevos repertorios de protesta basados en imágenes e íconos de la religiosidad popular a los movimientos sociales argentinos. Ha jugado un papel clave a partir de 2016, reuniendo organizaciones de movimientos sociales ideológica y políticamente heterogéneos para resistir las políticas sociales neoliberales del presidente Mauricio Macri.

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Known locally as *piqueteros* (pickets), social movements representing the unemployed and the poor have been important political actors in Argentina since they were founded in the late 1990s. These movements were historically fragmented and divided in terms of ideological and political identities and degrees of support for or opposition to the administrations of Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. Now, with the return of neoliberal policies under President Mauricio Macri (2015–), they are adopting new repertoires and, more important, engaging in collective political action with unprecedented levels of unity. Within the repertoire of Argentine social movements, the

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marches of San Cayetano on August 7 of 2016, 2017, and 2018, the national march of June 1, 2018, and other public demonstrations and actions are new elements that invoke popular religious images and icons. At the same time, they demonstrate the repertoire's capacity to bring together a wide array of social movements, unions, and political parties in a united front in opposition to Macri's policies.

In order to understand these two important changes, we must direct our attention toward a small organization founded in 2014 by activists and leaders of social movements aligned with the theology of the people and the message of Pope Francis. This organization, the *Misioneros de Francisco* (Missionaries of Francis—MF), is notable for being able to generate actions that crosscut the social, religious, and political realms. By incorporating religious icons into the social movement repertoire, though small and limited in resources it has become a key symbolic and cultural figure within and beyond the piquetero movement.

In this article, I describe the main features of the MF with special attention to its origin, trajectory, membership, and resources. I also attend to its cultural dimensions—its particular way of articulating social and political issues, inspired by the theology of the people and the figure of Pope Francis. Finally, I examine its role in the piquetero movement, its linkages to other organizations, and its contributions to the movement's repertoire of contention. The investigation relies mainly on data gathered in 2018 through interviews with leaders and members of different subgroups of the MF and allied social movement organizations. It also draws on journalistic articles and interviews, recently published books and articles on the theology of the people, and pictures and texts posted on social media by these organizations and their leaders. It also reflects my participation in various activities sponsored by the MF, including soup kitchens and protests.

Argentine social movements have rarely been studied from the theoretical perspective of the new social movements, but this perspective, with its emphasis on symbolic aspects, is applicable to the MF because of its revalorization of popular religious icons such as the Virgin of Luján and San Cayetano. Social movements are understood here as sets of organizations, groups, or interpersonal networks that operate as mobilizing structures and, with some degree of coordination, pursue a common agenda in the public arena. The life spans of social movements are highly variable (from a few months to several decades), but they always have a certain degree of temporal continuity. Although their displays of repertoires of collective action in public spaces may be frequent during periods of mobilization and sporadic at other times, they persist through their organizations, groups, and networks. Social movements may result from structural transformations such as the increase of unemployment and poverty in the case of the piqueteros but can also be the outgrowth of the different cultural, ideological, and (especially in the case of the MF) religious heritages out of which their collective identity is created and recreated (Buechler, 2011; Melucci, 1989; 1996; Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2004).

Social movements in any given historical period have a limited number of alternatives for public, collective action. The concept of a repertoire of action was first formulated by Tilly (1993: 264) as "a limited set of routines that are

learned, shared and acted out through a relatively deliberate process of choice." Repertoires are learned cultural creations that arise from the struggles and actions of social movement organization members and networks of activists. When the collective actions of social movements involve claims and conflicts of interest, they are called "repertoires of contention" (Della Porta, 2013; Tilly, 1993). This concept is a central category of analysis for the case of the MF, given the originality and success of the repertoire it introduced.

Special attention should be paid to the cultural dimension. According to Melucci (1989; 1996), social movements generate and display symbols, messages, and other repertoires as a means of constructing and reinforcing their collective identity and challenging hegemonic powers. They are sustained by interactions among and within social movement organizations, with all groups embedded in the same network of meaning. It is within these networks of meaning that new repertoires are created and later disseminated to the entire movement. Social movements are not just grassroots; they demand the construction of a multipolar action system responsible for general coordination and strategic decisions. In this sense, it is vital to consider both the everyday functioning of social movement organizations at the grassroots level and the perspectives and strategies of their leaders and the networks of activists that act as bridges across multiple levels, organizations, and territories. In the case of the MF, the organization's emergence and rapid growth can only be understood in relation to the intense networks of meaning embedded in the theology of the people and its connections with the future Pope Francis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The social movement organizations referred to as piqueteros appeared in the late 1990s. Since then, the movement has attracted the attention of many scholars for its capacity to organize and mobilize the poor and unemployed and its magnitude, political relevance, contentious repertoire, and persistence over time. Sociologists, political scientists, and anthropologists have researched different social movement organizations extensively, using ethnographic fieldwork, interviews with leaders, and secondary sources such as newspapers, published reports, and social networks. The theoretical perspectives and foci of these researchers are as heterogeneous as the organizations that make up the piquetero movement. What follows is a brief summary of their main approaches. Across a variety of disciplines, theoretical orientations, methodological strategies, and data sources, one issue has dominated publications about piqueteros: autonomy/heteronomy. This fundamentally political axis of analysis has been approached from different angles that I attempt to synthesize below.

One early approach attempted to understand the growth and consolidation of the piquetero organizations as another facet of the country's pervasive political clientelism (Escudé, 2005). This approach had limitations because it was not clear whether, in the exchange of favors, goods, and social plans for votes and other forms of support, the asymmetrical relations established among state officials, mainstream politicians, and social movement organizations were a form of demobilization or the persistence of contentious collective action

(Cerrutti and Grimson, 2005; Quirós, 2006). From the very beginning, research on piqueteros has been concerned with the autonomy/heteronomy of the movement in relation to the different political administrations that have controlled Argentina's national government over the past two decades. The movement originated at the grassroots, autonomous from the state and political parties, but after 2003 some piquetero organizations resisted attempts at co-optation by state authorities and political machineries while others succumbed (Svampa, 2008; Svampa and Pereyra, 2003). At the same time, some writers have analyzed the degrees of autonomy of different social movement organizations over time (Dinerstein, 2010; 2015). Social movement organizations with origins in far-left political parties or Marxist ideologies tended to reject compromising or aligning themselves with the governments of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner, whereas others with less radical ideological perspectives and/or past connections to the Peronist leftist guerrillas of the 1970s tended to support the government in one way or another. Others have highlighted not the co-optation but the inclusion of important social movement organizations within Kirchnerism, examining the overlapping interests and agendas of social movement organizations and political elites. They view the movement's support for official policies and the conversion of some activists into government officials as dynamics of alliance formation during the Kirchnerist years (Natalucci, 2012; 2015; 2018).

More recently, researchers have shifted their attention to the persistence of the piquetero movement over time (20 years) and its historical significance at the national and regional levels. Most organizations within the movement have survived well beyond the socioeconomic and political contexts in which they originated, and this persistence has yielded another axis of analysis, the adaptation of and shifts in repertoires and political strategies over time (Epstein, 2009; Kaese and Wolff, 2016). One final and more recent approach sees the piquetero movement as part of a second wave of integration into mainstream society in different Latin American countries. As did the labor movements of the 1940s, these organizations struggle to integrate the poor and unemployed into the political system and society at large. According to this approach, they are demanding that the state reclaim its role as a structuring force in society and recognize those previously ignored by state institutions and policies (Rossi, 2015a; 2015b).

One axis of analysis that remains less explored is the piqueteros' political and ideological identities. On the one hand, many of the activists who founded and sustain the movement have a background in Marxism, whether Leninist, Trotskyist, or Maoist. On the other hand, there are many activists who historically identified with left-wing Peronism. At the end of the 1990s they were united by their disenchantment with political parties and the search for new forms of autonomous political action. Beginning in 2003, with the presidency of Néstor Kirchner, there was a resurgence of Peronist identity among some activists who aligned themselves with the Evita Movement. Others maintained their Marxist identity, confronting the government to varying degrees. Lastly, some activists and movements experienced what Schuttenberg (2014; 2015) calls a national, popular turn, bringing them from the far left to ideological positions more like that of Peronism.

To summarize, the piquetero movement has been present and active for more than two decades in Argentina and has been studied in the social sciences from various perspectives. The persistence and relevance of the movement lie in the fact that it represents strong demands for the recognition and integration of an important sector of society. The contribution of this article is to pay attention to the emergence in recent years of images and symbols of popular Catholicism in marches and public events from a new-social-movements perspective. Although there are publications dedicated to considering the varied ideological and political identities that coexist within the movement, until now the religious dimension has been overlooked. The case of the MF has been studied recently in terms of the sociology of religion but not as part of a much broader social movement (Carbonelli and Giménez Béliveau, 2015; 2016a; 2016b; Giménez Béliveau and Carbonelli, 2018).

THE THEOLOGY OF THE PEOPLE AND FATHER TELLO

At the outset of this project, a well-known leader of the national piquetero movement said to me, “We are all Tellistas” (followers of Tello). He showed me the small plastic medallion of the Virgin of Luján that was hanging around his neck. “This is what all Tellistas wear,” he said. In the same meeting another leader made a similar comment and referred to the theology of the people that inspires Pope Francis. This led me down an unexpected line of inquiry. Rafael Tello (1917–2002) was a Catholic priest from Argentina and a professor of theology at the Catholic University of Argentina, in Buenos Aires, for more than 20 years. He also fostered pastoral activities among the working class. Among other initiatives, he promoted a pilgrimage for young people to the basilica of the Virgin of Luján, which was carried out for the first time in 1975 in a context of extreme political repression and just before the coup d’état. The popular worship of the Virgin of Luján goes back several centuries, and pilgrimages to this basilica have a long history. The popular pastoralism inspired by Tello aimed to strengthen and revitalize this aspect of popular religion through the massive mobilization of youth from parishes, organizations, and other institutions linked to the Church. The youth pilgrimage was so successful that more than 40 years later it still attracts nearly 1 million people each year. The pilgrims walk 60 kilometers from the parish of San Cayetano in Buenos Aires to the Basilica of the Virgin in Luján.¹

The theological orientation and pastoral practices of Father Tello earned him the enmity of the ultraconservative archbishop of Buenos Aires, who, in 1979 (in the midst of the civil-military dictatorship), suspended him as professor of theology. This suspension, which Tello never appealed, was the end of his public career but not of his theological or pastoral work. In the years following, he maintained discussion and reflection groups for religious leaders working among the poor. At first, Father Tello’s teachings were transmitted orally to a small group of followers. Over time, they began to materialize as notes prepared for every meeting and transcriptions of these encounters that in recent years have been compiled and analyzed by his disciples and by a new generation of priests and pastoral workers (Albado, 2017; Bianchi, 2012).

In order to understand the ideological underpinnings and actions of the MF, we must attend to the theological and pastoral developments known as the theology of the people that occurred in and around Buenos Aires after Vatican II (1963–1966). This theology has been developing in the region for half a century but has gained new international recognition and diffusion thanks to the papacy of Francis. It can be seen as a parallel development to liberation theology, albeit with a more historical perspective and a strong emphasis on culture rather than sociology and political economy (Luciani, 2017; Rivero, 2015; Scannone, 2017). More precisely, the theology of the people emerged out of the debates of the Bishops' Pastoral Commission, which was created by the Argentine Conference of Bishops during the postconciliar period to develop a national pastoral plan aligned with the spirit of Vatican II. Father Tello was one of the experts on this commission (Rivero, 2015; Scannone, 2017). From 1967 to 1970, the future pope (then Father Jorge Bergoglio) studied theology at the Máximo de San Miguel School, where he was a student of the Jesuit Juan Carlos Scannone, a leading advocate of the theology of the people. From then on this theological perspective and the teachings of Father Tello were a constitutive element of Bergoglio's thought (Scannone, 2017). In 2012, as bishop, he introduced a book about the work of Tello (Bianchi, 2012) to the School of Theology at the Catholic University of Argentina. Referring to Tello as one of the most brilliant minds of the twentieth-century Argentine Church, he declared Tello's work the foundation for evangelism in the country. At the same time, he indicated that Tello's thinking on popular piety and religiosity preceded several documents central to the Latin American Catholic Church, including those of the bishops' conferences of Puebla (in 1980) and Aparecida (in 2007) (Bergoglio, 2012).

Tello saw a connection between working-class culture and a popular Christianity that, in Latin America, can be traced to the first evangelization. Among other things, he highlighted the importance of sacraments such as baptism, the worship of the Virgin Mary, and certain saints, religious festivals, and pilgrimages. The popular pastoralism he envisioned was based on the restoration and reinvigoration of the legacy of the first evangelization. In contrast to liberation theology, the theology of the people centers not on class-based contradictions (although it does not ignore them) but on strengthening popular culture as a means of resistance and social unity. At the same time, instead of calling for the creation of small grassroots ecclesiastical communities it aims to permeate society through the language of religious icons, festivals, and traditional pilgrimages.

Had Father Tello been simply a professor of theology, he would not have been relevant to the repertoire of contemporary social movements, but the most important aspect of his work was his ideation and practical drive to build a model of popular pastoralism consistent with the theology of the people. Since the 1970s his teachings have inspired several generations of priests, other religious figures, and lay activists in Greater Buenos Aires. He helped create the Saracho Foundation (named for one of the first pilgrims of the Virgin of Luján) and the Priestly Foundation of María Estrella de la Evangelización, both of which are based in Luján and dedicated to popular pastoralism. Over the years, his disciples and secular followers have formed a network of grassroots activism with nodes in different municipalities and neighborhoods.

To comprehend the public actions of the MF and their contributions to the repertoire of the piquetero movement, it is helpful to examine a few aspects of the theology of the people. In this unique theology, culture and the people are central and intrinsically linked. People are the product of history, which is seen not merely as a sequence of events but as a process through which a culture is molded. The Latin American people emerge following the conquest of the Americas, when the subdued indigenous peoples adopt the Christian faith and, through the sacrament of baptism, become part of colonial society. The first evangelization triggers a unique historical event, making Christianity a foundational aspect of the culture of a whole people. For Tello, it is the poorest and most oppressed of Latin American people who have preserved, over several centuries, the nucleus of a popular culture that radiates out toward the rest of society. This popular culture stands in juxtaposition to modern culture, which is linked to the development of capitalism and the Enlightenment. In the present day, modernity forms part of the cultural hegemony of powerful countries, channeled through the media and, more recently, the drug traffic and drug consumption that affect popular neighborhoods.

The broad literature on the Argentine piquetero movement has paid little or no attention to questions of teleology or religious issues in general. Nonetheless, among the heterogeneous group of activists that built and sustained this movement, there were some who came from or sympathized with the social welfare activities of the Catholic Church. At the same time, expressions of popular religiosity are widely recognizable and very common in the areas where these social movement organizations operate.

THE MISSIONARIES OF FRANCIS

The MF came into existence through interpersonal networks created before the papacy of Francis and the affinity between Father Bergoglio's teleological thinking and that of social movement leaders. The pope has long been interested in politics, particularly the Peronist movement of the 1960s. Upon his arrival in the diocese of Buenos Aires, he converted the chapels located in shantytowns into parishes, and during his years as cardinal he developed relationships with the leaders of various social movement organizations. Among them was Emilio Pésico, the founder and leader of the Evita Movement, one of the main piquetero social movement organizations, and someone who shared his appreciation for the theology of the people and the teachings of Tello (Novaresio, 2018). In August of 2013, a few months after Pope Francis was appointed, Pésico traveled to Rome to baptize his newborn son. According to stories shared by members of the MF, it was there, in a conversation between him and the pope, that the idea emerged to create an organization to spread the new pope's message among the poorest and most excluded. It would be an organization able to reach those places where the Catholic Church had a weak presence. There is no public declaration or document to back up this story, but it was transmitted orally throughout the network of activists that first joined the MF.²

The MF's first meetings took place in 2014, in the central office of the Confederación de Trabajadores del Economía Popular (Confederation of

Workers of the Popular Economy—CTEP) in Constitución, a poor and stigmatized area of Buenos Aires. Pérsico convened a handful of activists from the Evita Movement who were either close to the religious leaders advancing the theology of the people or, judging from their backgrounds and biographies, might be inclined to participate in a new organization that aimed to become carriers of the pope's message in the heart of the piquetero movement. From the very start, they were joined by a Catholic priest serving in one of the poorest areas of Greater Buenos Aires and a public administrator close to Pope Francis with experience in Catholic institutions and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

Now the MF is coordinated by a committee that includes several founding members and a priest. The committee meets weekly at the CTEP headquarters in Buenos Aires. The movement itself is made up of more than 20 groups of activists scattered throughout Greater Buenos Aires and several more in different provinces of Argentina. The committee follows the activities of these groups, discusses political strategies, and organizes workshops on social, political, and theological issues for members. It is difficult to ascertain the precise number of members of the MF, since groups have variable memberships over time and may be more or less involved with the movement at any given moment. Most members are simultaneously members of other social movement organizations within the CTEP or the Evita Movement. They assume their roles as members of the MF for certain social and religious activities, but most of the time their primary identification is with their own organizations. Except for the banners members carry and the vests they wear at rallies and public events, the MF has little in the way of monetary resources, vehicles, or other goods. When it needs transportation, a canopy, or equipment and food for a soup kitchen, it borrows from the other social movement organizations with which it is affiliated. In 2015 two buses packed with members of the MF and 20 carefully packaged icons of the Virgin of Luján completed a 1,300-kilometer pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of the Virgin of Caacupé, in Paraguay, to participate in a ceremony during Pope Francis's visit to this neighboring country. On that occasion the pope blessed the icons and their carriers. The pilgrimage and the blessing of Pope Francis represent an important milestone in the development of the MF. In fact, the only belongings that member groups really value and protect are the religious icons they worship and display in their chapels, public events, and rallies.

From 2015 to 2018, the MF built some 20 chapels in poor areas, mainly in Greater Buenos Aires. In 2015 several chapels were constructed by cooperatives mainly related to the Evita Movement with support from official public employment programs. With the change of administration in December of that year this official support was discontinued, but construction efforts continued. These chapels or oratories are rather modest structures with images and icons of popular Catholic religiosity such as the Virgin of Luján (always present), San Cayetano (the patron saint of workers), and other saints. Many of them contain pictures of salient historical figures from the Argentine popular church, such as Monsignor Angelelli and Father Carlos Mujica, both of whom are venerated as martyrs. These chapels serve as community centers and, when a priest is available, are used to celebrate masses and baptisms. However, members of the MF



Figure 1. March of social movement organizations in Buenos Aires, with members of the MF wearing white vests and carrying icons of (from left to right) San Cayetano (two), the Virgin of Itatí, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. At right is an icon of the Virgin of Luján. Photo © Pablo Forni.

and their icons are not confined to their chapels. Some groups organize “visits” of the icons of the Virgin to homes in the neighborhood, while others take them to crowded public spaces such as train stations, allowing people to worship and touch them and distributing flyers with prayers and messages from Pope Francis (Figure 1).

Since its founding, the movement’s relationship with the Catholic Church has been difficult. While it enjoys the personal support of the pope, its relationship with the Argentine Catholic Church is not institutionalized. The groups and chapels recognize themselves as Catholic but are not formally under the Church’s jurisdiction. On occasion the priests in charge of local parishes have distrusted these new chapels, which lie inside their territory but outside their jurisdiction, and this has given rise to quarrels and complaints. Only a few priests have developed good long-term relationships with the movement, visiting its chapels from time to time to celebrate masses or baptisms. However, this has recently started to change, since the new bishops appointed by Pope Francis in Argentina are more sympathetic toward the movement, and one bishop is officially reviewing the organization in order to evaluate its incorporation into the association of the faithful within the Catholic Church.

The MF is a network of activists from different social movement organizations and different districts of Greater Buenos Aires. Since its first meetings this



Figure 2. “Workers will not kneel before the IMF,” the banner leading the San Cayetano’s Day march on August 7, 2018. On the left is an icon of San Cayetano, and “IMF” is printed in the colors of the U.S. flag. Behind the banner, MF protesters can be seen carrying other icons. Photo © Pablo Forni.

network of individuals and activist groups has grown slowly and kept a low profile. Despite its connection to a global figure such as Pope Francis, it has remained embedded in everyday life on the ground and focused on grassroots activities at the micro level. Inspired by Father Tello’s theology of the people, almost imperceptibly it has begun introducing novel practices into the piquetero movement’s repertoire.

The neoliberal policies implemented by President Macri since he took office in December 2015 have challenged the political strategies of social movement organizations. In this new context, the MF has begun to appear more in public and to play an important role in bringing together different social movement organizations. Since the origins of the piquetero movement in the 1990s, its constituent social movements have been divided along ideological and political lines and, during the Kirchner years (2003–2015), by their positions with regard to the national government. In 2016, neoliberal policies and the threat of cuts to public employment and social programs encouraged the leaders of several organizations to develop a united front. The leaders of the CTEP, the *Corriente Clasista y Combativa*, and *Barrios de Pie* agreed to march to the Plaza de Mayo on August 7, the feast day of San Cayetano, under the banner “Land, Roof, and Work” (Figure 2), the slogan promoted by the pope in his meetings with social movements in other countries. They also decided that the march would depart

from the Iglesia de San Cayetano, in the neighborhood of Liniers, 6 kilometers from the Plaza de Mayo. In this way the march was reminiscent of the mobilizations for bread and work conducted by union leaders with links to churches in the 1980s as a way of protesting and confronting the civil-military dictatorship.³

The success of this first march placed the leaders of these three organizations at the center of a multipolar action system for the broader piquetero movement. They came to be informally known as “the Cayetanos” and became a space for discussion and collective decision making for numerous social organizations. The MF began to play a major role, leading marches and carrying religious images and icons. From then on, this practice was incorporated into the repertoire of social movements and observable in other marches and public events, including a mass organized by the unions and the burial of a social activist who was the victim of police violence. Obviously, the worship of popular Catholic icons has long been present in the popular sectors, but before the MF it was not part of the repertoire of Argentine social movements.

Macri’s presidency and the return to neoliberal policies constituted an abrupt change in the political scene that rendered obsolete many of the quarrels and divisions between progovernment and opposition organizations within the piquetero movement. In this context, the MF gave the leaders of the primary social movement the repertoire of symbols they needed to articulate a united front of resistance. This novel repertoire of action was introduced in the San Cayetano march in 2016 and had notable resonance among social movement organizations, labor unions, political parties, and other members of civil society. It exceeded the Cayetanos’ expectations. Despite being a small organization, the MF, through its images and icons, came to occupy a central role in the articulation of unity of social movement organizations.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article the origins, development, and activities of the Missionaries of Francis since 2014 have been examined in terms of Tilly’s repertoires of collective action and the perspective of the new social movements developed by Melucci, a theoretical framework that could be applied fruitfully to other identity, cultural, and ideological aspects of social movements in Argentina. A first conclusion is that the MF is unique among Argentine social movements. When I started investigating, I wondered whether it was a religious or a political or a social organization. I soon realized that these distinctions made no sense for the actions of the MF. It was unlike any other organization in its capacity to merge religious, social, and political concerns in both its identity and its actions. The MF activists are committed to social and community initiatives, religious and devotional work, and political activities and marches.

A second conclusion is that the MF is relevant among Argentine social movements despite being small and almost without material resources because it has introduced a new repertoire of action based on popular Catholicism. This repertoire was created in the social laboratory of the followers of the theology of the people during the preceding decades. A set of eminently pastoralist activities (pilgrimages, missions) has been introduced by the members of the MF to

public space. The marches of August 7 from the Iglesia de San Cayetano to the Plaza de Mayo made possible the creation of the Cayetanos, bringing together the leaders of different social movements that were previously distanced. Thus the new repertoire introduced by the MF was strategic for the unification of the different movements and groups in a united front against the neoliberal policies applied by the Macri administration since 2016.

NOTES

1. The cult of the Virgin of Luján dates to the seventeenth century and is the main expression of popular Catholicism in Argentina. The Virgin's image is found in most churches in the country but also in train and bus stations, hospitals, pharmacies, and plazas and on buses and in almanacs. Its presence crosses social classes and political identities.

2. This story parallels that of the creation of the Evita Movement. In the latter case the conversation was between Pésico and Néstor Kirchner shortly after he was elected president.

3. San Cayetano (1480–1547) was an Italian priest of aristocratic origin who dedicated his life to the poor and the sick. He was canonized in 1671, and his remains lie in Naples. Although his cult in Buenos Aires goes back to the nineteenth century, it was only in the Great Depression that he became the patron saint of workers, especially of those seeking employment. The yellow ears of wheat that accompany his image represent bread and work. Thousands of devotees come every August 7 to the church dedicated to him in Buenos Aires to ask for jobs or give thanks for finding or having jobs. Next to that of the Virgin of Luján, it is the most important popular cult in Buenos Aires.

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