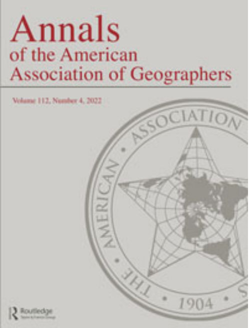

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Articulating Populism in Place: A Relational Comparison of Kirchnerism in Argentina

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How are populist movements articulated in place, and what political tensions can arise when they mobilize across scales? Despite the historical significance of particular places for populist movements (e.g., countryside or city), much populist scholarship remains trapped in a national lens, and geographical analyses are only starting to take seriously place-based articulations. Drawing on Gillian Hart's Gramscian approach, we understand articulation as a dual process of cojoining and resignifying that unfolds through geographically situated practices and language. We extend this by paying attention to actors of populist mobilization, political parties, and social movements, examining their articulation of political subjectivities and antagonisms through place-based contexts, thus providing an analytical framework for studying populism. Considering the national-popular movement of Kirchnerism, our analysis unfolds through a relational comparison of two contrasting places in Argentina—its wealthy capital city and the impoverished province of Jujuy—moving dialectically across different scales, considering contradictions between local and national mobilizations of Kircherism while also contextualizing these in regional and global process. In so doing, we demonstrate that a geographically sensitive analysis of populist conjunctures provides insights into the success and failures of national popular movements. Specifically, place-based movements face dilemmas between gaining support and autonomy from national counterparts, whereas national popular movements both depend on and are threatened by local populist success. *Key Words: Argentina, articulation, Kirchnerism, place, populism.*

Between 2003 and 2015, Peronism, Laclau's (1977) archetypal case of populism, took on a progressive, center-left form under Argentine Presidents Néstor and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2003–2007 and 2007–2015), where it became a hegemonic "national popular" movement known as Kirchnerism. The success of Kirchnerism relied on its capacity to articulate a diverse set of demands, spanning the "popular" working-class sectors, much of which had been disincorporated under the previous neoliberal incarnation of Peronism (F. M. Rossi 2017), and the middle classes, whose standard of living had been in decline following the financial crisis of 2001 (Ozarow 2019). Yet, in 2015 Kirchnerism dramatically lost the national elections, sending the national movement into a crisis that it is still recovering from, as the 2021 midterm elections highlighted. In a country with strong political decentralization, regional identity, and territorial inequality, Kirchnerism is informed by diverse geographical contexts within Argentina, and its ability to articulate in and across different places has been a key strategy. Taking two contrasting places in Argentina—its wealthy capital city and impoverished province of Jujuy—we examine how the national popular movement of Kirchnerism was articulated in place and what implications this had for its success and failures. We expose dilemmas faced by place-based populist movements that rely on support from national organizations while seeking to maintain their own autonomy. In turn, this reveals tensions within national popular movements that are threatened by place-based movements yet depend on successful local articulations to build and maintain hegemony.

The article thus argues that greater analytical attention to place in studies of populism sheds light on political dynamics and tensions that might otherwise be marginalized. Populism is necessarily articulated in and through the particularities of place, understood as a relational context through which political subjectivities and antagonisms are trans-

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lated. Despite the long-standing centrality of particular places for historical understandings of populism, such as the rural versus urban foundations of Peronism (Germani 2006), geographers have only recently begun to take place seriously in studies of populism (e.g., Agnew and Shin 2017; Lizotte 2019; McCarthy 2019). Drawing on Hart's (2013, 2014) Gramscian reading of articulation (Ekers, Kipfer, and Loftus 2020) as inherently geographical, we understand articulation as a dual process of cojoining and resignifying that unfolds through geographically situated practices and language. We extend this by paying attention to key actors of populist mobilization, political parties, and social movements, examining their articulation of political subjectivities and antagonisms through place-based contexts, thus providing an analytical framework for studying populism. Starting from the particularities of Argentine Kirchnerism, our analysis unfolds through a relational comparison (Hart 2018b) of two places, moving dialectically across different scales, considering contradictions between local and national mobilizations of Kircherism and also contextualizing these in regional and global processes.

The article focuses on two places—the northwestern province of Jujuy and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA)—chosen due to their sharply differing characteristics: socioeconomically (Jujuy being one of the country's poorest and CABA the richest) and also culturally, with Jujuy geographically and demographically closer to the Andean region and CABA a cosmopolitan capital city. In each place, one organization is considered to analyze populist articulations with(in) Kirchnerism. In Jujuy, we examine the Organización Barrial Tupac Amaru (Tupac Amaru Neighborhood Movement; OBTA), an urban social movement led by an indigenous woman who struggled over housing and access to social policies. OBTA was key in articulating the identities and antagonisms of an economically and culturally peripheral place within Kirchnerism. In CABA, we examine the center-left political party Nuevo Encuentro (New Encounter; NE), which sought to articulate the middle class in Argentina's capital city that has long been hostile to Peronist politics. Based on long-term ethnographic work, our relational comparison examines both "spatio-historical specificities as well as interconnections and mutually constitutive processes" (Hart 2018b, 373) to grapple with the conjuncture in which Kirchnerism took root and eventually fell into crisis.

Methodologically, our ethnographies draw on fieldwork undertaken during years when Kirchnerism was suffering major setbacks, providing us with a historical vantage point from which to understand its historical and geographical mobilization, akin to Lefebvre's (1991) regressive–progressive method followed by Hart (2018b). Fieldwork undertaken in San Salvador de Jujuy involved four visits between 2013 and 2015. Alongside participant observation with grassroots activists, street mobilization, assemblies, and meetings, it involved twenty in-depth interviews, including most of the organization leaders and several midlevel activists involved in territorial organization. An analysis of the OBTA's media communications was also undertaken, particularly focused on social media during the political campaigns of 2013 and 2015. Fieldwork in CABA was undertaken across a total of nine months during three visits between 2016 and 2018. Alongside participant observation with grassroots NE activists, fieldwork included sixty-seven in-depth interviews, covering party leaders in CABA, the national leader, most midlevel activists involved in territorial organization, and a sample of new activists.

In what follows, we start by providing an overview of literatures on populism and place, elaborating our understanding of articulation. We then provide a geographical–historical overview of the Kirchnerist conjuncture before analyzing the place-based articulations of the national popular movement through the vantage points of the OBTA in Jujuy and NE in CABA.

Populism, Articulation, and Place

Populism is a highly contested yet widely used term that typically refers to a discourse and strategy in which an appeal to "the people" is made in direct opposition to some understanding of "the elite." Recent work in political science tends to define populism as a "thin-centered ideology" (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017) in which populist appeals attach themselves to established ideologies such as socialism or fascism and are usually seen as a threat to (liberal) democracy (De la Torre 2015; Kaltwasser et al. 2017). In contrast, our understanding broadly follows the pioneering work of Laclau (1977), which understands populism not as ideology per se but as the articulation of "popular-democratic interpellations" (i.e., of the people) in antagonism to a dominant

ideology. In his later work he emphasized how populism is a means of reinvigorating radical democracy (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Laclau 2005). Laclau's (1977) understanding of articulation was innovative, extending Althusser's (1969) conceptualization by acknowledging how it not only involves "linking together" but also "giving expression to" a new identity (Hart 2013; see also Hart 2007; Ekers, Kipfer, and Loftus 2020). Echoing Althusser, Laclau (1977) saw these articulations as determined (yet never reduced) by classes and their contradictions. Laclau (1977, 161) presented a nonreductionist reading of class arguing that its ideological content is not predetermined but is contingent and comes into being via the articulation of "non-class contents" (e.g., nationalism). In the quest for hegemony, classes thus assume nonclass contradictions, and it is here that populism arises as a political strategy for articulating across class and nonclass antagonism; that is, between class and "the people."

The (over)determining role of class in populist articulation would soon be critiqued and expanded, notably by the postcolonial intervention of Hall (1980, 1996). As Ekers, Kipfer, and Loftus (2020, 1579) summarized, whereas Laclau saw populism as "contingently articulated with class relations through hegemonic projects in particular historical contexts," Hall gave equal weight to race, and the articulations between class and race became central to his and subsequent postcolonial readings of populism, including by Hart (2007), who further considered articulations of gender and sexuality. The preceding accounts have expanded the set of determinations in populist articulations, but Laclau's later work, including that with Mouffe, took this further by rejecting the determinism of any single hegemonic project and instead pointed toward the open-ended "chain of equivalences." Here, we part ways with such post-Marxist approaches and instead follow the Gramscian-inspired tradition that understands articulations as historically determined by hegemonic projects, always understood in their geographical (and historical) conjuncture (Hart 2002; Ekers, Kipfer, and Loftus 2020). Indeed, a geographical sensitivity to the role of place in determining populist articulations is too often missing in otherwise nuanced studies of populism in Latin America and elsewhere and provides the core motivation of this article.

Geographers have made significant attempts to theorize the role of space and place in determining articulations (not always explicitly defined as populist), which in turn reflect larger ontological debates over the spatial. Broadly following the antiessentialist reading of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), scholars have understood space as constituted by a radically open set of articulations that link across multiple spaces and times (Massey 1994; Barnett 2004; Featherstone 2011). Place, following Massey's (1991) well-known theorizing, is already constituted by multiple articulations to elsewhere, and it is the ongoing negotiation between different groups that identify with any given place that determines a hegemonic meaning of place (Massey 1994). This approach radically opens up the possibilities for subaltern agencies in determining how hegemonic projects are articulated in and through place (Featherstone 2011). At the same time, however, there is a risk in poststructuralist readings of place and articulation following Massey (and Laclau and Mouffe) that processes of determination, rooted in geographically and historically specific hegemonic projects and political economies, are sidelined, and this presents a key moment of divergence in the work of Hart (Hart 2007; Ekers, Kipfer, and Loftus 2020). Following Hart, we argue that if place is to provide a useful analytical framework for understanding populism, then we must be attentive to the contradictory processes through which articulations are historically and geographically determined.

We understand place as a geographical context through which political and social life is produced. Places are multidimensional, involving both material practices and symbolic representations (Lefebvre 1991), and consist of a specific location, a concrete everyday "locale," as well as a distinct "sense" or identity (Agnew 1987). The significance of place as context has been highlighted by electoral geographers (Agnew 1996; Johnston and Pattie 2006) as well as studies into social movements (Miller 2000; Nicholls 2009). In short, it plays an active role in shaping the political identities, opportunities, resources, and demands that sustain both electoral and contentious mobilizations. Place is not detached from society but is dialectically related, both producing and a product of social relations (Lefebvre 1991). Our political understanding of place is closely related to readings of scale, understood as levels of formal and informal political institutions (Miller 2000; Wills 2019). Places, as context for political activity, are not constrained to any single boundary but are formed in

relation to multiple scales (e.g., neighborhood, city, nation). Although we agree with Massey (1994) that places consist of articulations with extralocal experiences (i.e., a global sense of place), we part ways with poststructuralist readings of place that have sought to erase its scalar topography at the expense of exaggerated topological views of "flat space" (Marston, Jones, and Woodward 2005). The context of place must be understood in relation to both the identities and social composition of "the people" for whom it provides everyday lived experience and material practice, as well as political antagonisms that intersect with formal political institutions of the state, embedded at multiple scales.

Only recently have geographers made explicit interventions with regard to the study of populism, including on the role of place (Lizotte 2019). Building on long-standing work in electoral geography, Agnew and Shin (2017, 2019) provided an elaborate study into populism by looking at the shifting spatiality of voting patterns as well as how populism is "taken to the people" across geographical space, arguing that "[p]opulism takes on different forms at different times and in different places" (Agnew and Shin 2019, 46). Their work is helpful for identifying certain features of place—spatial demography, leaders, and political communication—that are expected to influence populist success. They focus predominantly, however, on the national scale and on electoral outcomes, and there is much scope for further expanding the perspective to consider subnational places and populist articulations beyond electoral cycles. Elsewhere, scholars highlight a historical shift from rural to urban bases of populist support as well as the urbanization of representations of the elite (U. Rossi 2018; Weinstein 2019). This literature demonstrates that populist electoral success is highly contingent on both the demographics of particular places and the geographical framings (and claims) of specific populist parties and leaders and calls for further work from a spatial perspective. Indeed, a geographical analysis has much to add to recent work that focuses on key actors of populist mobilization, notably social movements and political parties (Roberts 2006; Jansen 2011; Gerbaudo 2017; de Nadal 2020).

The work of Hart stands out for being the most asserted attempt to develop a geographical approach to populism. Based on a careful reading of the shifting political conjuncture in South Africa (and more recently India and the United States), Hart has demonstrated the potential for revitalizing Gramscian concepts of hegemony, articulation, and translation, critically engaging the insights of Laclau, Hall, and others (Hart 2007, 2013, 2014, 2019; see also Ekers, Kipfer, and Loftus 2020). Central to Hart's reading of Gramsci is that linguistics (and, hence, articulation and hegemony) are inherently spatial, as well as historical, and, as such, any populist analysis must pay close attention to those spatial relations (ideas, practices, and representations following Lefebvre) that make hegemonic projects possible. In other words, populism can only be understood in the context of place. In her work on South Africa, the articulation of class and race in a nationalist project is highly contingent on the space–time of 1990s (neoliberal) postapartheid. Hart drew on Massey's (1994) relational understanding of place that provides a "double articulation" in that it constructs subjects within it, but this subjectivity is brought about through already existing relations, and articulations, elsewhere (see Hart [2018a]). Hart (2018b) thus provided a deeply relational (and dialectical) mode of analysis to examine political conjunctures in their geographical (and historical) context. It must be noted that her approach has emerged in dialogue with colleagues (see Ekers et al. 2013) and overlaps with the work of others. Notably, the conjunctural and relational analyses of Kipfer have urbanized analyses of populism, considering dynamics of territorial state strategies alongside claims to spatial forms of (sub)urbanity (Kipfer and Saberi 2014, 2016) and provided insights into the spatiality of popular urban mobilizations (Kipfer 2019).

We take Hart's (and related) work forward by highlighting three elements of place as "context" through which populist actors mobilize. First, political subjectivities are constructed in and through place and provide a basis for articulating the people in a populist project. The significance of place for political subject formation has been well documented (Keith and Pile 1993; Nicholls 2021). Subjectivities are dynamic and relational, constantly in the process of becoming and drawing on extralocal experiences (Massey 1991). Indeed, transnational dimensions to populism are usually present, even if not always analyzed (Moffitt 2017; Bosworth 2020). Nevertheless, the shared lived experiences and representations of place provide sufficient stability to act as a basis for subject formation, which populist

projects might seek to strategically articulate in the course of mobilization (Agnew and Shin 2017; Lamour 2020). Second, political antagonisms reflect place-based hegemonies that could span both formal and informal political institutions (Hart 2014). Electoral geographers and political scientists have long emphasized the importance of place for structuring party alliances and cleavages (Johnston and Pattie 2006; Eaton 2017). In addition, places could facilitate the accumulation of resources (Nicholls 2009), including social and political capital, through which certain political forces or alliances gain hegemony (Stone 1993). Third, the context of place refers not only to its cultural and political particularities but also to the ideas and languages, including academic, that shape it (Sunley 1996; Gong and Hassink 2020). Places situate the translation of ideas and theories (Ekers, Kipfer, and Loftus 2020) and provide a vantage point for dialectical abstraction in the movement between generality and particularity (Hart 2018b; Cox and Evenhuis 2020). Crucially, place provides an entry point for a multiscalar, relational analysis of the conjuncture that, in turn, exposes key contradictions in populist articulations, thus providing insights into the failure and successes of hegemonic projects (Hart 2020).

Kirchnerism and the Populist Conjuncture

Before turning to our empirical analysis, we first "place" Kircherism within the historical and geographical contours of its populist conjuncture. Kirchnerism emerges from the Argentine tradition of Peronism, which first took shape during the government of Juan Domingo Perón (1946–1955) when it sought to incorporate "the people" within its national popular movement. This was a period in the region that has been characterized by Collier and Collier (1991) as a "critical juncture" leading to the major incorporation of labor movements by newly formed populist regimes (e.g., Vargas in Brazil or Velasco Ibarra in Ecuador). In Argentina, a national popular discourse emerged and became firmly rooted in the Peronist tradition. Explaining Peronism's characteristics and developments has been an ongoing point of debate.

For Argentine sociologist Germani (2006), populism was understood as a stage in modernization and the political incorporation of the masses. Moving away from the model of representative democracy, the national popular regime provided what Germani (2006, 234) called an "experience of participation" for the popular sector, or the "new" working class. At the same time, "the national" was used to refer to the transfer of loyalties from the local to the nation-state community, ensuring cohesion. The national popular thus responded to a particular conjuncture of ex-colonial countries, where the national interest is considered an expression of the people, whereas the elites are perceived as allies of colonial and foreign forces (Germani 2006). Laclau (1977) provided an alternative reading of Peronism that rejected the idea that populism is merely a transitional phenomenon and gave greater emphasis to the historical conditions that allowed for a strategic articulation across class and nonclass antagonisms. Peronism, then, is explained as a specific logic of political articulation via the division of the political field into two opposing camps: the people versus the elite or "anti-people." Yet this polarization is unstable, denoted by contingency and the constant struggle for the definition of those identities that, as a product of the articulation process, always remain contingent and precarious.

The first Peronist government came to an abrupt end with a coup d'etat, which led to a new phase across the region that O'Donnell (1988) termed "bureaucratic authoritarianism." Nevertheless, Peronism, understood as a popular and grassroots movement, continued to mobilize throughout the twentieth century, first through its linkages in the labor movement (James 1988) and later, following neoliberal restructuring, through new social movements. The 1990s generated a highly contradictory moment for Peronism. On the one hand, the Peronist party and elites underwent a radical reorientation as Peronism was appropriated by the neoliberal discourse of President Carlos Menem (1989–1999), which sought to represent the hopes and aspirations of a newly emerging middle class in the context of globalization (Viguera 1993; Novaro 1994; Nun 1995). On the other hand, a growing popular sector found itself once again disincorporated from the state following deindustrialization and a weakening of corporatist and welfare structures, provoking the mobilization of popular movements in which the strategic focus was territorial: to control and appropriate space to achieve their material and immaterial objectives (Merklen 2005; F. M. Rossi 2017; Halvorsen, Fernandes, and Torres 2019).

A profound economic and political crisis in 2001 opened a radically new conjuncture in Argentina that would provide the basis for a revitalized national popular Peronist movement. Under a logic of transversality, the newly elected Peronist President Néstor Kirchner responded to crisis by articulating across the territorially rooted popular sectors, political parties, trade unions, and elements of the local ruling class, which together would form the national popular movement known as Kirchnerism (Cantamutto 2017). This period reignited the study of populism and Peronism in Argentina in which, despite some debate (Aboy Carlés 2005), there is consensus over the populist character of the Kirchnerist governments, identifying diverse aspects including the overdetermination of the national popular state imaginary, the movementist grammar, and the construction of a popular subject (Biglieri 2010; Muñoz 2010; Natalucci 2010; Rinesi, Vommaro, and Muraca 2010). The populist project of Kirchernism was deepened following a crisis in 2008 in which the government faced a fierce backlash from rural sectors against proposed hikes to agricultural export tariffs. This provided an opportunity for President Cristina Férnandez de Kirchner to directly rally the people, which was further aided by the construction of new populist organizations such as La Cámpora that responded to her.

The deepening of populism from 2008 took place in a regional populist conjuncture in which years of popular revolt against neoliberal disincorporation was being articulated into movements that would invoke symbols such as indigenism (Bolivia), socialism (Ecuador), and Bolivarianism (Venezuela; Hawkins 2010; De la Torre and Arnson 2013; Silva and Rossi 2018; Andreucci 2019). This regional turn to left populism has received extensive analysis from scholars who both celebrate and lament its democratic implications (Paramio 2006; Schamis 2006; Follari 2010; De la Torre and Arnson 2013; Pogrebinschi 2013). For Kirchnerism, however, the significance of this regional shift is in the transnational support received by the Argentine government, as well as the resonance of popular sentiments performed in moments such as when Néstor Kirchner, flanked by Presidents Chávez and Lula, publicly rejected the International Monetary Fund at the summit of the Americas. Moreover, global events such as the World Social Forum, regularly hosted in South America, as well as the creation in 2008 of the Union of South American Nations (which integrated twelve states under a regional identity), gave a platform for the Kirchner presidents to stand shoulder to shoulder with regional leaders and speak to popular movements worldwide, including those mobilizing in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.

In this national and regional populist conjuncture, it is crucial, we argue, to analyze how populism was articulated in place, because local politics is often a site in which contradictions become visible and are played out (cf. Hart 2014). Studies into Kirchnerism have examined how the political incorporation of popular sectors (F. M. Rossi 2017), including the managing and distribution of social policy (Natalucci et al. 2013), have been guided by the territorial logics and strategies of the popular movements that emerged in the 1990s. Rarely, however, is the national popular analyzed from the context of place. The national popular discourse in Argentina, we argue, relies on a contradictory relationship to place-based context, both marginalizing it and relying on its articulation. The national is configured as a central hegemonic device, but we must pay attention to the various dimensions from which that signifier is filled with meaning: ideological, class, ethnic content, and so on. Moreover, this meaning needs to be built around a people subject: It is national, but it is also popular. In other words, the "people" are constructed via the multiple relationships and demands that are processed in the construction of a subject against the so-called elites, mobilized by parties, movements, and leaders. The national popular discourse, however, must be translated to (and from) the particularities of place-based context and the strategies of articulating place take on a central role.

Our analysis draws on two cases of place-based populist mobilization within the national popular Kirchnerist movement. First, we examine OBTA, a social movement that emerged in the province of Jujuy in northwest Argentina during 1999, in a context of economic and social crisis in the wake of more than a decade of neoliberal governments and social policies. Soon after the triumph of President Nestor Kirchner in 2003, OBTA was incorporated into the national movement, going on to gain roles in government, forming a political alliance as part of the strategy of incorporating "cross-cutting" movements defined by the first Kirchnerist government. Second, we examine NE, formerly called Encuentro

por la Democracia y la Equidad (Encounter for Democracy and Equity), a political party that was founded in 2004 in the province of Buenos Aires before arriving in CABA in 2008. Although small by electoral standards, NE became particularly well known in CABA for its large activist base. Although it was born as an independent force that provided "critical support" for the Kirchnerist government, from 2008 they gradually became closer to the national popular movement, eventually forming part of their electoral alliance for the final term of President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's rule (2011–2015).

Articulating Kirchnerism in Jujuy: OBTA

Jujuy is located in a frontier region with a high percentage of population of indigenous origin, little development of its productive sector, and high historical rates of poverty, unemployment, and job insecurity. These racial and socioeconomic variables intersect: The indigenous people are also the ones who carry out the most precarious and lowest paid work. It is also a highly unequal province, especially since the neoliberal period of the 1990s. In political terms, Jujuy can be characterized as part of the so-called periphery of incipient capitalist development, with little diversification and a historical concentration of political power in one party, the Peronist Party (PJ), demonstrating a weakly institutionalized party system with low competitiveness. Since the democratic transition in 1984, all of the provincial governors have been from the PJ, setting it up as a predominant party. Only in 2015 did it lose an election to the Cambiemos alliance, which also replaced the Kirchnerist national government.

Jujuy is thus a traditionalist, conservative, and sexist province with great inequalities. At the same time, and partly due to this, it is the place in Argentina where the fiercest popular protests during the 1990s took place. A growing cycle of social protest emerged throughout the country, with Jujuy a focal point for social mobilization. Vaca Ávila (2017) argued that the PJ's strategy was successful in winning elections but not in governing, due to social pressure and the growing atomization of the party, as it was overtaken by increasingly virulent factional struggles. In the face of the Peronist party being subsumed by factions and disputes, OBTA offered itself as an organization that represents the "genuine" popular form of Peronism, a possibility that opened up with the emergence of Kirchnerism and its local and transversal incorporations to the PJ itself.

The increase in mobilization is explained both by the pressure of fiscal adjustment imposed by the nation on the province and by the high rates of unemployment and job insecurity. The first element provoked a systematic delay in the payment of salaries to state employees, a situation that would trigger a strong mobilization of the social sector nucleated in the Front of State Unions. With regard to the second element, the focused policies that were implemented to respond to unemployment were inefficient and encouraged the organization of the unemployed, who would be at the forefront of the Libertadorazo uprising in 1997, when the first roadblocks were made by unemployed workers in the town of Libertador General San Martín–Jujuy. The political context of place—linked to a crisis of representation and factionalism of the political parties, on the one hand, and growth of protest with processes of grassroots social organization, on the other—is thus a key element to consider in our analysis.

From the point of view of the economic elite, the main private producer and employer in the province is the national company, Ledesma, owned by the Blaquier/Arrieta family. Ledesma leads the sugar and paper markets in Argentina and also participates in the alcohol, bioethanol, fruit, and citrus juice markets. It constitutes itself as an inescapable actor for understanding the constitution of the provincial power bloc, which has been sustained since the beginning of OBTA's activities, at the beginning of the twentieth century. Ledesma developed a controversial reputation, with allegations of exploitation of rural workers throughout its history and complicity with the last civic–military dictatorship.

OBTA was born as a social and political response to the consequences of the neoliberal period and, as such, organizes and feeds the sectors hardest hit by those years: the popular sectors, understood as not only the poorest population but, more broadly, all of the subordinates, across multiple dimensions: political, racial, cultural, and gender (Torres 2019). It is an organization that considers itself part of the national and popular movement, specifically Peronism, the main political movement in the province. Its political identity amalgamates this identification with cultural belongings linked to Andean

influence: its indigenism, the role of carnival, and the role of ceremonies such as the celebration of the *pacha mama*, which define its popular profile as opposed to the elites. The confrontation with local elites is reflected in their clear opposition to Ledesma's power, so much so that it was one of the main organizations that organized to include the Blaquier family in the "trials for memory," which judged the crimes against humanity perpetrated during the last civic–military dictatorship (1976–1983).

We propose, then, to reconstruct the way in which the organization articulates, on the one hand, political subjectivities and, on the other, antagonisms, within the national populist project, from the context of the place of Jujuy and its political geography. We understand Jujuy as a place inhabited by political subjectivities and antagonisms linked to three core elements: Indianness, social class, and gender inequalities. All of these cleavages are clearly articulated by OBTA, a large-scale social movement in the province during the Kirchnerist era that, outside the traditional PJ faction, fed the "new" Kirchnerist Peronism with the formation of a political identity, which is configured with and from particular local features.

A specific characteristic of OBTA's identity is represented by the indigenous factor, which refers to an ideological matrix that shapes various actions and decisions of the organization. The intersection between labor and ethnic categories led to a confluence of indigenous and class demands (Karasik 2005; Gaona 2018). The national popular tradition that was updated by OBTA during Kirchnerism incorporates new social, cultural, and socioeconomic cleavages in its discourse and its rupturist character. Indigeneity, sexual minorities, and human rights, among others, were incorporated into the demands and identity of Kirchnerism.

This articulation strengthened the plebeian power of "Tupaquero" Kirchnerism in Jujuy, challenging the structures of a province with traditional and conservative features. OBTA, in addition to claiming in its own name the indigenous leader Tupac Amaru, deploys a logo that depicts the province of Jujuy covered half by the Argentine flag and half by the Whipala flag (which represents indigenous peoples), and it is displayed prominently at all of its venues, soup kitchens, and mobilizations. The organization's indigenous roots are manifested not only in its symbols but also in the importance of the ancestral ceremonies and their places of realization (they built a replica of the Kalasasaya temple in the main neighborhood of OBTA, a copy of the one in Bolivia) and the privileged place of "the elders" leading all of the mobilizations and acts. The mobilization of Kirchnerism in Jujuy unfolded in a context of growing indigenous-led populism in neighboring Bolivia, which together shaped the regional conjuncture.

The role of social class in OBTA's activism is also central. OBTA is an organization that became hegemonic in Jujuy, playing a key role in incorporating the informal sectors into state policies and defining labor sources. A fact often pointed out is that OBTA represented, between 2003 and 2015, the third largest employer in the province, behind the company Ledesma and the provincial state, with a particular ability to create and enroll jobs in a "welfare scheme" (Manzano 2016) that included health, education, culture, and more.

Furthermore, the gendered nature of the organization has been the subject of study (Tabbush and Caminotti 2015; Gaona 2017), highlighting the leadership of a woman in a traditionalist province and the process of women's empowerment carried out by the organization at various levels. OBTA can be considered a women's movement under the leadership of Milagro Sala, which is exercised through a decentering of the gender roles expected between visible political women and figures of hegemonic femininity. The figure of female leadership that looks after the interests of the neediest people, which goes back to Evita Perón, was updated by Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and in Jujuy is represented by Milagro Sala as a "flag bearer of the humble," synthesizing in her figure all of the stigmas and reasons for discrimination that affect regional collective subjectivities: to be poor, to be Indian, to be a woman.

> To know Milagro, the leader of the Tupac, is to feel supported. It's a lot! To feel that, little by little, the men who are sexist, are no longer sexist, they have to respect you. (Nora, lawyer and member of OBTA gender group, Jujuy, 16 February 2016)

The practices and discourses of OBTA articulate this mythical element with the Kirchnerist present: The vision of Nestor and Cristina is the continuation of activism by the most neglected sectors, which OBTA clearly represents in Jujuy.

OBTA was thus able to articulate the various political subjectivities that populate subalternity in

Jujuy, and it did so with the national and popular project that was proposed by the Peronist government, while turning its back to the hegemonic party tool in the province: the PJ. The local, traditional Peronist party had shown that it no longer responded to the humble, the Indians, or the women, who had been suffering from *jujeña* inequality for a long time. OBTA, on the contrary, from a movementist grammar (Natalucci 2010), promoted the articulation of these multiple demands, inscribed in public space through unconventional repertoires of action and political subjectivities that wove together inequalities and submissions.

In short, the articulation of the Kirchnerist populist identity in Jujuy was developed by incorporating a regional indigenist matrix under the leadership of a coya woman. Their leader synthesized the multidimensionality of inequality in the province—social, economic, cultural, political, and gendered—reaffirming the particular features that make up the two poles of politics in the province: the people (under the key of multiple subordinations already indicated) versus the oligarchy (the Blaquier/Arrieta family and its close relations with the political and judicial power). The province has a historically and geographically rooted oligarchy that is amalgamated with the cleavages of class, race, and gender. In Jujuy OBTA thus easily recognized and defined the "other" against which its populist project was configured.

The Ledesma company, led by the Blaquier/Arrieta family, represents in a more paradigmatic way the oligarchy or antipeople in the province, linked to the political and judicial powers. This identification collaborates in mobilizing the various actors who conceived themselves as Kirchnerists in Jujuy—internal factions of the PJ, trade unions, and other social movements—and allowed, temporarily, to articulate across them all. They all shared the view of "the company" (as Ledesma is known in the area) as a powerful actor in both economic and political terms that responds to the interests of a provincial minority. OBTA played a crucial role in this definition and in publicly denouncing the company's labor irregularities while also being one of the main promoters of the trial "against humanity" against Blaquier.

For OBTA, the "anti-elite," the "people," or the "we" is made up of the poor, of Indians, and of women. As Horacio, a member of the gender working group, stated:

> In the Tupac and with Milagro, we have learned that we are no less than others because of our sexual choice, or because of the color of skin or because we have grown up based on buns [laughs].

Indeed, this affluence of demands of subordinates (by class, gender, and race) is expressed in the profound urban transformation generated by the Tupac Amaru and in its apparent obstinacy in building swimming pools in each of its neighborhoods, a material and symbolic claim that challenges years of exclusion from provincial public and private pools (Torres 2018).

The recent history of the province presents OBTA as a movement that knew how to articulate the popular sector's demands and subjects (across class, gender, and race) of Jujuy with the national popular project of Kirchnerism. This, however, opened various oppositions: On the one hand, there was the provincial PJ that saw its representation of the Peronist population questioned; on the other were certain union leaders who had lost their influence and, most central, the provincial economic and social elite, whom the OBTA framed as antagonistic economic and political actors in the region.

At the end of the Kirchnerist government, the contradictions and political confrontations that broke out in the province with the advance of OBTA deepened when an opposition government was inaugurated in the province and nation. The organization was persecuted (Milagro Sala and several leaders of OBTA were incarcerated) and dismantled, unable to maintain its power and influence without being part of a project of national and popular government.

The regional context of the retreat of left-wing populism and the growth of the right since 2015 was aggravated by the crisis in Bolivia in 2019, which had a profound demoralizing impact on activists in Jujuy. OBTA's lack of autonomy from the national popular project left little room for maneuvering, and the organization continued channeling the representation of the most vulnerable sectors of the province without national state support. Paradoxically, the harsh judicial situation of the members of the organization provoked national and international solidarity, indicating possible support bases for the popular

movement in the future at this highly uncertain time.

Articulating Kirchnerism in CABA: NE

Peronism has had a difficult history in the nation's capital city, one of the wealthiest regions in the country with a long history of foreign immigration. During the first decades of the twentieth century, the city was dominated by the Socialist and Radical political parties (Walter 1993). The latter provided a precursor to the national popular project of Peronism, yet with a greater emphasis on incorporating the middle classes following male suffrage (Rock 1975), whereas the former sought to capture the immigrant working-class population that had come to work in the ports (Walter 1977). Prior to decentralization in 1994 and the constitution of CABA in 1996, mayors in Buenos Aires were delegated by national governments. During Perón's first governments (1946–1955), there was an attempt to subsume the particularities of local concerns within the national project. As Landau (2018) summarized, this involved a shift away from neighborhood politics and alliances toward the installation of an "organized society" structured around Peronist indoctrination. As we see in what follows, this has, from the outset, posed a contradiction at the heart of Kirchnerism with regard to its articulation of subjectivities and antagonisms in Buenos Aires as it seeks to (re)affirm the national popular discourse through place-based articulations, thus making itself vulnerable when *porteños* seek to affirm their political subjectivities.

Since CABA's government was created in 1996, no Peronist candidate has been directly elected mayor, and Peronist coalitions, including Kirchnerists, have tended to fare poorly in legislative elections. Between 1996 and 2003, the city legislature and government were dominated by center-left factions, initially in alliance with the Radical party (UCR, which provided the first mayor) and then via a smaller progressive coalition, Frente Grande. From 2007, a new center-right party, the PRO, built hegemony, consistently controlling both the government and mayor's office, as well as majorities in the legislature, with Kirchnerist coalitions struggling to gain more than a quarter of the vote share despite President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner winning landslide national elections in 2007 and 2011. At the high point of the national popular movement, in 2011, CABA's residents voted for President Fernández de Kirchner in first place, yet her mayoral candidate only received 28 percent of the vote, as the PRO gained an easy victory for the city government. In a city where political life is already closely intertwined with national events, particularly from a mediatic perspective, the national–popular movement of Peronism has failed to establish a strong identity, and this challenge informed NE's strategies of articulation.

Since their arrival in the city, around 2007, NE has undergone a process of articulating the political subjectivities of Kirchnerism, and Peronism more broadly, in its mobilization strategies. NE initially defined itself as providing "critical support" for the government, yet maintained its own autonomous platform based on the progressive agenda that its leader, Martín Sabbatella, had developed through his mayorship of the provincial town of Morón. Key moments in the Fernández de Kirchner presidency pushed NE to define itself on the side of the government, as it did in 2008 when NE marched to support Kirchnerism against backlash from the agro-export sector (the "oligarchy") in the context of tariff hikes. Gradually, NE dropped its critical position and came to identify itself in support of the populist project. It was not until the 2011 elections that NE became formally part of the Kirchnerist movement and we can identify the party mobilizing exclusively in support of a populist project. From this moment, the party grew rapidly in CABA, particularly in terms of its grassroots organization of activists and branches. NE occupied a relatively unique political space in the city due to its capacity to articulate both Peronist and non-Peronist identities and saw its key function as expanding the horizons of Kirchnerism.

Following the victory of Kirchnerism in the national elections of 2011, Sabbatella noted that NE had brought an additional 700,000 votes for the president and commented:

> We are not part of the "non Peronist" current in the ruling coalition; in our interior, together with other national political traditions and cultures, popular, democratic, progressive and of the left, is the history, identity, and footprint of Peronism. … Kirchnerism is today an identity in construction that convokes and interpellates many. The challenge is for this historical movement to be able to give birth to the force that expresses it, synthesises it and organises it.

There are two important points to note from this quote. First, NE had come to position itself as both identifying with Peronism and also as being more-than-Peronist. The idea of the "left" is explicitly understood in Argentina as not being part of Peronism; instead, it represents the subjectivities of socialists and communists, the latter providing Sabbatella's first entry point into politics via the Youth Federation of the Argentine Communist Party. While mayor of Morón, Sabbatella also promoted a progressive urban agenda, leading the Network of Mercosur Cities at a time of leftist governments and participatory agendas, something that appealed to the (non-Peronist) progressives in CABA. NE thus used its unique position to articulate across a historically wide gap between Peronists and non-Peronists, creating a space for more-than-Peronists. Second, however, nowhere would this challenge be more difficult than CABA, and it is important to acknowledge that Sabbatella was speaking as national leader and not directly to the concerns of *porteños*. Indeed, his own electoral focus had always been on the traditionally Peronist province of Buenos Aires. As such, the leaders of NE in CABA had an additional challenge to articulate in the context of a city famed for its so-called *gorila* (anti-Peronist) tendencies.

We can observe NE's strategy of articulating (more-than-) Peronist differences by considering their highest profile candidate in CABA, Gabriela Cerruti, who has held a position in the local parliament and then national congress since 2007. Her journalistic background facilitated her strong media presence, particularly as social media was taking off, and she used this to represent a vision of NE's political subjectivity and vision of the city. In 2015 she ran as a mayoral candidate, giving her a platform to outline this vision. It is notable across two interviews how she simultaneously claimed that "the city is not gorila [anti-Peronist]" ("Gabriela Cerruti" 2015) while expressing her own distance from Peronism:

> Others learned their political formation from a military man, we learned political formation from a woman lawyer and I think now is a good time to demonstrate it. ("La Frase Antiperonista" 2015)

This demonstrates her attempt to separate Kirchnerism from an outdated Peronism through gender and an implied commitment to democracy. This was in line with Sabbatella's broader vision to update Peronism to the twenty-first century, yet her attempt to represent *porteños* involved a delicate balance with her (and the party's) relationship to Peronism. This modern view of Kirchnerism was presented toward what Cerruti saw as the liberal and "free-thinking" nature of *porteños*, who are not stuck in their ways. For NE's other candidates in CABA, such as their President José Cruz Campagnoli, it is the progressive characteristic of NE that is key, something he placed in a history of left-wing and "anti-neoliberal" expressions in the city.[1] Centrally, Kirchnerism presented NE with an opportunity to articulate a new, forward-looking identity that would not be tied to Peronism. In his closing remarks at a large rally in the city, Sabbatella noted:

> [Kirchnerism] is a founding identity of a new historical movement in Argentina; it is the representation of the interests of the popular minorities for the coming long years.[2]

At this same rally, the president herself spoke and mentioned that "we can't all think the same about everything, we come from different histories."

In addition to articulating a more-than-Peronist space with the electorate, NE sought to articulate the political identities of potential activists and thus expand its grassroots appeal. Although there were exceptions, the majority of activists came from outside Peronism and were in some cases hostile. What was interesting to note was the gradual process of "Peronization" that took place in activist identities. Fernanda, for example, was a local leader in the south of the city, responsible for branch activity. She played a crucial role in establishing links with local residents, particularly through an emphasis on engaging cultural activity. Through her activism in NE, her own identity shifted, as she described to me:

> Peronism was the most disgusting practice that I had come across in the area I was brought up, really bad, corrupt. … I was never going to join a Peronist organization such as La Cámpora, I never identified as Peronist and I only felt comfortable in other spaces, such as Nuevo Encuentro. … I think that Nuevo Encuentro made Peronism much more open, I think that after all that has happened I begun to understand Peronism from a different place, I don't know if I could tell you that I am Peronist or not now.

Fernanda's description of her passage into a political space shared with Peronism was typical of interviews with NE activists who described the key role of NE

in bringing them on this journey. Although few of NE's leaders came from Peronism, most came to embrace it through the subjectivity of Kirchnerism and its articulation with a broader set of values. At the same time, NE's articulation of Kirchnerism in CABA relied not only on more-than-Peronist subjectivity but on establishing a clear antagonism.

In addition to articulating with local identities, NE mobilized Kirchnerism by articulating with place-based antagonisms, particularly against the hegemony of the right-wing PRO party. The national popular movement of Kirchnerism emerged through a typical populist antagonism between *el pueblo* and the *anti-pueblo*, the latter a combination of national oligarchs and transnational neoliberal elites. In addition to the subjectivity of the people, this antagonism needed translation via place-based articulations in CABA. The growth of Kirchnerism as a national project and the building of NE as a grassroots political party both coincided with the rise of a new political force who used CABA to consolidate its local hegemony. Articulating an antagonism between the popular Kirchnerist project and the PRO led by Mauricio Macri, mayor and former president of one of CABA's famous football clubs, required first identifying conflicts and then framing them within the national project.

For example, in early 2012, NE, together with other progressive forces in the city, formed an alliance against Macri's 127 percent hike in metro fares. In this context, NE was explicit that Macri "is clearly the expression of the neoliberal ideology that in the nineties brought him to participate, from his company, in the process of privatization."[3] As they mobilized, NE used its trade union delegates to push for strikes and its neighborhood activists organized rallies on street corners under the slogan of "Enough Macri."[4] Following one of the most resounding mayoral victories in the history of CABA, NE sought to highlight the antagonism that existed between Macri's vision and the popular sectors of the city. A party statement noted:

> It is not unexpected that the worst areas of the *porteños* government are those destined for the large popular majorities, like transport and social policies. Those deficits are the fruit of the conservative and elitist vision of the "good child" that governs the richest district in the country.[5]

The metro fare hike mobilization intensified through a ten-day strike action in August 2012 that, although unable to halt the rise in fares, achieved better working conditions for delegates. During the strike, Macri claimed that the conflict was political maneuvering by Kirchnerist forces; yet in so doing, he fell into a trap of reproducing the national antagonism at the local scale. Hence, both NE and the Macri government found it convenient to articulate this antagonism as part of a national clash of political projects. It was crucial, however, that NE could, as with its political subjectivity, provide an expansive and open understanding of the Kirchnerist side of the antagonism. As they continued their campaign and as fares increased, NE responded with petitions and street actions in defense of the "many" against the few.[6] NE sought to build a popular mobilization that exceeded party lines in the city against the Macri government. Following a large march, NE stated:

> Because we want a city orientated toward popular needs and not for a minority, we raise our flags for more solutions and less make-up.[7]

By 2014, metro prices had almost tripled, and NE's delegates continued to call out Macri for his "exclusive and elitist conception of transport."[8] In this manner, they continued to appeal to as wide a sector of the city as possible to build an alliance against Macri while mobilizing support for Kirchnerism.

Joining the people under the Kirchnerist movement took on different forms across CABA depending on the local profile of the neighborhood and its activist base (see Halvorsen 2021). In middle-class areas, local branches focused on political education, providing public workshops and talks on a range of topics that exceeded a narrower focus on "Peronist" indoctrination of other Kirchnerist organizations. In working-class neighborhoods and informal settlements, the party focused more on providing mutual aid and a range of support, such as running after-school clubs.

By the end of the Kirchnerist government in 2015, NE had grown as a grassroots force, generating a broad support base for the national popular project by its capacity to articulate a more-than-Peronist movement in opposition to the neoliberal city government. On the one hand, this left NE on strong footing to evolve into a new electoral alliance between 2015 and 2019 that sought to further push at the boundaries of Kirchnerism, establishing links

with previously hostile politicians in a bid to better represent with the *porteño* voter (see Halvorsen 2020). On the other hand, however, with Kirchnerism now in opposition at the national stage, its political space was shrinking, and this inevitably meant a prioritization for candidates from more explicitly Peronist organizations such as La Cámpora, who had closer ties to the national leadership, and a subsequent marginalization of NE's candidates, leaving it in 2019 without any representation in the city legislature.

NE's role in articulating the national popular movement in CABA thus condensed an internal contradiction that would lead to a split in the party as different factions sought to realign themselves under a more explicit positioning within the national Kirchnerist movement (which by this stage had returned to government under the presidency of Peronist Alberto Fernández), with others promoting a more internationalist agenda based on a progressive municipal appeal. With left populism in retreat both nationally and regionally, and the right growing in hegemony in the city, NE was left with few strategic options in the short term. For some, the future must involve a more explicit incorporation by the party into the national movement, in the hope of receiving greater resources (including candidates). For others, though, the way forward is the opposite: a long-term project to build a popular *urban* movement that can learn from new municipal experiences worldwide, such as that of Barcelona.

Conclusion

As populism increasingly commands attention within the current global conjuncture (see Hart 2020), developing spatially sensitive analyses will generate important insights. Recent scholarship has begun to take seriously the multiple scales that intersect in populist analyses, including the urban and transnational (Featherstone and Karaliotas 2019; Bosworth 2020; Popartan et al. 2020). In this article, we demonstrated how a spatially informed conjunctural analysis of Kirchnerism provides the basis for understanding the strategies and tensions in the articulation of national popular movements in place. Although we focused specifically on the role of parties and movements, further analysis could productively engage the role of place-based leadership and some of the confluences and tensions this provides for populism. Moreover, there is scope for greater attention to geographical difference across and within different places, something this article has only just begun to explore. In conclusion, we wish to highlight that a spatially sensitive analysis of populist movements, in this case focused on place, not only is of theoretical interest for how we understand populism but has important political consequences for the potential successes or failures of national popular movements themselves.

By articulating between the national popular movement and the particularities of place, tensions and contradictions inevitably arise. In the case of OBTA, we observed a social movement that managed to build hegemony in Jujuy, incorporating local identities around questions of indigeneity and gender as well as firmly situating itself in a particular antagonism. The early decision of the movement to join so strongly with the national popular project, however, left it exposed once Kirchnerism was electorally defeated. This led to the incarceration of their leader, Milagro Sala, as well as the rapid deterritorialization of the movement itself. The case of NE is more complicated, because it sought to position itself as an open and heterodox form of Kirchnerism that distinguished itself from larger, Peronist forces such as La Cámpora. Although this gave the party a political opportunity to expand its base of activists and, to a lesser degree, electoral support, it was always vulnerable to being relegated by larger political forces. In short, its successful alliance with leftist and progressive forces in the city was simultaneously a threat to the hegemony of dominant Kirchnerist organizations. Their inability to construct a new hegemony in the city ultimately led to the implosion of the party and a rapid end to its attempts to articulate a new meaning of Kirchnerism in the CABA.

Drawing lessons from our place-based analysis of populism is challenging, and we move cautiously against making any sweeping conclusions. Nevertheless, it is evident that the multiscalar and relational place-based dynamics of national popular movements deserve greater attention from scholars and activists alike. A key task is to move beyond those analyses that remain in the realm of electoral politics, as seen in a growing Argentine literature on subnational dynamics (Mauro et al. 2021), and take seriously the social construction of local hegemonies and configurations of power. We have shown that locally rooted populist movements are likely to be

fickle if dependent on their position within ever-shifting national electoral alliances. At the same time, too much autonomy from the national popular posed a threat to Kirchnerism, thus creating strategic dilemmas. Yet the lack of will from national leadership to invest greater resources in the long-term construction of popular movements in specific places has political consequences. At the time of writing, CABA has seen the rapid and seemingly unexpected rise of right-wing populist Javier Milei, outflanking much of the mobilization work of grassroots Kirchnerists in recent years. In Jujuy, Gerardo Morales of the right-wing Change Juyjuy Front is midway through his second term as provincial governor. There are no simple responses, but the national popular movement must assume its historical and geographical responsibility in the configuration of Argentina's new and precarious post-Kirchnerist conjuncture.

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Notes

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