

Banging On The Pots And Pans

By: Karin vonKrenner

I love hot fudge Sundays. Layered, tactile tastes and textures. Savouring the fleeting experience while shovelling it down before it melts into mush. Moving house is similar. Layered challenges. Hopes for new opportunities and dreamed adventures. The tingly mushes of sadness of leaving friends and familiar places. A present life, melting like ice cream on the tongue.

Packing is a selective wrapping of memories we choose to relive. A broken toy from That Birthday or tarnished decoration from That Christmas. Bring it, sell it, give it away? We are torn from the past and rushed into an uncertain future. Scheduled to choose, wrap and label for an unknowable future. We are pressed to assess and reassess the priorities of emotions tied to -things.

Moving Day arrives and the truck rocks up. It's too late to undo it all. Grab a box and start stacking. This is when neighbours and friends pop up like "wack-a-moles" to help. Mostly they mean well and in their potential assistance, always welcome. (Especially those who bring food!) Inevitably, there Will be the box labelled "Handle With Care-FRAGILE!!!" hitting the pavement with a spectacular crash. Regardless of the amount of exclamation marks on the box, it will get dropped. It's Murphy's Law of Moving.

Savvy friends who have moved before, put in the hours knowing the end reward of the "Great Toss It Event". The moment fatigue hits and the thought of packing one more thing, is simply impossible. I don't care if Grandma Moses painted it! Toss it! Like brides maids catching the bouquet, it's a scramble on who gets what.

The truck careens off into the sunset and it's finally over at the end. Unpacking it all later will be a messier version of Christmas. Despite best efforts there are always surprise boxes. And, of course, the mysterious missing boxes. Boxes you swear you packed that vanish into a parallel universe along the way, like socks in the dryer.

My 2 boxes of pots and pans (carefully labelled and colour coded) did the parallel universe thing during my last move. Which left me in a sorry state of hunger coupled with a political dilemma. Was it a good thing they were gone? My empty stomach rumbled in protest.

My arrival coincided with a country happily rioting against the latest political shenanigans of their government. Regardless of reason, the French practice a distinctive protest with the clatter of their kitchen accessories. Banging saucepans in France dates back to the Middle Ages. Villagers traditionally used this custom to humiliate ill-matched marriages and annoy unpopular aristocrats.

Today, the chorus of saucepans, known as "casseroles," continues to express their displeasure and anger at any misbehaving politicians or, icky marriages.

This tradition, deeply ingrained in French culture, faced an ironic twist when President Macron, (who is adamant on protecting "authentic" French-ness), attempted to ban this tradition during his speaking tour of the very annoyed rural communities.

The French, bless them, are not easily swayed away from their kitchen utensils. French politicians should know better and the big pots came out of the cupboards.

Crushed into silence by the noisy protests the poor man fled back to Paris where burning cars seemed easier to deal with.

The saucepan's role as a symbol of French protest began in the 1830s. Deeply displeased with a new king, the French expressed their disapproval through a custom known as "charivari" (making a racket). Charles X abdicated fleeing for the sake of his ears and, head. Current politicians maintain tradition by also fleeing.

History plodded on and pots, lids, and spoons as a form of protest spilled out of kitchens and onto global streets during the 20th century. Algeria joined the cacophony in their fight for independence. Lebanon, Kenya and Myanmar followed suit with their empty pots protesting rising costs of living.

However, the kitchen pots' true prominence as a tool of protest emerged in South America. In 1971 Chile, (not chilli) masses of people banged "cacerolazos" pots and pans protesting food shortages during Salvador Allende's regime.

Combined with the practicality of cooking, banging pots shares a unique symbolism for hunger and a demand for justice that now spans continents.

In an increasingly violent world rocked by climate crisis ,inflation and war, perhaps it's a good idea to put aside destructive weapons. Instead head to the kitchen, grab the biggest pots and spoons available and make a global racket against broken political systems. Drown out corrupt politicians intent on only filling their own pots. It does begs the question, will we still be shot if we are armed with noise instead of rocks? It's a good question.

Back in Paris, France, the shooting of 17-year-old Nahel Merzouk on June 27th,2023 bore eerie similarities to America's George Floyd case. Compelling videos exposed police brutality and a deeply-rooted racism. Nahel, fell victim to the prejudice of his North African descent and, the colour of his skin.

This poisonous virus of cultural patriotism is spreading worldwide. Political leaders exploit it to deflect attention from draconian economic policies. In the historic political playbook, it is used to create scapegoats and re-direct public anger.

It's not our fault, it's "them". The ones who are "different" from us. Needs some fuzzy reminders via Hitler, Mussolini, Trump or UK's Boris Johnson? Is Frances Macron following suit? Does preserving "culture" support an "us vs them" agenda of division and hate?

And, seriously, in a world of mixed DNA, who the hell is "them" anyway. At what point do we tell our children they are simply, human. (Might be up to the singularity of AI to sort us out as a species vs colour shades.)

In the kitchens of both the US and France, the recipe for peaceful protests has some distinct ingredients. Both countries share commitments to preserve the act of dissent. To date, our pots and pans are not yet considered contraband weapons. In France, the right to protest is ingrained in the country's legal culture. The French Constitution recognizes the right to demonstrate and assemble peacefully. It acknowledges these actions are fundamental to a democratic society.

However, similar to cooking a delicate soufflé, there are ingredients to ensure a harmonious outcome.

French law requires organizers notify their local authorities in advance of protests. This is to allow for coordination and ensuring public safety. Which seems reasonable. My spoon is suspended for the moment but keeping an eye on my pot, just in case..

The caveat being that, although peaceful protests are protected, there are instances where police may intervene. *“If the demonstrations pose a threat to public order or security”*. And there it is. Who gets to decide what constitutes a “threat”? I think it may be time to bang my pot again.

In a broken system, who defines what a threat is and, who are the “threatened”? Yep, it’s a very twisted yet pertinent question.

Across the Atlantic in the good ole US of A, the recipe for peaceful protests is our First Amendment, which was cooked up as a side sauce to our Constitution. It explicitly safeguards our rights to freedom of speech and assembly.

Despite a cultural ocean between the two countries, the caveats are similar. Yes, the right to protest is protected. But. The US legal system distinguishes between peaceful assembly and actions that incite violence or pose *clear* threats. This wording recently caused a US ex-president to take a legal tumble. “Inciting violence” adds a nuanced approach the French version lacks. Perhaps this explains all the car burning in Paris. Maybe not. Maybe they just hate cars. Which is Very Un-American. I would never burn my car.

Both systems were however, created with an intention of creating balance in the freedom to protest while maintaining order and protect the common good. In a perfect world, this would be very ok or, “d’accord”.

In the face of complex modern issues, the traditional protest using pots and pans bears a deeper significance. It reaches back through our mutual histories. It's a symbol of unity, as people from different backgrounds come together to demand change. It transcends political boundaries reminding us that some problems are universal and require collective action. All the cooks in the global kitchen stirring up the future.

In the grand kitchen of life's complex recipes, the traditional pots-and-pans protest emerges as a simmering stew of something deeper than just kitchen noise. It's the clamour for justice. The boiling demand for equality, and a french-fried declaration that old prejudices have overstayed their welcome. It is a unified racket drowning out borders, and reaffirming the belief that certain conundrums transcend borders and necessitate a global clash of sound.

The rhythmic clanging of ladles and pots transforms into a symphonic cry for brotherhood and decent life standards. People coming together across all cuisines creating a potluck for humanities inclusive progress.

Despite shared histories, protests in France intersect with the deeply ingrained sense of “liberty, equality, and fraternity”, while in the US they play a crucial role in advancing civil rights and challenging systemic injustices. Both however are democracies that are inherently dictated “by the people”. Protesting is the voice of the people.

As France and the USA navigate their complex, political landscapes, protests will continue to serve as a powerful tool for citizens to express their grievances, challenge authority, and advocate for positive change. In both countries, the right to protest must be defended as an essential aspect of our democratic values, allowing the voices of the people to be heard.

The right to engage in peaceful protest stands as a universal and potent tool for citizens across every nation. It represents the collective expression of populations seeking change, justice, and progress, transcending both geographical boundaries and cultural differences.

From bustling streets to sprawling avenues this right empowers individuals to shape the course of their societies and the world at large. It underscores the fundamental principle that a democracy's strength lies in its people's ability to peacefully assemble, voice their concerns, and contribute to the ongoing evolution of their nations.

Stripping societies of this right would stifle a crucial channel for citizens to proactively engage with their governments. The ability to peacefully protest serves as a critical counterbalance to power and a mechanism for societal growth, reminding us that the collective voice is an indispensable ingredient in the recipe for human progress.

So, as pots and pans resound in a wonderful uproar, know that in the grand Michelin kitchens of the world, even a kitchen utensil can stage a revolution.

Get out your pots and start banging if you believe in any of these things. It's time to get cooking.

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