“Consumerism and its Discontents:

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of History
in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT


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This dissertation explores the quotidian experience of economic development by studying both the material realities and discursive worlds of 1960s Argentina. I reveal the gendered relationship between economic development and an expanding consumer culture by analyzing the use, circulation, and meanings attributed to household appliances by journalists and public intellectuals. In the late 1950s, many economists, politicians, and intellectuals fervently believed they had found an economic model — developmentalism — that would finally provide the means of raising Argentines’ standard of living and make the Argentine economy as robust as those of the United States and Northern European countries. Household appliances played a key role because they achieved both those goals, (supposedly) improving women’s lives in the process by in part facilitating their increased participation in the workforce.

Developmentalists believed their economic model to exist independently of ideology and cultural influences, but their model encountered cultural realities that limited its success. Consumerism—the way through which Argentines interacted with development—and its effects on family and gender relationships complicated the process. Both supporters and critics of developmentalism attacked women’s roles as consumers to articulate many of their protestations against changes in women’s status and to express anxieties about seemingly unrelated social and cultural changes. I argue that through the course of the 1960s the discussion about consumerism increasingly became a way through which different groups offered distinct visions of how “Argentine society” ought to be transformed.

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This study draws on a broad array of written and oral sources. To trace the connection between economic development and consumer society, I interweave an analysis of economic and infrastructural data – such as production statistics or the availability of gas, water – with a study of socio-cultural discourses found in a wide variety of magazines, essays, films, and interviews. I juxtapose these sources in unusual ways to demonstrate two things. First, the cross-referencing of disparate sources to reveals a fuller, more complete picture of economic development and its effects—transcending macro-structural phenomenon to offer a view of quotidian change. And, two, this more complete pictures details how a narrative of hope and idealism evolved into one of anxiety and vitriol as the decade progressed.
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Introduction

In June 1963 the influential Argentine magazine *Primera Plana* published an article describing how the “consumption habits of the [average] Argentine show a society and a people in a process of sharp transition.” To demonstrate this fact the article provided data from motivational research published by the manufacturer of a washing machine, as well as the magazine’s own research regarding Argentines’ use of refrigerators. According to the logic of the magazine, “market surveys and motivational research…are gathering a mountain of information regarding ‘who is the [average] Argentine.’”¹ This exciting data -- some of the first of its kind to be collected in Argentina -- was interpreted to grasp not only the psychological state of that “average Argentine” but also how companies could better sell to him/her.

The article particularly focused on some “fascinating” findings concerning lower-middle-class Argentine women in order to explain Argentines’ ambivalence to this “process of sharp transition.” The manufacturer wanted to find out why their washing machines were breaking at disproportionately high rates. The survey reported that lower- and middle-class women felt guilty for having their domestic workloads lightened by the appliance. Believing the washing machines undermined their status as “queens of their home,” the women reportedly sabotaged their own appliances, violating basic instructions on how to operate the machines. Contrary to the recollections of women who presented

themselves as enthusiastically purchasing appliances, the psychologists hired by the manufacturer to investigate the problem argued the anxieties demonstrated by these housewives indicated the resistance of lower-class women to change, as well as their incapacity to recognize that this technology was “meant to help” them.\(^2\) As advertising of appliances like washing machines was increasingly aimed at the lower classes, for whom “both prejudices and resistance to innovation appeared stronger,” the magazine and the manufacturer worried about how to keep up strong sales of appliances, which were crucial to maintaining a strong local industry. Yet, at the same time, the article concluded that anxiety about economic and social instability caused Argentines to consume at a rate much higher than their peer countries: Argentines were seeking solace in material goods. Argentines, the magazine worried, were becoming too materialistic and consumeristic.

This article from *Primera Plana* highlights most of the ambivalences that dominated discussions regarding both consumer culture and economic development in Argentina. *Primera Plana* was strongly developmentalist; this meant the editors believed Argentina needed to pass through a series of universal stages before becoming an industrialized, high consumption society like the United States or those of Northern Europe. The editors wanted sales of domestically produced washing machines and other appliances to fuel both processes of industrialization and high levels of consumption. As

\(^2\) Anecdotal evidence from interviews strongly contradicts this assertion. All women I spoke with welcomed the arrival of the washing machine and wished they had been able to purchase it earlier. Only one woman said her Spanish mother-in-law did not want her to purchase the appliance because “real” women washed clothes by hand, but the interviewee portrayed this way of thinking as outdated.
demonstrated by the article, developmentalists also exuded a deep faith that surveys and other social scientific research methods could be applied to improve marketing and advertising techniques. Better advertising and marketing meant higher sales, and higher sales meant a growing economy. These thinkers applauded both the increased statistical knowledge quantitative social science techniques supplied and how it improved sales of key consumer goods like washing machines and refrigerators. Developmentalists wielded modern sociological survey techniques in order to find out the mental state of the “average Argentine” insofar as that mental state affected sales and consumer habits.

To be sure, these developmentalists were not as interested in how Argentines felt about changes in consumer culture, the rise in consumer debt, or changes in social structure as the country became more industrialized. They simply saw household appliances, which could be produced domestically, as crucial to Argentina’s industrialization. Putting technology in the home would boost industrial development and allow Argentine families to enact first-world lifestyles. It was part of an economic formula, one that required consumer participation and held the promise of a raised standard of living. That is where their understanding of the impact of household appliances ended.

Yet, this article also evinces a growing ambivalence about how a burgeoning consumer society was making Argentines increasingly materialistic, showing how consumerism was both a salvation and a curse. The article reflects a growing distrust of the female consumer for not acting in what was her “rational” best interest. While we cannot really know why those washing machines were breaking—the reluctance of
industry cheerleaders to admit manufacturing defects would not be unexpected—both the journalists and the industry representatives viewed any kind of cultural resistance to the use of new goods as a psychological fault, an irrational fear, something that needed to be conquered and defeated rather than explored.

This dissertation investigates seemingly disconnected economic, social, and cultural changes to trace the connections among development policies, a boom in consumption, and changes in daily life in Argentina. I ponder the question: what does it mean to live in a developed country, and how is that development measured? After researching the history of the washing machine in Chile, I became interested in learning how the production and consumption of appliances can be used as a metric of development rather than, say, the production of steel. The study of appliances gave particular insight into understanding the quotidian experiences of development and also revealed the unexpected, often gendered, anxieties that arise around changing practices of consumption and development. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Argentine politicians, journalists, industrialists, and everyday citizens sought to realize their vision of a “developed” Argentina. Among other things, a “developed” Argentina would have a robust manufacturing sector that would supply its citizens with objects of first-world comforts. Those objects would principally consist of household appliances, the use of which would be made possible by universal access to water, gas, and electricity. Thus, economic development would be driven by the pocketbooks of Argentine consumers and

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facilitated by infrastructure built by the government. Yet these plans produced unexpected results: the Argentine government was only able to fulfill these promises of development unevenly across the nation. And the intellectuals and journalists who lauded and encouraged Argentina’s move towards a consumer-driven economy at the beginning of the decade vigorously resisted unforeseen cultural changes resulting from a surging consumer culture. The end result was general discomfort with perceived changes in gender roles and the increased consumerism associated with that drive.

This dissertation clarifies many fundamental issues of Argentine, development, and consumption history. First, I explore how this iteration of consumerism, so connected to economic development, differed from previous waves of economic expansion that have occurred in Argentina since the 1880s. I also show how the growth of a consumer culture was stimulated by an explosion in the media and advertising. While other scholars have documented this phenomenon, I demonstrate how it was purposefully fomented by businessmen, politicians, and even powerful journalists. I argue that the media and advertising were tools in the developmentalist economic programs favored in the early 1960s and should not be understood as solely part of the international popular culture explosion. Second, I demonstrate that despite idealistic

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enthusiasm, development programs were unevenly implemented across Argentina, thus different cities had higher or lower standards of living depending on the availability of services. To this end, I focus on the Argentine cities of Córdoba and Salta in addition to Buenos Aires. In the 1960s, “development” was a buzzword that engaged the imaginations of politicians, intellectuals, and ordinary people alike. “Third-world” decolonization and national liberation movements sought not only political but also economic liberation. This meant there were feisty debates about how to measure development, what it entailed, and how it was to be achieved. To optimistic minds in search of a new world equality, it was just a matter of finding the right model. In Argentina this often meant the rest of the country needed to “catch-up” to the capital of Buenos Aires, which since the late-eighteenth century has aggregated a disproportionately large amount of the nation’s media, intellectual production, and wealth. Despite the best intentions of the developmentalists, the lack of development and wealth outside the capital heavily influenced how those in the interior\(^6\) participated in a consumer society. And third, I explore how Argentines reacted to, commented on, and negotiated these economic, social, and cultural changes. I demonstrate that Argentines were engaged in a vociferous self-analysis that took as its subject the discourse surrounding consumerism. In effect there was a deep ambivalence at the heart of Argentine consumerism: many ordinary Argentines welcomed the increased comfort

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\(^6\) In Argentina, anything outside greater Buenos Aires, or at least the province of Buenos Aires, is referred to as the interior. When used by porteños, which it often is, it conveys a certain condescending attitude about life outside of Buenos Aires. The term embodies a whole litany of understandings about the unequal political, cultural, and economic relationships between Buenos Aires and the rest of the country. The use of the term could be a study in its own right.
items like appliances provided to them, yet they also feared that advertising would make Argentine children into materialistic slaves of a foreign capitalist machine. In addition, hyper-rational proponents of developmentalism -- those who promoted the universalistic, scientific nature of development -- verged on the hysterical in their opposition to consumer culture, especially in the ways that they perceived women to benefit from that consumer culture. I explore why development was hailed as positive, progressive, productive, and masculine by Argentine journalists, intellectuals, and politicians and why the resulting consumerism –the intended result, a necessary part of the economic equation – was decried as passive, immoral, illogical, and feminine by those same people later in the decade. By examining the two sides of the same discursive coin (development and consumerism), we can begin to see how deeply held cultural notions of gender, progress, and modernity shaped such reactions. In other words, these were two totally different ways of representing the same phenomena.

Household appliances played a crucial role in shaping Argentina’s consumer society of the 1960s. In general, consumer durables and household appliances are ascribed meaning and help shape identities, although in different ways than the more obvious markers of status like clothing, cars, or furniture. As social scientist Helen Meintjes noted when studying the meaning of the washing machine in Soweto homes, appliances,

though easily thought of as mundane run-of-the-mill possessions, similar in nature and defined only by their purpose are no different to any other household belongings in their symbolic capacity. They create and communicate meaning by their presence in the home and are as much part of a meaning system in which gender and generational relations are
shaped and acted out, social status is marked, ideology is represented, aspirations are manifested, or strategies for living are mirrored, as any more obviously symbolic domestic objects.\textsuperscript{7}

Indeed, discussions about appliances (their importance, their use, their utility) have proven ideal for gauging attitudes regarding gender roles. In addition, they were some of the most important status symbols in 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s Latin America. Household appliances were viewed as symbols of progress and modernity in part because they were technological items and in part because the technology had originated in the United States or Europe, both seen as representing superior cultures and economies. Imports continued to carry cultural capital in Latin American societies even as many governments were trying to promote locally produced items. Therefore, advertisers emphasized how appliances would make:

an easier life filled with American and European technologies, one not so taxed by the drudgery and strain of washing,...a more civilized life. Washing clothes had always been a human labor; that a machine could now replace that labor was remarkable, and implicitly progressive. Advertisements [for washing machines] emphasized the centrifuge and its labor-saving capacity as particularly 'modern.' That it was a mechanical process that replaced labor was implicitly modern...\textsuperscript{8}

In part it was this symbolic modernity that made household appliances such an important part of the industrialization project of the developmentalists. On another level, Argentines needed reliable access to water, electricity, and gas in order to make use of

\textsuperscript{7}Helen Meintjes, “‘Washing Machines make Lazy Women’: Domestic Appliances and the Negotiation of Women’s Propriety in Soweto,” \textit{Journal of Material Culture} 6, no. 3 (2001): 346.

\textsuperscript{8}French-Fuller 85.
these labor-saving status symbols. In this way, their use and circulation came to be
directly tied to infrastructure. As this dissertation demonstrates, appliances provide a
unique window onto the gendered connections between consumerism and economic
development.

A Note on Terminology

In its most basic form, consumption refers to the purchase and use of goods and
services. It both precedes and goes beyond the act of purchasing an object and involves
the use, display, and circulation of an item. Yet consumption is much more than that.
Scholars have determined over the past half century that consumption is a primary site for
the establishment and contestation of personal identities. As George Ritzer and Don
Slater said in the inaugural issue of the *Journal for Consumer Culture*, “All acts of
consumption are profoundly cultural.”

Therefore I understand consumption to be a site of active, socio-cultural process through which the terms of daily life are contested.

The process of consumption is also embedded in gender, class, and family
identities, relationships, and ideologies. In this way, consumption marks difference
within and belonging among social groups. It produces meanings thoroughly linked to
contemporary cultural themes, as well as offering a representation of social relations
specific to the historical moment and place in which it occurs. I argue that as
consumption becomes a primary way to assert a sense of belonging—and thus a sense of

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how people are a part of an imagined community — it affects and even alters Argentine conceptions of identity. In this regard, identity is best understood as a continual, shifting process produced within material realities and discourse, which is a system of representation. Thus, to reiterate, consumption is not only an economic function; it also sustains and reproduces social systems.

Consumerism and consumer cultures are generally associated with “modern” or “post-modern” societies in a state of advanced capitalism. Consumption may be associated with all human societies, but in consumerism and consumer culture “key social values, identities, and processes are negotiated through the figure of ‘the consumer’ (as opposed to, say, the worker, the citizen, or the devotee).” Thus, personal identity is largely constructed in relation to the things one owns, and status becomes expressed primarily through forms of conspicuous consumption along with “the decline of traditional status systems.” In a consumer society citizens also begin to primarily express a feeling of national belonging through consumption: those unable to access comfort and technology feel excluded from the national community. And lastly, consumerism equates personal happiness with the purchase and use of goods, an assertion frequently found in advertising images and commented on in late 1960s Argentina.

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12 Ritzer and Slater 6.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

The media and advertising play an important role in creating new identities as they increasingly hail consumers through the discourse of consumerism. This discourse constructs self-conceptions through a normalizing practice involving the appropriation and use of consumer items (which themselves are discursive and performative). As everyday life is infused with consumerism, most aspects become commercialized and the nation in part becomes an “interpretive community of consumers” or a consumer society. The media, advertisers, and government produced a discourse of what it meant to be a modern-day citizen of Argentina through the use of those consumer items. This discourse was interpreted and modified by ordinary citizens. And Argentines did discuss the new sociedad de consumo (consumer society) in magazines, comic strips, and letters. For example, a female letter writer to the popular magazine Confirmado complained that a regular column about consumption and trends aimed at women had gone too far, that the column was fomenting a crass brand of materialism. The author of a popular comic strip reflects on the pervasive nature of advertising and branding through an episode in which the title character, a little girl named Mafalda, goes to the beach and finds a seashell. She tells a friend she has found the Shell logo, and the friend decides to search the sand looking for the Esso logo! Examples such as these demonstrate that Argentines were self-consciously ambivalent about how much consumer habits and advertising were changing their society.

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16 Garcia Canclini 25.
18 Quino, Mafalda, El Mundo, February 9, 1966. See chapter 3 for an extensive discussion of this comic strip.
Because of its rich possibilities, I analyze the phenomenon of consumerism and its relationship to economic development through studying the production, circulation, use, and symbolic meaning of household appliances. In order for that relationship to be revealed, I strive to apprehend consumerism as a phenomenon that satisfies not only desires but also needs. Many scholars of consumption and consumerism often ignore this difference. Preeminent historian of consumer culture Frank Trentmann explains this disconnect, arguing that scholars of consumption break into two schools that often talk past each other. The first is concerned with shopping and mass consumption and analyzes the “arrival” of a consumer society in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe. He states that historians working on shopping and mass consumption “argued that a modern consumer society only developed once the large bulk of society, freed from the regime of needs, was able to enter a system of ever-expanding goods and desires.”

This definition is unsatisfactory because it excludes the possibility of necessity or utility as a part of consumer culture. Consumer durables are less susceptible to trends, but they also, in fact, greatly improve the standards of living of the consumers who purchased them in a way that a pair of jeans, a record, or a bottle of wine cannot. Appliances are eminently useful in this sense. They alleviate drudgery (washing machine), re-organize daily chores (refrigerator), make cooking more hygienic (gas stove), and even connect people to crucial information across space (television). This difference between

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appliances and other consumer goods is what makes them useful in revealing the link between consumerism and development.

The other school of consumption studies emerged from historians of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, who “worked with a theory of culture inspired, in part, by Durkheim and Mary Douglas, where ‘need’ is as much a cultural construct as ‘desire.’” Trentmann goes on to say that “writers privileging the twentieth century often employed an essentialist definition of needs that stood in stark contrast with the ‘culture’ of consumerism” and therefore needs were specifically excluded from understandings of consumerism.\footnote{Trentmann, “Beyond Consumerism,” 375.} Appliances during my period of study went from being perceived as a “luxury” to a “need” in a few short years and reflect changing notions of cleanliness, the use of time, and allocations of labor. Utility and necessity, in addition to status and belonging, inescapably form how I think about consumerism.

My work emphasizes not only the circulation and use of goods but also the role industrial production and availability of services in creating a consumer culture. At first blush it might appear that I am solely interested in the traditional production/consumption relationship. However, I argue that looking at the production/consumption dichotomy implies a straightforward analysis of economic relationships. This work is deeply engaged in the cultural understandings associated with economic practices and how this interaction changed daily life and gender roles. As feminist critics have noted, both consumerism and development were shaped by similarly gendered, universalizing values.
Literature Review

This dissertation enters into conversation with the literatures on 1) post-World War II consumer societies, 2) feminist critiques of economic development and 3) 1960s Argentina. While some US-based historians of consumption have argued that South American countries are too poor for consumer politics to matter, daily life and consumption in the region have received an increasing amount of attention, especially from scholars of Argentina. Historians like Fernando Devoto, Marta Madero, and Ernesto Goldar have focused on daily life in earlier time periods, especially the 1920s and 1950s. Argentine historians of consumption like Fernando Rocchi have mostly explored consumption using a top-down economic approach that highlights government policies crucial to understanding consumption in earlier decades. Rocchi’s excellent economic history *Chimneys in the Desert* takes a macroeconomic lens to consumption and seeks to broaden understandings of early industrialization in Argentina. Using an economic definition whereby mass consumption equals the presence of a consumer society, he argues that mass consumption began in the early twentieth century with the growth of consumer demand in a booming export economy. Rocchi contends that the study of demand reveals “the importance of the domestic economy in different spheres of Argentina’s social life by studying industry during the export boom years.” Following the evolution of the use of specific consumer goods (like ready-to-wear clothes and

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cigarettes), increased consumption, he argues, meant that “the market became the driving force in sociability… Market values reached a point when they invaded the most sensitive and private ceremonies of private life.”\textsuperscript{23} However, Rocchi ignores how culture shaped the market. His top-down approach also does not address how consumers understood increased consumption, nor does it systematically trace out the changes he describes. This dissertation takes a different approach by examining consumption as not only an economic but also a cultural phenomenon.

In addition, my work reveals the contested reception of Argentina’s consumer society by moving the history of consumption beyond an almost total reliance on business and advertising archives that tend to create a simplistic narrative of Americanization. By relying on those archives, past studies replicated business perspectives and ignored how most people reacted to the changes produced by a consumer society (as indicated by the article opening this introduction in which businesspeople and advertisers argued that women sabotaged their appliances out of resentment or ignorance). These business-centered narratives produce a misleading account in which the United States is portrayed as successfully imposing its culture on the rest of the world through media, film, and business.\textsuperscript{24} Historians such as Victoria de Grazia have described changes similar to those occurring in Argentina as an “Americanization” of daily life. Like those who have studied this phenomenon in Japan

\textsuperscript{23} Rocchi, \textit{Chimneys in the Desert}, 72.

and Latin America, De Grazia’s term largely reflects her focus on the influence of American businesses and marketing techniques, as well as the fact that much of the new technology originated in the United States. The increasing presence of American-style advertising and the larger cultural importance of foreign consumer goods did profoundly change how Argentines experienced and organized the world around them; developmentalists enthusiastically promoted this aspect of consumer culture. But capitalism alone lacked the power to simply transfer American culture to Argentina, and Argentines themselves mostly did not understand or discuss consumerism using those terms. De Grazia’s formulation would imply a passive acceptance of American culture on the part of Argentines. Argentines of the 1960s were obsessed with their position in the world, and they aspired to be socially and culturally close to and accepted by the Global North. While they did define certain nations as “modern” countries, depicting the complex changes that occurred in Argentine society through consumer practices as “Americanization” is simplistic and one-sided. Ultimately, although Argentines understood the commercialization of daily life through a discourse they associated with the “first world,” this process of transculturation was specific to Argentine realities and more complicated than the term “Americanization” implies.

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With this dissertation I also contribute to a surge of new histories of 1960s Argentina that modifies a literature until recently focused almost exclusively on political militancy. Historians of Argentina had created a narrative of the 1960s that described how radical labor strikes, the Peronist “resistance,” student agitation, and a newly formed urban guerilla movement created a violent and politically tumultuous decade. In this teleological interpretation, the decade culminates in the Cordobazo, a May 1969 uprising in which leftist unionists and students in the city of Córdoba rioted and attacked international symbols of capital. These narratives of economic and political change underscore the conflictive nature of late 1960s Argentine life and the importance of changing political regimes, yet they obscure how people experienced the 1960s. Only recently have historians of Argentina focused on the “frenetic” pace of social and cultural changes. Both historian Sergio Pujol and cultural critic Laura Podalsky contend that a publishing boom of magazines, an increase in advertising, the commodification of lifestyle, and the importance of appliances in this new developmentalist, consumer regime all contributed to a reorganization of daily life. However, neither traces their changing receptions. To counterbalance traditional narratives of 1960s Argentine history,


28 Podalsky 66.
a group of young, mostly female, mostly Argentine historians has recently created a vibrant community that focuses on the cultural and social changes of the 1960s. As indicated by the innovative edited volume *Los ’60 de otra manera: vida cotidiana, género, y sexualidades en la Argentina*, this group has investigated changing sexual mores, family structures, consumption, visual cultures, childhood, divorce, abortion, and contraception. Particularly exciting is Valeria Manzano’s excellent work on how youth became a crucial political and cultural category. I am most closely in conversation with her and her collaborators, scholars like Isabella Cosse and Karina Felitti. This innovative group of scholars reflects a newly robust community of inquiry regarding Argentine popular culture and quotidian life in the 1960s.

My project engages with the legacy of Peronist policies of consumption and specifically builds off the work of historians Natalia Milanesio and Eduardo Elena. It

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explores how both the optimism of Peronist populism and the legacy of a deeply divided country gave way to the anxiety and fear of the later Peronist government and the Dirty War. But my project does not directly engage with the enormous and exuberant debates of Peronist literature. That literature most extensively examines the populist nature of Peronism, the figures of Juan and Evita Perón, and the relationship of the working classes with Peronism. While the voluminous scholarship on Peronism has yielded important insights, it also has overshadowed important historical questions from the mid-twentieth century. I am primarily interested in understanding changing gender roles and economic development outside of the framework of the Peronist debates. Rather than ignoring Peronism (as indicated by Chapter 1), I understand these two areas to be subject to both transnational and national considerations in which Peronism was not a dispositive factor.31

My work also joins a larger feminist critique of development studies that has fought to demonstrate how the home is a site for both “modernization” and “progress”

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and how the logic of developmentalism is gendered. Feminist scholars in the early 1990s began to formulate a critique of what they dubbed the masculinist nature of development economics. They did this in three ways. First, scholars such as Catherine V. Scott utilized discourse analysis techniques to reread development literature and demonstrate the gendered assumptions on which development theory relied (absolute dichotomies of public/private, modern/traditional, describing development as a war, etc.) Second, feminist scholars amplified notions of labor, oppression, and the effects of colonialism to show how women were both written out of developmentalist priorities and also how women’s labor was often not counted. Long-standing masculinist biases of liberal economic theory had rhetorically and ideologically connected markets and rationality to men (the producers in an economy) and the household and irrationality to women (the consumers). Therefore, embedded in developmentalist logic, economic development could only take place in the public space and not in the home. These assumptions therefore meant that women’s work in the home were not valuable to the nation and the tools they used—appliances—could not be modernizing. Preeminent feminist economist Lourdes Benería has repeatedly drawn attention to how women’s contributions to the economy, specifically their reproductive labor, are underestimated and ignored in national accounting statistics. Her work, along with that of other feminist scholars of development, has detailed how this exclusion affects the success and failure

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of development projects across the world. The influence and importance of feminist critiques of development is seen in the appearance of both the academic journal *Gender and Development* as well as the *Women, Gender, and Development Reader*.

Feminist critiques of developmentalism help explain the vitriolic and emotional reaction against women, consumerism, and changing gender roles at the end of the 1960s. These critiques help to point out how in developmentalist logic women were inextricably linked to the household and tradition. As Catherine Scott states, “depictions of tradition in general are marked by social constructions of gender differences.” The explanation for this lies in what Scott says is development theory’s “dualistic construction of gender in which male/culture/modernity is understood to be superior to female/nature/tradition.” She argues that in development theory, autonomy, self-sufficiency, separation from the household, and rationality are considered masculine characteristics that not only describe an ideal man but also the positive aspects of economic development. Women are associated with the home and are considered traditional, conservative, and emotional. In developmentalist discourse, women’s role “was portrayed through societal ideals of femininity in terms of dress, sexuality, and

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35 Scott 122.

36 Scott 57.

37 Bergeron 3.
behavior appropriate for women as the ‘centers’ of homes and the ‘carriers of
tradition’. Economic development and ‘modernization’ for women meant freedom
from drudgery, seclusion from the household, and the ability to be ‘fully human’; this is
incredibly optimistic, but reflects gendered assumptions about the backward, inefficient,
and traditional nature of women’s work. When Argentine women were perceived by
journalists and essayists to be taking on masculine characteristics through work and
financial independence, not only were they challenging their “natural” roles following
Catholic Church logic, they were also challenging paradigms embedded in the logic of
development rhetoric. A woman who was becoming liberated, autonomous, and non-
domestic was embodying the masculine characteristics developmentalists ascribed to the
nation writ large. In this way, women challenged the assumptions of developmentalist
logic of how development would defeat the backward home on its way to a consumer
society. When consumerism – perceived as feminine, passive, and unproductive – also
began to take on an increasingly important role in driving the economy, both
developmentalists and its critics reacted strongly against consumerism and the women
seen as primarily responsible for it.

Gendered developmentalist discourse contains an innate contradiction in its
attitude towards household appliances. As described previously, on one level advertisers
and enthusiastic developmentalists portrayed household appliances as modern, civilizing,
and progressive. They were fundamentally important to the developmentalist project of

38 Bergeron 20.
39 Bergeron 58.
further industrializing the country. On a deeper, more symbolic level, these same developmentalists struggled with portraying these tools of domestic labor as modern. Household appliances in Argentina were almost never referred to as tools of work – by advertisers, journalists, or essayists – in the 1960s. The appliances industry was known as the “industry of comfort” and they were “appliances of comfort.” As historian of technology Steven Lubar stated, appliances wouldn’t be labeled as technological tools of work. He explains, “the more an activity is in the province of men, especially…white men, the more we label it ‘skilled,’ the more we label it ‘technological’.” He goes on to say, “household technologies are, generally speaking, technologies of consumption, and so they have been difficult to understand in the traditional framework [in which masculinity is associated with technology].” In 1960s Argentina, appliances were a way for women to create a warm, welcoming home for husband, children, and family. Only when they became tools of liberation, supposedly freeing women from the burden of household drudgery to go to a paid job, did they become dangerous. In developmentalist logic, markets and technology were in direct opposition to family and

40 I am indebted to Inés Pérez’s work for reminding me of the importance of this error. See “El trabajo doméstico y la mecanización del hogar: discursos, experiencias, representaciones. Mar del Plata en los años sesenta,” in Los ’60 de otra manera: vida cotidiana, género, y sexualidades en la Argentina, eds. Isabella Cosse, Karina Felitti, and Valeria Manzano, 171-204 (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2010).


42 Lumbar 21.
households (following WW Rostow himself).\textsuperscript{43} Rhetorically developmentalists could not recognize the technological nature of appliances or that they were tools of work because that contradicted the logic and dualisms -- public/private, masculine/feminine, modern/traditional -- embedded in developmentalist logic.\textsuperscript{44}

\section*{Sources and Methodologies}

My research brings into view the quotidian experiences resulting from larger development policies, and to do that I consulted an unorthodox collection of sources. In particular, to understand changes in domestic life as part of larger schemes of economic development, I had to move beyond the usual collection of statistics and economic analysis. Therefore, I draw on methods from social, economic, women’s, oral, and cultural history to see the connections between economic development and consumerism, assembled through visits to twenty archives and libraries in five cities in the United States and Argentina over 22 months of research. I cross-reference this wide variety of sources to reveal a fuller, more complete picture of economic development and its effects. In my years of research, I have been amused by 1960s movies, laughed at hundreds of comic

\textsuperscript{43} Bergeron 57.

\textsuperscript{44} See Lumbar 15. Lumbar notes that concepts about masculinity helped shape the industrial revolution and that machinery has been gendered masculine. Feminist historians have argued that women’s technological innovations have been seen as non-technological and therefore not recognized by, say, the US patent office. In the past, historians have argued this is because as women were in large part driven into the home by the industrial revolution and men became the producers. The home, strongly gendered as feminine, became a site of consumption and not production and the idea of separate, hierarchically ordered spheres was reinforced. Many of women’s inventions have been related to the home, and as the home was considered a site of consumption and not production they have not been recognized as technological achievements.
strips, tabulated economic statistics, interpreted advertisements, and read and re-read numerous reflective essays.

I first examined some of the most popular general-interest and women’s magazines of the decade, which helped me to understand the general mood of the decade and how it shifted over the years as well as how specific moral and material concerns ebbed and flowed. These publications also allowed me to trace the evolution of intellectuals’ and journalists’ reactions to consumer trends. Similarly, changes in household appliance advertisements in these magazines reveal shifts in sales strategy (from housewife to independent young woman) and technology, as well as the availability of gas, water, and electricity to would-be Argentine consumers. Therefore, I spent months in the Biblioteca Nacional and Hemeroteca de la Biblioteca del Congreso reading all available editions of *Para Tí, Confirmado, Panorama, Primera Plana, Claudia, Vosotras, Gente,* and *Pulso.* Since *Claudia* and *Vosotras* were largely unavailable at the national libraries, I searched for private collectors operating out of open-air markets who owned runs of magazines unavailable in any of the libraries. These collectors allowed me to “rent” copies of the magazines and take photographs of relevant articles. While this helped me to find more issues, I certainly didn’t come close to finding enough for a good comparison to the Catholic magazine *Para Tí,* which was available in full at the national libraries. For this reason, I rely more heavily on *Para Tí* even though *Claudia* was more on the vanguard in terms of promoting new cultural values. I also examined editions of the newspaper *Clarín, La Nación,* and *La Prensa* for advertisements and coverage of specific events, like the civil reform of 1968. The
resulting methodical perusal of *Primera Plana* and *Confirmado* ultimately allowed me to chronicle how systematically these magazines went about promoting the developmentalist project. And at the same time, this fact made apparent the mainstream popularity of developmentalism as a discourse and political ideology.

I used small public libraries, bookstores, video stores, and used bookstores in Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and Salta to discover hard-to-find sources. Enormously influential works such as Mafud’s *Argentinos y el status* or Sebreli’s *Vida Cotidiana* reveal, as I discuss in depth in chapters 3 and 4, the degree to which discussions of consumption and consumerism dominated 1960s sociological and cultural discourse. Buenos Aires’s myriad used bookstores provided an avenue for finding specific editions of these works, which were sometimes missing from the National Library. Argentina’s best art house video store was a mere three blocks from my apartment during one sixteen-month research stint. During unexpected and long closures of the national and congressional libraries (if not because of union strikes, than because of the swine flu or building renovations), I utilized the vast knowledge of underpaid video store clerks to find and watch about a dozen different Argentine films from the 1960s. Public libraries in both Córdoba and Salta supplied local newspapers that helped determine the years television started to broadcast and served as a comparison to advertising in national newspapers. In these small, provincial, or neighborhood archives, I found many of the same essays, underscoring their longstanding importance.

Beyond the realm of discourse, I wanted to find out whether the developmental and gender-role changes that elicited so much commentary “actually” occurred to the
extent asserted by intellectuals and pundits. Did an increased number of women enter the workplace? How quickly did television expand? And how many Argentines actually owned household appliances? During research I turned to statistics, the same statistics fetishized by the developmentalists, to see if they could provide answers to these questions. I sought economic data from both private and public sources. At the Ministry of Economy’s Biblioteca Prebisch and the Biblioteca Tornquist at the Central Bank, I searched for production figures of household appliances, electricity, and gas, as well as the availability of running water. At the INDEC (national statistical service) library, I searched national population and housing censuses for rates of appliance ownership, women working, marriage and divorce, and the like. Oftentimes I found frustrating gaps or contradictory data, but rather than allowing them to stymy my progress, I soon learned to read these “problems.”

I used research from the United States Embassy in Argentina (found at the National Archives II in College Park), The J. Walter Thompson (JWT) archives at Duke University, and other contemporary Argentine magazine articles to fill in some of those missing gaps. The Embassy records yielded unexpectedly valuable survey results regarding media usage and the rising cost of living. JWT provided great information on advertising expenditures and the ups and downs of the advertising industry in Argentina. The magazines in question often conducted small qualitative surveys about women’s sexuality, the perception of advertising, or other pertinent issues. Sometimes they contained data not found elsewhere (for example, the number of households with access to piped-in gas). I also uncovered a complete collection of Arturo Frondizi’s speeches at
three US university libraries, which I utilized to understand Frondizi’s developmentalist priorities, language, and evolution of thought. The University Siam di Tella library and the Centro de documentación sobre la Argentina at the University of Buenos Aires had extensive information regarding industry in general and the manufacturer of household appliances Siam di Tella in particular.

This dissertation complements these written and visual sources with 43 interviews I conducted in Córdoba (then a booming industrial city on the outer edge of the Pampas), Salta (a poor, more heavily indigenous city in the Northwest), and Buenos Aires, the national megalopolis and capital. These interviews have provided the best way to understand differences in lived experiences across provincial capitals and the national capital. I characterize these as interviews rather than oral histories because I did not “seek an in-depth account of personal experience and reflections,” but rather I was interested in specific recollections about the purchase, use, and impressions of household appliances and how they changed the interviewees’ lives.45 I requested additional information regarding the family’s class, education, work histories, etc., to understand my interview subjects better, but was able to conduct only one lengthy interview with each person (with the exception of one couple, who were interviewed in both 2006 and 2009). The interviews not only provided lively anecdotes but also helped me to restructure my research questions and pay attention to important data in written sources that I would have otherwise missed. For instance, when I asked interviewees about when they first

purchased a gas stove oftentimes they would answer with the date they received access to public gas lines. This continual emphasis on the arrival of services from a number of interviewees helped me to think seriously about the connection between services and the use of household appliances. Hearing how Argentines expressed the advantages of having appliances or having better appliances – a fully automatic versus a simple washing machine – also gave life to material differences that could otherwise appear small or unimportant. And finally, hearing how Argentines described the differences in the media landscape between Buenos Aires and Salta or Córdoba, drove home the regionally differentiated diffusion and reception of advertising. For example, an interviewee in Salta said that nothing changed in the 1960s and there was no advertising while an interviewee in Buenos Aires noted that during the same period consumerism “took off” because of television.\footnote{Luisa Feinstein [pseudo.], interview with the author, May 11, 2009 and Yamila Oliva Alonso [pseudo.], interview with the author, July 9, 2009.} Therefore, although the interviews may appear to have a limited presence in this dissertation, they in fact helped shape my questions, the trajectory of the project, and the way I interpreted the evidence I found.

I juxtapose these sources in unusual ways to demonstrate how a narrative of hope and idealism that evolves into one of anxiety and vitriol. In order to understand the meanings of consumerism as Argentina entered the 1960s, I draw on presidential records, speeches, and secondary sources to analyze the ideological inspirations for development programs and how those economic policies were unevenly implemented. I then consider surveys of economic data alongside recollections in interviews to demonstrate how,
despite the best of intentions, the uneven regional spread of electrical, gas, and water services excluded many urban Argentines from the development project that emanated from and centered primarily on the capital. I also juxtapose magazine articles, sociological surveys, interviews, and essays written by Buenos Aires intellectuals to show how development programs encouraged urban Argentines to buy more appliances and other goods during a time of relative economic stability and booming advertisements. The fact that the vast majority of the voices in this dissertation come from men and not women reflects the intellectual power structures of the time. Still, it is ironic (and a tribute to the continuing power of these structures to silence female voices) that often women are the object rather than the subject of this dissertation. And lastly through the popular film and play *La Fiaca*, the influential comic strip *Mafalda*, Juan José Sebreli’s essay *Vida Cotidiana y Alienacion*, other essays, and interviews, I argue that the discussion about consumerism increasingly became a way in which different groups debated distinct visions of what “Argentina” was supposed to be.

**Organization**

Over the course of four chapters I trace how the initial idealism and optimism of developmentalists in the late 1950s and early 1960s rapidly disintegrates and is replaced by strong feelings of anxiety and unease regarding changes in gender roles and consumption. I demonstrate how and why Peronist policies of mass consumption created expectations of high standards of living across classes and propelled a powerful new political language of well-being that politicians continued to embrace after his downfall.
These politicians, including the newly elected Arturo Frondizi in 1958, were enthusiastic disciples of developmentalism, which they felt would bring Argentina into the newly coined “first-world.” Developmentalism’s embrace of new “scientific” methods of measurement and universal explanations of economic growth animated a loyal group of passionate followers. They professed to not only embrace the appliance factories, dams, highways, and gas pipelines that Argentina would need to become first-world but that they would also welcome a “liberated” Argentine woman: women’s status had become a key marker of a nation’s status. I trace how these politicians and academics enthusiastically set out to statistically analyze Argentine economy and society, ignoring elements considered unimportant in the developmentalist list of priorities (for example, steel production). Disappointments soon began to color their enthusiasm, however, during their initial attempts to implement such an ambitious development project. Vocal journalists and intellectual critics began to complain of society becoming overly consumeristic, of advertising creeping into every aspect of life, of women having too much power as consumers. As social and political instability began to rock the nation, especially after a coup in 1966, I argue that these critiques became more emotional, vitriolic, and gendered.

The first chapter, entitled “Economic Development and Consumerist Pleasures: The Intellectual, Political, and Cultural Milieu of late 1950s Argentina,” examines the continuities and ruptures of the intellectual scene that shaped Argentines’ unique relationship to consumer culture in the 1960s. It explains the initial optimism of the developmentalists and their faith that economic development would quickly raise the
standard of living and restore Argentina’s past glory. Most Argentines understood both their trajectory of economic development and their status as a consumer society through the Peronist language of dignity, “comfort,” and well-being. I describe how Perón welcomed the working classes into lives of “comfort” and consumer access that was once only known to the privileged. Later in the chapter I explain how the implementation of developmentalist economic policies also determined the type of consumerism Argentines experienced. I argue that, in a complex way, Peronism provided the vision of a consumer society while developmentalism provided the imperfect means to achieve that end.

I then, in the second chapter, analyze seemingly unrelated social, cultural, and economic sources to show how developmentalists went about optimistically implementing their project. In so doing this chapter reveals how economic development is ideologically and culturally constituted. I argue three main points in this chapter entitled “Fomenting Mass Consumption amid Uneven Development.” First, I illustrate the material conditions available for the growth of a consumer society. I demonstrate how the expansion of a consumer society was contingent on the widespread availability of basic services such as running water, gas, and electricity. I analyze the availability of basic services to also reveal Argentine access to consumer status symbols like washing machines, refrigerators, or gas stoves. Second, this chapter reveals the often unrecognized connection between economic development, an expanding consumer culture, and changing gender roles by considering quantitative data in relation to qualitative sources (i.e., journalistic discourse, interviews, magazine articles, advertisements, etc.). And third, I examine both the phenomenon of data collection and
the data itself in order to provide the most complete picture possible of Argentina’s
economic development in relation to a burgeoning consumer society. Imbricating these
nontraditional sources allows me to assess how economic development and
industrialization impacted cultural norms and social structures in urban areas. Thus, in
this chapter I demonstrate that widespread structural changes did occur and that
journalists and essayists were reacting against very real changes.

In the third chapter, I analyze how both proponents and critics of
developmentalism understood the social, cultural, and economic ramifications of
economic development. Utilizing magazine articles, essays, movies, and comic strips, I
show how proponents of developmentalism were successful in the search to understand a
changing Argentina via the quantitative social sciences (surveying, analysis of structural
changes, etc.). These men excitedly hailed the rapid expansion of advertising agencies
and embraced the power of quantitative sociology to help measure social change. Central
to this endeavor was their belief that the purchase of technological items like household
appliances would raise the Argentine standard of living. For their part critics linked
many of the fast-paced social and cultural changes to a deepening consumerism within
Argentine society. Their concerns centered on the materializing influence of advertising.
These critics questioned what the pay-off for participation in a consumer society was,
throwing into doubt the hegemonic idea that technology improved quality of life. They
did this by observing and analyzing the experience of “everyday life” in a developing
country. At a time when right-wing military men and leftist activists were at
loggerheads, both the left and the right attacked developmentalists and capitalists,
agreeing that because of its rapidly expanding consumer culture, Argentine society was in moral crisis. I argue that both those on the left and the right were disquieted by the increased advertising, the proliferation of new appliances as status symbols, and the attendant new patterns of daily life. As a result both supporters and critics reacted with a moralizing and culturally conservative rhetoric.

In the fourth and final chapter, “A Discontented Consumerism: Modernizing the Argentine Economy while Maintaining the Gendered Status Quo,” I trace the evolution of the discourse of Argentine intellectuals and journalists regarding women, work, and consumerism. Intellectuals and journalists initially advocated for economic development and for the mass consumption that this development would necessitate. One aspect of that formula—as part of a larger modernization project—also purported to embrace the entrance of women into the workplace and other measures toward gender equality. Within just a few years, however, women were perceived to gain in socio-economic status solely through their roles as consumers. Because women were becoming more financially independent individuals, these writers objected to what they thought of as the diminished status of men. The journalists and intellectuals studied here came to demonize the “consumeristic” woman whom they portrayed as abandoning her family in search of a materialistically “comfortable life.” In this way, proponents of economic development failed to understand how deeply-held cultural notions of gender and family would affect the experience, nature, and even success of economic development in 1960s Argentina. Leftist critics who supported a more equal society in terms of class were surprisingly scathing in their rejection of gender equality, thus illustrating that the sexist
vitriol had little to do with politics. In a close analysis of these sources—a locus of intellectual commentary regarding women, work, and consumerism—I argue that during a period of great social and political transformation, prominent critics and journalists channeled their anxieties into a rejection of specific gendered, quotidian practices.
Chapter 1: Economic Development and Consumerist Pleasures: The Intellectual, Political, and Cultural Milieu of late 1950s Argentina

Argentina’s push for economic development and an expanding consumer culture was shaped by both contemporary social scientific trends circulating internationally and by its own experience negotiating a post-Peronist Argentina. Like other countries in Europe and parts of Asia, various Argentine governments of the late 1950s and early 1960s focused on expanding its infrastructure, growing its industry, and improving the standard of living of its people. Like other countries, Argentine policy makers and journalists who helped shape public opinion were enthusiastic promoters of the notion of “development” (a new term coined by the Argentine economist named Raúl Prebisch of the UN sponsored Comisión Económica para America Latina [CEPAL]) and also economic developmentalism. As it did with other countries in the periphery, the United States attempted to influence Argentina’s economic policies as part of its Cold War strategy. And like other countries in Europe and Asia, Argentines quickly adopted household appliances and utilized them in similar ways.

Unlike other countries, Argentina was entering this new phase of industrialization immediately after Peronism. Not only had Juan Domingo Perón had restructured the Argentine economy and society, he had articulated a new language of national belonging that was unique to that historical moment in Argentina. While North Americans and the Soviets engaged in the “Kitchen Wars” – where each nation battled to demonstrate that
their people had the highest standard of living largely through the use of appliances\(^1\). Argentines understood their trajectory of both economic development and as a consumer society utilizing the Peronist language of dignity, comfort, and well-being. Perón had welcomed the working classes into lives of comfort and consumer access that was once only known to the privileged. These new “rights” and the language used to defend the “rights” was hotly contested, but the new language helped define the terms of the debate.

In addition, the Argentine government implemented policies to redistribute wealth and Argentines themselves discussed their economic standing as compared to other countries in the world with the knowledge that only 40 years before they had been one of the wealthiest nations in the world – with per capita income equal to that of Germany and higher than Italy, Spain, and Sweden.\(^2\) By the 1950s they were an “underdeveloped” country, a status that galled many Argentines and left them with a desire to recuperate their lost – and rightful -- standing in the world. Wealthy Argentines could and did live like their European and North American counterparts, utilizing refrigerators, gas stoves, and automatic washing machines. However, most Argentines could only aspire to do so as they did not have the income or the services available to them (electricity, water, or gas) that would make that lifestyle possible.

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Thus, while we must understand how Argentine economic policy was shaped by international currents of economic thought (much of which was conceived by an Argentine), we must also understand that Argentina’s national experience with Peronism, its drastically shifting status as a wealthy nation, and its relative remoteness from Cold War debates over the standard of living shaped a unique relationship to consumer culture. Argentina’s cycles of booms and busts meant that most Argentines had personal memories of when things were better for their families. In Buenos Aires, the architectural magnificence of the city provided evidence that the economy and the country had been prosperous only 50 years before. Both recent wealth and Peronist policies gave many families fleeting access to comfort that quickly disappeared with the arrival of yet another economic downturn. By examining the continuities and ruptures of the intellectual milieu of the late 1950s and early 1960s, I reveal the conditions under which Argentines negotiated the contradictions of a post-World War II consumer culture while straddling the newly defined first and third worlds. By doing so I demonstrate how, in a complex way, Peronism provided the vision of a consumer society while developmentalism provided the imperfect means to achieve that end.

In this investigation, I use “developmentalism” to refer to a specific economic philosophy as it was promoted and enacted in the second half of the twentieth century. However, the term “developmentalism” can also be used to describe 200 years of thought in which economic development is an evolutionary and universal process.\(^3\)

developmentalists in the second half of the twentieth century do subscribe to that notion, they are also a specific group of theorists and politicians and it is to this group I refer. Developmentalism has also been used synonymously with modernization theory and indeed they were very similar in that they were popular after World War II, ahistorical, teleological, and stagist. Modernization theory’s most important theorists, including W. W. Rostow, argued that developing or traditional countries needed to pass through various phases of development before becoming like the United States (high consumption, high level of industrialization). These stages were universal and all societies must pass through them to become developed. Developmentalism also shared these assumptions, but incorporated the idea that uneven development came from the unequal relationship between core and peripheral countries. Peripheral countries needed to employ the “correct” policies to achieve economic development and therefore the state needed to play an active role. Because developmentalist theorists were particularly concerned with how these peripheral countries should industrialize – and thus progress through the different stages – they were strong proponents of Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI). Thus, rational government policies would protect developing nations from the unequal economic relationships characteristic of the core-periphery relationship and in only 10-15 years these countries would become “developed.”

In this chapter I focus on the policies and language of Juan Domingo Perón (1946-1955) and Arturo Frondizi (1958-1962) rather than presidents Arturo Illia (1963-1966) or General Juan Carlos Onganía (1966-1970) because Perón’s and Frondizi’s policies shaped the outlook and trajectory of Argentina 1960s consumer society. Illia,
despite some economic policy changes, continued to use the same language of economic development and emphasized the same priorities of the Frondizi government. He emphasized the importance of technology, petroleum, energy, steel, industrialization, economic independence, and national integration. By the mid-1960s he dropped most of the Peronist language from his rhetoric. His presidency is remembered as a short period of stability, but was not terribly influential culturally or in terms of economic policy.

General Onganía’s rhetoric did change when he became president in a coup d’état in 1966 and his policies were influential. He was a Catholic conservative who believed the true economic strength of the country still lay in agriculture (el campo), that the state was too interventionist, that the unions had too much power, and he was concerned about the moral emptiness of a materialistic and consumerist society. As he said upon assuming power in 1966, development shouldn’t only tend to the “technical and economic while relegating to second best social and cultural problems as well as the spiritual fulfillment of man [sic].” His critiques of the problems of a consumer society are like those of all developmentalist critics and are more fully discussed in chapters 3 and 4.

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4 See Arturo Illia, Mensaje del excelentísimo señor presidente de la nación (Buenos Aires: República Argentina, 1963); Arturo Illia, Mensaje del excelentísimo señor presidente de la nación Doctor Arturo U. Illia (Buenos Aires: Dirección de Relaciones Públicas de la Secretaría de Prensa de la Presidencia de la Nación, 1965); Arturo Illia, Mensaje del excelentísimo señor presidente de la nación doctor Arturo U. Illia (Secretaría de prensa de la presidencia, 1966), and Arturo Illia, Mensaje del excelentísimo señor Presidente en la Comida de Camaradería de las Fuerzas Armadas (Buenos Aires: Dirección de Relaciones Publicas de la Secretaría de la Presidencia, 1965).  

5 Juan Carlos Onganía, Discurso del presidente de la nación en la comida de camaradería de las fuerzas armadas (Buenos Aires: Secretaría de Difusión y Turismo, 1967), 13, 22.  

6 Juan Carlos Onganía, Planeamiento y desarrollo de la acción de gobierno (Buenos Aires: Presidencia de la nación, 1966). See also Juan Carlos Onganía, discurso del presidente de la nación al inaugurar la reunión de gobernadores de provincias en Alta Gracia, (Buenos Aires, 1968).
Peronism and its Legacy

Juan Domingo Perón was elected president in 1946 with the overwhelming support of the working-classes and strong opposition of the oligarchs. Amongst other things, Perón came into office seeking social justice, the strengthening of Argentine economic independence, and the overturning of accepted social hierarchies through a state-controlled, capitalist economic system. Perón worried about the vulnerability of the working class family through unfettered capitalism, yet he was virulently anti-communist and diligently sought to protect private enterprise and property. Perón needed to find a “third way” between free market capitalism and communism that encouraged mass consumption and redistributed wealth. This “third way” would be called justicialismo, a political philosophy that – among other things – utilized the policies of an activist state to create social justice through equally distributed mass consumption. While there is a robust historiography on the history of Peronism, for the purposes of this investigation I will focus on how his policies regarding mass consumption reshaped the Argentine mindset and influenced the economic, social, and cultural trajectory of the 1960s. The literature on consumption and Peronism is limited and thus I rely on the works of historians Eduardo Elena and Natalia Milanesio.

Perón argued that the Argentine economy needed to be protected and he strongly promoted economic independence from Europe and the United States as a pillar of his ideology. Many Argentines, including Perón, believed the country was beholden to English economic interests. In 1939 about 39% of all investment in Argentina was
In 1933 the controversial Roca-Runciman Treaty gave Argentina the right to sell Britain enormous quantities of beef, but Argentina had to do so at below market price and primarily using British *frigoríficos* (meat packing plants). In addition, Britain was given exclusive rights to control rail travel in the province of Buenos Aires. Mostly in response to the onerous terms of this treaty, Perón banned foreign investment, nationalized the railroad, and eschewed reliance on foreign trade. Instead he created policies that relied on heavy state intervention such as price controls.

Juan Perón’s interest in both improving the standard of living and the debate about economic protectionism were not unique to his presidency. As the sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel has argued, successive Argentine governments since the nineteenth century have debated the best way for Argentina to “progress” or, in modern parlance, to “develop.” In order to do so, scholars and politicians have alternately argued that the best way was either through opening up the country to free trade or shutting it off to protect local economies. Underlying these debates has lain a belief that Argentina needed to progress through certain stages of development until it reached the highest level of culture and economic advancement. These assumptions became most apparent with post-World War II theories of economic development. Peronist philosophy was part of

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8 See Ramón Grosfoguel, “A TimeSpace Perspective on Development: Recasting Latin American Debates,” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 20 no. 3/4 (Summer-Fall 1997) 465-540 and Grosfoguel, “Developmentalism, Modernity, and Dependency Theory.” Some scholars have looked at the debates about economic development of the 1960s and mistakenly believed the issues that dominated those discussions – protectionism vs. free trade; stagist notions of development; the relationship between lesser-developed and developed countries – were unique to that historical moment. However Grosfoguel convincingly demonstrates that those issues had a longue durée dominating South American policy circles all the way back to the eighteenth century.
that long-term discussion and sided squarely on the side of protectionism. Peronist policy also addressed concerns that elsewhere had been dealt with in the 1930s – providing an adequate standard of living and protecting workers from the excesses of the free market - but he took these academic concerns out of policy journals and made them part of a narrative of national liberation.\footnote{Eduardo Elena, “Justice and Comfort: Peronist Political Culture and the Search for a New Argentina, 1930-1955” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2002), 10 - 11.}

Peronist policy focused on raising the workers’ standard of living through an assorted variety of methods. The government supported labor unions’ right to negotiate higher wages, which they did several times over the first five years of Perón’s presidency. Perón massively extended social welfare programs and built hospitals, schools, hotels to be used by workers in subsidized vacations, and workers’ homes at a frenzied rate.\footnote{Elena, “Justice and Comfort,” 5.}

Thus, Peronist economic policy was strongly nationalist whose success relied on the state’s ability to usher in widespread prosperity and well-being.\footnote{Elena, “Justice and Comfort,” 9.} His policies engendered massive income redistribution in the mid-1940s that enraged the wealthy and meant that the working classes could massively increase their levels of consumption.\footnote{Eduardo Elena, \textit{Dignifying Argentina: Peronism, Citizenship, and Mass Consumption} (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), 253.}

Workers could eat better, dress better, and enjoy their leisure time in unprecedented ways. They were able to live more comfortably, take vacations, and visit near-by hospitals thanks exclusively to the state. In this way Peronism not only maintained
economic independence from economic powers like Great Britain, but also transformed
the relationships between the state, civil society, and political actors.13

Thus the emphasis on mass consumption as a way to rebuild after the war differed
from policy makers in post-World War II Europe and the United States.14 First, it was
essentially state-directed and interventionist. The core of the Peronist project was to at
once restrain market capitalism and provide the Argentine people of all classes with both
dignity – through a high standard of living -- and consumerist pleasures and comfort.15
Therefore, Peronist authorities were more interested in satisfying consumer needs rather
than cultivating alliances with private businesses. Indeed, Perón had a fraught
relationship with private enterprise and employed a “confrontational, state centered
approach, one that strained relations with commerce, agricultural, and industrial
organizations.”16 Second, the Peronist definition of consumption encompassed more than
just the purchase and use of quotidian objects like clothing, household appliances, or
food. As referenced in the previous paragraph, it also encompassed housing, subsidized
leisure, and health care.17 The consumption of all of these things gave workers a vida
digna or dignified life. As the historian Elena states: “references to the vida digna reveal
how Peronists reformulated understandings of justice around an ideal of enhanced

16 Elena, “Justice and Comfort,” 123.
17 Elena, Dignifying Argentina, 13.
citizenship and elevated standard of living." Through this new form of consumption and a vida digna -- which were given to the Argentine people by the state -- a new form of social citizenship would be enacted.

Peronism was efficacious not because its economic policies were successful in the long-term, but because it had such a convincing message and vision of social citizenship. That vision was of a more decent society, one built on notions of social justice, a vida digna, and high standards of living. Perón utilized established “cultural understandings of comfort and status” to integrate workers into society that had previously marginalized them. He created a new political language that redefined the place of the working classes in society and was built on three terms: bienestar (well-being), standard de vida (standard of living), dignidad (dignity), and justicia social (social justice) which became the new language of social citizenship. The meanings of these words were conveyed through the massive state social programs and propaganda apparatus, which portrayed working-class families enjoying vacations, receiving good medical care, and living in houses that were once only available to the middle classes. These images that portrayed a “dignified life” were “emblems of the Peronist regime’s campaign to forge a New Argentina.” In this way, Perón was able to tap into “cultural perceptions of respectability and individual progress” and his ability to do that explains the lasting resonance of Peronism.

18 Elena, Dignifying Argentina, 8
While Perón sought to reorder Argentine society through recast class hierarchies, his policies relied on gendered hierarchies that reinforced patriarchal social formations.\textsuperscript{21}

Utilizing gendered norms that construed a male breadwinner and female housewife as the basis of the ideal family, Perón’s policies explicitly sought to protect the patriarchs’ abilities to provide a good standard of living for their families. Thus, as Elena states: “As part of these understandings of class and citizenship, the promise of ‘dignity’ rested on assumptions about gender, respectability, and family life.” Elena continues,

Perón, like the majority of earlier reformers, highlighted the inability of male household heads to provide for their dependents, or as he put it, to ‘maintain their families with decorum’. This political discourse of ‘dignity’ tapped into working audiences’ cultural expectations about masculine responsibility. In this fashion, like other leaders of the time Perón upheld the ideal of separate spheres that few working-class families attained, but to which they nevertheless might aspire. Unlike other leaders, his administration provided a family wage that made this possible. The activist state described in Perón’s speeches would not usurp the authority of the paternal figure, but rather improve his capacity as provider through higher salaries.\textsuperscript{22}

Thus while male workers’ positions in society improved, the needs of women were subsumed within that of her husband and family.\textsuperscript{23}

The importance of married homemakers and mothers under Peronism is exemplified in Perón’s austerity campaign when responsible consumption became

\textsuperscript{21} Elena notes that Peronist policies “mirrored campaigns across the globe committed to the ‘modernization of patriarchy’.” Elena, \textit{Dignifying Argentina}, 9.

\textsuperscript{22} Elena, “Comfort and Justice,” 106-107.

\textsuperscript{23} It is important to note that women were granted the right to vote and Evita, Perón’s famous second wife, focused particularly on improving the quotidian lives of women by giving them sewing machines, Christmas \textit{panettone}, and the like. The expansion of water and electricity to homes disproportionately improves the working lives of women.
women’s (ie, married, full-time homemakers) most important task. In 1949 the economy was doing very badly, inflation was skyrocketing, and workers’ purchasing power plummeted. Perón instituted an austerity campaign that enlisted the housewife as his strongest and most important ally to revive the national economy through responsible consumption. As historian Natalia Milanesio argues, Peronist propaganda targeted married, full-time homemakers who were considered “rational administrators” “naturally” devoted to the welfare of their families. Both married men and single, unmarried women were not enlisted as they were alternatively considered irresponsible and self-indulgent consumers. The austerity campaign particularly focused on housewives’ battle to economize with food and other quotidian purchases which put this “previously unnoticed domestic task…at the center of the economic project, making them essential to restoring the national economy and bestowing new public recognition upon the women who performed them.” In this way, more than at any other time, homemakers enjoyed a form of empowerment because of their place in the home. However, this standing was fleeting and relied on both women’s status as both married and without remunerative work. It assumed that somehow marriage changed women’s inclinations towards consumption. In addition, the austerity campaign ignored single or working women as being valuable to the Peronist political project. Thus, as exemplified

25 Milanesio 92.
26 Milanesio 95-96.
27 Milanesio 94.
28 Milanesio 110.
by the austerity campaign, Peronist policy both actively worked to reinforce gendered hierarchies and roles within the family and advocated for the concerns that mattered most to the vast majority of women.

While the activist state was paternalistic and patriarchal in its attitude towards women, it also made significant strides toward improving the lives of women because of its focus on consumption policies. On the one hand, Perón’s government actively encouraged women to stay home and solely exercise their “proper” roles of wives and mothers. Indeed, the number of wage-earning women was at an all-time low of around 20 percent during his first two presidencies. On the other hand, in reaction to the demands of activists, Perón instituted a limit to their work schedules because he recognized they had the added burden of all the household chores (men did not have this double shift). Perón was also very concerned about the household, the rights of the consumer, and the everyday struggles of a working-class family to make ends meet. In many ways, he conceptualized the economy, which was so focused on the everyday and the household, in a way that addressed the concerns of women much more than the abstract and macroeconomic approaches of the developmentalists. So while Perón’s equal pay laws did rest on gendered logic that now seems outdated and while his policies subsumed female workers under their male co-workers, the first Peronist regime more directly addressed the needs and interests of many families than the governments of the 1960s. In that sense, Peronism’s legacy regarding women and gender is decidedly mixed.

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29 Elena, *Dignitying Argentina*, 171.
Modern household appliances were viewed as key tools for that perfect housewife and took on many of their symbolic and practical importance under Peronism that carried into the early 1960s. Appliances promised to erase certain class differences as all families, not just those wealthy enough to afford servants, could be unburdened from the drudgery of hard domestic labor with the help of a washing machine or electric floor polisher. Drawing on notions of scientific housekeeping and early twentieth century hygiene campaigns, advertisers in the 1940s and 1950s emphasized the hygienic qualities of a refrigerator (food wouldn’t spoil and make your family sick). Utilizing images of Peronist iconography, advertisers insisted appliances would make women better caregivers and the men who purchased them better providers (this assumption would change in the 1960s). In line with Peronist notions of gender, newspaper advertisements presumed an audience of a housewife/mother without an independent income who needed these tools to better care for their family, to make their lives comfortable.\[30\] An ad from 1954 shows a woman on her hands and knees polishing the floor. The tag line reads, “This drama is finished! Shine your floors with the new Encerasol [floor polisher].”\[31\] A different series of ads for SIAM/Hoover appearing in the winter of 1956 show women with their new washing machine and a picture in the corner where they are pictured shivering while washing clothes by hand outside. The ad reads “Remember

\[30\] Interestingly, as historian Inés Perez has pointed out, appliances were not sold as “machines of work, rather as products of comfort.” This underlines the idea that household labor was not, in fact, really work and that it is the machines doing the work rather than the people operating the machines. Pérez 186.

\[31\] La Prensa, June 10, 1954.
The ads demonstrated that as Argentina sought “progress” through the accumulation of new technologies and other items of leisure and comfort, it would be unseemly for (middle-class) Argentine women to continue scrubbing the floors on their hands and knees. So even though the addition of these appliances into one’s home would help advance the country out of “barbarity,” the changing of prescribed gender roles was not part of the negotiated process. Women would still be in charge of the washing and cooking thus caring for their families (this was supposed to be a crucial part of their identity) and husbands would provide economically for their families.

The distribution of household appliances increased drastically during the Peronist years, but it was only in the 1960s when national factories were able to produce unrestricted by import barriers did the majority of Argentines purchase refrigerators, washing machines, and eventually televisions. Thus, appliances were useful in Peronist propaganda in that they were a modernizing force within the home and at the same time reinforced idealize gender roles. In addition, most appliances were made in Argentina (they were one of the few bright spots in Argentine manufacturing) and therefore fit nicely into Perón’s plan of economic nationalism.

By the early 1950s, difficult realities began to sharply collide with the images of abundance and middle-class lifestyles that Peronist propaganda promised. In the late 1940s after only a few years of consistent renegotiations of union contracts and increases in benefits (including paid vacations, health insurance, and more generous family wages), inflation became a serious problem for many Argentines. Pensioners were particularly

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32 Clarín, April 7, 1956.
hurt. In addition, constant shortages affected not only manufacturing and industry, but housewives had difficulty procuring basic goods. Argentines grew weary of the shortages as well as long lines and high prices for manufactured goods. And not surprisingly the benefits of Peronist policy affected Argentines unevenly. Many middle class Argentines became embittered as they saw themselves becoming downwardly mobile. Consumption had grown in certain regions and not in others (Buenos Aires and its suburbs benefitted disproportionately). Thus, more sectors of Argentine society became disaffected and the military and church’s opposition to him more entrenched. In September 1955 Juan Perón was overthrown in a coup d’état.

Inventing Development

Perón was overthrown when he had lost the support of not only the middle classes and students, but also the support of the church and, crucially, the military. At the end of his term, Argentina was incredibly polarized and at loggerheads as the economy was in free fall after years of unsustainable economic policies. The newly installed military government wanted to rejuvenate industry, curtail the power of labor unions, and stop inflation from skyrocketing again. However, because the country was so polarized, the primary goal of the anti-Peronist military led government that overthrew Perón in 1955 was to “deperonize” Argentine society, politics, and economy in all its forms. To start with, the Peronist party and all Peronist symbols were outlawed and Perón himself was

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33 See Milanesio, “‘The Guardian Angels of the Domestic Economy’.”
34 Elena, *Dignifying Argentina*, 143-145.
exiled. Even mentioning Perón’s name was outlawed. While this might seem like an obvious first step for a new set of rulers who despised Perón and all he stood for, as historian Luis Alberto Romero notes, “The proscription of Peronism, and with it that of the working class, defined a political setting that was fictitious, illegitimate, and inherently unstable, one that opened the way for a struggle – unresolved – between the country’s great corporative powers.”

More fundamentally the new government had to heal a country that, as the historian Felix Luna noted “had touched bottom, [was] locked in hatred, distrust, and prejudice,” and had to assimilate “that vast sector of the Argentine population who [had] put their hope in the figure [of Juan Perón],” whose hopes and standard of living had been raised by Peronism.

From 1955-1958 the military leaders frenetically attempted to govern a fractured nation with an iron hand, trying to erase the fact that Perón or Peronism had ever existed. Yet in order for a civilian government to be successful, they would have to make alliances with Peronist supporters as well as reinvigorate the Argentine economy. It was in this historical context that politicians began to search for some kind of ideological answer to Peronism. Instead, they found an economic philosophy called developmentalism.

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38 Altamirano, *Bajo el signo*, 51.
The intellectual Arturo Frondizi was one of the most prominent politicians in the late 1950s and he was obsessed with the new-fangled idea that Argentina needed to be “developed.” His ideas were strongly shaped and influenced by the internationally renowned economist Raúl Prebisch and by Frondizi’s closest advisor, the nationally prominent economist Rogelio Frigerio. Frondizi’s economic plan differed from the Peronist model in key rhetorical and strategic ways, yet was amenable to the vast majority of the Argentine population who still supported the deposed leader. For example, Perón often articulated how the Argentine people would directly benefit from his policies in their everyday life while Frondizi tended to emphasize how public works would grow the Argentine economy and, in general terms, raise the standard of living. From 1955-1970 public discourse about the economic direction of the country became framed by the language of economic development and Argentina’s status as a developed or underdeveloped country. Economic development “attracted and inspired a wide intellectual swath” of interest that went beyond the walls of academics, policy makers, politicians, and activist journalists. Its validity convinced politicians of all stripes, but it did not come close to being as ideologically inspiring or all-encompassing as Peronism.

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40 While Prebisch was very well respected internationally, his status within Argentina until the mid-1950s was more dubious. He was considered a conservative reminder of the 1930s as he had been on the delegation that negotiated the hated Roca-Runciman treaty. His reputation was quickly redeemed, but the intellectual changes that marked his shift from imperial sell-out to national protectionist underscore a lifetime of continually changing economic philosophies and intellectual growth.

41 Altamirano, Bajo el signo, 55.

42 General Onganía, who led a coup to overthrow President Illia in 1966, discussed its benefits in a speech at West Point in 1964. Altamirano, Bajo el signo, 56.
While developmentalism – and its US twin, modernization theory – were popular around the world after World War II, Argentina’s intellectuals shaped it to fit Argentina’s peculiar economic and political realities. Developmentalism assumed that all societies could and must pass through different stages of development before they would arrive at the final, most developed stage. This ultimate stage was marked by industrialization and a heavily consumerist society (like the United States) and countries like Argentina just needed to “catch up” to them through the acquisition of technical know-how. Therefore, both Prebisch and Frigerio argued that “underdeveloped” countries needed to industrialize and in order for that to happen domestic industries needed to be protected.\(^43\)

Developmentalism emphasized the importance of industrial development; creating, expanding, and maintaining basic infrastructure such as electricity, water, and gas; the development of industries that could foment the development of the rest of the country, in other words: oil, steel, and cement. Accordingly, as politicians twenty years before had also argued, they advocated for Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI).\(^44\)

Frondizi’s endorsement of ISI and its underlying policy assumptions mark many of the differences between Peronist and Frondicista economic policy. The importance of ISI in restructuring the Argentine economy meant that, as under Peronism, a strong and

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\(^43\) Altamirano, *Bajo el signo*, 54. Frigerio had founded the magazine *Que* which became the informal mouthpiece for Frondizi’s campaign for the presidency. In it, Perón announced his support for Frondizi and asked his supporters to vote for the candidate. It was in large part thanks to this endorsement that Frondizi was successfully elected president.

\(^44\) Celia Szusterman notes that the biggest industrial expansion took place in Argentina between 1937-1939 and then again between 1959-1961. It was “vegetative” under Peronism. Thus the structure of the Argentine economy again changed drastically in the late 1950s as manufacturing expanded rapidly. See Celia Szusterman, *Frondizi and the Politics of Developmentalism in Argentina, 1955-1962* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press), 177.
activist government was needed to protect local industries. However, unlike Peronism, Frondizi’s government and all governments in the 1960s developed strong alliances with industrialists and were more distant if not sometimes antagonistic to the Peronist unions. Developmentalists were concerned with the welfare of the working-classes, but they believed that standards of living would be raised through the free market, rather than only through government intervention and policies.\(^{45}\) As Frondizi said in an interview a few years after being overthrown, “The agent of development would be private capital, although the State reserved a few ‘cerebral’ functions: to prioritize heavy industry and help direct investment through credit and policy.”\(^{46}\) Thus, developmentalism was fundamentally a capitalistic enterprise that sought to grow the economy through fostering industrialization rather than consumption. Consumption was supremely important in this economic equation, but the policies did not focus on augmenting it. Frondizi’s program of developmentalism may have shared some superficial similarities to Perón’s economic programs (a criticism often levied by his opponents), but Frondizi tackled development from an a different ideological vantage point that was created in the mid-1950s and used different rhetorical justifications for it. Yet his rhetoric carefully selected from the Peronist repertoire of vocabulary. His early speeches are filled with references to an economy of *abundancia*. He also specifically emphasizes the need to address the

\(^{45}\) It is interesting to note that Frondizi was at all popular with staunchly Peronist supporters considering what a prominent intellectual he was and how anti-intellectual Peronism was. As the conservative scholar, Arturo Jauretche, a contemporary of Frondizi noted, “For the first time in Argentine history an intellectual receives the support of the people or, said in another way, for the first time the people are not against the intellectual.” (Altamirano, *Los nombres de poder: Frondizi o el hombre de ideas como político* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998), 77)

\(^{46}\) Altamirano, *Los nombres de poder*, 58.
bienestar (well-being) of the average Argentine through economic development. For instance, in 1959 he says economic development is “called oil, coal, steel, electricity, and heavy industry. They mean liberty, democracy, self-determination, and well-being.” These awkward attempts to mix Peronist language with the emphases of development policy hampered Frondizi’s ability to explain his policies in a more warm and direct way. Both his technocratic language and inability to harness state propaganda meant that most Argentines did not feel the benefits or pride of development. For example, the Peronist propaganda machine successfully promoted the laying of a major gas pipeline in 1947. Newspapers described how both the workers of the largest gas pipeline in the Americas and the Argentine people would directly benefit from the project. They published detailed descriptions of the rich and abundant food that pipeline workers were given by their employer (the state), the high salaries, and the incredibly clean conditions at the camp. In addition, the pipeline itself was marketed to capture the imagination of Argentines, something Frondizi’s government was never able to do. As historian Milanesio notes,

> The pipeline became an icon of national assertiveness, proudly conveying the technical ability of Argentine engineers, the laboriousness and selflessness of the national working class, and the efficiency of the state. When the construction ended, the government displayed these messages in a monumental parade of workers, equipment, and vehicles down the

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48 Also like Perón, Frondizi pushed his national economic agenda utilizing language of “a national struggle.”
streets of Buenos Aires and a two-day exhibit of the machinery that congregated around 12,000 students.49

Thus, Perón successfully utilized large-scale public works to sell his vision of a better Argentina and gas as a tool for the well-being of the people, not industry.

Frondizi’s discourse was more filled with the new development language, which utilized social scientific words spread by intellectual circles and universities. The language of development was sweeping Argentina because not only did Prebisch have enthusiastic supporters in Argentina, but more importantly the quantitative sociologist Gino Germani created a prolific and influential group of disciples by helping to create a bachelors program in both economics and sociology at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA).50 Those who worked at Prebisch’s CEPAL – the chief instrumental organization for spreading ideas about development -- also worked at the UBA and the sociology and economics degrees essentially became vehicles for teaching ideas about developmentalism and later Dependency Theory. CEPAL began publishing the journal Desarrollo económico (Economic Development) in 1958, which became enormously influential in spreading the newest ideas about development along with the new terms to describe that status. A new, theoretical vocabulary framed by a social science world view where everything could be measured through statistics and surveys and words like “periphery,” “semidesarrollo,” and “terms of exchange” spread beyond political institutions and academia as institutions from the Catholic Church to the Armed Forces.

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50 Altamirano notes that even though “development” was a topic of economic thought that had circulated since World War II, it did not gain widespread circulation in Argentina until the fall of Perón in 1955.
began opining about the best ways to develop the country. As the historian Altamirano explained, “the new socioeconomic map was [now] ordered on developed-underdeveloped axis.”

More than anything this new concept of “economic development” changed how Argentines understood the state of the Argentine economy and the relationship of Argentina to the rest of the world. As new data emerged regarding GDP, per capita income, and access to basic services Argentines began to see that Argentina was no longer measured as equals with Australia and Canada, whom it had always seen as its peers. It was through this language that Argentina became part of a heterogenous group of “peripheral countries,” a position they were deeply uncomfortable with. For the next fifteen years, “economic development” was on the lips of ordinary Argentines and policy makers alike.

Frondizi shared Perón’s moral imperative to redistribute wealth and create a more socially just society, but he argued that the economy had to grow in fundamental ways in order for that to continue happening. In other words, Frondizi maintained the pie had become too small. He noted after his overthrow that in 1958 “the wealth that needed to

51 Altamirano, Bajo el signo, 55.
52 Altamirano, Bajo el signo, 56.
53 Altamirano, Bajo el signo, 56-57.
54 The mainstreaming of economic development becomes more obvious in the mid-1960s after the arrival of the influential magazine Primera Plana. Magazines which focused on current events, popular comic strips such as Mafalda and even literature began to fervently discuss economic development through understanding Argentina’s place in the core/periphery relationship.
be redistributed had been distributed and we had to create more wealth.” Frondizi, like other presidents before him, argued that a primary challenge to having a just society was the poor distribution of wealth across both class and region. His solution to doing this was creating industrial poles outside of greater Buenos Aires, like in Córdoba. Using developmentalist logic, the collective standard of living would be maintained through buying goods produced in Argentina.

Both Peronism and developmentalism advocated for economic independence yet their means were very different. In 1949 Raúl Prebisch published what became known informally as the “CEPAL Manifesto.” In it, he laid forth an economic philosophy that endorsed anti-dependence nationalism, modernizing capitalism, regional integration, national effort, expansion for the internal market, absorption of the labor force, raising technological level, endogenous creation of technology. Frondizi embraced these tenets and strongly advocated for them in his 1954 publication Petróleo y Política in which he criticized Perón for allowing foreign investment into the oil sector. In this way, Frondizi and Frigerio closely followed Prebisch’s CEPAL guidelines. However, upon being elected in 1958 he quickly invited foreign investment that started an in-flow of money into the oil and manufacturing industries (cars especially). This meant that the availability of household appliances exploded and cars were made significantly cheaper and more widely available. However, unionists and some economists thought that meant Argentina

55 Luna 13.
57 Szusterman 82.
was again beholden to foreign interests (as they were in the 1930s to England). This contradiction – a strong rhetoric of economic independence and ISI while allowing foreign investment - was not lost on Frondizi’s contemporaries. As the prominent industrialist Guido di Tella commented, “The originality of [Frondizi’s] economic program lay in that it combined a strong ISI plan – as extreme as that of CEPAL – with policies of foreign investment that were abhored by cepalino circles and nationalists of all stripes.”

Still, in the short term, at least, his policies were successful. However, many of his supporters from the 1958 presidential campaign – both unionists and leftists – never forgave him for betraying that fundamental campaign promise of restricting foreign investment and the debate about the role of foreign economic interests in the Argentine economy continues until this day.

While under Peronism consumption was a focal point of economic policy, Frondizi’s developmentalist policies focused on the supply side of the equation. Continual growth of mass consumption was seen as a crucial part of the economic formula for growth, but it was not the target of government policies or programs. For example, in 1961 Frondizi said “that reality presupposes a consumer market in permanent progression.” Frondizi accepted high levels of consumption as necessary to reach the

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58 Altamirano, *Los nombres de poder*, 80.

59 The long-term success is more debatable. As Ramón Grosfoguel noted, “rather than importing consumer goods, Latin Americans were forced to import machinery, new technologies, patents, and licenses for which they needed to pay still more. The “national” bourgeoisie became associated with multinational corporations. They were dependent on foreign capitalists for technology, machinery, and finance.” Grosfoguel, “Developmentalism, Modernity, and Dependency Theory in Latin America,” 358.

highest stage of Rostovian growth, but he was not enthusiastic about discussing the topic nor did he focus his policies on it.\textsuperscript{61}

Instead, Frondizi emphasized the development of infrastructure and in particular the importance of oil and natural gas independence in arriving to that final stage of economic development.\textsuperscript{62} In a speech given in 1958 Frondizi explained the importance of oil independence: “oil is what moves our locomotives, tractors, and trucks, our boats, airplanes, and military equipment. It feeds our factories, gives electricity to our cities, and comfort to our homes. It is the slave of national life and we get almost all of it from abroad.”\textsuperscript{63} Despite the initial outrage of some of his supporters for seeking foreign investment, in three years the government had increased oil and natural gas production by 150 percent.\textsuperscript{64} Frondizi focused on funneling that new oil and gas to the “indispensable infrastructure that was required by this new development economy,” and excluded reproductive priorities, like housing, “unnecessary work,” and “the mere production of services.”\textsuperscript{65} For those living in smaller cities, towns and rural areas, it meant years

\textsuperscript{61} Interestingly, despite Frondizi's lack of emphasis on consumption, Catholic critics accused his government of being "materialist". In a speech given in September 1961 commemorating the naming of officials to the Development Commission, Frondizi answers those critics by saying “the economic development of the country is not an end in itself. The expansion of the economy and the creation of more goods and services are only simple instruments for the \textit{spiritual} fulfillment of a people” and that economic development will bring the “social and material progress that our nation needs” [emphasis added] (Frondizi, \textit{Mensajes Vol. 4}, 231 and 234.). The final objective of economic development was of “elevating the social level. We do not conceive of the first (economic development) without the second.” (Arturo Frondizi, \textit{Mensajes Presidenciales Vol. 5} (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Centro de Estudios Nacionales 1978), 58.)

\textsuperscript{62} Frondizi also obsessively connected the drop in national steel production to a drop in the national standard of living. It was so important that Frondizi declared 1960 to be the year of steel.

\textsuperscript{63} Frondizi, \textit{Mensajes presidenciales vol. 1}, 134.

\textsuperscript{64} Luna 14.

\textsuperscript{65} Luna 16.
lobbying for the investment, laying the pipes themselves, or continuing to buy gas in more expensive, less efficient (canisters) garrafas and (large canisters) tubos. Yet Frondizi was closely following the economic plan outlined in the famed “Plan Prebisch,” where Prebisch also recommended the urgent need to increase the supply of electricity, improve the railroad system, and bring technology to agriculture.66

The supporters of developmentalism rather than the developmentalist politicians more ably articulated how developmentalist policies exalting steel production were connected to improved standards of living within the home. The general interest magazine Panorama said, “it is not natural to associate the hell that is the steel blast furnaces, the mountains of iron, with the comfort of every home.” However, the journalist continued, the most solid way to measure the "standards" of a country was through its production of steel as it supports light industry and the production of consumer goods, which "only serve[s] to improve the standard of living like electric shavers, cars, space heaters, and refrigerators."67

These underlying differences in economic priorities – industrialization and oil independence for Frondizi, consumer abundance and schools for Perón – demonstrate that while both Presidents were concerned for the “well-being” of Argentines, Frondizi’s policy emphases were more abstract, cold, and far removed from the daily experiences of most Argentines. Peronist policies, on the other hand, emphasized the quotidian and

66 Altamirano, Bajo el signo, 52.
were “eloquently inclusive in social terms” utilizing “a nationalistic appeal to the general citizenry.” Historian Milanesio notes that, for instance, “Gas del Estado announced an era of ‘Gas for all the households, from the most luxurious to the most modest,’ openly communicating the Peronist goal of improving the standard of living for all citizens.”

Frondizi presumed that Argentines knew how they would benefit and had trouble articulating the benefits in a relatable fashion.

Despite his inability to express it, Frondizi did see a clear link between the development of steel, energy, and oil and how they would improve standards of living and “well-being.” Frondizi saw this happening through a chain of events: once we improved the supply of electricity and oil to – most importantly – industry then industry would expand. The development of steel plants would also be crucial in supplying steel to heavy industry, primarily the production of cars and other vehicles. This would employ people and with their new income their standards of living would rise because they would buy things that raise the standards of their material surroundings (partly through buying what they produce). As he said in 1960, “the modern world marches on steel, is driven by oil, coal, and electricity. Without iron, steel, and electricity, peoples are deprived of their future and are condemned to misery, dependency and

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backwardness.” However, Frondizi’s vision paled in comparison with Peronist propaganda and iconography that so fantastically painted a vision of a better tomorrow.\(^{70}\)

Frondizi also emphasized the importance of “developing” the provinces. He repeatedly emphasized that the provinces needed to “catch-up” to the level of development and standard of living more like that of Buenos Aires (just as Argentina needed to “catch-up” to the United States). This integration would be aided “through a vast network of roads and all modern means of communication, which will bring closer our different regions.”\(^{71}\) In his travels Frondizi restated that the purpose of development was to increase the standards of living across Argentina and argued that it increased the “level” of culture in a way that would integrate the country into a “big spiritual family,” thus recognizing that the country was divided geographically, economically, and culturally. When discussing how electricity would give the rural population the joys of “modern comforts” Frondizi emphasized that would mean rural folk would not feel the “impulse to emigrate from their native place.”\(^{72}\) This leveling would take place with the help of technology.

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\(^{70}\) Yet, Frondizi understood how the whole issue of underdevelopment was at times more about Argentina’s standing in the world. As he said in a 1958 speech, “The spectacle of our cities without electricity, unusable streets continually becoming dirtier and more depressing, express an absurd decadence of a people that is young and potentially rich.” This quote suggests that Frondizi, like many Argentines, was self-conscious of its position as an underdeveloped country that should be able to harness its possibilities better. (Frondizi, *Mensajes Vol. I*, 235-236.)


\(^{72}\) Frondizi, *Mensajes Vol. 5*, 93.
Although Frondizi emphasized the importance of technology in helping Argentina reach its zenith, he was interested more in how technology would be useful in the factory than the home. Following W. W. Rostow’s ideas of universal development, Frondizi argued that Argentina’s access to technology had “unified all societies in one historical process that is unique and universal.”\textsuperscript{73} While travelling in Thailand in 1961 he thanked western technology for permitting the liberation of “men” “from the heavy yokes put on [them] by nature and that has furnished the necessary conditions so that all States may all be a part of one universe.”\textsuperscript{74} This meant that Frondizi argued passionately for the development of “high technology consumer goods in the petro-chemical and electro metallurgical field” was essential for the progress of Argentina.\textsuperscript{75} To Frondizi, who did not appreciate the enormous pent-up demand for them, the production of household appliances was already passé. Indeed, Frondizi actually met with SIAM executives, who were the biggest manufacturer of refrigerators in Argentina, to convert their refrigerator factories into automobile factories. The executives tried to convince him this was impossible and Frondizi walked away from the interview very unhappy with their lack of “cooperation.”\textsuperscript{76} This anecdote illustrates the gendered priorities of Frondizi’s economic policies and his lack of appreciation for the importance of technology in quotidian domestic life.

\textsuperscript{73} Frondizi, Mensajes Vol. 4, 4.
\textsuperscript{74} Frondizi, Mensajes Vol. 4, 11.
\textsuperscript{75} James, Resistance or Integration, 107.
Frondizi’s interest in how appliances modernized life was scant because he primarily saw economic development taking place in heavy industry and not the home. He occasionally did recognize how Argentina’s status as a developed nation could be measured by appliances when he stated during a visit to the United States that: “[Argentina has] achieved a high level of development thanks the combined efforts of businesspeople, technicians, and workers. We manufacture not only food products and textiles, but also radios, televisions, washing machines, refrigerators, tractors, rail cars, trucks, and cars.” Other developmentalists appreciated both the modernizing effect of household appliances and their importance to the industrialization of Argentina and they promoted their sales enthusiastically. Indeed, the production of appliances steadily increased throughout the 1960s.

To most Argentines the importance and meaning of appliances in their promise of a better life changed little with the overthrow of Perón. Advertisements in both popular women’s magazines and newspapers continued to portray women as perfect wives and mothers with the help of household appliances. Advertisements promoting the success of Argentine industry, like the one appearing in the women’s magazine Para Ti, imitated Peronist iconography and portrayed a hypermasculine, muscular man (see below). In the early years of Frondizi’s government, there seemed to be a cultural expectation that women were duty bound to purchase them as part of their effort to create a warm, comfortable, and modern home. This expectation was reflected in a quiz given by the popular woman’s magazine Para Ti in March of 1959. In it readers were asked to

explain why they wanted to get married and what priorities they would have in their marriage. In one question, they asked readers to rank in importance the duties of a housewife. Options included fixing a day and time for every household task, preparing food to the taste of your husband, and the acquisition of “more modern appliances to contribute to the comfort of your home.” Thus, being a good housewife meant not only keeping an impeccable house and catering to your husband's wants, but also purchasing appliances. Household appliances, even ten years after their initial push by Peronist leaders, continued to be alternately symbols of status, efficient housekeeping, and fashion throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s.

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78 “Siete ‘tests’ para el matrimonio,” Para Ti, March 10, 1959, 56.
Appliances’ symbolic modernity was almost more important than how they alleviated household tasks or provided entertainment for the family. For instance, more than two years after the “How to be a Good Housewife Quiz,” the conservative and Catholic magazine *Para Ti* presented readers with a quiz asking them whether they were modern or stuck in the old ways. Included amongst the questions of whether readers thought women should be allowed to wear pants on the street, whether it was “normal” for women to “work on the same par as men,” was the question: “Do you have at least three of the following appliances at home: refrigerator, blender, washing machine, record
player, electric shaver.” In this way appliances were both an obligation for those who could afford them (as indicated by the 1959 quiz) and a symbol of modernity.

Through these quizzes we can see how appliances were conceived in different registers. In the first iteration, the purchase of appliances was the duty of a good housewife who wishes to create a comfortable and welcoming home for her family. In the second, the use of appliances meant you are modern, open to change, embracing what the future brings. In both cases, the writers of the quizzes implied that appliances are a very good thing and are therefore encouraged readers to embrace them, although for very different reasons.

Despite Frondizi’s and the other developmentalists’ best intentions, they utilized a narrow definition in which broader understandings of the impact of development were either left out or purposefully ignored. In general, they underestimated the importance of culture which, as scholar Ramón Grosfoguel has noted, can lead to “analytical impoverishment of the complexities of political-economic processes.” Developmentalists were focused on production and only saw consumption as an act of purchasing, a necessary component of an economic equation rather than a complex socio-cultural process in which class and gender identities are constructed and contested. They did not fully appreciate or envision how things like washing machines, refrigerators, record players, or even blue jeans could play pivotal parts in changing gender roles, generational divides, and class status. In measuring the economy they ignored women’s

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79 Roger Dal, “¿Es Usted chapada a la antigua o ultramoderna?,” Para Ti, November 7, 1961, 10-11.
reproductive labor and the contributions of women in the informal economy. To Frondizi the repercussions of running water and the ability to own a washing machine was simply a “higher standard of living.” They were not a woman going out to work or a working-class family going into debt. And they were not cultural reactions to such social changes (for instance, conservative sectors of Argentine society arguing that large numbers of middle-class Argentine women working lead to the “masculinization” of women).

Until the end of Frondizi’s term, even when he knew his overthrow was imminent, he continued to advocate for his development plan, specifically emphasizing the need for more sources of electricity. Finally, by early 1962, Frondizi was forced to recognize new cultural and social winds were blowing and the first signs of a crisis between the generations were emerging. In one of his final speeches he addressed the concerns of parents worried about a supposed moral crisis and “the liberalizing of habits” brought on by “certain ignoble forms of cinema, literature, theatre, or television” (emphasis added). More than he would like to have acknowledged, Frondizi enabled these changes by helping to build the infrastructure that spread these new messages.

**Conclusion**

Frondizi was successful in fulfilling his administration’s priorities, but ultimately had an unsuccessful presidency. Like petroleum and gas production, consumption of steel and cement went up significantly from 1958-1961 and the production of electricity

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81 Frondizi, Mensajes Vol. 5, 151.
increased 17 percent. Frondizi successfully lobbied for a USD$95 million loan from the World Bank to create to finish and enormous power plant called Dock Sud located in Buenos Aires. Household appliances like washing machines, refrigerators, ovens, and televisions sets became more widely available as parts became more easily available and production increased. As can been seen in his prolific speeches given throughout his term, he never tired of promoting his economic program of energy, oil, and steel. However his obsessive focus on the tenets of developmentalism meant that many concerns of the average Argentine were partially ignored. He did not successfully address the more immediate and tangible needs of the Argentine population as Perón had. Frondizi had an enormously deep concern for the long-term well-being and progress of ordinary Argentines through creating basic infrastructures and services that would eventually benefit the majority of the population in fundamental ways. Yet in disdaining the more quotidian, immediate concerns that made ordinary Argentines’ lives more comfortable and livable he seemed a cold and remote leader unconcerned with their experiences.

Frondizi would have been more successful in conveying his message by continually articulating what economic development looked like and felt like to ordinary Argentines. It was Frondizi’s inability to establish a strong and warm relationship with the Argentine people that meant, in part, his presidency and legacy would resonate far

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82 Luna 14.
83 Luna 55.
84 The cover of an important humor magazine called Tia Vicenta made fun of Frondizi’s focus on oil. On a 1958 cover they portrayed oil sprouting from his head.
less than Perón’s. Frondizi’s focus on increasing heavy industry and belief that Argentina had moved beyond appliances, both symbolically and practically, was premature and it underscored how Frondizi was out of touch with the quotidian struggles of most Argentines.

Even though Frondizi was overthrown in a military coup in March 1962, the foundation for most of the social and economic changes of the 1960s had been laid. First, his industrialization policies and the rapid expansion of manufacturing helped to maintain a strong working-class who were able to consume at much higher levels than many workers around the world. Second, the media had begun a prolific expansion during Frondizi’s administration. Television and therefore advertising and American shows were rapidly expanding to interior cities like Córdoba and then Salta. A boom of magazine publishing began at the end of Frondizi’s term, including the arrival of the phenomenally influential *Primera Plana* that acted as both a liberalizing cultural force and a conservative political force. Third, the importance of consumption, both symbolically and economically, continued to be strong throughout the decade. Peronism had reshaped its meanings so that it was no longer only the right of the oligarchs to live well. Under Frondizi’s brand of developmentalism a vibrant capitalism nurtured the advertising industry, which was aided by the explosion of television and magazines. And fourth, while Perón had reinforced a gendered hierarchy to consumption, one which Frondizi did not address directly, ordinary people began to overturn those hierarchies in the 1960s. This overturning was initially welcomed and then vociferously resisted by
different facets of society. Despite Frondizi’s general obliviousness to these changes, his economic policies played an unexpected role in helping them come to be.
Chapter 2: Fomenting Mass Consumption amid Uneven Development

In 1960 Argentina, Buenos Aires was the only Argentine city to have television. Its three stations broadcast only a few hours a day and never in the summer. While some of the shows were locally produced, many like Bonanza were imported from the United States. Through these shows Argentines were exposed to “first-world” standards of living and cultural products. Locally made commercials aired between programs also encouraged the purchase of new-fangled products like jeans, hi-fis, washing machines, refrigerators, and television sets – all made in Argentina. In that way, television promoted both the new standards of living through the programs it aired and the products needed to enact those standards through the commercials shown between those programs.

The television set itself was one of the most important status symbols of the decade. By 1969, most major cities in Argentina had television and therefore access to the same imported and domestic television shows, the same commercials, and the same status symbols. Every night Argentines from Patagonia to the Bolivian border watched the same programs on the one, two, or three stations broadcasting in their region. Argentines increasingly had access to similar visions of a consumer society. Developmentalist politicians and journalists who had tirelessly encouraged the expansion of television because of its importance to economic development and symbolic modernity therefore were eager to measure the expansion of television and the production of television sets.
The chain of reaction connecting economic development with contemporaneous social and cultural changes is usually not evident, especially when analyzing macro-economic statistics alone. In the case of television, the link between the expansion of consumer culture and economic development is more obvious. Even how the changes were gendered is fairly clear: for instance, critics of television decried how its popularity emphasized “feminine” domestic life over a more “masculine” public life simply because quotidian life began to focus more on the home.¹ However, because these connections were usually not obvious, government officials and businesspeople only interested in gauging economic development simply did not see the social and cultural consequences. Things like the number of women entering the workforce, unemployment levels in the provinces, or rates of appliance ownership were not recorded at all, not recorded in a thorough manner, or not recorded accurately.² Developmentalists were very interested in understanding the rates of production of household appliances, but not the rates of ownership. The distinction is key because it demonstrates that the production in and of itself was what was valuable to those tracking economic growth, but not how owning and using the appliances changed people’s lives.

I argue that economic development is culturally and ideologically constructed and that we cannot understand the meaning of development outside of the historical moment.

² For instance, the government does not start its regular *Encuesta Permanente de Hogares*, which studies in-depth household consumption, until 1973. Its predecessor, the *Encuesta de empleo y desempleo* did not survey unemployment in provincial cities when it began. And the private Consejo Técnico de Inversiones published *La economía argentina* estimated how many televisions were being produced by individuals in their garages, but not how many women were employed in the informal sector.
in which it was constructed. I demonstrate this by analyzing and cross-referencing seemingly unrelated social, cultural, and economic sources to reveal a fuller, more complete picture of economic development and its effects. I do this in part by applying a cultural analysis to economic statistics. By both reading into these statistics and considering them in relation to unorthodox sources (ie, journalistic discourse), I demonstrate how they reveal the often unrecognized connection between economic development, an expanding consumer culture, and changing gender roles. Furthermore, I demonstrate how the widespread availability of basic services is fundamental to the expansion of a consumer society. I do this through mining economic sources for information about Argentina’s consumer culture. In other words, I understand that statistics demonstrating the availability of gas, water, electricity, and television signals also show whether Argentines even had access to consumer status symbols like washing machines, refrigerators, or hi-fis. In Argentina, the expansion of gas, water, and electricity happened at the same time as developmentalist discourses came into vogue and consumer culture expanded, whereas in the US and Europe these basic services were already in place before development became the measure of progress. Thus, in Argentina the strengthening of consumer culture was tied to economic development in a way unlike in the United States or Northern Europe.3

3 Feminist scholars of development have most successfully demonstrated how economic development is ideologically constructed. In the 1960s dependency scholars objected to the supposed universal trajectory that all nations needed to take in order to reach the “highest” level of development, which was basically just a copy of the United States. However, there is a reluctance to trace the chain of reaction. Cultural studies are generally uninterested in understanding cultural changes taking into account economics and vice versa.

Sources

The statistics collected build a picture of the Argentine economy and how it affected people’s daily lives, yet they provide at best and impoverished portrait. For this reason, I examine both the phenomenon of data collection and the data itself in order to have the most complete picture possible of Argentina’s economic development and its relationship to a burgeoning consumer society. In other words, it is not enough to analyze the numbers themselves, one must also interrogate why other statistics were not collected, some only minimally, and others seemingly inaccurately. For instance, Argentine governments in the 1960s had an ongoing concern with inflation, sexuality and reproduction, the cost of living for workers, and how the labor force was handling widespread structural changes. In 1963 then President José María Guido’s government conducted a study of fecundity while President Illia’s government conducted a study of the consumption of foodstuffs and a survey on “the income and expenses of salaried urban families in the cities of Córdoba, Mendoza, Tucumán, Formosa, y La Pampa.”5 Onganía made a survey on family budgets and one on induced abortion and the use of contraception. In terms of industry and production, by the late 1950s government officials chose to measure things like the number of household appliances and automobiles manufactured; the production of steel, grains, and natural gas; the availability of electricity, water and other utilities; and the export of beef. For the most part, this information appears to be accurate and believable as statistics from at least 6

5 In addition to the population and housing censuses of 1960 and 1970 and the economic census of 1963, there were several government-sponsored surveys that took place only once. See Gladys Massé’s article “Encuestas,” in Población y bienestar en la Argentina del primero al Segundo Centenario: Una historia social del siglo XX, ed. Susana Torrado, 257-262, (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2007).
different sources measuring the production of household appliances vary slightly but generally mutually reinforce each other.\textsuperscript{6} Some of the statistics require special scrutiny. For instance, it is impossible that male unemployment hovered under five percent for much of the 1960s as the state of the economy fluctuated wildly.\textsuperscript{7} Other statistics reproduce and reify the very categories they conceive.\textsuperscript{8} For example, in 1958 the Frondizi government sponsored a survey to discover the cost of living for workers’ families in which the only economically active member could be the male head of household. Thus the existence of female heads of households was simply erased.\textsuperscript{9} What they measured, did not measure, and measured inaccurately helps to paint a picture of how Argentine policy makers and businessmen understood development. In this way, this chapter demonstrates how the very process of collecting and employing statistics was an integral part of the broader effort in Argentina to become a “developed” country.

The gaps in the government’s data collection reveal that the developmentalists focused on what they understood to be most important: industrialization, the production of gas and electricity, and export crops. The Argentine government did not collect unemployment figures by sex in many provincial cities. They completely ignored the existence of the informal labor market when measuring unemployment and did not

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\textsuperscript{6} Three such documents are \textit{Censo Nacional Económico}, published by the Ministerio de Economía; the \textit{Anuario estadístico}, published by INDEC; and \textit{La economía argentina}, published by the Consejo Técnico de Inversiones (not a governmental association), which is generally known as a reliable consulting firm. However, there is shockingly little publicly available information about them, their origins, or their association with the government.

\textsuperscript{7} INDEC, \textit{Encuesta de empleo y desempleo}, (Buenos Aires: INDEC, 1970) 21, 72, 174, 123.

\textsuperscript{8} Nash and Safa 23.

\textsuperscript{9} Massé, “Encuestas” in \textit{Población y bienestar}, 257-262.
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measure appliance ownership frequently outside the major cities. (Appliance production, however, was surveyed frequently.) Government statistics only followed the changing status of women in the most minimal way because women’s status was subsumed under men’s (in other words, it was assumed that women’s status could be ascertained through gathering information about husbands or fathers). While surely lack of government funds and inexperience by government officials explains why much of this basic information was not collected, the missing data also points to the particularities of the government’s developmentalist ideology. While successive Argentine governments understood that strong middle and working classes were necessary to have the consumer society that would foment industrialization, they were not especially interested in investigating the “softer” or “secondary” issues related to changing social relations. This explains, why, for example, data was collected on how many refrigerators or televisions were produced in small neighborhood shops, but not on how many women were working in the informal market (such as maids or laundresses), or whether women’s incomes were rising as more professional women entered the workforce.

While the gaps in the Argentine government’s data collection reveal their developmentalist priorities, the subjects of United States government surveys in Argentina convey the priorities of that country’s Alliance for Progress program, which provided an unexpected source for data on media.\textsuperscript{10} The Alliance wanted a thorough

\textsuperscript{10} The Alliance for Progress was started by President John F. Kennedy in 1961 as a way to keep Latin American countries from Communism by improving Latin Americans’ economic condition. The guiding philosophy of the Alliance was modernization theory, a close relation to the developmentalism preached by Frondizi. See Jeffrey Taffet, \textit{Foreign Aide as Foreign Policy: The Alliance for Progress in Latin America} (New York: Routledge, 2007) and Michael E. Latham, \textit{Modernization as Ideology: American Social}
understanding of the media landscape so as to understand how to best reach the Argentine public and surveyed accordingly. For the purposes of my study, the penetration and availability of the media is a key indicator of what kind of access Argentines had to advertising and images of aspirational living or new, modern ideas in rapidly changing 1960s culture. In addition, unlike the Argentine government or private enterprises (like the Unión Industrial Argentina (UIA) or Argentine magazines) that tended to focus almost exclusively on the federal capital of Buenos Aires, U.S. surveys included many interior cities like Córdoba and Salta. The Alliance for Progress thoroughly and repeatedly measured the penetration of television into the interior\(^\text{11}\) of Argentina, who read which magazines and newspapers, and how those patterns varied across provinces. Therefore, some of the most extensive data collection about the interior is found through U.S. government sources.

Another source of information is trade associations, like the Unión Industrial Argentina (UIA), which carried out surveys about television ownership or advertising within Buenos Aires and published those results in their semi-monthly magazine. Businessmen were interested in an expanding media in the hope that advertisers would have more opportunities to reach a public with more disposable income. The UIA was

\[^{11}\text{In Argentina, anything outside Greater Buenos Aires, or at least the province of Buenos Aires, is referred to as the }\text{interior}.\text{ When used by porteños, which it more often is, it conveys a certain condescending attitude about life outside of Buenos Aires. The term embodies a whole litany of understandings about the unequal political, cultural, economic relationships between Buenos Aires and the rest of the country. The use of the term could be a study in its own right.}\]
particularly interested in the power of television but also recognized that increased
magazine readership in the interior along with continued radio listenership were crucial to
the marketing of their products.

Evaluating government production statistics alongside surveys about the media,
advertising, and appliance ownership demonstrate that these industries grew at rapid rates
during the 1960s and, we can suppose, drove each other’s growth. Magazine articles that
discussed these industries reveal how businessmen, intellectuals, and policymakers
couraged the growth of industry, the media, advertising, and consumption yet generally
did not understand the relationship between all of them in a systematic sort of way. Thus,
reading the unusual coupling of sources clarifies the connection between economic
development and consumer culture.

General interest and women’s magazines filled in the final link between economic
development and consumer culture by repeatedly discussing how daily life was changing
and how people felt about it. General interest magazines like Primera Plana,
Panorama, and Confirmado funded small, qualitative surveys about changing societal
attitudes. They were particularly interested in women’s sexuality and behavior, youth
culture, and attitudes toward the government. They also conducted many interviews that
sought to understand women’s desire to work outside the home, their desires to adopt

12 They also had many articles about economic development and industrialization along with the articles
about changing gender roles and/or appliances. However, none of the magazines connected the
phenomena.
household appliances, and their views about relationships and family. When they could not do the research themselves, they enthusiastically publicized and discussed the works of quantitative sociologists and more controversial popular sociologists who wrote extensively on consumer culture in contemporary Argentina. There was also a long-standing interest in reporting the challenges involved in daily life in the capital—long and crowded commutes, spotty telephone service, or the difficulties in finding a maid. These stories reflect the reality of the daily lives of middle-class porteños with telephones and disposable income to buy choice appliances and trendy clothes but miss the quotidian struggles of poor porteños or those living in provincial cities. The editors and the intellectuals whose musings they published presumed Buenos Aires to be in the vanguard of changing social mores that would ultimately influence the behavior of Argentines in the interior, but their silence on life in the interior indicates a lack of interest and perhaps a disdain for those living in the provinces. While these silences are telling, they do little to help us understand differences across provinces. In addition, most of these articles were written by and for men, thus illustrating how men’s experiences and perspectives were considered the norm while women’s experiences and perspectives were considered a deviation that needed to be explained.

I conducted a series of 43 interviews in 2006 and 2009 in the cities of Buenos Aires, Córdoba, and Salta that set in relief the connection between infrastructure development and consumer culture. They demonstrate what it meant to Argentines

13 However, there seemed to be little interest in exploring male sexuality, men’s experiences in the workplace or men’s attitudes towards relationships and the family.
across class and region to live with unreliable services while at the same time trying to enact a modern, consumer lifestyle. They illuminate in a way that statistics alone cannot, for example, the ways in which access to piped-in natural gas is so much more convenient and time-saving than bottled natural gas. The way interviewees answered questions also helped me to understand the paradox of underdevelopment in a consumer society. For instance, when I asked interviewees when they got a gas stove many would pause to think. They would answer by telling me the date piped-in gas arrived to the neighborhood and then say that is when they purchased the stove. In other words, they had the resources to purchase the stove and were just waiting for the government to lay the pipes. This way of answering my question enabled me to more fully understand the relationship between economic development and consumer culture. Throughout this chapter I utilize the words of my interviewees to both corroborate and bring to life what the statistics tell us.

Through various economic surveys along with more qualitative inquires, we will begin to get a comprehensive picture of the connection between economic development and consumerism. The Argentine government collected statistics on the most obvious gauges of economic development: industrial production, some unemployment figures, and the like. The US government, for reasons having nothing to do with economic development or consumer culture, surveyed extensively about the media habits of Argentines, a key way through which Argentines accessed consumer culture. Yet we are left mostly with information about middle-class life in Buenos Aires and have the sketchiest picture of urban provincial life as both government statistics and qualitative
descriptions of life there are minimal, and we are unable to know how urban life really differed between cities in the interior and the capital. Still, assembling this nontraditional assortment of sources allows us to assess how economic development and industrialization impacted cultural norms and social structures in urban areas.

**Access to Comfort?: The Supply of Water, Electricity, and Gas**

Argentines had limited access to consumer culture because the Argentine government had trouble providing access to water, electricity, and gas. Without these services, Argentines could not access many of the status symbols (televisions, refrigerators, washing machines) key to this new consumer society. Access to water was considered by developmentalists to be a basic indicator of development and had no obvious links with consumer culture. However, in 1960s Argentina washing machines were a key status symbol, and some Argentines could not purchase or utilize them because they did not have reliable access to running water. Also, without widespread access to safe drinking water, Argentine developmentalist politicians could not boast that Argentina was “developed” or that Argentines enjoyed the same standards of living as North Americans or Northern Europeans.

As with gas and electricity, access to running water varied widely between Buenos Aires and the provinces and, we can suppose, between provincial capitals and smaller towns. However, the Argentine government only published statistics about access to water by rural and urban provincial access and did not break down those statistics any further. Any towns over 2,000 inhabitants were considered urban, but these
small towns had fewer services than large provincial cities. Therefore, we do not know whether residents of the city of Córdoba had more or less running water in their homes than those living in towns in the province of Córdoba. This lack of specificity in the data, which belies an interest in only understanding differences between rural and urban standards of living, obscures important distinctions between those living in provincial capitals and those living in provincial towns.

Access to water, not unexpectedly, differed drastically by region, and even those with access to indoor running water did not necessarily get it from a public source. At first glance, the data can easily obscure subtle differences in development across Argentina and as compared to other nations. The government publication entitled *Anuario estadístico* (or *Statistical Yearbook*) notes that almost every dwelling in the federal capital had running water by 1945. In 1960 that number was 96%, and in the federal capital the vast majority had water from a public grid. However, only 91% had an indoor running toilet, which indicates that five percent of those with access to an indoor, public water supply were not hooked up to a sewer system. The picture is different in urban Córdoba in several ways. First, only 54% of houses in urban Córdoba had access to running water that came from the public water supply in 1960. However, 38% had access to running water in or near their homes through a motorized pump, hand pump, well, or other source. In urban Salta, 55% had indoor running water through the public water system, and 16% had access some other way. Access to water increased 27% in the province of Córdoba after the first Peronist years (1945-1950). It continued to increase at solid rates through the early 1960s and then again jumped by 28% between
1965-1970. Salta, not surprisingly as the poorest of these three provinces, showed a 56% increase between 1945 and 1950 (Perón’s first presidency). Access to water then jumped again by 28% from 1965-1970 and by 22% from 1970-75. This meant that in the 1960s only just over half of households in Salta and Córdoba had the ability to operate a washing machine (or hot water heater), even if they could afford it, as they did not have running water within their homes.\textsuperscript{14} Thus even though at first glance access to water was relatively high as compared to other developing nations, Argentina was not like a “first-world” nation because many Argentines did not get their water through public access, or they were not hooked up to the sewer system.

President Arturo Frondizi (1958-1962) made significant investment into the expansion of gas and oil production that made gas much more available to the Argentine population. Despite this success, its distribution was still frustratingly limited. We know this both from qualitative evidence describing the availability of gas and through interpreting the lack of data about availability in homes. We do not know exactly how many homes had access to piped-in gas because that data does not exist.\textsuperscript{15} The magazine \textit{Primera Plana} estimated there were only 708,500 users of piped-in natural gas in 1964, a small percentage of the total population of roughly 20 million. This lack of access is underscored by the fact that as late as 1962 plans were only \textit{in the works} to lay gas piping large enough to serve the intended populations in some of the most important


\textsuperscript{15} The 1960 census has information about water and electricity in homes, but not gas. The \textit{Anuario estadístico} has water and electricity, and information about “gasoductos” and where fuel was distributed.
thoroughfares and neighborhoods in Buenos Aires.\textsuperscript{16} Instead, the government recorded in a relatively thorough way the production of gas, which had exploded in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It increased by 60\% between 1955 and 1958 and then tripled between 1958 and 1961 to 4,909 million cubic meters. It stabilized to around 6,073 million cubic meters in 1962 for the next few years.\textsuperscript{17} Thus the expansion of services occurred during the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s at a pace that exceeded the expansion under the first Peronist presidency, but access was still quite limited.\textsuperscript{18}

Instead of piped gas, many Argentines relied on canisters (\textit{garrafas}) of gas, yet only in 1960 did the commercialization of \textit{garrafas} for retail sale by private firms even become legalized. These \textit{garrafas} could be used for stoves and space heaters. Before that only the state-owned Gas del Estado manufactured and distributed gas in cylinders and only sold them in very large sizes. Even with their limited usability, demand for those massive cylinders called \textit{tubos} well outpaced supply, and Gas del Estado was ultimately incapable of distributing widely enough. Private firms then began to sell \textit{garrafas} in cylinders of 5, 10, and 15 kilograms in 1960, thus making them more user-friendly to households. They also struggled to keep up with demand. As a US Foreign Service Dispatch noted in 1960, “The shortage of bottled gas has caused annoyance and

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\textsuperscript{18} \textit{El anuario estadístico} indicates that access to water did expand most rapidly under the Peronist years (roughly 1945-1955) in most places. However, production of electricity and gas expanded more quickly in the 1960s. For example, nationwide the production of electricity increased 21\% from 1950-1955, but then 41\% from 1955-1960, 64\% from 1960-65, and 29\% from 1965-1970. \textit{El anuario estadístico}, (Buenos Aires: INDEC, 1981) 276-279.
\end{footnotesize}
discomfort during the past months to many householders who have on occasion been left without hot water and their normal means of cooking for weeks at a time.”

When asked when they purchased a gas stove, time interviewees would pause and remember the date piped gas arrived to their neighborhood to fix the date of purchase for their stove. All these details indicate Argentine housewives were anxious to switch to gas as soon as they could afford it, whether it was piped in or using *garrafas* or the larger *tubos*.

The availability of gas in *garrafas* meant that more women could retrofit their kerosene stoves to work with gas *garrafas*. Kerosene stoves were often adopted when families were ready to give up cooking with wood, charcoal, or corncobs but as kerosene stoves were notoriously dirty, smelly, and difficult to light (and required alcohol to do so) the change to gas was seen as an advancement by most. In interviews, many housewives ruefully described the laborious task of lighting a kerosene stove, which involved soaking a wick with alcohol, waiting, working a small pump in a vigorous fashion, and finally lighting the wick to ignite the kerosene. One pump too many and the kerosene stove could explode. If the process was not done absolutely correctly, the kerosene stove tended to emit a terrible smell, requiring the device's removal from the house altogether.

Natural gas stoves, on the other hand, just required a match to light the burner and were essentially odorless. Asked in a *Primera Plana* article about the importance of natural

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19 “Foreign Service Dispatch 9/2/59,” Box 8 – 504.14, United States Embassy, Buenos Aires, General Records, RG: 84, NACP.

20 Claudia and Eduardo Luna [pseud.], interview with the author, July 9, 2006. Adriana Eguren [pseud.], interview with the author, July 7, 2006 (who described the process as “muy sacrificado”).
gas one porteña explained, “I couldn’t deal with charcoal anymore. They wouldn’t bring it on time. And then [with kerosene] having to use the heater, uncover the burner all the time because kerosene doesn’t always burn well. It really was torture. I prefer the garrafa. Since I made them put in the gas, I work less.”

Gas in tubos also had an unusual use in Argentina. In a speech given on radio and TV to the Argentine people on November 4, 1960, Frondizi, utilizing the “simple clarity” of a housewife, explained why the expansion of gas was so important to the average Argentine:

The housewife who until yesterday [had to] light the fire every morning, like a ritual, so that it would last all day…now just has to light the miracle of that small [gas] flame of her modest and useful gas stove every morning. For the woman who handles the household chores of the house or farm, oil is comfort, hygiene, and also more free hours (that can be dedicated to) fruitful labor or restorative leisure. Gas – that is to say, oil – takes one closer to light, heat, the possibility of a refrigerator; in sum, all of the details of well-being that were until yesterday reserved for the big cities or the richest.

In the above quote Frondizi mentions the “possibility of a refrigerator.” Argentine manufacturers, unlike those in Europe or the United States, produced a small number of refrigerators that ran on gas or kerosene. Therefore, a family could operate a refrigerator even though they did not have access to electricity. The manufacturers of kerosene- or gas-fueled appliances marketed specifically to that landed aristocracy who

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lived outside of Buenos Aires. The advertisements would say something like “Wherever you may live, this big refrigerator is for you…” or “Do you live outside [Buenos Aires]? This is YOUR big refrigerator run on GAS.” The appearance of this unusual product underscores the economic and social reality of Argentina, especially in comparison with “first-world” consumerist nations.

Figure 2: Para Ti, 14 November 1961.

Argentine manufacturers of gas-fueled stoves also innovatively marketed to Argentines without access to piped-in gas. Most of the advertisements for stoves/ranges emphasized that they worked equally well fitted for kerosene, gas in canisters, and gas in...
large tubes (not just piped in gas). One store sold a package of both gas fueled appliances (heaters, hot water heaters, and stoves) along with the installation of the gas pipes from the street to their homes. Of course, customers could only take advantage of this offer only if they lived in a zone where gas pipes were laid. In this November 1958 advertisement, the store advertises the installation of gas in your house, payable in installments over 20 months, along with the delivery and installation of any Domerc product (which produced gas-run stoves, water heaters, and space heaters). While this advertisement is certainly unusual, it does illustrate the underlying problem to the widespread use of appliances: an uneven economic development across Argentina that meant that even middle- and upper-class families did not have reliable access to gas or electricity. So even though the Argentine state wanted Argentines to live “comfortably” and with high standards of living, they struggled to supply the means (whether it was water, electricity, piped gas) to do so.

The lack of access to gas in the early 1960s, especially in comparison to electricity and water, was befuddling to Argentines, considering that the technology was relatively old, its benefits well-known, and that powerful politicians understood its convenience. Yet much of it continued to burn off as a by-product of oil production.26 Natural gas and the appliances dependent on it (stoves, hot water heaters, and space heaters) were already old technologies, and gas stoves had been available for nearly 40 years. The well-known “home economist” and cook Doña Petrona even started her

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career by selling gas stoves to women in the late 1920s. Magazines like *Primera Plana* and *Panorama* wrote about the issue repeatedly and covered the product launches of gas-powered appliances. The March 10, 1964 lead story in *Primera Plana* entitled “Natural gas, the bridge to the future” merited extensive commentary by the editor (in the “Letter from the Editor”), illustrating the importance of the issue.

While gas in canisters was better than a kerosene stove, piped-in gas was the best and the “most advanced,” but the government could not lay pipelines fast enough. As one man in Córdoba explained: “You don’t have to be waiting…you don’t have to wait for the señor to come at a certain time…and if there is a problem you might be without gas and then you can’t cook or anything. And you had to bribe the gas men to bring you the gas on time…”

Large and important pipelines were built that connected southern oil fields with Buenos Aires, Rosario, and Córdoba. However the network of pipelines did not expand much from there. A mother and daughter in Salta remembered how they purchased a gas stove that could be retrofitted to work with piped in gas. Then they waited. As they said, “We can’t put in the infrastructure ourselves…to have a comfortable life the government has to do it.”

Once again, this reinforces the discrepancy between the Argentinian government’s desire to support consumer culture and its inability to provide basic utilities.

It is difficult to know how access to electricity grew over the 1960s because of how the Argentine government measured it. As mentioned previously, the government

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measured kilowatt production and access of all urban areas within a province (rather than, say, the capital city versus towns). Household data is only available from the 1960 housing census, and it also demonstrates a much wider access in Buenos Aires than in Córdoba and Salta. Seventy-nine percent of urban Córdoba province homes had electricity (much more than water) while only 67% of Salteño homes had electricity. In the federal capital, meanwhile, 99% had electricity in their homes.²⁹ In order to stimulate industry, electricity production in Buenos Aires nearly tripled between 1960-65 and then increased by 26% between 1965-70. In Córdoba, production more than doubled between 1955-1960 and then by more than 50% between 1960-65. Salta increased its production between 1955-1960 of 58% and then 110% between 1960-65. However, these impressive statistics do not mean production was reliable or consistent or whether it was primarily household or industrial access that increased. Most of the new production was funneled towards industry, as indicated by the advertisement below, and sometimes households had to find alternative ways of running their lights and appliances.³⁰


Figure 3: This advertisement appeared in *Primera Plana* on 1 October 1963. The ad emphasizes how additional electricity supply was first made available for industry and now is available for the home as well. The image of the home emphasizes how electricity can primarily be used for the running of modern appliances.

Throughout the 1960s many homes and businesses still had to rely on their own generators, despite the ongoing efforts of Argentine governments to increase electricity production. While many homes in the federal capital as well as Greater Buenos Aires supposedly had a 24-hour a day supply, often times during the summer they were subject to brown-outs or a reduction in current that made it difficult to impossible to run refrigerators or fans. In a 2006 interview, Eduardo Luna remembered how he had to

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outfit the electrical socket in which his refrigerator was plugged so that the constant brown outs would not mean his refrigerator would stop running. In 1962, 34% of electricity was “auto-producción,” or personal generators, a full eight percent increase from 1961. This number hovered around 30% for the rest of the decade. Therefore, even though the production of electricity exploded in the 1960s, it appears from these statistics that the public supply was unreliable, not widely available, and perhaps funneled towards industry as indicated by the number of people who relied on “auto-producción.” Without the reliable and widespread supply of electricity, Argentines could not operate refrigerators, hi-fis, washing machines, or even electric shavers, all of which became more popular in the 1960s.

Therefore, while daily life for many Argentines apparently looked much more like those of their North American and European counterparts -- filled with appliances and gadgets -- in reality Argentina’s limited infrastructure affected how Argentines enacted their version of consumer culture. Argentines without electricity, water, or gas in their homes were excluded from economic development in their homes and the lessened workloads that resulted from the use of household appliances. The same is true for Argentines who had unreliable electrical service or service that only lasted from 7am until 10pm. People would only buy appliances once they had those services and they were reliable. Underscoring this reality, when asked whether she preferred having a maid or a washing machine, one salteña said “of course [the maid] because often the electricity

32 Consejo Técnico de Inversiones, La Economía Argentina 1966 (Buenos Aires, 1966), 171.
would go out and you had to wash by hand.”33 Lack of electricity meant Argentines were also excluded from access to the booming national media, specifically television. These Argentines felt increasingly excluded from the national imaginary and a “modernity” implicitly tied to the supply of electricity and to a lesser extent to water and gas. Appliances, as an interviewee in Buenos Aires noted, were “the components of modernism.”34 In a sense, these developments emphasized the differences between the “haves” and “have nots.” While Argentine politicians enthusiastically encouraged Argentine families to purchase household appliances, many families could not do so because their government did not supply affordable and reliable access to gas, water, and/or electricity. Successive governments that so championed the benefits of a consumer society or simply the purchase of appliances to stimulate local industry undermined their goals by not supplying these services.

**Producing Comfort: The Production of Household Appliances**

A thriving domestic appliance industry was important to both economic development and the expanding consumer culture of Argentina. The local production of refrigerators, washing machines, televisions, gas stoves, hi-fis, and the like meant that Argentina was both industrializing and allowing its citizens to enact more comfortable, “first-world” standards of living. Argentina had one of the largest manufacturers of

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34 Marcela Ibáñez [pseudo.], interview with the author, July 18, 2006.
appliances in the Americas. Because of its interest in the industry, the Argentine government surveyed the appliance industry consistently and in detail. Yet it did not frequently collect data on appliance ownership for two reasons. First, it was easier to survey businesses rather than homeowners. Second, the Argentine government was simply more interested in production. This reflected the developmentalist logic that development was measured through the number of factories, dams, and bridges built and not as much by “the miracle of the gas stove” in the home. While developmentalists wanted a robust consumer market, knowing that the appliances sold well was enough for them, and they did not focus on measuring ownership or resulting changes in reproductive labor.

The importance of appliances in industry, in the national imaginary, and for national pride is illustrated by the history of appliance manufacturer Siam di Tella. SIAM was founded in 1911 and was undoubtedly the most important Argentine company of the early- and mid-twentieth century. It initially made industrial machines, but by the early 1930s it produced commercial refrigerators and by the late 1930s refrigerators for

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35 See the Argentine government publication *Comercio Exterior*, which lists how few appliances were imported. It is true that many wealthy and upper-middle class Argentines would bring back appliances on shopping trips to Miami, and later Paraguay or Brazil, but those numbers were comparably small in the late 1950s and 1960s.

36 Frondizi emphasized the building of roads and highways. Many interviewees remember the roads in their small towns finally being paved in the 1960s and 1970s. Adriana grew up only what is now a few hours drive from Buenos Aires, but she noted that as an adolescent, “It wasn’t easy to arrive to Buenos Aires [as] the roads weren’t paved. The [town’s] streets were dirt and it meant so much cleaning [for my mom].” Adriana Eguren [pseudo.], interview with the author, July 7, 2006.

37 There was a certain recognition that patterns of consumption had changed significantly since Peronism because the 1960 survey “Indice del costo del nivel de vida” had to drastically revise what was included in the surveyed products. Massé 263.
domestic use. The refrigerator in Argentina essentially became synonymous with SIAM, and today one can still find 40-year-old machines humming away in homes. They were remarkably well built and durable and bring back warm memories to many grandmothers, whose first refrigerator was often a SIAM. By the 1960s, SIAM produced a whole line of domestic appliances – including washing machines and irons – and also began building cars and motorcycles. During that decade, it was one of the biggest companies in Latin America and employed over 15,000 people. The family company was considered a symbol of successful entrepreneurship, inspiring books about its story. Many family members became enormously influential in the government, the academy (a Di Tella co-authored a book with Gino Germani, for instance), and the arts. The company established the Instituto Di Tella in 1958 (so favored by the avant-garde art critics at Primera Plana), which by the late 1960s was the heart of “the crazy block” in Buenos Aires, which was considered synonymous with avant-garde art and performance art. Today that institute is a prestigious private university particularly known for its business and history degrees and houses what is left of the company’s archives. In 1962 they were set to unveil a new line of appliances and contracted a young comic strip writer to conceive of an innovative marketing campaign. That writer, Quino, invented the comic strip character Mafalda. The campaign never came to fruition and Quino saved his concept for later publication. During these glory years the company was in reality hopelessly badly run, drowning in massive debt, and operating with antiquated technology. While some of the brand names still exist, SIAM essentially was state-run by the end of 1970s and out of business by the early 1980s. The importance of SIAM –
an appliance manufacturer –, its reach into politics and the academy, and the emblematic place of its refrigerator in the Argentine imaginary illustrates the importance of appliances to development in the mid-twentieth century.\footnote{See Jorge Schvarzer, \textit{La industria que supimos conseguir} (Buenos Aires: Planeta, 1996).}

The few ownership statistics available corroborate the perception that \textit{porteños} owned a disproportionately large number of appliances. The Argentine government only surveyed appliance ownership in 1960 for the housing census and then again in 1980. The housing census of 1970, due to strict budgetary restraints, only asked a few simple questions and did not inquire about appliances.\footnote{The census of 1970 was conducted under the military government of Levingston and during a fiscal and political crisis. Giusti also notes the 1970 census was a “spectacular failure” because only 2\% of the findings were ever processed and not until 1977. It was also the first census to be politicized. Alejandro Giusti, “Censos modernos: 1960, 1970, 1980, 1991, 2001,” in \textit{Población y bienestar en la Argentina del primero al Segundo Centenario: Una historia social del siglo XX}, ed. Susana Torrado, (Buenos Aires:Edhasa, 2007), 215.} Therefore, we do not know how rates evolved over the course of the 1960s. Residents of Buenos Aires and its suburbs (Greater Buenos Aires) owned about 58\% of the 1.7 million refrigerators in Argentina, yet the capital and its suburbs made up 34\% of the population. Córdoba residents only had 6.6\% of refrigerators while they made up nine percent of the population and Salta residents owned 0.6\% with two percent of the population. The country as a whole reported about 304,000 iceboxes and 62,000 gas refrigerators.\footnote{INDEC, \textit{Censo nacional de vivienda 1960}, (Buenos Aires: INDEC) xxxvi-xxxvii.} The statistics were even more skewed for gas stoves: Buenos Aires and its suburbs also had 68\% of the gas stoves, while Córdoba had about four percent and Salta only 0.4\%. Yet 12\% of wood stoves were in
Córdoba, two percent in Salta, and 7.5% in the capital and its suburbs.\(^{41}\) In addition, 45% of washing machines were in Buenos Aires, while Salta only had 0.6% and Córdoba nine percent.\(^{42}\) And finally, even though neither Salta nor Córdoba had television (i.e., no television signal was broadcast there), residents still owned 146 and 3,369 television sets respectively. This statistic reflects how strongly a television set was both a status and modernizing symbol. Buenos Aires and its suburbs had a whopping 90% of television sets, not surprising considering they had access to television since 1951.\(^{43}\)

Because no nationwide census was taken regarding appliance ownership until 1980, we are left to extrapolate how the rest of the 1960s evolved. Some private entities, usually appliance manufacturers, surveyed ownership occasionally throughout the 1960s, but they focused only on the federal capital and its suburbs.\(^{44}\) We can assume that television set ownership exploded in the provinces as stations started broadcasting throughout the decade.\(^{45}\) We can also assume that more provincianos purchased washing machines, refrigerators, and other appliances as they had more access to water, gas, and

\(^{41}\) Ibid.
\(^{42}\) Ibid.
\(^{43}\) Ibid.
\(^{44}\) For instance, a manufacturer of televisions surveyed Greater Buenos Aires in 1960. A few times JWT also conducted its own surveys, but again also only focused on Buenos Aires and its suburbs. It is uncertain why the advertising agencies also focused on the capital and its suburbs when that market, compared with the rest of the country, was more saturated. Perhaps they felt the rest of the country was too poor to justify the expense, or perhaps it was just too expensive to conduct those surveys.

\(^{45}\) The business magazine *Pulso* estimated in 1967 that 79% of houses in Greater Buenos Aires, 66% in Córdoba, and 49% in Salta had a television. In 1969 they estimated that it was 91% in Greater Buenos Aires, 76% in Córdoba, and 64% in Salta. These numbers seem overly optimistic. It is hard to believe that an impoverished region like Salta could acquire so many televisions within 5 years of gaining a signal. “La dura lucha por la audiencia,” *Pulso*, February 10, 1970.
electricity. One salteña remembers appliances arriving quite quickly after about 1965 or 1966. She said, before that “everything that was appliances was rather unaffordable.” Many Argentines were finally able to purchase long desired appliances because the economy was relatively stable and grew strongly after the recession of 1962-1963. When asked why they purchased their refrigerator or washing machine the year they did, many simply answered “economic possibility.” And lastly, continued strong production figures indicate that Argentines outside of Buenos Aires must have been buying appliances in large numbers.  

Appliances were rare enough at the beginning of the decade that a woman’s magazine read mostly by working-class and provincial women called Vosotras had to convince women to buy them and were still instructing their readers how to use appliances in 1960. For instance, an April 1960 article gives women safety pointers on how to cook on a gas stove, implying that many of their readers were accustomed to cooking over charcoal or wood. More interestingly, in a series of articles over the rest of the year, the magazine essentially chastises its readers for not purchasing and using household appliances. In two successive articles in May and June of that same year, they try to convince women that buying a refrigerator is actually a cost saving measure rather

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47 For example, Renata Kovacs [pseudo.], interview with the author, May 4, 2009.
48 Argentina exported very few household appliances. As ownership figures are hard to come by, it is impossible to know what market saturation rates were.
49 Vosotras was different from Claudia and Para Ti in that it was priced lower than its competitors, used cheaper paper, presumed that its readers either worked outside the home or did not have servants, and also that its readers had more economic restraints than other magazine readers.
than an expense. The article details how in the end a refrigerator will save time (fewer trips to the market), money (allows you to waste less food as it will keep for a few days), and energy (meaning the housewife does not have to cook as frequently). In the second June article, a reader has written in to give other readers who do not yet own a refrigerator tips on how to conserve things and maximize the benefit of the refrigerator. She is thrilled with hers and wants to tell people why it has made her life so much easier. It is unclear whether this series of articles was underwritten by an Argentine manufacturer or why Vosotras chose the winter of 1960 to begin this campaign; however it does illustrate that appliances – even ones as basic as gas stoves and refrigerators – were not widespread in the provinces or among the lower classes.

Appliance production – from gas stoves to refrigerators to washing machines – fluctuated wildly in the 1960s, following the trends of the overall economy. All sectors started off strong at the beginning of the decade, only to dip drastically due a severe recession in 1962/63. It took several years for the appliance industry to recover.

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51 A few months later a fictionalized account criticizes the over-achieving housewife who is constantly cleaning, inflexible, and despite having appliances that are meant to ease her labor (such as a washing machine) continues to do things by hand. The article chastises this fictional housewife for having to do everything herself, not allowing a maid, machine or, husband to aid her in an endless litany of tasks. She is constantly unhappy and unsatisfied with everything, and the article urges her to become more modern by utilizing the appliances she has in her home.

52 “Cruzada del optimismo: como ahorrar dinero gastando más” and “Cruzada del optimismo: como ahorrar dinero gastando más: los gastos se congelan dentro de la heladera,” Vosotras, (Buenos Aires: May 26 and June 9, 1960). In August of that year, and as part of that same series, the magazine also urges Argentine families to purchase space heaters, stating that a freezing cold home creates crankiness and thus cannot be a “happy” place. As it is the housewife’s role to create a hospitable and warm (both figuratively and apparently literally) home environment, it was her responsibility to make the decision to buy the heater.

53 Business struggled because since both short- and long-term credit were nearly impossible to come by, businesses turned to barter so the economy would not come to a complete standstill. For example, the newspaper El Mundo started accepting goods from their advertising clients – such as televisions, refrigerators, and even apartments – in lieu of cash payment. These goods were then distributed to
Interestingly, it was the mundane gas stove whose production increased steadily to more than double its production by the end of the decade (to almost 405,000 in 1969). The more fashionable but in reality more elastic production of refrigerators and televisions fluctuated wildly. Refrigerators hit a low of 105,374 in 1963 and a high of 202,164 in 1970, while industrially produced televisions had a low of about 75,000 in 1963 and a high of 202,309 in 1961. Gas water heaters also exploded in the 1960s, which saw increased production (even during the recession) from 63,000 in 1960 to 172,000 in 1970. Families who switched from cooking with wood stoves often lost their heating and hot water system as well. Many houses had pipes going to the bathroom that were heated by that wood-burning stove. When families made the switch they also had to buy a new gas-powered water heater, which could explain why water heater sales expanded so much.

So essentially the production of gas water heaters and gas stoves steadily climbed in the 1960s, while the production of refrigerators and washing machines was more susceptible to economic fluctuations and struggled to return to late 1950s levels. These numbers suggest that while refrigerators, televisions and washing machines were more

employees of the newspaper with very advantageous payment options. Channel 9 in Buenos Aires offered free advertising on a program entitled “The Market of Happiness.” Rather than paying to be sponsors of the show, the channel allowed the manufacturers of household appliances to simply donate the appliances that were to be given away. “Cuando el dinero desaparece, los comerciantes recurren a la antiquísima formula del trueque,” Primera Plana May 14, 1963, 20.

54 INDEC, Boletín de estadísticas 1969, (Buenos Aires) 91-97.
symbolically important to journalists and intellectuals commenting on changing consumer culture, Argentines were dedicated to buying duller gas-fueled appliances during tough economic times in part because of the expansion of the availability of garrafas, tubos, and piped gas.

A closer analysis of these statistics reveals how both economic development and consumer culture were different in Argentina than in the United States or Northern Europe. First, as the earlier quote about gas-fueled refrigerators from President Frondizi reveals, Argentines purchased appliances suited to the reality of living in Argentina; Argentines – in particular wealthy landowners – could own a refrigerator even when they did not have electricity. Second, appliance sales were not dominated by mass-produced, brand name appliances as in North America and Northern Europe. Many televisions and refrigerators were not made by major companies like Zenith, Admiral, or SIAM, but rather pequeños armadores or small-scale, neighborhood men who would assemble televisions and refrigerators to sell to acquaintances and friends.58 The presence of pequeños armadores frustrated those collecting statistics as it made it much more difficult to know precisely how many refrigerators and televisions were being produced.

In 1960, the private organization Consejo Técnico de Inversiones estimated about one-

58 According to the Revista de la Union Industrial, these were the most popular brands. Revista de la Union Industrial. (Buenos Aires: July 1960) 98. ARTICLE TITLE

Many experienced technicians and managers from SIAM, having learned everything about the business, left SIAM to either work for the competition or found their own businesses. SIAM was willing to sell them the compressors, the single most important part of a refrigerator, and many poor and working-class people would buy their first refrigerator from a friend rather than a large company. In interviews, two different executives (Clutterbuch and Sozio) noted that they lost considerable market share in the 1960s even as refrigerator sales remained extremely strong. By 1973, SIAM, one of the most well-known companies in all of Latin America had declared bankruptcy. See Torcuato Sozio, interview with Luis Alberto Romero. January and September 1973. Guido Clutterbuch, interview with Leandro Gutiérrez, January 1973.
fifth of televisions were produced by these *pequeños armadores*. This percentage steadily increased to around 70% in 1963. Twenty-five percent of refrigerators in 1960 and 10% in 1963 were also produced in this fashion.  

The government stopped recording how many refrigerators were produced by *pequeños armadores* in 1967 even though the numbers had increased back to 25%. They continued to record how many televisions were made until the close of the decade, when an estimated 45% were produced in small shops.  

Why were so many of these large and complex appliances produced by, essentially, individuals in their garages? First, Argentines chose to purchase these no-name appliances because the *pequeños armadores* offered more flexible credit. While home-goods stores offered payment plans of 1, 2, or 3 years, they required a pay stub to corroborate income.  

An upper-class interviewee named Romina Bidoglio who was self-employed for many years and could not provide a pay stub would always save to buy her appliances in cash, while a couple who worked in a factory had access to store credit. As Romina said, “so to have credit you had to be salaried and with a good salary and only

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60 Consejo técnico de inversiones, *La economía argentina 1967*, (Buenos Aires), 188.  
62 Many of those who grew up in a small town remember that it was fairly common in the 1960s for store owners would give credit based on one’s word. For example, Josefina Viana said shop owners in small towns “would give you that convenience.” Josefina Viana [pseudo.], interview with the author, May 7, 2009.  
en blanco, that wasn’t very common. I had no way of proving my income.\textsuperscript{64} The pequeños armadores on the other hand offered flexible credit terms that were better for those working in the informal labor market or who did not have steady work, even if they tended to be more expensive than appliances purchased in a store. And it was easy for the pequeños armadores to buy all the parts necessary because, in the case of televisions, tariffs on “replacement” parts were much lower than on imported televisions. Therefore large numbers of supposed “replacement” parts were imported, and entire televisions could be assembled in this way.\textsuperscript{65} In terms of refrigerators, SIAM, the primary manufacturer of refrigerators, made it very easy to buy their parts, including the all-important compressor. While SIAM was synonymous with refrigerator in Argentina for decades, according to a former SIAM executive, in the end the wide availability of SIAM’s extremely high-quality compressors meant that SIAM actually undermined its own dominance of the market.\textsuperscript{66}

The phenomenon of the pequeños armadores demonstrates the desire of working- and middle-class Argentines to own televisions and refrigerators – any television or refrigerator – and reveals how desirable these products were. It also reveals how many Argentines accessed the consumer durables market in a different way from their North American and European counterparts, one dictated by the economic restrictions of their

\textsuperscript{64} Romina Bidoglio [pseudo.], interview with the author, July 28, 2006.

\textsuperscript{65} Consejo técnico de inversiones, \textit{La economía argentina 1964} 207; \textit{La economía argentina 1965} 209; \textit{La economía argentina 1966} 223; \textit{La economía argentina 1967} 188; \textit{La economía argentina 1968} 181 (only TVs); \textit{La economía argentina 1969} 197.

country. Many of those interviewed purchased a refrigerator, television, or both from someone in the neighborhood. They did not express any kind of dissatisfaction that it was not a brand name product, and they did not indicate that it functioned worse than brand name appliances. On the other hand, those who had brand name appliances were very proud of their SIAM refrigerator or Eslabón de Lujo washing machine, often emphasizing multiple times the name of the company. About 20% of my interviewees mentioned buying a television, refrigerator, or washing machine made by a *pequeño armador*. While government officials bemoaned the proliferation of these small shops, as it made the collection of statistics and taxes difficult, the importance of the television and refrigerator industries is underlined by the fact that the Argentine government *did* attempt to estimate how many were produced in these no-name shops.

**Aspiring to Comfort: The Reach of Television and Magazines**

How Argentines interacted with consumer culture largely depended on their incomes, access to basic services, and access to the different types of media that proliferated during the 1960s. These included newly-published magazines and the expansion of television to the provinces. Access to magazines and television increased Argentines’ exposure to consumer culture in several ways. First, magazine articles instructed readers on current trends, changing tastes, the latest technological innovations, and how consumers behaved in the United States or Europe. Television shows exposed viewers in the *interior* to aspirational lifestyles of the porteño elite and idealized portrayals of North American families living in comfort. And both television and
magazines offered new ways for advertisers to reach Argentines. Argentine journalists and sociologists consulted frequently for this study referenced the explosion of media. But how much did it really expand, and how many Argentines did this expansion reach? Was it really as large as journalists and sociologists implied?

Surveys reveal a slower penetration of television and smaller readership of magazines across Argentina than some historians of the 1960s have indicated, although US Department of State surveys on media usage found that Argentines were voracious consumers of traditional media (radio and newspapers). However, that does not mean that television and magazines were not influential. For instance, according to the US Information Agency, about two-thirds of Argentines read a newspaper on any given day in 1963. About half of porteños, 72% of cordobeses, and two-thirds of salteños listened to the radio. And perhaps because of a less dense media market, more cordobeses (41%) and salteños (31%) read magazines than porteños (26%) on any given day. There were so many magazines on the market that even the most “influential” magazines published in Argentina in the 1960s (meaning they were heavily read by the porteño middle and upper classes) only reached a small percentage of Argentines. For example, in 1966, only two percent of porteños and one percent of cordobeses read Primera Plana, while the statistic was negligible in Salta. Panorama was read by four and five percent of the Buenos Aires and Córdoba population, respectively, and did not appear statistically in

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Salta. The women’s magazines Claudia, Para Ti, and Vosotras were more widely read in the three cities, with four to 14% of the population.\footnote{Research Report (1-12-67): Comparative Media Use in Provincial Cities in Argentina, Box 2, Records of the United States Information Agency of Office Research, Records of Research Projects, Latin America, 1964-1973; Argentina 1956-1960, Country Project File, 1951-64, Office of Research, RG 306 Records of the United States information Agency, NACP.}

Argentines’ access to magazines produced in Buenos Aires was largely restricted for economic reasons. While the magazines were widely distributed, often times they were simply too expensive for poorer Argentines to purchase. Indeed, the magazine Primera Plana was purposefully expensive so as to attract a more exclusive readership.\footnote{Graciela Mochkofsky, Timerman: El hombre que quiso ser parte del poder (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2004) 92.}

In 1969, Primera Plana cost 150 pesos while Para Ti cost 70 pesos (and the popular sports magazine El Gráfico was 100 pesos). For a maid making less than 50,000 pesos or even a low level office worker making less than 100,000 pesos a month, regularly buying these weekly magazines would add up to a significant expense that many could not afford.\footnote{J. Walter Thompson Argentina Annual Marketing Report, Box 8, J. Walter Thompson Company Thomas Sutton Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.} This meant that poor or working-class Argentines would often read magazines after they had been passed around amongst family and friends. Or they would read them while at the hairdresser, barber, or doctor’s waiting room.\footnote{Adriana Eguren [pseud.], interview with the author, July 7, 2006} In one interview, a woman in Salta said that as a child in the 1960s she knew that magazines were not “meant” for her or her friends, as they were far too expensive.\footnote{Sandra Rubio [pseud.], interview with the author, May 13, 2009.} This would mean their access to
magazines was often sporadic and delayed, while middle- and upper-class Argentines would have regular and immediate access to weekly publications.

The spread of television was different from magazines in that it required a significant capital investment on the part of businesses, individuals, and the government. It was an investment that most made quickly. Developmentalist journalists writing in *Primera Plana* and *Panorama* argued that the expansion of television into cities beyond Buenos Aires was crucial for the economic development of Argentina and the rapid expansion of a consumerist society. The buzz surrounding television in the early 1960s was constant. Television’s importance – to advertisers, industrialists, and the general Argentine population – grew along with its importance to Argentine industry (a way to produce jobs). It also became increasingly integral to the development of the advertising industry and the most visible window onto US culture. For the first time ever, the women’s magazine *Para Ti* launched its own television program in 1962. Both *Primera Plana* and *Panorama* dedicated weekly columns to discussing the business of television, reviewing television programs currently popular, or analyzing the influence of television on family relations. Some of the most prominent advertisements revolved around the selling of television sets. An astonished journalist from *Panorama* noted in April 1964 that even families in the shantytowns acquired televisions rather than buying a gas stove or refrigerator, purchases viewed as much more “practical” by the porteño elite. The poor family did not consider the television to be a luxury, but rather something very useful. The journalist ascribed the ubiquity of televisions across social classes as part of an “almost pathological euphoria for television” across Buenos Aires. Continuing, he
stated, “Amongst the poorer classes, the possession of a television set is the most basic, visible, and appreciated index of economic comfort.”\footnote{“El video es vida: un nuevo modo de pensar, sentir, y ver nuestro tiempo,” \textit{Panorama}, April 1964, 92.} The porteño elite, of course, was hardly immune from the above-mentioned “pathological euphoria,” as observed by a 1964 cartoon showing Minister of Finance Alvaro Alsogaray meeting with his analyst. Alsogaray’s head is the shape of a television and he says to his doctor, “Doctor, I have a complex…”\footnote{“Psicoanálisis,” \textit{Primera Plana}, August 18, 1964, 10.} However, porteños’ obsession with television belies that economic reality behind the television industry.

In reality, the expansion of television was sluggish until the 1960s and uneven thereafter. Channel 7 began broadcasting in Buenos Aires in October 1951 and was the only station to broadcast for 9 years. As indicated by the advertisement below, television did not arrive to the city of Jujuy, in the Argentine Northwest, until 1966.\footnote{“Ya ingresó en la era de la televisión,” \textit{Primera Plana}, May 24, 1966. The advertisement implies that Jujuy has “caught up” with the rest of (developed) Argentina.} Because the owners believed no one would actually bother to watch television during the summer, Channel 7 turned off its signal between January and March from 1951-1959.\footnote{“Televisión: 1963: Detrás de la pantalla, un cúmulo de sombras y esperanzas,” \textit{Primera Plana}, January 8, 1963, 44.} Between 1959 and 1961 Channels 9, 11, and 13 arrived in quick succession to the Buenos Aires market. Starting in 1961 there were four stations broadcasting within Buenos Aires, one each in Mendoza and Mar del Plata, and two in Córdoba. Therefore in 1963 most Argentines did not watch television simply because there were no stations broadcasting in their cities. This meant that while nearly one out of every two porteños watched
television on any given day, only six percent of cordobeses watched the recently arrived station, and no one in Salta watched (where television would not arrive until 1964). By 1966, 75% of porteños watched television one or more days per week while 50% of cordobeses did. Only a negligible percentage of salteños did. Still, there were an estimated 800,000 television sets in Argentina at the start of 1963 and nearly a million by the middle of 1964. And as we know, almost all of these televisions were assembled in Argentina. For this reason alone, some developmentalist journalists were excited about the economic possibilities of the rapid expansion of television.

78 Ibid.
Figure 4: This advertisement appeared in *Primera Plana* on May 24, 1966. The masculine figure is dressed in an indigenous-inspired pancho, hat, and pants typical of the Northwest of Argentina, where the province of Jujuy is located.

Yet even with the excitement of the possibilities of television, the 1962-63 economic crisis hit TV hard. Advertisers lacked sufficient cash to advertise on the four different stations within Buenos Aires. While television was popular and fun, it was not dominant enough to take advertising pesos away from newspaper, magazines, and radio. In addition, Argentines stopped buying television sets during the recession years. This made the expansion into the interior even more crucial as start up provincial stations would not initially produce their own programming; rather they would pay Buenos Aires

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stations to rebroadcast porteño (or US) shows. This expansion needed to continue, journalists argued, so that advertisers could make more money and so that better, more expensive television programs could be produced. Economists had calculated that every provincial television station needed at least 5,000 television sets operating within its signal’s reach to make the station viable. In no uncertain terms Primera Plana argued that Argentina could not risk the possibility of a station going bankrupt because not only would that mean the loss of jobs at the station, but it would also hurt the Argentine television set industry and put hundreds of technicians trained in television repair out of work (not to mention the cultural importance of having as many Argentines as possible watch televisions programs and advertising). Therefore, businessmen and advertisers thought it crucial to expand to cities like Rosario, Bahía Blanca, Salta, Santiago del Estero, and Jujuy.

For their part, provincial Argentines were indeed excited and ready to purchase television sets as soon as possible. One woman living in a small town in the province of Buenos Aires, today a two-hour ride from downtown, recalled her family's delight with their television set in spite of the years-long struggles with a sporadic picture, the quality of which depended on wind direction and the contortion of the rabbit ears. A woman

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82 “Una hora y media que costó mil horas,” Primera Plana, October 8, 1963, 44.

Indeed a live variety show was designed to launch three new car models in October 1963. It was the most expensive live show produced in Argentina up until that time and was broadcast to interior cities through “remitadoras” (retransmission towers).


84 Adriana Eguren [pseud.], interview with the author, 7 July 2006.
from the city of Rosario remembers her father bringing home a television set years before
a station even began transmitting a signal. They would occasionally turn it on to find
only static, but the set was more a piece of furniture and a status symbol in their
neighborhood. When television finally did arrive to Rosario, her father purchased a
newer, more modern set!\textsuperscript{85}

\textbf{Selling Comfort: The Expansion of Advertising}

Cultural historians of Argentina have described the 1960s as a period in which
advertising took off and advertising agencies in Buenos Aires multiplied.\textsuperscript{86} Available
statistics support that general impression.\textsuperscript{87} The increase in advertisements is crucial
evidence that a strengthening consumer society existed. In addition, in 1960s Argentina
advertisers began to have increasing cultural caché as magazines like \textit{Primera Plana} and
\textit{Confirmado} promoted the idea that advertisers could positively transform Argentine
society. Both magazines treated advertisers like celebrities and featured regular
interviews with advertising executives and new local advertising agencies. They also

\textsuperscript{85} Estéher Resanovich [pseud.], interview with the author, 2 June 2009.

\textsuperscript{86} This was a constant theme in Quino’s \textit{Mafalda}. See also Sergio Pujol, \textit{La década rebelde: los años 60 en
la Argentina} (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2002).

\textsuperscript{87} Much of our understanding of how the business of advertising in 1960s Argentina worked necessarily
comes from the records of the (North American) J. Walter Thompson Company (JWT). It was the first or
second top-billing agency in Buenos Aires for all of the 1960s and thus reflects the overall trends of the
industry. Many of its records were archived and now stored at the John W. Hartman Center for Sales,
Advertising, and Marketing History at Duke University. Most of the other agencies, even the larger ones,
did not keep records past the state mandated 10 years or are now defunct with their records discarded. The
Advertising Association of Argentina was not founded until the 1970s and does not allow outside
researchers to access its records. McCann Erickson, another of the top billing agencies, has not donated its
archives for public consultation. Therefore, the only industry records available to researchers are those of
JWT.
gave space to hot new advertising campaigns and profiled the “scientific” nature of new campaigns.

The records of the J. Walter Thompson Advertising Agency, the top-billing agency of the 1960s, reflect a general increase in advertising and the number of Argentine advertising agencies and advertising professionals over the course of the decade. By 1968 there were over 1,000 advertising agencies operating in Buenos Aires, and competition was fierce. In addition, JWT billing figures record a 30% increase in the number of pesos spent on advertising between 1964 and 1965. In 1969, the magazine Primera Plana reported that advertising investment went up 45% from the year before. JWT’s figures also indicate a steady move of advertising pesos away from print and radio to television and outdoor advertising. For instance, 45% of JWT advertising pesos went to television in 1969, while only 42% did in 1967. This makes sense considering that television expanded outside of Buenos Aires in the 1960s. Therefore the

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88 August 23, 1968 Letter to Peter Dunham, J. Walter Thompson Company Thomas Sutton Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University: “We have day and night competition from 1,000 agencies – of which 997 are local and are filled with relations.”


JWT was number 2 behind McCann Erickson; JWT billed $4,400,000 in 1965 and $400,000,000 in 1964; an increase of 10% in dollars, but 30.5% in pesos.


The report found that 45.2% on TV, 37.7% print, 6.6% radio, 4.0% cine, 4.9% via publica; 24% was advertising for consumer durables, including household appliances, and 22% para foodstuffs. In 1967 billing was as follows: 41.8% TV, 24.7% newspapers, 17.8% magazines, 9.1% radio, 4.2% outdoor, and 2.4% cinema.
general impression of social critics and Argentines alike is corroborated by available statistics.92

**Conclusion**

Statistics regarding Argentina’s economic development, consumer culture, and industrialization alternately reveal and obscure what was “really” going on with the Argentine economy and social structure. These statistics do prove that Argentina was experiencing some very real changes in its social structure, economic structure, and the experience of daily life, but they need to be carefully interpreted with an understanding of the historical moment in which they occurred. Most of the changes involving the marketplace were disproportionately felt in Buenos Aires and in the middle- and upper-income sectors, which explains why porteño journalists and intellectuals believed the changes were more drastic than they really were. The detailed nature of some of the statistics and the absence of others demonstrate that developmentalists measured Argentine development narrowly, focusing almost entirely on industrial production, the distribution of services, and the like. Interrogating the statistical silences and reading this economic data against unorthodox social and cultural sources reveals the more widespread ramifications of development.

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92 Even though advertising did expand rapidly, those living in the provinces remember the 1960s as a decade when there was “no” advertising, although it notably increased with the arrival of television. One cordobesa remembered Córdoba as such a small town that “you didn’t need advertising” – everyone just saw the goods in the store window. A salteña remembered there being “few media outlets.” And many provincianos remember magazines as being expensive and difficult to purchase.
Chapter 3: ‘Between Love of Progress and Terror of the New’: The Moralizing Conversation about Consumerism and Development

The consumer habits of the Argentine in 1963 show a society and a people in deep transition. The ambivalence, the game of back and forth between the love of progress and terror of the new, between dissimulation and exhibitionism, between the personal preference for a more pleasant and peaceful past and a more and more tense present, between the anxious desire to rise in social standing and the certain, omnipresent risk of self-destruction—all these things seem to be on the mind of the Argentine in 1963.¹ – *Primera Plana*, June 1963

As the combination of state infrastructure policies, private-sector commerce, and advertising campaigns succeeded in cultivating popular consumerism, it fostered a new set of debates over whether its impact was positive or negative. The Argentine magazine *Primera Plana* was often a forum in which these debates took place. For instance, the magazine published a survey entitled “The Argentine of 1963” when the economy struggled to exit a crippling recession in June of 1963. To reiterate, the wide-ranging survey reflected upon many of the issues preoccupying Argentines of all social classes. The results surprised readers in more ways than one. The surveyors interrogated habits they believed illustrated the characteristics of the “average Argentine,” things not commonly found in the United States or Europe. In particular, they focused on how Argentines used household appliances. They noted that Argentines bought refrigerators at a much higher rate than their counterparts in countries with similar climates, overstocked them, and stored in them items not requiring refrigeration. This

phenomenon, the journalist at *Primera Plana* suggested, was a coping response to the social and political instability of Argentina: "the need to accumulate food as a symbol of security appears, among other reasons, to be one of the [principle] reasons Argentines are devoted to their refrigerators." These habits were particularly noticeable in 1963 because the Argentine nation as a whole was “a society and a people in the acute process of transition.”

Why did the editors at *Primera Plana* dedicate a lengthy article examining the mental state of “the Argentine of 1963?” Why did they seek the answers in the results of private market surveys that examined consumer patterns? What was the relationship between changing consumer behavior and a feeling that Argentine society was changing “too rapidly” starting around 1963? The answers can be found if we examine the intellectual responses to both the rise of developmentalism and the expansion of consumerism, as well as the relationship between the two. Developmentalists focused on production numbers, macro-economic growth, the power of surveying, the rise in the standard of living, and other macro-economic concerns. Proponents of developmentalism looked and found answers for understanding a changing Argentina through the quantitative social sciences (surveying, structural changes, etc.). They then applied these methods to advertising and market research so that businessmen could better sell their products and the economy could subsequently grow. They excitedly hailed the rapid expansion of advertising agencies, the power of quantitative sociology to measure

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*2Ibid.*

*3Ibid.*
society, and the ways in which the purchase of technological items like household
appliances would raise the Argentine standard of living. Public intellectuals, on the other
hand, focused on the results of these changes. In other words, they linked many of the
fast-paced social and cultural changes to a deepening consumerism within Argentine
society; public intellectuals worried about the influence of advertising and the benefits of
participating in a consumer society and questioned the hegemonic idea that technology
always made life better. They did this by reflecting, observing, and analyzing the
experience of everyday life in a developing country. Critics, such as journalists,
essayists, sociologists, and comic strip writers, analyzed and reflected upon how that
growth shaped everyday life: how was growth experienced in the home and the
workplace, how it affected families and friendships, and what it meant in terms of
shifting gender roles.

While responding to the same set of changes in Argentine consumption,
developmentalists and critics essentially talked past each other, appearing to address
separate and unrelated phenomena: the former addressed economic formulas of
development and the latter reflected upon daily life and consumption. The divide
between the quantitative and qualitative marked the difference between the
developmentalists and critics. When looking at a washing machine, developmentalists
reflected on the jobs created to produce that machine while critics pondered how the
consumer debt needed to purchase the machine affected familial relations.
Developmentalists saw the growth of advertising revenues as a sign of Argentina
reaching the pinnacle of a developed society while critics pondered how it affected
children. The vast gap between developmentalists’ and critics’ understanding of economic development reflected the fact that Argentines did not see the two as connected.

Starting in 1962 both critics and developmentalists recognized that changes prompted by development programs and felt that consumer culture generated unease, angst, and resistance amongst Argentines. The magazine *Primera Plana* most effectively and powerfully voiced the developmentalists while a disparate group of critics, first articulated by Juan José Sebreli’s 1964 book *Vida Cotidiana y alienación*, wrote in various forms and publications. The conversation became more contested and nuanced as the magazines *Confirmado*, *Gente*, and *Panorama* entered the conversation around 1965. It was the comic strip *Mafalda*, however, that with its publication in 1964 quickly became the most influential critic in terms of popular readership of developmentalism and consumerism. Through a subtle portrayal of a porteño middle-class family, the comic strip writer Quino posed biting questions about the influence of advertising, the nature of underdevelopment in Argentina, and the payoff of participating in a consumer society. The conversation reached its apogee in 1968 and 1969 as an increasing number of critical articles, essays, and plays overtly decried capitalism’s influence and questioned the disciplining obligations it required of its consumer citizens. The work of polemical

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4 *Confirmado* was firmly capitalist and at first an imitation of *Primera Plana; Gente* was finding its feet, but settled on being a celebrity magazine; and *Panorama* was supposedly apolitical and funded by *Life* magazine. The magazine editors explained their project and who funded them in *Panorama*’s first editions. In these columns, the magazine staunchly claimed that *Panorama* didn’t “at all” reflect a North American perspective and stated that it was an “Argentine magazine, published in Buenos Aires for an Argentine public…” See *Panorama*, June 1963.
sociologist Julio Mafud and the extremely popular film *La Fiaca* (written by Ricardo Talesnik) were particularly influential examples of this ideological position.

Critics offered their observations in a climate of polarized politics and their most vitriolic attacks came during the repressive dictatorship of General Onganía (1966-1969). They remained surprisingly uncensored. *Primera Plana*, founded with the express purpose of overthrowing President Illia and installing General Onganía, eventually succeeded in this goal. Ongania’s government immediately began to repress student activists, censor publications, and repress “immoralism” (short skirts on women, long hair on men, etc.) despite promises to the contrary. Ironically, Ongania’s censors shut down the magazine when *Primera Plana* criticized those actions. While Ongania was in agreement with the magazine’s liberal economic perspective and support of authoritarian politics, he staunchly opposed its liberal talk of sex, promotion of avant-garde art shows, and other progressive cultural movements. Yet, amidst this climate, the playwright Ricardo Talesnik remained allowed to produce his play critical of consumerism and Quino continued to publish *Mafalda* in the newspaper *El Mundo* and then *Siete Dias*. Ongania’s censors did not stifle the moderate, supposedly apolitical voices, addressing an exploding consumerism.

By the late 1960s voices on both the left and the right expressed comparable moralistic concerns regarding the excesses of consumerism. Even though Ongania pushed development projects with a similar enthusiasm as Frondizi, he agreed with conservative Catholic critiques that: “the advances of the industrial age…have given birth to a consumer society whose dynamic is governed by the cold application of economic
laws. [These laws] conceive of individuals as only consumers, of a people not as a community but as a market who must be managed and standardized so they can assimilate the products they went to sell [to the public].”\(^5\) He argued, just as Perón did 20 years earlier, that there must be a third route to a prosperous country: “to choose between misery and oppression, between a capitalism without country and a Marxism without God does not reconcile dignity and human liberty.”\(^6\) Just the year before, in 1969, the Marxist Julio Mafud expressed similar concerns about consumerism, although he focused on the role of advertising. He worried that advertising and its messages of materialism were becoming the guiding force for Argentines at the expense of all other institutions: “the traditional values of a society…have nothing to do with the values fabricated by advertising…In contemporary Argentine society advertising has more influence than other institutions (the State, the Church, unions, and university)…”\(^7\) At a time when right-wing military men and the cultural left were at loggerheads, they both agreed that society was in crisis because of an expanding consumer culture and attacked developmentalists and capitalists. Indeed, understanding critiques of consumerism transcends political or other ideological outlooks. I argue that actors across the political spectrum, classes, and religion were disquieted by the increased advertising, presence of new appliances, and new patterns of daily life. They reacted with a moralizing and culturally conservative rhetoric that served to underscore that more than just superficial,\(^\)  

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\(^6\) Ibid.

unimportant habits were changing in Argentina. At the end of a decade when bombs exploded and foreign executives were being kidnapped, Argentines also worried about consumerism, advertising, and development. While excited by the promises of technology, the world of television, and an expanded media landscape, they also worried about the influence of advertising, increased materialism, and a perceived obligation to enter debt so as to keep up with the latest trends.

The players

It is important to have some background information about the individuals who played important roles in shaping the discussion about development and consumerism. The supporters and detractors of developmentalism were formed by two different intellectual traditions and saw the world from very different perspectives. Many times these two groups observed similar problems but came to different conclusions about their causes, implications, and solutions.

The developmentalist mouthpiece *Primera Plana* did not just focus on promoting open-market, consumer driven economics. As journalist Graciela Mochkofsky noted, *Primera Plana* and *Confirmado* were also quite progressive and forward-thinking in terms of culture and some social changes (a survey about women’s views on sexuality in 1963 created a firestorm):[^8] they were “leftist when it came to cultural consumption because they wanted to be on the vanguard, modern, and European…they were economically liberal, at least in part, because they accepted with pleasure the new

consumption and comfort that multinational companies had brought with [the policies of former president Arturo Frondizi].” However, they were conservative politically. In this sense, the journalistic representatives of developmentalism shared something in common with its dissenters: both pushed the limits of public discourse and “civility” when talking about sexuality, divorce, marriage problems, and other once-taboo topics. However, the supporters of developmentalism saw the cultural changes they embraced as a completely separate phenomena from their programs of economic development, and, indeed, they were in some ways. Primera Plana, Panorama, Gente, and Confirmado often pictured themselves as being at the forefront of cultural consumption—their editors delighted in the “happenings” sponsored by the vanguardist Instituto di Tella—but dismissed observations or worries about increased materialism, personal debt, changing gender roles, or loss of national identity attributed by others to the new consumer boom. Developmentalists understood the effects of development and the resulting consumer boom as solely an economic project meant to expand wealth and raise the standard of living. Social or cultural changes were either not understood to be connected, their importance minimal compared to that of economistic concerns, or simply not observed by developmentalists (via Primera Plana). Following intellectual trends of the day, developmentalists believed that almost all social change could be simply measured through quantitative methods.9

9 Mochkofsky 93-94.

They argued this openly, but their articles belie a more ambivalent relationship with qualitative methods. While they enthusiastically embraced and promoted quantitative social research methods and made fun of Sebreli and Mafud’s “impressionistic” and inaccurate methods for interrogating social change, they too
Like developmentalists around the world, Argentine developmentalist intellectuals and politicians enthusiastically promoted the benefits of surveying, market research, motivational research, and the like as a way to help grow the economy. These methods largely came out of the exploding quantitative social sciences. In Argentina this meant that developmentalists embraced the methods of the Italian-Argentine sociologist Gino Germani. Germani founded the sociology department at the Universidad de Buenos Aires and by the early 1960s had gained an international reputation as one of quantitative sociology’s biggest proponents. He was particularly keen to “attempt to establish an epistemological foundation for scientific research on society, including the generous use of social statistics” and like W.W. Rostow he argued that modernization was a “universal” process that could be measured accordingly. He and his disciples conducted surveys to obtain a better understanding of issues such as Argentine racial prejudices, reading habits, migration patterns, and class markers. These surveys would help Argentines “become self-aware” through understanding social structures and

used those methods when trying to understand changes regarding women and gender. For instance, they wanted to know why more women were entering the workforce. Quantitative methods could corroborate this was indeed happening – although they never bothered to prove this point – but they needed to employ qualitative methods to find out why. Much of what they found problematic in the work of Sebreli and Mafud was also evident in their small surveys.


patterns. Marketers and advertisers adopted these techniques and could use the same “scientific” surveying techniques to delve into consumer preferences across class and region. However, this sort of modernization of knowledge left him open to critiques from those on both the political left and right. Germani was attacked from the Catholic Right, who argued that Germani made a religion out of (the social) sciences and that quantitative sociology weakened traditional beliefs about God. Marxist leftists accused him of being a tool of imperialism for taking money from North American foundations. Germani left Argentina in 1966 to take a position at Harvard but his disciples continued to dominate the methodology and research priorities of academic sociology in Argentina.

The single most influential promoter of developmentalism in journalism was the founding editor of Primera Plana and Confirmado, Jacobo Timerman. His trajectory and intellectual biography are so crucial in understanding how developmentalism became understood in Argentina that they deserve a few pages of elaboration. Also his personal relationship with President Arturo Frondizi and Frondizi’s principle economic advisor Rogelio Frigerio illuminate the close relationship between powerful journalists and politicians. Today Timerman is mostly remembered for his internationally renowned book Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number in which he recounts his experiences of torture and anti-Semitism while illegally detained during the Dirty War (1976-1983). As such, he is remembered as a staunch defender of human rights, but in

14 Kahl 189.
reality Timerman’s legacy is far more complex. A Ukrainian Jewish immigrant who arrived in Argentina at a young age, Timerman was a strident anti-Peronist who celebrated Perón’s downfall in 1955. By 1955 Timerman was already close with Arturo Frondizi and Frondizi’s main economic advisor Rogelio Frigerio. Like other intellectuals, Timerman and Frondizi were disciples of Raul Prebisch and CEPAL (see Chapter 1), known for his Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) policy and dependency theory that dominated much of South American economic policy throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Timerman, along with other Argentine intellectuals including Sebreli, celebrated Frondizi’s strongly anti-imperialist and nationalist economic policies evidenced in Frondizi’s 1957 book *Petróleo y Política*. In this treatise — made infamous because the political stances within it were so quickly broken — Frondizi advocated the nationalization of oil reserves and other industries as a basis for development. Timerman was in the inner circle of those closest to both Frondizi and Frigerio when Frondizi was elected in 1958.15

Soon Frondizi disappointed his enthusiastic intellectual followers. Frondizi almost immediately began to break campaign promises and seemed to have a philosophical about-face: instead of nationalizing oil, he immediately signed oil concessions to North American and other foreign firms.16 While to some this about-face made Frondizi a traitor, Timerman remained supportive of Frondizi and accepted his ideological shift. His biographer Graciela Mochkofsky explains, “In large part

15 Mochkofsky 46-51.
16 Mochkofsky 62, 64.
[Timerman] continued believing in [Frondizi’s] modernizing project and agreed with the fundamental aspects of his policies: he agreed with [Frondizi’s] pragmatic turn…and supported the influx of foreign capital [into Argentina].”

Now Timerman enthusiastically supported the free market and foreign investment as Argentina’s solution to underdevelopment.  

As Timerman’s power and reputation grew, Frondizi distanced himself from the journalist; yet Timerman genuinely mourned Frondizi’s fall from power in March 1962 and immediately began plotting to overthrow his successor, Arturo Illia. Timerman hated Illia with a bizarre passion, allegedly because Illia was elected without a majority. But Timerman’s four-year campaign to oust him seems to suggest a deeper, less reasoned dislike of the man and his policies. After Illia was elected, Timerman was approached by a group of coronels opposing Illia who proposed that Timerman start a magazine with the express purpose of promoting the election of Colonel Juan Carlos Onganía. Timerman immediately and enthusiastically accepted the proposition, and the coronels sought an anonymous financier equally bent on Illia’s downfall. Timerman and the coronels settled on Raimundo Richard, the Argentine representative of the French multinational car company Peugeot. Peugeot was anxious to grow in Argentina and needed the economy to remain open to foreign capital in order to build and expand factories and sell more cars to a middle class “anxious to acquire new status symbols bought cars on a massive scale.”

17 Mochkofsky 65.

18 Timerman’s influence on Frondizi’s administration was so strong and his ideological switch so complete that Timerman was the key figure in helping to get the free-market and economically orthodox Alvaro Alsogaray (one of the most controversial and hated members of Frondizi’s cabinet) nominated as Minister of Finance in 1959. See Mochkofsky 71.
level.” The only sign that there was a special relationship between Peugeot and Primera Plana was the appearance of Peugeot’s advertisements on the back cover of Primera Plana for the first seven months of the magazine’s publication and Richard’s wife writing a regular column for the magazine. Other than that, Richard remained completely anonymous. Therefore the circumstances of Primera Plana’s founding illuminate two important points: First, even though the magazine became a transformational cultural influence, it was founded with the express political purpose of overthrowing an elected president (and was largely successful in its endeavor). And, second, the magazine exemplified the principles of developmentalism and a robust consumer culture it promoted. The magazine was funded by someone with an express interest in investing in the expansion of consumerism. It did this by prominently displaying advertisements and writing articles that promoted a strong consumerism amongst the middle classes.

Timerman’s magazine Primera Plana exemplified his new version of developmentalism. Like Germani, he also ascribed to W.W. Rostow’s vision that “traditional” societies needed to pass through a series of stages before arriving at the highest, most developed stage with heavy consumption. His developmentalism, like Frondizi’s, was “a continuation of developmentalism by other means” in that they

19 Mochkofsky 88.
20 Mochkofsky 85-88.
21 Mochkofsky 87-90 and Daniel Horacio Mazzei, “Primera Plana: Modernización y golpismo en los sesenta” in Historia de las revistas argentinas (Buenos Aires: Asociación argentina de editors de revistas, 1995).
22 Ezequiel Adamovsky’s well-regarded Historia de la clase media argentina notes that the 1960s were the apogee of the middle classes in Argentine, calling it a “paradise.”
believed “there wouldn’t be social well-being without economic development, there would be neither legality nor development without investment and credit from the United States and there wouldn’t be investment and credit if political disorder brought them to international isolation.”

He used his magazine to push a new vision of development that focused on creating a more efficient, North American-style business culture and a booming consumer society. To exemplify this view, Timerman filled *Primera Plana* with advertisements that “offered fuels, cars, ‘stereos,’ trips to New York on Boeing 707s, the ‘superjets.’” Timerman combined this phenomenon of consumption with the economic interests of the magazines and launched a large campaign to promote the car, the business of Richard. He even started a regular column about the issue [of car culture].”

Thus, Timerman not only utilized his magazine to push developmentalism in Argentina but also offered a business model of the developmentalist enterprise.

*Primera Plana* was groundbreaking in a myriad ways. First, as recounted above, the magazine not only espoused but also exemplified new business practices. Second, it was socially liberal. The magazine demonstrated its social openness by repeatedly discussing sexuality, changing women’s roles, and the cultural vanguard (through publicizing avant-garde artists and writers). Third, it cultivated consumerism by exposing new habits (dining out more frequently, for example), defining new tastes (in telling men how they should dress), and fomenting desires (encouraging Argentines to purchase the latest trends in, say, kitchens or women’s shoes). Fourth, “it created a

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23 Mochkofsky 86-87.
24 Mochkofsky 98.
whole new language for journalistic reporting: intelligent, ironic, irreverent, full of adjectives, full of winks [to the reader].”\textsuperscript{25} And, fifth, it helped to create all new sensibilities and habits by “creating new [codes] and offering a guide of what to do, what to see, what to listen to, how to dress, what to think and how.”\textsuperscript{26} Thus, it is difficult to overstate the influence and power that Timerman had through his two magazines, \textit{Primera Plana} (founded November 1962) and \textit{Confirmado} (founded May 1965), which was very similar in content and scope as \textit{Primera Plana}.\textsuperscript{27}

While developmentalists were excited by the theoretical and abstract possibilities of developmentalism, critics, on the other hand, analyzed the experience of development and the resulting daily struggles in negotiating quotidian life. The intellectual trajectories of key critics also need to be understood in order to appreciate how their ideological formations informed the objections and observations they made and why their perspectives were so drastically different from the developmentalists. The critics did not coalesce around one philosophy or ideology and had far less access to economic and political power than Timerman. The prominent figures of the decade included the comic strip artist Quino, the informally trained sociologist Julio Mafud, the controversial

\textsuperscript{25} Mochkofsky 94.
\textsuperscript{26} Mochkofsky 94.
\textsuperscript{27} See also Sergio Pujol, \textit{La década rebelde: los años 60 en la Argentina}, (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 2002) 79-142, who extensively describes the influence of \textit{Primera Plana}.

Despite Timerman’s (or maybe because of) journalistic brilliance, he was often a despotic, arbitrary, and difficult boss. Before founding \textit{Primera Plana} he had never stayed at any one job (in television, magazines, or newspapers) for more than a year or so. Timerman claimed he had become “bored” with the magazine only a little after a year and half after founding it (in truth, the funders wanted him to tone down his anti-Illia rhetoric), and he abruptly left the magazine. It was only after his departure that his younger editors made the magazine into what it is remembered today as “the reflection and symbol of the 1960’s,” especially in terms of its cultural influence. Mochkofsky 102, 109.
philosopher Arturo Jauretche, the sociologist Sebreli, and playwright Ricardo Talesnik, among others. These men advocated for the quotidian concerns of the working- and middle-classes, many of which in the 1960s responded to Argentina’s burgeoning consumer society. Both Sebreli and Mafud bucked the intellectual trends of the day: neither had university training as a sociologist and both rejected the absolute supremacy of quantitative sociological methodology that Gino Germani advocated.28

Although magazines like Primera Plana and Confirmado questioned the quality of his books, Sebreli’s university training (as a philosopher and writer), knowledge of theory, and association with the influential literary magazines Contorno and Sur lent his contributions legitimacy in the eyes of many porteño intellectuals. He defended his work by arguing that his work was more philosophy than sociology and that he “wanted to capture the ambiguity; with scientific methods that was practically impossible.”29 His intellectual reputation only grew as he worked with some of the foremost intellectuals, writers, and philosophers of twentieth-century Argentina. During the Dirty War he formed an intellectual “resistance” group and yet, mysteriously, never disappeared.


Sebreli published Historia argentina y conciencia de clase (Buenos Aires: Editorial Perrot, 1957); Martínez Estrada una rebelión inútil (Buenos Aires: Palestra, 1960); José de Castro and Juan José Sebreli, Ensayos sobre el subdesarrollo (Buenos Aires: Siglo veinte, 1965); Daniel Durand and Juan José Sebreli, La política petrolera internacional (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1965) amongst others.

Today Sebreli continues to be a public — although much more conservative — intellectual, writing about politics, Argentine history, and social observations for the aristocratic newspaper *La Nación*. Sebreli almost single-handedly started a renaissance of informally trained essayists who published widely in the 1960s and openly challenged the hegemony of Germani’s quantitative sociology.\(^{30}\)

Among the more prolific and controversial of these essayists, Julio Mafud openly criticized Germani’s methodology in a 1967 interview with *Confirmado* where he proclaimed that Germani’s school “imposed the statistic over sociological interpretation.”\(^{31}\) A unionized railroad worker with no formal academic training and an open disdain for “overly specialized” academics too afraid to draw conclusions, Mafud was a proud Marxist who advocated for the poor urban migrant (known in Argentina by the derogatory term “cabecita negra”). He was prolific, but his work did not have the lasting influence of Sebreli’s, which continues to be reprinted today.

While Mafud’s and to a lesser extent Sebreli’s work was suspect to other intellectuals because of their concern with the quotidian, lack of formal academic training, and preference for qualitative over quantitative research, the work of comic strip writer Quino found acclaim. Quino’s concerns were considered more “appropriate” for his medium. Instead of being criticized, he was lauded as insightful social critics in very same magazines that rejected Sebreli and Mafud. Although Quino became one of the

\(^{30}\) The most prominent of these essayists are the right-wing Arturo Jauretche, Julio Mafud (discussed in this chapter), and Alfredo Moffatt who wrote *Estrategias para sobrevivir en Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Jorge Álvarez, 1967).

loudest critics of consumerism and advertising, he was not particularly leftist or Marxist and did not eschew capitalism. Quino was already an established comic strip writer when he first conceived the comic strip. He had been hired by the Argentine manufacturing giant Siam di Tella for an advertising campaign to promote household appliances. While neither the campaign nor the product came to fruition, Quino held on to the concept for the comic strip until a friend from the magazine Primera Plana approached him.32 However, he only published in the magazine for a few months before a dispute over ownership of the strips led him to abruptly take his work elsewhere. The daily newspaper El Mundo quickly offered him a place and he published daily for several years. He published the strip in a total of three magazines and newspapers until 1973 and also began to syndicate it in Argentine newspapers in the interior in 1967. Demand for the comic strip was so high that Quino published his first collected edition of Mafalda in 1966. Primera Plana noted in October of that year that the collection, entitled Así es la cosa Mafalda, sold out in 48 hours. The second edition took 72 hours to sell out, and the third two weeks.33 Indeed, Mafalda is still one of the most popular comic-strip characters in Argentina and Quino’s books can be found in every kiosk and bookstore. Quino was recently honored by the city of Buenos Aires during its bicentenary and a statue of Mafalda was unveiled in the neighborhood of San Telmo.34 Despite his longstanding popularity, contemporary leftists criticized him for not being more ideological or biting in

34 Quino had written the first comic strips at his apartment in San Telmo, where readers imagined Mafalda grew up and her friends played.
his criticism of capitalism and advertising. This is not entirely surprising, though, if one considers that Mafalda in fact originated as an advertisement for household appliances.

The Developmentalists’ Vision: Quantifying a Nation, Advertising Development

Timerman in his magazine *Primera Plana* advocated for economic development and a consumer society through fomenting a new business culture, quantitative research, and robust advertising. In this way development and consumerism were a business and economic enterprise in which important social and cultural consequences did not figure. He created this vision meticulously.

The first step of this project was to stimulate and expand the domestic Argentine consumer market as a way to sustain economic growth. The stimulation of consumer markets was at the heart of Timerman’s developmentalist economic formula: without such expansion successful industrialization would be impossible. In 1964 one of the magazine’s editorial writers noted that while economists since Adam Smith had concerned themselves with production, increased consumption became the contemporary focus. The North American libertarian economist Henry Hazlitt, writing in *Primera Plana*, also emphasized the importance of increased consumption to maintain high levels of production. He went on to say, “Today the dominant theory accepts as given the importance of production and is more interested in the means through which consumption can be increased.”35 And the economist and friend of Rogelio Frigerio, Arnaldo T. Musich, noted in his 1962 book, this new economic system implied “the inescapable

necessity of expanded consumption...that is to say, raising the standard of living and buying power of populations until now denied [such access].”

In other words: expanded consumption meant an increased standard of living. If Argentina failed to produce the goods that the Argentina public demanded, Musich continued, the country would be doomed to “underdevelopment.”

The second step was to instruct its readership on how to become better advertisers and businessmen through the adoption of modern business techniques. For those in marketing and advertising, modern business techniques meant quantifying the Argentine population through the rapid adoption of market surveys. Market and motivational research would stimulate a “deeper and more profound connection with society” whose surprising findings would intensify one’s understanding of the “human condition.”

That is why Primera Plana so enthusiastically published and promoted the results of their survey “The Argentine of 1963,” mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. This advocacy began immediately after publication: in Primera Plana’s first issue from November 13, 1962, Timerman bemoaned the fact that “Argentina is a country without statistics.” In a statement from Timerman two weeks after the magazine first began publication in 1962, the editor declared: “Market studies have become a necessity in

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37 Musich 20.


today’s mass society, which is submitted to an intense consumerist regime. Its writers focused particularly on developing more accurate ways of measuring their audience (e.g., more accurate surveys to collect statistics) with the goal of increasing advertising revenue and instructing its powerful audience how to adopt a new vocabulary. For instance, in an article entitled “Market Research and the Art of Scientific Selling,” published in the third issue of Primera Plana, the anonymous author guided readers through a list of English terms ("selective selling," "traffic survey," and the like), explaining how incorporating these techniques would expand their business. A tutorial explained how methods from anthropology, sociology and psychology helped explain the consumption habits of Argentines from different social strata, going on to guide readers toward the best market-research organizations in the country. Finally, the tutorial described, step-by-step, how to conduct a typical market survey. The magazine not only advocated increased advertising and surveying, it instructed advertisers and businessmen on precisely how to go about doing such research. 

Primera Plana featured within its pages not only Germani’s work but also the results of many similar, prominent surveys.

Market researchers were inspired to measure and divide Argentine society using the same methodologies as Gino Germani. For instance, the magazine published a feature story in December 1962 on Germani’s relatively large survey of 2,200 Argentines.

42 “Consumismo: La investigación del mercado y el arte de la Venta Científica,” Primera Plana, November 27, 1962, 23.
in which he sought to understand things like Argentines’ attitudes toward racial prejudices (always denied), authoritarian attitudes, social stratification, anti-Semitism, women in power, the standard of living for the retired, and the assimilation of immigrants. As a symbol of their modernity, they even planned to use modern IBM computers to tabulate their results. Marketers took a particular interest in breaking down society according to socio-economic status, gender, and immigrant status or origin as the basic ways to figure out who was buying their products.

Thus, the editors of Primera Plana showcased both the market research itself as well as the results themselves. They fervently argued that more market research should be done to paint a picture of “the average Argentine.” Surveying in general and market surveys in particular appealed to developmentalists for three reasons. First, it meant utilizing techniques from the new and “scientific” quantitative sociology that so enthused writers at Primera Plana. Second, advertisers — described by the magazine as “the engineers of progress” — also utilized these techniques to help map the Argentine population and provide a more rigorous and methodical understanding of Argentine class structures and ethnic makeup, thereby more effectively selling locally manufactured


44 Even though Primera Plana still promoted these techniques, its editors recognized how this type of surveying and breaking-down of the population could appear absurd and overly concerned with unimportant minutiae to Argentines not familiar with the purpose of market research. In the same 1963 article that discussed Argentines’ use of refrigerators, the magazine poked fun at this type of surveying: “The habit has been introduced in Argentina – in part thanks to television – of investigating, for example, which of two soaps (whose samples have been given free to the women being surveyed) appears foamier to 1,152 middle-class housewives between 25 and 35 years old, socioeconomic level ‘c,’ with two children, their own home and washing machine, living in the capital and its suburbs.” “Encuestas – El argentino de 1963: un ser que se debate entre polos contradictorios,” Primera Plana, June 11, 1963, 28-29.
goods. And, third, these surveys demonstrated that Argentina’s consumerism was becoming more entrenched as the notions of personal identity and social status became increasingly expressed through the things one owned. Because of the strengthening relationship between consumerism and identity, it made perfect sense to Primera Plana and other supporters of developmentalism to analyze how the average Argentine’s consumption patterns offered one of the most fruitful ways of understanding Argentines’ deeply felt, psychological reactions to world events, local politics, social changes, and economic conditions.

Developmentalists like those at Primera Plana welcomed advertising and the desires it fomented as a fundamental part of economic development. The advertisers themselves, their agencies, and the work they produced were constantly lauded in magazines. As part of the developmentalist project, Primera Plana saw advertising as utterly indispensable in the quest to “modernize” Argentina by expanding consumer markets. In addition, “modern” advertising firms would conduct market research surveys and the statistics collected through them could be used to better understand the nation’s peoples. Prominent advertisers, in particular those who founded their own agencies, were treated as celebrities in its columns. The writing staff enthusiastically promoted the importance advertising had in changing all aspects of modern life. One writer gushed in October 1963 “in a century that has been prodigious in its revolutions, advertising has built its own. There is no doubt that this revolution has ended up becoming one of the most beneficial and controversial, because it produced a social impact equivalent to some
of the biggest leaps in history.⁴⁵ In other words, advertising was the source of much progress in Argentina. The good news for the developmentalists was that advertising had increased ten-fold between 1952 and 1963; do in no small part to the expansion of television.⁴⁶

Developmentalists argued that the expansion of television into cities beyond Buenos Aires was crucial for the economic development of Argentina. This expansion produced jobs in television studios, television set factories, and for repairmen, actors, and advertising agencies. Its role in promoting products through advertising was seen as especially important. Therefore, developmentalists vigorously tried to encourage the growth of television, whose growth took off in the 1960s.⁴⁷ Even though the majority of Argentines did not even have access to a television signal, enthusiastic developmentalist journalists, anxious to believe that television’s modernizing force had reached and affected the majority of Argentines, overstated television’s influence over the entire country. They wrote as if absolutely everyone watched television programs and that these programs were universally influential.⁴⁸ Endless magazine articles beginning in 1958 had fretted over the influence of television on children, even though only 38 percent

⁴⁵Ibid, 19.
⁴⁷Please see Chapter 2 for a more in-depth discussion of the expansion of television.
⁴⁸Para Ti started including a TV guide with its magazine, including those sold in the interior of the country. When a letter writer protested the uselessness of the guide to those living outside of Buenos Aires, Córdoba, or Mar del Plata, the editor simply replied that a station would be arriving soon to her city. Cartas de lectoras, Para Ti, April 30, 1963, 74.
of Buenos Aires residents (and no one else in the country) had a television in 1960.49 And an October 1963 article from the women’s magazine Claudia commented, “A television set is already not a luxury, rather one more element of home comfort. Watching television one or two hours a day is normal in the majority of families.”50 Porteño intellectuals and journalists ignored the different material and cultural realities of the rest of the country in their ideological and enthusiastic fervor for television.

Developmentalist supporters as voiced by Primera Plana and Confirmado saw the expansion of consumer culture as a wholly good phenomenon because it grew the economy, raised the standard of living, and economically developed the country. In order to make these things happen, they encouraged local businesses to expand advertising and be more “scientific” in their approaches to selling their products through the adoption of social science methodologies. They also pushed for the opening of more television stations. They treated advertisers as celebrities and advertising as a social force for good. However, developmentalists vision of Argentina’s consumer society was mostly limited to macro-economic patterns and rates of consumer growth.

The Critics’ Worries: Advertising, Debt, and Anxiety of Status

While Primera Plana certainly reflected the mainstream intellectual tendencies of the time—faith in quantitative social science techniques and “economic development” in solving most societal ills—dissenting voices articulated an alternate vision. They took

different approaches and focused on different issues and only generally coalesced in their
disagreement about the desirability of a consumer society. Critics reflected on the
negative fall-outs of the quickly expanding consumer culture that developmentalists
chose to ignore. They wondered about the saturation of the media and advertising, the
fact that consumers were going into debt to buy consumer objects like appliances, and an
increasing materialism. They also mourned the passing of an era. Critics agreed with
developmentalists that an in-depth examination of different class characteristics and
habits was badly needed, but they argued that quantitative surveys could not answer
specific questions about the quotidian. Instead of the quantitative sociology prescribed
by Gino Germani, critics like Sebreli advocated studying daily life and adopted the
methodology of French philosopher Henri Lefebvre among others. They observed and
reflected upon daily life, by thinking of what these changes meant to Argentines. In 1969
the critic Julio Mafud succinctly expressed the sum of their anxieties: “The growth of
[consumer] debt supports Argentina’s current consumerism. The simultaneous
manufacturing of products and the manufacturing of needs causes that to happen. The
advertising flood… and the irresistible anxiety of status saturate and affect the longings
of today.” The concerns of the critics as expressed in the above quote reveal a massive
rift between intellectuals, politicians, and economic theorists. This rift was evidenced not
only in their research methodologies and questions but also in a discussion about the
moral impact on the Argentine people. At the beginning of the decade, the disagreement

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51 See Sebreli’s explanation of his intellectual influences, p26-29 in the prologue to his new book.
52 Mafud 160.
also demonstrated how the two groups (developmentalists vs. critics) lived in different intellectual worlds.

While developmentalists and critics may have inhabited different intellectual worlds, Argentines across class and region spoke the same language of “development” and “under-development.” Comic strips by Quino indicate that young and old were concerned by Argentina’s status in the world as compared to other countries and about what characteristics made Argentina underdeveloped. For instance, in a June 1966 comic strip published 2 days before Ongania’s coup, Susanita (Mafalda’s aristocratic, traditional, elitist, and maternal friend) complained that she was sick and tired of living in an underdeveloped country, one in which her family’s telephone constantly went out. Mafalda asks Susanita whether it hurt her to refer to Argentina as “underdeveloped.” When Susanita asks Mafalda what she would prefer to call it, Mafalda thinks for a second and says “an amateur country.” This comic strip reveals two important points. First, it reveals that Argentines were aware their country was “underdeveloped,” that their country was “behind,” in some manner, and that they were embarrassed by this. And, second, it reveals the poor functioning of their telephone system represented this state of underdevelopment. This type of comic strip reveals how issues of “underdevelopment” resonated with Argentines.

53 Quino, *Mafalda, El Mundo*, June 27, 1966. See also Quino’s April 2, 1965 comic strip in which he describes developmentalist ideas as coming from the “first-world” or his May 20, 1965 comic strip in which he describes Argentina’s government as being submissive to the International Monetary Fund, the Paris Club, and World Bank.

54 There was a never-ending stream of comics, articles, and letters making reference to the poor quality of telephone service across Argentina throughout the 1960s. It really seemed to gall Argentines much more than the poor service of electricity or gas, yet many countries in Europe also experienced long waits for the
They may have shared this language of underdevelopment, but the legacy of Peronism divided critics’ and developmentalists’ worldviews. Some critics, like Sebreli and unlike the anti-Peronist Timerman, understood the early 1960s as a post-Peronist world and sought to keep the cultural influence of working-class consumption that had been glorified under Peronism. Perón intended not only to redistribute wealth but also to improve workers’ quality of life by enabling increased consumption and thus comfort. The male worker had been a particularly exalted figure under Peronism, portrayed in propaganda and advertising as the supreme example of Argentine masculinity. In the early 1960s Sebreli interpreted the worker’s reality through the lens of what had been lost with the overthrow of Perón, something Timerman did not discuss. Developmentalists, on the other hand, fetishized middle-class values and culture. While Sebreli cannot be categorized as a Peronist per se, he believed that “the principles of Peronism (social justice, economic independence, and political sovereignty) …took hold in Argentina installation of lines. In relative terms, their experience of phone service wasn’t all that different from the European countries they wanted to emulate.

thanks to Peronist propaganda [and justified] Peronist demagogy as a means to awaken
the consciousness of the working class.”

Thus, while Timerman in *Primera Plana*
focused on how advertising, modern social scientific techniques, and economic
development would lead to another upswing in middle-class consumption, Sebreli
reflected upon how the change from a working-class to a middle-class consumption
affected the worker’s daily life. He interpreted the changes that occurred around him as
symptomatic of a post-Peronist world in which the working classes, whose lives were so
spectacularly transformed by Peronist policy, stood to lose the most in this new iteration
of a consumer society that exalted middle-class tastes and international trends in popular
culture.

Sebreli saw the worker as feeling alienated in both work and leisure. It was the
alienating experience of meaningless work that actually pushed the working classes
towards an even more isolated consumption. Sebreli argued that changes in consumption
resulted directly from industrialization and changes in labor practices. In generic terms, he described changing workplace conditions—such as loud machinery separating

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57 By the early 1960s, Sebreli argued that this romanticized world had come to an end. In the late 1950s General Pedro Eugenio Aramburu outlawed the Peronist party, his government forbade the mere mention of Perón’s name, and, most importantly, a series of subsequent governments worked to reverse Perón’s pro-labor policy.
58 Mass society/mass culture was a term popularized in the 1920s that described the increasing influence of the media (radio and magazines), movies, professional sports, and the like that implied a certain level of consumerism. The term consumer society or consumer culture could be found in the late 1950s or early 1960s, but was considered a neologism (at least by Timerman in November 1962) that was popularly used amongst North American economists. Within a few years, however, the term had gained a widespread usage (it appears several times in *Mafalda*), was used by Sebreli in his 1964 book, and its meaning seemed to be well understood by the average Argentine.
workers—that estranged workers from each other and increased distances between owners and workers. Sebreli was heavily influenced by C. Wright Mills’s *White Collars: The American Middle Classes* and incorporated Mills’s understanding of workers as a cog in a vast bureaucratic machine, but he focuses on the role of blue rather than white collar workers. Therefore the workplace had become a progressively more monotonous place where workers felt increasingly disaffected and powerless. As a result of workplace unhappiness, workers became less interested in union activities and more involved in their leisure activities outside of work, which Sebreli described as “alienated leisure.” Sebreli portrayed these new activities that absorbed workers’ hours outside of the workplace as constituting part of the new “industry” of leisure and being products of “mass culture.” Workers now spent their time reading magazines, going to the movies, attending soccer matches, and watching television rather than participating in the social life of their neighborhoods. Sebreli noted, “The emptiness that during other periods brought him to union activity…was substituted by various forms of alienated leisure.”

Sebreli’s observations were actually borne out by the 1963 survey published in *Primera Plana*. In it, young people increasingly expressed boredom and a certain alienation from both work and their own country, which the developmentalist journalists at *Primera Plana*.

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60 Sebreli 138.

61 Sebreli 143.
Plana termed a pessimistic, apathetic “país desorientado” (disoriented or not organized country).⁶²

Critics expressed concern that workers were becoming depoliticized by mass consumption and mass society. Sebreli, for example, mourned that “a new generation of workers arose under Peronism, one deceptively integrated into a consumer society, one that lived fascinated with nylon and scooters and danced to rock and did the twist, and who had no other aspirations than just immediate enjoyment.”⁶³ Therefore Sebreli understood the promises of Peronism to be a mostly a deceptive ruse, perhaps even a betrayal: the influence of mass leisure culture was linked to an increased, apolitical materialism that depoliticized the unionized worker.⁶⁴ Mafud was concerned that increased consumer aspirations made society more individualistic. He argued that people chose to work 2 or 3 jobs instead of participating in a labor union and organizing: “the individual does not want social change, he wants a change in their social status.”⁶⁵ Yet Sebreli contradictorily argued that workers needed those diversions to interrupt the “monotonous and absurd flow of daily life;” in some ways Sebreli understood why workers turned to such “distractions.”⁶⁶ Thus, at the beginning of the decade the critics

⁶² “Carta del Director”, Panorama, August 1963, 9.
⁶³ Sebreli 149.
⁶⁴ His concerns were slightly overstated. Even though he argued that by the early 1960s workers were symbolically excluded from the national imaginary, a 1963 article in Primera Plana noted that manufacturers of washing machines were increasingly targeting the working classes as the middle- and upper-class markets were saturated. See: “Encuesta: El argentino del 1963: un ser que se debate entre polos contradictorios,” Primera Plana, June 11, 1963, 28-29.
⁶⁵ Mafud 38.
⁶⁶ Sebreli 145.
were ambivalent about how consumerism was affecting the working and middle classes. This ambivalence, however, slowly morphed into a steady critique of status symbols, advertising, materialism, and increased household debt.

Critics questioned whether status symbols were really necessary or improved one’s quality of life. Julio Mafud stated in 1969 that “it was always common to say that to work [and] accumulate goods was to progress, advance, triumph in life…[a person who has a] refrigerator, washing machine, and even a car is a person who has arrived. [But] is that person happier now [that] they possess all those goods and symbols or before when they didn’t have one?”

Mafud essentially asked whether we lived better now. As with other status symbols of the epoch, Sebreli recognized that a car could be useful for a worker and his family, but he complained that it very quickly became simply a symbol of class and also ostentatious consumption: “[a car] had to be expensive and the latest model to convey status: the poor office worker who after so many sacrifices would buy a Fiat 600 thinking he [sic] had reached his highest aspirations was immediately anguished because he didn’t have a Fiat 1500. And if one day he did have it, he would start going after the miserable Ford, and so it would go on indefinitely.”

Thus both Mafud and Sebreli argued that the utility of these objects were overemphasized and saw the quest for status symbols as endless.

Leftist critics objected to how much these status symbols constructed the identity of urban Argentines and they had difficulty adjusting to the fact that education,

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67 Mafud 11.
68 Sebreli 107.
profession, or family origin no longer carried as much weight in giving people status. Mafud complained that “no one cares about the occupation of a bank manager or executive. What is important is his lifestyle and the status symbols he is able to acquire because of his profession.”\textsuperscript{69} He goes on to say, “in contemporary Argentine society one’s status is completely made up by ones material and economic goods.”\textsuperscript{70} Sebreli went even further when in 1964 he complained that in Argentine society one “identifies being with having and where ownership is the only way to be recognized by everyone else [emphasis added].”\textsuperscript{71} They both objected to the implicit materialism that these new symbolic systems required.

Critics reflected on how all status symbols, often in the form of household appliances, inhibited human communication and hurt marriages and families rather than enriching those relationships. Quino reflected on the issue over the course of several strips. In one, Susanita complained how her television set stopped working the night before and that meant that during the whole dinner and the whole evening they were left without television. Because of that she realized just how boring her parents were.\textsuperscript{72} In this comic strip Quino reflected on how television inhibits family members from talking with one another. In another comic strip, Mafalda went to speak with her mother. She followed the sound of the vacuum cleaner and tried to tell her mother something. When she realized her mother didn’t even know she was there and couldn’t hear her over the

\textsuperscript{69} Mafud 33.
\textsuperscript{70} Mafud 22 and 11.
\textsuperscript{71} Sebreli 91.
\textsuperscript{72} Quino, \textit{Mafalda, Siete Dias}, date unkown.
din of the vacuum, Mafalda walked away and asked if she chose a bad moment or a bad century to try to communicate with her mother. While Quino reflected on the overall value of these technological intrusions into Argentines lives or at least tried to remind the reader that they were not wholly good, critics reserved their most biting criticism for television in particular.

Figure 6: Mafalda comic strip that appeared in El Mundo

Critics objected both to the pressure to buy a television set and the increased amount of advertising brought into the home through commercials. Quino noted how much social pressure there was especially on children to have a television set. In an early strip, Mafalda became angry because a friend of hers could not believe that Mafalda did not have a television. Mafalda screamed, “Am I some sort of weirdo for not having a TV?” All of a sudden she was surrounded by a sea of concerned looking children’s faces

73 Quino, Mafalda, El Mundo, November 6, 1966.

74 Commentators since the late 1950s were concerned that children watched too much television. Articles appeared constantly in magazines like Para Ti, Claudia, Primera Plana, and Confirmedo about how television watching was changing children’s behavior and affecting familial relations. Quino also commented on the issue in his 27 March 1965 strip. In it Mafalda’s dad wants to tell Mafalda she needs to watch less television, but is afraid she will hate him for telling her so.
and Mafalda’s face betrayed a sense of self-consciousness. In this way, Quino, who resisted owning a television set himself, showed television was so important in children’s socialization that by 1965 they felt alienated from their peers if they did not own a television set. (Soon after, Mafalda’s family does purchase a television set and she is so excited that she passes out when it arrives.)

![Figure 7: Mafalda comic strip that appeared in El Mundo](image)

While developmentalists lauded television as an economic engine and a key place for the expansion of advertising, critics believed television shows and advertising were coercing Argentines into aspiring to a lifestyle they could not afford. Their criticism increasingly centered on advertising and became more distressed as the decade progressed. First, Sebreli complained that workers were duped by advertising. He stated that the “overwhelming [amount of] advertising incites the worker to purchase a car. He then feels obligated to spend a great deal of his meager budget on the purchase and maintenance of a car.”

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77 Sebreli 106.
consumption, advertising saturated Argentines’ senses and accustomed them to the idea of *needing* to live a certain way, even if it was a nearly impossible standard to achieve for most people. In this way, Sebreli blamed television for showing the working classes how much distance separated them from the “petty bourgeoisie.”

Critics underscored how Argentines felt their lives mismatched those in the commercials and pointed out that advertising created unnecessary feelings of inadequacy, especially amongst Argentine men. In a strip Mafalda’s father reacted badly to a whisky advertisement. The advertisement stated, “Those who live well drink Black-Grog Whisky.” Infuriated, Mafalda’s dad screamed at the television, “and what about those who know how to live well but whose salaries don’t let them?!” Mafalda, abashed at her father for pointing out that life is not like advertisements commented, “forgive him; the poor guy has the bad habit of believing life is not as it is portrayed in advertisements.”

Mafud argued that it was the media who forced the “ideal of high consumption and a high standard of living” down the throats of middle- and working-class Argentines. This level of consumption made Argentines want “goods and products of industrialized countries” even though most Argentines could ill-afford to have them or lacked access to them. Interestingly, while Mafud objected to this raising of expectations, the more elitist critic Eduardo Tiscornia encouraged it. He said that “the raised level of expectations caused by cinema and television” served as motivation for “the poorest” in Argentine society to

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78 Mafud 52-53.
79 Sebreli 150.
81 Mafud 52-53.
work harder so they could buy the things they wanted.\textsuperscript{82} Both perspectives condescended to know what was “best” for the lower classes of Argentina. Thus, critics objected to televisions as an object in and of themselves and because they brought so much more advertising into the home.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Mafalda_Comic.pdf}
\caption{Mafalda comic strip that appeared in El Mundo}
\end{figure}

While critics objected to Argentines being encouraged to buy goods they didn’t need, they objected more strongly to how advertising equated happiness with the accumulation of material goods. For instance, in a late 1960s comic strip Mafalda’s friend Miguelito watched the TV at a very close distance. He just turned on the TV and already saw at least three advertisements (for deodorants, hot dogs, and washing machines). He turned to Mafalda with a worried look on his face and said that apparently you are an idiot if after purchasing all these things you are not happy.\textsuperscript{83} This strip resonated with the readers because objectively they knew these things cannot make them

\textsuperscript{82} Eduardo Tiscornia, \textit{¿Qué pasa con la Argentina?}, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Tres Americas, 1962) 139-140.

\textsuperscript{83} Quino, \textit{Mafalda, Siete Dias}, date unknown. In another comic strip Mafalda’s mother tells her to stay inside and watch television. Mafalda gets an increasingly concerned look on her face as she watches more and more advertisements. She wanders over to her mother and advises her to buy a new shampoo, soap, detergent, and more things with the tone of a zone-out zombie. Worried her mother sends her outside to jump rope.
happy, but they also recognized the marketing technique and had been persuaded to
believe its message.

The critics’ discontent grew as they reflected on what seemed like an
oversaturation of advertising and logos on television, billboards, magazines, and
newspapers. They reflected on what this meant to children growing up in the new media
landscape. In one comic strip, Mafalda chatted with her aristocratic friend Susanita.
Mafalda told Susanita she worried about how next year would turn out because she had
not heard a single jingle or seen a single advertisement recommending the virtues of the
upcoming year. Susanita said that, actually, she had not heard or seen anything either.
Mafalda replied, well then, what can we expect from a year so badly advertised!?! This
comic strip reflects that Mafalda and Susanita have learned to only trust “products” that
have been advertised: advertising gave something worth or value; it told Mafalda and her
friends what to expect, whether the “product” is good or bad.\footnote{Quino, \textit{Mafalda, El Mundo}, December 29, 1965.} As young children they
failed to understand that “a new year” is not a product to be advertised, not something
created by businesses and sold to them by advertising firms or that its value is determined
by an advertising campaign. In another example, Mafalda is on the beach with
Miguelito. She finds a seashell that looks like the Shell Oil logo and when she shows it
to Miguelito he immediately starts to look for the Esso Oil logo in the sand.\footnote{Quino, \textit{Mafalda, El Mundo}, February 9, 1966.} Both of
these strips are funny to the reader because we laugh at the naïveté of children who
cannot distinguish between naturally occurring objects and marketed products. As media
studies scholars later articulated, many times urban children’s first contact with an object, in this case a shell, is through the media. They only come into contact with the actual object after first seeing it in a magazine, on a billboard, or on television. Thus, Miguelito’s initial exposure to a shell came through seeing the shell oil logo brand and he fails to understand it is an object that is naturally found on the beach. This comic strip is funny because it seems so absurd, but Quino demonstrates a certain preoccupation that young Argentines can not conceive of things outside of a mass-produced, mass-marketed, and branded world.

Figure 9: Appeared in El Mundo in 1966

By 1968 and 1969 critics felt that consumerism, advertising, and materialism had finally become so out of control that they needed to be reined in. In a comic strip Quino portrays a ridiculous looking and cheesy spokesperson selling every domestic appliance imaginable that resonated with the audience: he obviously represented a typical figure appearing on television and they recognized the type. Mafalda then turned off the television and while looking worried, wondered what is going to happen when this
“consumer society” became a “satiated society” (through a play on words in Spanish). While *Primera Plana* envisioned the positive role advertisers should play in expanding consumer markets, Quino foregrounded the role of the advertisers in the swelling consumer society to illustrate that consumerism reached a saturation point.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 10: Appeared in *Siete Dias* in the late 1960s or early 1970s**

Concerns about advertising were compounded with growing concerns about familial cycles of debt, which ratcheted up the emotional tone of the rhetoric. Mafud, Quino, Sebreli, and Talesnik all worried about the cycle of debt into which the Argentine family was falling. As they doubted the necessity of things like appliances in the first place, the critics saw the availability of credit as a trick to purchase things they did not need rather than as a help in making their lives easier. In a *Mafalda* comic strip Miguelito pointed out that their parents didn’t have washing machines, refrigerators, or televisions when they were children, but now they have to work incredibly hard just to make the installment payments on these items. So Miguelito wondered what sorts of

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86 Quino, *Mafalda, Siete Dias*, date unknown.

87 Interviewees recalled how it was sometimes difficult to make these payments at the end of each month. They recalled it would cause stress or arguments. Some didn’t remember having to make payments and
things “the organizers of our exhausting future” were inventing for them (the children) to pay in installments. I surmise that this strip resonated with their audiences because porteños were quietly skeptical of how these things were supposed to change their lives and felt resentful of the cycle of obligations it entered them into. Mafud echoes the sentiment alluded to in the comic strip that workers were overworked and unhappy just so they could make the installment payments on their refrigerators, washing machines, and television sets. He notes that “many Argentine workers feel imprisoned by their debt and the goods they consume.” In their own ways, all of the critics saw consumerism and the cycle of debt as inescapable.

Developmentalists rejected resistance to changes they understood as imperative for development as classist and elitist. Left and right wing critics often voiced their resistance to the influence of youth culture, women more active in public life, and especially the equalizing powers of mass consumption. As one developmentalist editorial writer in Primera Plana explained, “Progress and development can only appear harmful to individuals in the upper-classes who see no benefit in others reaching a higher level of consumption…[they have a] repressed and latent resistance deep inside against progress… to appreciate what industrialization and development mean, you have to think about workers whose salaries allow them to buy houses, cars, vacations, education,

they surmised this was because making the payment wasn’t an issue and therefore wasn’t talked about in the family.

88 Quino, Mafalda, Siete Dias, date unknown.

89 Mafud 124.
etc.” As under Peronism, the upper-classes resisted the increased expectations of the working-classes, especially in terms of consumption and the use of household appliances. They begrudged the higher living standards of the poor and working classes. For instance, upper- (and even middle-) class housewives expressed disdain at maids who demanded better work conditions and yet had easier jobs because appliances alleviated their labor. The maids demanded such things as all day access to hot water, a radio in their rooms, and access to a space heater. The controversial (conservative) philosopher Arturo Jauretche noted that the “señoras gordas” or rich older women were “irritated that they can see the television antennas [in the shanty towns] and [they suspected] that there are also refrigerators and gas stoves; they cannot understand that the search for ‘comfort’ is a human necessity and that for those who cannot get an adequate amount, do what they can within their means.”

Developmentalists also dismissed concerns about the widespread availability of credit. Often those complaining about its widespread availability simply begrudged the fact that the lower classes could have the conveniences and comforts they thought belonged exclusively to the upper classes. They resented the fact that the simple possession of a refrigerator or washing machine was the marker of status. Household appliances were paramount in that symbolic world. While astute social observers like

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92 Arturo Jauretche, El medio pelo en la sociedad Argentina, (Buenos Aires: A Peña Lillo, 1966) 122. The political scientist Szusterman characterizes Jauretche as a “right wing intellectual.” She says, “The Right in Argentina was never more than a handful of coteries, of individuals who, beyond their embrace of nationalism, seemed to have very little else in common. There were Catholic and liberal, free-trade and interventionist, aristocratic and populist versions.” Szusterman 170.
Jauretche understood that the upper-classes objected to the lower-classes appropriating status symbols and ways of life the rich deemed to be their own, developmentalists like those at *Primera Plana* interpreted their resistances as being against “progress” and “modernization.” Both, rightly, saw this type of resistance as an expression of classism and a fear that the upper classes were losing cultural influence.

Although Quino was firmly amongst the critics of consumerism, he published an astute comic strip regarding the hypocrisies of the Argentine bourgeoisie and the right to a certain standard of living. In it, Manolo (the son of Spanish immigrants whose family owns a small bodega and who is a budding entrepreneur) excitedly tells Mafalda about his brother’s life in the United States. He’s so excited that his brother already has a car even though he only works in a supermarket. Manolo comments, “What a fabulous country.” Manolo excitedly asks Mafalda when that will be possible in Argentina and she answers: when things change so that it is possible. All of a sudden Manolo realizes that he does not want things to be so equal in Argentina and screams, “I’m talking about the advantages of being over there, NOT subversion here!” In this comic strip Quino succinctly lays out the internal contradictions of the Argentine mindset: in theory they want the majority of Argentines to have the same standard of living as in the US, but they are not willing to make the changes in social structure necessary for that to be possible.

Criticism of consumer culture eventually became extreme and contorted. Julio Mafud in sections of his book *Argentina y el status* blamed everything that was wrong with Argentine society on the excesses of consumerism. Not only did advertising become more influential than church, family, and university, but he also argued that
having “good taste, being modern, is more important than getting a good education.” The
search for comfort had become so extreme that people no longer wanted to make any
effort in daily life: “Almost no energy is used to act in this world.” Appliances now
substituted for human contact. Like the 1963 Primera Plana article that opened this
chapter, Mafud also argued that Argentines’ relationship to their refrigerator was a
metaphor for how they protected themselves from the insecurities of an unstable world.
Using questionable Freudian analysis Mafud argued that “the refrigerator…is not
acquired for the objective reason to conserve food. The refrigerator as with any other
appliance constructs a secure interuterine world. The refrigerator represents, for
many…the security of knowing there will always be food at home” and keeps an outside
world that was “conflictive, indomable, uncontrolable” at bay. For someone who was
so critical of consumerism and a perceived fetishization of household appliances, he also
proposed an elaborate explanation for why Argentines were so devoted to their
“comfort.”

Conclusion
The animated discussions about how to implement economic development and the
meanings of consumer culture reveal that Argentine society was indeed fundamentally
changing and Argentines were disquieted by these changes. Developmentalists
enthusiastically implemented a model of progress they felt would dramatically improve
their country’s well-being and were excited to employ a new “scientific” system of

93 Mafud 179.
94 Mafud, Status, 185.
knowledge (through the quantitative social sciences) that would help them understand the world, grow the economy, and improve the standard of living. They were not concerned with the things critics saw as the negative consequences. These critics were not proposing an alternative, rather they were making observations and reflections upon a system that Argentines knew and recognized: critics of all political and philosophical leanings made similar critiques against developmentalists and capitalists. Quino’s Mafalda was so immensely popular precisely because he dealt with the issues that resonated with Argentines of the time period. He not only explored the details of Argentine childhood, but also consumerism, household appliances, underdevelopment, and advertising. Importantly, these were topics that could be openly discussed under an authoritarian government and during a polarized time in Argentine politics and Argentines had a thorough and honest discussion about the consequences of having a rapidly expanding consumer society. Primera Plana was shut down for criticizing Ongania’s government, but Mafud could publish his book and Quino continued to publish his comic strip.

Even though developmentalists and critics often talked passed one another, one group focused on the quantitative and the other on the qualitative, they both were concerned for the well-being of “the average Argentine” and both groups often displayed a moralizing, almost condescending tone suggesting they knew what was “best” for the working classes. As marketing scholar Craig J. Thompson has pointed out in his research, discourses surrounding consumerism tend to not only be moralistic but also consolidate rather than challenge “ideological legacies and socio-economic power
structures – often reproducing entrenched class, gender, and racial hierarchies.\textsuperscript{95} The conversation about consumerism, its tensions, disconnects, and surprising agreements, often took on an emotional and often gendered tone. It was through this gendered language, discussed in the next chapter, that critics’ deep resistance to structural changes associated with consumerism was revealed.

Chapter 4: A Discontented Consumerism: Modernizing the Argentine Economy while Maintaining the Gendered Status Quo

In 1963 popular Argentine magazines *Para Ti* and *Primera Plana* proclaimed that equality between men and women had arrived in Argentina: all previous opportunities shut off from women were declared open, and men had at last discarded their old sexist attitudes. Just two years later, however, in 1965, those same magazines nervously started questioning whether middle-class women benefitted too much from the booming consumer economy and, perhaps, had become too financially independent from their families or husbands as they entered the workforce in greater numbers. These changes were understood to hurt the Argentine family and weaken Argentine society. And by 1968, magazines and some porteño intellectuals had begun to decry not only the weakening of Argentine society, but also the materialistic woman and the fall of the Argentine man from his natural, authoritarian status both within the family and also at work. What transpired over the course of the decade that caused journalists and intellectuals to first embrace and then so vehemently protest against gender equality? Why did these writers constantly draw a connection between women, work, and consumerism and the supposed weakening of Argentine society? And was this discourse based in actual structural changes or on the fears of certain sectors of Argentine society who linked their discourses to the political and economic instability building around them?
In the 1960s many middle-class Argentine women decided to seek full-time remunerative work outside the home for the first time and at the same time household appliances became more widely available. The number of women in the paid workforce increased by 17% over the course of the decade, and the vast majority of those women were middle-class, well-educated, and professional.1 At the beginning of the decade journalists, social critics, and politicians across the political spectrum supported the idea of women seeking work outside the home for personal reasons and also the idea of equality between the sexes. Both government officials and journalists portrayed household appliances, important status symbols of the time, as mechanisms for industrialization, symbols of first-world living, and tools for the perfect housewife and for the woman wishing to work outside the home. Developmentalists were pleased as the consumer market grew and sales of appliances continued to climb. Almost all of these major, technological items (washing machines, refrigerators, blenders, vacuums, even televisions) advertised to make daily life better were primarily or entirely used by women in the home, and women had the power to purchase them. As they were some of the most expensive and high status purchases that could be made, women’s own status in Argentine society was seen to be increasing.

However, by the middle of the decade, unlike in the United States, Argentine journalists and social critics largely linked women’s liberation to the contemporary boom

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in consumption and popularity of household appliances.\footnote{As one example, see Alice Kessler Harris’s \textit{A Woman’s Wage: Historical Meanings and Social Consequences} (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991).} They understood that the popularity of household appliances allowed women to work as it lightened and shortened their household chores while, paradoxically, obligating women to work in order to pay for these status symbols. As María Feijoo and Marcela Nari commented in their 1996 article on women in 1960s Argentina, “although many women were forced to seek employment to meet their basic needs, an increasing number joined the labor market to practice their professions or to gain access to new types of consumer goods—entertainment, cigarettes, fashionable clothing, household appliances, processed foods, and so on.”\footnote{María del Carmen Feijóo and Marcela MA Nari, “Women in Argentina during the 1960s,” \textit{Latin American Perspectives} 23 no.1: 12.} As Argentina moved toward economic chaos and increased urban guerrilla violence at the end of the 1960s—a socio-political phenomenon normally foregrounded by historians of the time period—Argentines were also fighting a much more quotidian, private, and gendered battle regarding changes with gender roles, work, and the home. Porteño intellectuals understood the changes in the workforce to be more widespread than they actually were because it was mostly middle-class, well-educated, and single women in Buenos Aires who sought work. In other words, these intellectuals personally saw the professions and offices of Buenos Aires changing and wrote extensively about it because middle-class women working in increased numbers affected their lives. Surprisingly, magazines, intellectuals, and politicians from different ideological perspectives almost
uniformly spoke out strongly against the (mis)perception that women were gaining more status through work and an expanding consumer culture.

Initially, journalists and social critics were enthusiastic about how household appliances seemed to solve a plethora of problems: they could liberate women from drudgery and help create a higher standard of living and a booming economy based on a consumer society, making Argentina a developed country. Increased domestic Argentine consumption, particularly in the realm of household appliances, was central to programs of economic development in which policy makers, industrialists, advertisers, and even important journalists relied on an expanding internal market capable of purchasing nationally produced goods. And indeed the Argentine economy grew strongly, if erratically, throughout the 1960s, and thus more Argentines had money to buy these new goods. However, the initial enthusiasm came to an unexpected halt around 1965. I argue that around that year journalists and intellectuals began to react negatively as the increasingly consumer driven world was perceived as disproportionately benefitting women who controlled household purchasing decisions and used the much-lauded appliances. Thus, appliances had multiple meanings to Argentines in the late 1950s and 1960s: they were tools to make the perfect housewife, they were a symbols of modern living, and their relative exclusivity (despite being around for 20 years) meant they were also a status symbol. Soon, though, appliances were understood by both journalists and porteño intellectuals as a key tool in upending gender roles and restructuring the workplace.
In this chapter I trace the evolution of the discourse of Argentine intellectuals and journalists regarding women, work, and consumerism. In previous chapters I demonstrated that these intellectuals and journalists initially advocated for economic development and for the mass consumption that this development would necessitate. Part of that formula—as part of a larger modernization project—also purported to embrace the entrance of women into the workplace and more gender equality. Within just a few years, however, as women gained in socio-economic status through their roles as consumers and as more financially independent individuals, these writers objected to what they perceived as the diminished status of men. The journalists and intellectuals studied here came to demonize the “consumeristic” woman whom they portrayed as abandoning her family in search of a “comfortable life.” In this way, proponents of economic development failed to understand how deeply held cultural notions of gender and family would affect the experience, nature, and even success of economic development in 1960s Argentina. A close analysis of these sources—a locus of intellectual commentary regarding women, work, and consumerism—reveals that during a period of great social and political transformation, prominent critics and journalists channeled their anxieties into a rejection of specific gendered, quotidian practices.

This chapter popular magazines like *Panorama, Confirmado, Primera Plana, Claudia, Vosotras, y Para Ti*; writings by sociologists like Julio Mafud and Juan José Sebreli. I also include various comic strips, most of them drawn by Quino and featured in his most famous *Mafalda* and analyze the widely popular film *La Fiaca.*

Understanding the evolution of *Para Ti* during the 1960s deserves special consideration.
because of its apparent willingness to incorporate socially liberal discourses when it had been such a strongly Catholic and conservative magazine until that point. Historian Isabella Cosse, who has written extensively about magazines in 1960s Argentina, describes *Para Ti*'s audience as “the woman anchored in procreation, dependency, and submission.” Yet in the mid-1960s the magazine was forced to significantly revamp its look and editorial content because of strong competition from the modernizing *Claudia* (founded in 1957), which discussed women’s sexuality, sex, women in the workplace, and other such topics. As Cosse points out, “the drive of the modernizing discourse [in the 1960s] had so much weight that even the most conservative visions had to stay up to date.” Cosse convincingly argues that *Para Ti* was forced to welcome some of these new modern changes, including frank discussions on women’s sexuality and the role of women in the workplace, but this was part of a “strategy to accept the debates over new ideas so that they could battle and defeat them.” Cosse describes how the editorial board

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4 It is important to underscore that both *Para Ti* and *Claudia* targeted both upper-middle class and educated women as their primary audience. They assumed their readers did not have to work out of financial necessity; rather it is a choice they make. They also assumed their readers have servants and leisure time. *Vosotras* targeted lower-middle class and working-class women, was read more widely in the provinces, and actually had a higher circulation than either *Claudia* (second highest) or *Para Ti* (third highest). However, both *Vosotras* and especially *Claudia* were not properly archived in the National Library and it is very difficult to find the complete run of both of them. Even consulting private collectors does not yield a remotely complete collection. Therefore, this study relies most heavily on *Para Ti*.

5 Isabella Cossé, “Los nuevos prototipos…” Email to author, 8 May 2012.

*Claudia* targeted women who “rejected obsessive cleaning, formal socializing, and ostentatious customs…married women and mothers who wanted to fulfill themselves outside of the home but didn’t want to feel they had neglected their husbands and children. *Claudia* offered a different way of being a housewife.”

6 Isabella Cosse, “Los nuevos prototipos femeninos en los años 60 y 70: de la mujer doméstica a la joven ‘liberada’,” in *De minifaldas, militancias, y revoluciones: exploraciones sobre los 70 en la Argentina*, Andrea Andújar, Débora D’Antonio, Karin Grammático, Fernanda Gil Lozano, María Laura Rosa y Valeria Pita, Editors, 12 (Buenos Aires, Editorial Luxemburg, 2009).
of *Para Ti* saw the magazine as a forum in which women both open to and against changes could debate their viewpoints, but the editorial board was pushing a strain of conservative, elite Catholicism. Cosse argues that, in particular, the magazine appeared to support women working outside the home utilizing “a rhetoric of rupture,” but in reality women’s employment continued to be “subordinated to the needs of the home.” This duplicity was abandoned by the early 1970s. While other magazines like *Primera Plana* and *Confirmado* did not have such clear ideological investments in preserving conservative gender models, their harsh reactions to changing gender roles underscored how deeply held, cultural views on gender clashed with the supposedly acultural aspirations of a modernizing society. In 1960s Argentina that “modernizing society” was articulated through the language of “scientific” economic development.

**The Big Picture**

Often the reactions of Argentine journalists and intellectuals regarding women, work, and consumerism were prompted by changes in the structure of the Argentine economy, an increase in the years of education received by women, more women working after childbirth, and reforms to Argentine law, under which women were given more equal status. The 1960s saw a massive restructuring of the Argentine economy away from the agro-export sector. Both the construction and service industries netted large gains, and that benefitted working-class men and middle-class women. In addition,

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7 Cosse 15.
8 Cosse 13.
9 See Fanelli 403.
the number of women who said they had completed or attended some university almost
doubled over the course of the decade, from 87,691 in 1960 to 154,100 in 1970 (although
this was still a small percentage of the population: from just over 1% of the population to
1.7%). By the end of the decade university enrollments for women sky-rocketed to
34% of all enrolled students, with especially high populations in the fields of sociology,
psychology, and social work at the same time that those fields were gaining increasing
importance in the business world. Disproportionate numbers of elite, well-educated
women entered the workforce. Even though only 1.2% of women had completed
university, they made up 3.7% of the workforce. And while 7.9% of women had finished
high school, they made up 17.3% of the workforce, whereas 43.2% of women only had
some grammar school and they made up 30.9% of the labor force.

Increasingly, more women worked outside the home and worked for longer after
marriage and childbirth. In 1960 only 22% of the economically active population were
women, while in 1970 it was 34%. These figures, of course, do not include women

10 INDEC, Censo Nacional de Población 1960, (Buenos Aires: INDEC) 30. INDEC, Censo Nacional de
Población 1970 (Buenos Aires: INDEC) 46.

11 Starting in the early 1960s, porteño intellectuals became very interested in the power of social sciences
(psychology, sociology, political science, and social work) in measuring society and explaining social
phenomena. They were particularly enthusiastic about the power of quantitative surveying and magazines
like Primera Plana, Confirmado, and Panorama actively covered the results of or commissioned their own
surveys to measure things like views on sexuality to consumer preferences. This fascination with
quantitative social sciences was partly born out of the influence of the prominent sociologist Gino Germani,
who founded the Sociology Department at the University of Buenos Aires. Intellectuals and journalists
(like Jacobo Timerman and Arturo Frondizi) in favor of capitalist expansion through foreign investment
and increased domestic consumption also encouraged advertisers to take on these “modern” surveying
techniques so as to better sell their wares to the Argentine public. Please see the entirety of Chapter Three
for an extensive discussion of this phenomenon.

12 INDEC, Censo Nacional de Población 1960, (Buenos Aires: INDEC) 98 and INDEC, Censo Nacional
working in the informal sectors – as maids, street vendors, or selling food out of their homes – and therefore probably underestimate the number of total women working in both 1960 and 1970. And of those women who worked, 54% were single even though single women made up only 33.4% of the population.\textsuperscript{13}

Patterns of marriage and informal unions also changed. Between 1960 and 1970 the marriage rate for Argentine women dropped about 10%, from 54% to 49% and the number of women who lived in “informal unions” increased 25% from 4% to 5%. Although small, the number of divorced women skyrocketed from 0.1% of the population to 2% of the population.\textsuperscript{14} Thus, more couples were eschewing traditional marriage and simply living together. While this is still a tiny percentage, it is a drastic increase that would have been perceived as a threat to family structures by conservatives and Catholics. Yet most women did not continue working after marriage and childbirth: only about 45% of married women at the age of 30 worked, while about 75% of their unmarried sisters did. Thirty-year-old women with two or more children were the least likely to work, with only about 15% in the labor force.\textsuperscript{15} Still, the largest increase of women into the workforce was seen among married women with children, the demographic group who would provoke the most anxiety among social observers.

\textsuperscript{13} Wainerman, \textit{Educación, familia, y participación económica femenina en la Argentina} (Buenos Aires: Centro de Estudios de Población, 1981) 514, 518.


\textsuperscript{15} Wainerman, “Educación, familia, y participación,” 521.

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Both the employment and education numbers better reflect an increase in the number of middle-class, more highly educated women entering the workforce. Thus the social commentators, journalists, and others who fretted over changes they were seeing in porteño offices, schools, and homes were actually reacting to very real changes in women’s behavior. Importantly, those changes were particularly concentrated in urban, middle-class, and highly educated women with whom these sociologists and journalists came into so much contact. Therefore, they overemphasized how the changes were affecting Argentine society.

Under the dictatorship of the Catholic General Onganía (1966-1970) the civil code was reformed. According to the sociologist Catalina Wainerman, this reform “completely modified the civil capacity of women and signified a very important advance in the judicial equalizing between both sexes.” The reform was not debated in Congress but instead was simply implemented and announced by the government in April of 1968. Newspapers from the time period carry no record of any discussion of the reform either immediately before or after the reform was implemented. First, the new legislation moved towards legalizing divorce and it essentially became legal for Argentines to separate and remarry. Argentines also could have their divorce proceedings ratified in Uruguay, Mexico, and Bolivia without even traveling to those countries. In addition,

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women became entitled to spousal and child support, gained automatic custody of children under the age of 5, and could no longer be considered legal minors. While both anti-consumer and anti-woman rhetoric ratcheted up in 1965, it is only in 1968 with these judicial reforms that the rhetoric became truly vitriolic and virtually hysterical.

Competing and Changing Ideals

From roughly 1958-1969, two ideological viewpoints informed how intellectuals and journalists interpreted the gendered changes in Argentine society. Both of them were based on idealized and elite notions of how women and men should behave and had “always” behaved. Understanding these stereotypes demonstrate the ideological investment that leftist intellectuals and Catholic journalists had in maintaining gender roles and why they resisted perceived changes to gender roles in the way they did.

On the one hand, an elite strain of Catholicism strongly influenced how women’s roles within society, including in the home, at work, and in politics, were interpreted. As noted above, the conservative women’s magazine *Para Ti* was the most vocal and widely circulating mouthpiece of this type of Catholicism.\(^{18}\) Since its founding in 1922, the magazine strongly promoted the idea that within the family women were the most responsible for “maintaining and reproducing quotidian [life].”\(^{19}\) Following an influential strain of Church logic, women were responsible for the reproduction of quotidian life based on presumed essential and natural differences. These differences were “derived

\(^{18}\) While there were many debates in Catholic communities about the roles of women at home and work, for the purposes of this chapter I focus on the influential elitist version promulgated by *Para Ti.*

from nature…and fixed by God.”

Utilizing the logic that biology determines the roles of the sexes and the characteristics of their personalities, women were naturally destined for maternity and, in modern society, marriage. Paid work outside the home—a distraction from this absolute duty to household, husband, and children—was only justified in difficult financial situations. In an otherwise progressive publication that supported workers’ rights entitled “Work and Home,” Pope Pius XII stated that work outside the home was only “the answer only under extreme economic necessity, as a suffered obligation, never as a way to personal satisfaction or fulfillment, never as a right.”

Thus, conservative Catholic sectors of society tended to reject the increase of more educated and middle-class women working outside the home, considering it unnatural, dangerous to Argentine society, and a threat to the natural authority of men within society and the family.

On the other hand, many leftist intellectuals were also deeply uncomfortable with both the idea of professional, working women and the increased focus on quotidian life through home-based consumption, which they saw as bourgeois, materialistic, and an “imitation of the model imposed by decadent imperialist societies.” Indeed they were often more vitriolic in their criticism than the Catholic conservatives. Intellectuals like Juan José Sebreli, Julio Mafud, and some of the columnists at Primera Plana or Panorama were Marxists, or at least Marxist ideas shaped their notions of gender roles.

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20 Wainerman, Ibid., 79.
21 Wainerman, Ibid., 81.
22 Feijoo and Nari 20.
As did leftist activists in other parts of the world, these intellectuals saw the women’s liberation movement as a deviation from the “real” (i.e., class and anti-imperialist) struggle.\textsuperscript{23} In addition, they began to associate the booming consumer culture with economic imperialism, as exemplified in the well-known documentary “La Hora de los Hornos.” This famous documentary made in 1968 by the filmmaker Pino Solanas states at the beginning that “this film speaks of neocolonialism and everyday violence in Argentina and by extension all the other countries of this continent that haven’t been liberated…”\textsuperscript{24} Part of the way it does that is by showing a montage of Buenos Aires advertising, consumption, and elites reading magazines like \textit{Confirmado}. This newest iteration of consumerism, seen to cater to female consumers, was interpreted by some – like the filmmaker Solanas – as a bourgeois, foreign import that betrayed Argentine national culture and hurt its economic independence. Thus, many of the local products made by foreign brands were sold by a proliferation of advertising agencies as television expanded across the country and numerous magazines were founded. While many small, local advertising agencies became successful in the 1960s, the largest agencies in Buenos Aires were still the North American J. Walter Thompson and McCann Erickson. Of course, many of the heavily promoted new products also were foreign (Coca-Cola, Levis, General Electric, etc.).\textsuperscript{25}

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\textsuperscript{23} Ibid 20.
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{La hora de los hornos}, directed by Fernando Solanas (1968; Buenos Aires, Argentina: Pino Solanas, 2000), DVD.
\textsuperscript{25} According to J. Walter Thompson Argentina’s 1972 Annual Marketing Plan the two top agencies according to gross billing was J. Walter Thompson Argentina, followed by McCann Erickson, and then
Sebreli, Mafud, and some journalists increasingly blamed women for feeding the booming consumer society. They did this for two reasons: first, under Marxist thought women were traditionally identified as the consumers (who were seen as passive and unproductive) while men were the producers (and industrious members of society). Therefore leftist intellectuals reacted negatively when consumption began to have an increased importance in comparison to production. And, second, because of the importance of household appliances in driving this iteration of consumerism and changing quotidian life, women were perceived as disproportionately benefitting from it while men were perceived as being left to the side. Thus, through analyzing the discourse found in Argentine magazines and essays, I argue that those who were antagonistic to both the consumer boom and the “distraction” of women’s issues to the class and anti-imperial struggle became particularly anti-woman as they began to perceive the two issues as mutually constituted.

Both Catholic voices and leftist intellectuals relied on oppositional stereotypes of the “traditional” girl and the “modern” girl (a term used by journalists in Para Ti), but these stereotypes were also grounded in the historical realities of 1960s Argentina. Writers portrayed both the traditional and modern girl alternatively as materialistic or consumeristic, depending on whether the writer supported social changes linked to women’s roles and rights. Those critical of the modern girl—including here are almost all of the mainstream media and Marxist-influenced intellectuals—depicted the modern girl

as shallow and driven to abandon home and family because of her desire for consumer objects. The magazine *Confirmado* actively encouraged the consumerist image of the “modern” woman by dedicating a weekly column entitled “La Donna é Mobile” (“Woman is Fickle”). The column was solely about consumption and the latest trends. While “La Donna” claimed that the column innocently described “an attitude towards” life, one that defended “the pleasurable” and was dedicated to discussing the nice things in life, the column was so extreme that a letter writer in November of 1968 complained that while she understood the column was aimed at an audience of “a certain income level,” the column promoted excessive consumption and had gone too far.26 Those supportive of social changes for women depicted conservative, aristocratic, and Catholic women as status obsessed and resentful that other classes had access to comparable standards of living. For instance, the most popular cartoonist and social commentator of the 1960s, Quino, made active use of these two types by comparing Mafalda, his bright, curious, anti-domestic, and intellectually inclined protagonist, to Susanita, who was aristocratic, traditional, and materialistic. Quino introduced these two characters from the beginning of the comic strip, in 1963. Mafalda often criticized her mother, who she felt was wasting her life for not finishing her university degree and then becoming a full-time *ama de casa* (housewife). In roughly 1967, Quino introduced a character called Libertad, whose intellectual parents both worked. The introduction of a working mother

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Interestingly, in March of 1967 the magazine introduced what proved to be a controversial column by the writer Sara Gallardo. She represented the alternative vision of the modern, independent woman as she wrote an astute (if rambling) social critique of Argentine society.
was seen as a progressive move and Quino’s comic strip was one of the few mainstream media sources where these new role models were portrayed positively. Quino consistently criticized the “Susanitas” of Argentine society as behind the times and frivolous who wanted to spend their husband’s hard-earned money on unnecessary luxuries. For instance, a *Mafalda* comic strip appeared in August 1965 in which Mafalda tries to convince Susanita she should do more than just aspire to have kids and that she needed to “contribute to progress.” Susanita responds that Mafalda is right and she is going to learn how to play bridge!\(^{27}\) In a comic strip published just a few days later Mafalda asks Susanita how Susanita cannot even think of having a career. Susanita interprets this as a question about her future sons’ careers.\(^{28}\) From either ideological perspective, women were stereotyped and blamed for a surging consumerism. Quino, though, was the exception. He was one of the only popular voices that repeatedly portrayed women’s unpaid labor as inhibiting her participation in public and professional life and questioned whether household appliances really did “liberate” women from those domestic duties (a common trope of the time).

**Appliances and Work**

Household appliances had been portrayed by advertisers and industrialists as a utopian solution to household drudgery for at least twenty years, and in the early years of Frondizi’s government (1958-1959), appliances were depicted in advertisements as the perfect tool to help women be the perfect wives and mothers. There was a cultural

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expectation that women were duty-bound to purchase them as part of their effort to create a warm, comfortable, and modern home. Only the one notorious survey, which opened this dissertation, conducted by Primera Plana, suggested that lower-middle class women even felt guilty about not working as hard as their mothers and resented how appliances were supposedly displacing them as "queens of their home," but the commentary was overwhelmingly positive.\(^{29}\) For example, Para Ti offered a quiz in March of 1959 in which readers were asked to explain why they want to get married and what priorities they had in their marriage. In one question, they asked readers to rank in importance the duties of a housewife. Options included fixing a day and time for every household task and preparing food to the taste of your husband. One of the more important duties of a housewife was always “acquiring more modern appliances to contribute to the comfort of your home.”\(^{30}\) Thus, Para Ti’s portrayal of a good housewife included not only keeping an impeccable house and catering to a husband’s wants but also the purchase of appliances.\(^{31}\)

Early in the 1960s enthusiasm for household appliances was built on a growing sense that household labor was under-appreciated and women wanted other options other than being the perfect housewife.\(^{32}\) This can be clearly seen by tracing the discussion of household labor in the popular magazine Para Ti. Examination of the magazine reveals


\(^{30}\) “Siete ‘tests’ sobre el matrimonio,” Para Ti, March 10, 1959, 56.


\(^{32}\) “Observaciones de Mamá Isidora,” August 11, 1959, 114.
(1) why widespread distribution of household appliances was so welcome in Argentina, (2) why women looked for professions that would give them more recognition, and (3) why a more positive attitude toward the idea of women working emerged at the beginning of the decade. A series of comic strips and articles that appeared in both 1959 and 1960 criticized not only the lack of appreciation for what it takes to care for children and a home, but also the unpaid nature of that work. The first iteration appears in June 1959 and shows a census taker asking a woman what her job is. To that question she replies, “wife, mother, cook, dishwasher, washerwoman, ironing woman, seamstress, gardener, painter, nurse…” In other words, the modern mother and housewife understood that she fulfilled numerous jobs that could be filled by six or more separate positions. In October of that year, a surprisingly strident article entitled “The Housewife is the Potential of the Country” lambasted the lack of appreciation for reproductive labor. The author noted how many men proudly stated that their wives “do not work, [they] stay at home.” They prided themselves in giving her a “comfortable,” “boring,” and “easy” lifestyle with not much to do, not recognizing the seemingly endless tasks that had to be accomplished. The author even described studies in Europe that indicate how housewives work up to 70 hours a week and if women were paid for this work their earnings would make up 60% of the gross national product. Thus, while Para Ti advocated for strict domesticity of women in the early 1960s, they also lambasted society for diminishing and not recognizing the work, knowledge, or talent women put into

domestic labor.\textsuperscript{35} In another example, a comic strip that appeared in \textit{Para Ti} in May 1961 depicted a man in filth writing a letter to his fiancé. In the letter, he says he decided to move up the date of their wedding. In other words, incapable of cleaning and tidying up after himself, the man decides the solution to his problem is to marry sooner rather than later solely so that his wife can cook and clean for him.\textsuperscript{36} Similarly a March 1962 comic strip depicts an angry looking woman who said to her husband as he leaves for work: “I hope you remember that tomorrow it will have been three years I have been in your service.”\textsuperscript{37} This lack of appreciation underscored a growing discontentment with domestic life on the part of middle-class, educated women.\textsuperscript{38}

Appliances were also a principal way to demonstrate a family’s status through consumption and exemplify a modern approach to life, thus their importance to consumer culture. As implied by the language of another quiz, one wanted to both consume and have a “modern” life. A 1961 \textit{Para Ti} quiz asked readers to judge whether they were modern or stuck in the old ways. Those who were modern and who adapted to rapidly changing habits would accept women who wore pants on the street, thought it was

\textsuperscript{38} In the late 1950s a certain type of modern woman was “distracted” by modern city life. \textit{Para Ti} posited these women felt alienated and dissatisfied \textit{because} they shirked their domestic, wifely, or motherly duties by spending too much time volunteering or attending social events. For instance, the advice columnist named “Mamá Isidora” wrote an August 1959 column that portrayed a fictitious telephone conversation where a wealthy mother chastises her married daughter for spending too much time outside the home. In the conversation the mother claims that her daughter is never at home when she calls and only the maid ever answers. The mother accuses her daughter of only sleeping in the home and of not attending to her domestic and maternal duties. She then goes on to reproach her daughter for being attracted by modern life too much and accuses her of having lost her maternal love. The mother asks, “You have progressed so much that you no longer need the home at all? Is that right?”
“normal” for women to “work on the same par as men,” and had at least three of the following appliances at home: “refrigerator, blender, washing machine, record player, electric shaver.”

As demonstrated middle-class, urban women soon channeled their discontentment with domesticity into increased numbers at university and the office. Popular magazines said that appliances facilitated these transitions as they supposedly shortened and lightened domestic chores and thus allowed women to work outside the home. In August 1961, Para Ti ran an article entitled, “Professional Husband and Wife: Is it Not Advantageous?” in which the author acknowledges the challenges faced by married Argentine women who wished to work and how appliances could help women with that dilemma. She says Argentine women were shackled to domestic duties and for women’s conditions to improve, a reliable supply of electricity needed to be available throughout the country as “this would permit the use of modern equipment” (i.e., appliances). The time saved would allow women to work outside the home. Thus, while the motivations for women seeking remunerative pay were multifaceted and personal, there was a general perception — even within the Catholic magazine Para Ti — that appliances and the desire to purchase appliances both enabled and compelled women to seek outside work.

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39 Roger Dal, “¿Es usted chapada a la antigua o ultramoderna?,” Para Ti, November 7, 1961, 10-11.
40 Other articles just point to how it makes household chores less backbreaking work. An article in Para Ti from 2 May 1961 shows the before and after of the introduction of these appliances (14). Kornreich, “Frecuencia de las limpiezas,” Para Ti, May 2, 1961, 10-11.
41 Leticia Vigil de Estrada, “Marido y mujer profesionales: ¿Es inconveniente?,” Para Ti, August 22, 1961, 76.

In reality, though, as Ruth Schwartz Cowan argued in her book More Work for Mother, the work of Argentine women might have been lightened, but the workload increased.
Alternatively, women who were “shackled” to domestic labor through their appliances were seen as not fulfilling their potential. Quino most consistently articulated this point of view in his comic strip *Mafalda*. By March of 1965 *Mafalda* was appearing in the daily newspaper *El Mundo* and read widely, although especially in Buenos Aires. In one comic strip that appeared around 1967, Mafalda comes home to see the sparkling apartment, piles of ironed clothes, and clean dishes. She then asks her mother, “What would you like to do if you [really] lived?” In another strip that appeared around the same time, Mafalda contemplates how women have been responsible across the ages for sewing, washing, and scrubbing. She then laments how women had not been able to play a role in society until then.\(^{42}\) Thus, in the early- to mid-1960s, the media on both sides of the political spectrum generally recognized that women wanted to dedicate themselves to something other than household labor.\(^{43}\) Paid work increasingly became the answer to that and household appliances were perceived as a key tool.

Even with this new understanding, appliances, especially irons and blenders, continued to be symbols of domesticity. In a 1961 comic strip a man gives a woman an iron and her parents comment then “that it appears his intentions are serious.” In other words, the iron means he conceives of her doing domestic tasks, thus he conceives of her as his wife, and by giving her the iron he insinuates that he thinks of her becoming his

\(^{42}\) Exact dates unknown. Appeared in the magazine *Siete Dias*.

\(^{43}\) It bears repeating that of course a large minority of women worked because of financial obligation and their struggles were not recorded in any of these popular magazines except maybe *Vosotras*, which was aimed at working-class and provincial women.
 Appliances are also associated with the wedding day in comic strips. No matter their symbolic meaning, women were the ones who were associated with the use and ultimate benefit appliances could potentially provide. Because appliances were also associated with a modern lifestyle and their purchase was crucial in continually stimulating domestic industry, female and consumers and housewives were poised to be central agents in 1960s consumption.

**Growing Tensions between Work and Home**

In the late 1950s and early 1960s Argentine magazines enthusiastically welcomed gender equality. Within just a few years, however, those same publications cautioned women to not abandon home and family in their “dangerous” quest for liberation. Soon, as women had supposedly strayed so far from their roles as wives and mothers, these magazines encouraged women to return “domestic arts.” This appears to be a quick reversal on the part of these publications, but beneath the early breezy statements about women’s role at the workplace laid a more labored, ambivalent position towards women and their changing responsibilities at home and work. These ambivalences became a rejection as many middle-class women entered the workforce, stayed in the workforce, or sought higher education in larger numbers.

The early proclamations for equality were plentiful and jubilant. *Para Ti* proclaimed the battle for equality as won because “society” finally recognized women as

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the intellectual equals of men and so many new opportunities were open to women. The
world, the magazine proclaimed, “is your oyster”! *Primera Plana* declared how
wonderful it was that women were “more equal” than ever in Argentina and indeed
seemed very proud of high-powered women in key industries. *Panorama* bragged that
more women in Argentina were producers or directors in the symbolically important
Argentine television industry than in *any other* country in the world (even the United
States).46 *Para Ti* excitedly asserted that to be single was no longer seen as social death,
which imparted women with less pressure to land a husband.47 Indeed, the new, modern
wife was now an equal partner with her husband, in that she was someone with whom he
shared his concerns about work (although she did not necessarily work herself). The
magazine, in an article written by the “Christian Family Movement,” chastised young
women who held old-fashioned and elite ideas that a wife was simply an ornament too
uneducated to understand the concerns of her husband.48 Several articles encouraged
women’s working and reprinted labor laws that stated they did not need a husband’s
permission to work and also stipulated a workplace free of discrimination. Indeed one
journalist working at *Panorama* essentially challenged women to leave the home and
compete with men in the workplace. He stated that as “the economic value of the

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46 “Panorama de Panorama,” *Panorama*, November 1963, 19. The fact that the industry was television is
crucial. The expansion and development of this industry, in and of itself, was understood by journalists
like those at *Primera Plana* and *Confirmado* to be a key metric of economic development. As it was such a
“modern” industry, having “so many” women in such high powered positions was a source of pride as it
indicated Argentina’s “closeness” to first-world status.


traditional role of the woman entered into a crisis with the invasion of automatic appliances, pre-cooked foods, new textiles, functional living spaces…To have these conveniences women had to abandon their role at the ‘center of the home’ and start a life outside competing shoulder to shoulder with men.”

By rhetorically embracing equality between men and women, Argentine journalists and their editors in the early 1960s incorporated “first-world” and “modern” attitudes, attitudes necessary to be part of a community of “first-world” countries.

Advertisers started selling to a more financially independent, professional woman in the 1960s as more women entered the workforce or stayed in the workforce longer. Advertisements in the 1950s for big-ticket items like refrigerators, washing machines, and cars often targeted men, urging them to buy something nice for their wives, or presumed a husband’s approval was needed to finalize the purchase. By the mid-1960s about half the advertisements that appeared in Para Ti targeted women directly, telling them why they should buy a product. Argentine advertisers were well aware of this gendered consumption: 76% of advertisements for this “industry of comfort,” as it was


50 Starting in the late 1950s, Argentines of all classes became obsessed with how Argentina was an “under-developed” country. This new language of ranking Argentina based on notions of economic development originated both with Argentines’ sense that their once great nation was in decadence and also a new vocabulary coming out of the popularity of quantitative social sciences and developmentalism. However, it was not just intellectuals that obsessed with Argentina’s “underdeveloped status” as comic strips and casual references found in magazines make clear. See chapter 1 for a discussion of underdevelopment in Argentina.

51 Examining household appliance advertisements from Para Ti in the years 1964, 1965, and 1966, about an equal number of advertisements were aimed either directly at women or were non-specific. Only a few were aimed at men, and usually around Mother’s Day, when men were urged to purchase appliances for their wives.
termed in the 1950s and 1960s, were aimed at women. In addition, Argentine women were responsible for 72% of the household purchasing decisions. One advertisement from 1966 even indicated that a husband’s signature was not necessary for an in-store payment plan, rather the store had “feminine credit” available for its customers.\textsuperscript{52} Unlike in the 1950s, advertisements increasingly portrayed women in non-domestic settings. For example, a popular ad for the Necchi sewing machine showed a young woman in a little black dress slapping her forehead in a particularly modern gesture, as if in disbelief at how great the sewing machine was. There is nothing in the woman’s appearance that hints at domesticity, rather the ad experiments with a younger, more independent, and playful feel to convince young women they can use this sewing machine to make a fashionable wardrobe.\textsuperscript{53} A slightly provocative 1965 General Electric campaign for refrigerators and washing machines targeted a new type of young woman: independent, single, financially stable, and living on her own. At a time when women in advertisements were often portrayed formally and demurely with coiffed hair, hat, gloves and jewelry, these advertisements featured confident almost defiant looking women staring straight into the camera. The women sit casually next to the appliance, are dressed informally and modernly (in shorts, no less!), and have tousled hair. The tag line reads, “A different [sort of] help that allows me a different life.”\textsuperscript{54} Unlike almost all other advertisements for household appliances, this one did not feature young married women

\textsuperscript{52}“King of Comfort,” \textit{Para Ti}, April 11, 1966.

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Para Ti}, October 20, 1964 and \textit{Primera Plana}, June 30, 1964 amongst many others.

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Para Ti}, December 27, 1965.
who wanted to provide comfort to their families; rather it was aimed at those who wanted a “liberated” lifestyle. The subject and message of this campaign, remarkably early in the decade (1965), would have stoked the objections of those opposed to a consumer society and its messages of economic and social independence for women.

Figure 11: Appeared in Para Ti in 1965.

Alongside these positive representations of a “liberated” lifestyle lay evidence of a conflicting message, one that told women they should not be independent or self-sufficient after all. A 1963 survey of Argentine men conducted by Primera Plana depicted that the majority of young Argentine men saw their female partners as an extension of themselves (i.e., only interested in supporting the endeavors of their husband
and boyfriend) and wanted “their” woman to be fully dependent on them: they did not
want women earning a separate income. The surveyed men also asserted that while they
themselves expected to have sex with different partners before marriage, they certainly
did not want their eventual wives to; if the women did so, they would have to offer very
good explanations for their actions. The anonymous writer of the article scolded the
men for having such an old-fashioned and discriminatory attitude toward women. The
clash of opinions between those interviewed in the survey and that of the journalist
expose how much attitudes toward women, her sexuality, and financial independence
were in transition.

In the mid-1960s articles increasingly emphasized that acceptable jobs outside
marriage and motherhood were based on the natural skills and instincts based on
women’s experiences as wives and mothers (again, another old trope). By doing so,
these journalists were keeping women bound to the definitions of gender they knew and
understood. Therefore jobs worked by women outside of those narrow boundaries
implied a betrayal of nature. One article despondently asked, “What [would] happen
when women do the jobs of men?” insinuating a betrayal of femininity if women took a
job as a taxi driver or a carpenter. As this objection became more prominent later in the
decade, Quino made fun of these attitudes. In a comic strip that first appeared in 1968 or
1969, Susanita yells at Mafalda that it would be crazy for her to study a profession and
become a doctor, lawyer, or engineer. She says that instead she will become a housewife

55Primera Plana, “‘El hombre argentino cree en el amor, pero subestima a su pareja,” September 3, 1963,
18-19.
and that she is “going to be a woman. And not one of those effeminate women who do men’s work.” The comic strip is funny because Susanita, accustomed to hearing the word “effeminate” used as an insult and not understanding what it means, incorrectly screams that in order to be a real woman she refuses to be “effeminate.” Quino criticizes the sector of society who holds such views by making Susanita look ignorant and ill-informed.

Women were also advised to re-embrace their “natural” roles as wives and mothers in the home. Women were still counseled to submit to their husbands, as was one letter writer in Para Ti, by the magazine’s advice-columnist priest. He noted that she would be happier if she stopped fighting her natural (submissive) place within the marriage. Indeed, Argentine girls who dreamt of what profession they wanted to practice in adulthood—rather than becoming housewives like their mothers—were derided as “playing at men.” Another Para Ti journalist named Irene Dumas warned that even though she endorsed women getting out from under the absolute authority of the husbands, she cautioned that doing so in the wrong way could endanger marriage. Even if they were going to work, they should not humiliate their husbands by making them partake in household chores. Dumas concludes the article by saying, “Do not forget ladies…that your husband is the head of the family, the head of household, and in general

56 Quino, Mafalda, Siete días, date unkown.
he likes it that way...let him be in charge.” Magazines were giving specific advice for women to maintain a submissive place next to men at the same time they were encouraging the abstract notion of “women’s liberation.”

Even when magazines accepted that middle-class Argentine women wanted to work, they had to do so without “threatening” masculine pride. They could avoid this by exhibiting their femininity when working in a position traditionally held by men. For example, a *Panorama* article proclaimed that equality had arrived as “women know that the world is theirs too. First, the right to vote; second, [being able] to smoke in public, and then competing with men for managerial positions.” However, the journalist continued, because women tried to enter what until recently were male-only spaces, they had to take special care in “paying attention to one’s personal appearance” (i.e., to appear particularly feminine) so that these women would not be perceived as masculinizing themselves. In another example, a January 1963 article in *Claudia* lauded one young woman’s escape from “servitude” through remunerated work outside the home. Nevertheless she should maintain her femininity, to always try to be sexy, and not to threaten the egos of men. Thus, on the one hand, journalists proclaimed women welcome in the workplace, and on the other they displayed a deep anxiety that the natural order of things was threatened.

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60 “La industria de la belleza,” *Panorama*, December 1964, 100.
61 Ibid., 100.
62 “¿Adónde va la mujer?” *Claudia*, January 1963, 22.
In order to protect the male ego women also must not appear to be men’s competition in the workplace. They argued that women were still women, equal but different from men, and middle-class women who wish to enter the office must do so, “not with egotistical eagerness of competition, rather with the same patient collaboration and with the same faith that she uses to manage her home.”\textsuperscript{63} In other words, women were to enter the workforce as man’s “helpmate,” not to be ambitious on their own accord.\textsuperscript{64} Increasingly throughout 1967 and 1968, \textit{Para Ti} warned women to not take away jobs from men, who were the more legitimate holders of these jobs as they were the “natural” breadwinners and authority figures of their home. Even though customs were changing and perhaps heads of household were no longer the tyrannical, absolute leaders they had once been, both journalists and readers at \textit{Para Ti} repeatedly and emphatically urged women not to challenge their husbands’ “natural” role as head of the family. This would, as some articles made clear, make him feel ashamed and diminished as a man. As \textit{Para Ti} asked in 1968, “How can you share, without hurting his pride, the responsibility of maintaining the home?”\textsuperscript{65} This magazine in particular carried out a series of articles cautioning women how their working would hurt the male ego and they should be very

\textsuperscript{63}“Un camino para la inquietud de la mujer que trabaja,” \textit{Para Ti}, September 29, 1959, 53, 81.

\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Para Ti} continued to struggle with these social changes. In February 1961 an article about female executives expressed astonishment that women in developed nations were executives in industries such as mining and agriculture (13 February 1961). An October 1961 article entitled “Should Women Work?” contained a full-page drawing of a worried and serious looking woman cradling her infant. The article expressed deep worries about women working and advocated they stick to home-based industries (24 October 1961). Despite such contradictory messages in March of 1962 \textit{Para Ti} introduced a fashion section aimed exclusively for the “working girl” or young female office workers.

\textsuperscript{65}“La esposa independiente,” \textit{Para Ti}, April 29, 1968, 10-12.
careful when discussing the woman’s contributions to the household budget.\textsuperscript{66} By becoming his “rival” she would inadvertently question his masculinity through underscoring his inability to provide for his family and home.

Women had to be particularly careful of damaging their husbands’ egos when it came to asking for money. The interpretation of what it meant for wives to ask their husbands for money changed radically in the 1960s. This change in interpretation reflects a perception that women’s status was gaining at the expense of men. Traditionally men were expected to hand over their entire pay packet to their wives so that she could pay for the monthly household expenses. However, columns and letters in women’s magazines from the late 1950s to late 1960s indicated that men did not do so; instead, they would give their wives what they thought was needed. Because inflation was so high and men never did the shopping or paid for the maid, wives accused men of not having any idea of how much daily life actually cost and therefore short-changing them on what they needed to get by. In 1959 a \textit{Para Ti} writer complained how humiliating it was for wives to ask their husbands for extra money to get to the end of the month. At the time, this was portrayed as an act of groveling in which the husband deliberately withheld money in an opprobrious gesture. However, by the late 1960s women were told that asking one’s husband for money implied that he was not an

\textsuperscript{66} These articles were almost entirely written by Eva Giberti in \textit{Para Ti} and appeared between October 1967 and, roughly, June 1968. Eva Giberti has been a prolific feminist, intellectual, and psychologist of family, children, and women since the late 1950s. She continues to be active in Buenos Aires. She was named a distinguished citizen of Buenos Aires in 2003.
adequate provider. By asking him for money wives were insulting their husbands’ manhood.  

Journalists and social critics generally resisted women’s quest for increased social and economic independence by expressing a lack of comprehension, or even an outright rejection of women’s desires to work outside the home. Magazines like Primera Plana, Confirmado, Para Ti, and Panorama would regularly ask professional women featured in news articles why they chose to work (of course, a question never posed to men). Normally the women would reply they did it out of a quest for personal fulfillment, because of economic necessity, to “collaborate” in the family budget, or so as to not waste their education. They were then immediately asked whether they did not think the home and the education of her children were absolutely the most important concerns for a woman, to which almost all of the women answered a resounding yes. Even successful and well-known women interviewed for their professional achievements—like the extremely successful chef, television personality, and ecónoma Doña Petrona—would emphasize the preeminence of the home over work, despite their own personal experiences. In one interview Doña Petrona proclaimed that “one likes for the man, the husband, to maintain his superior role…we women like to feel submissive, in a way.” She went on to say that women ought not to work and that women should be the only ones trained in the household arts as it would be degrading to men to have to cook or

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Thus professional and successful Argentine women were obliged to walk a
tightrope in media depictions: they could be successful as long as they asserted that home
and family were more important to them. Showing a genuine interest in the success of
her own career would lead to accusations that she was becoming “masculinized” or that
she was eschewing her “natural” role as wife and mother.

Magazines focused on how appliances and other comforts motivated women to
seek remunerative work. In order to delegitimize the reasons behind Argentine women
wanting to work—reasons social critics had themselves conceived—these writers
accused Argentine women of being overly materialistic or consumerist. This materialism
propelled them to buy shiny, new things, enter the workforce, and therefore reject their
natural roles as wives and mothers. This old adage was nothing new and generally drawn
from European writers accusing British and French women of the same thing, but they
utilized it to critique Argentine women’s entrance into the workforce. They did so by
relying on anecdotal evidence and small samples of middle-class porteña women. For
example, in 1964 Panorama asked a secretary why she worked long hours in a second
job. She answered, “I like to live comfortably, with all the modern comforts in my home
[meaning appliances]. And [I like] to dress well. And buy all the records and books that

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69 While magazines conducted or consulted large, data generating, quantitative surveys to answer other
questions about the demographic makeup or changing social patterns of Argentine society, magazines like
Primera Plana, Confirmado, Para Ti, and Panorama relied on anecdotal evidence of why middle class
women were working in larger numbers. In other words, they relied on the same qualitative sociological
techniques they so criticized when evaluating the work of Mafud or Sebreli to understand the connection
between women, work, and consumerism.
I like and to see the shows that attract me.” Thus, this young woman wanted to have a good time and have her domestic labor eased. Another journalist questioned why a model, who earned upwards of 190% of her fiancé's salary, really wanted to continue working after marriage, implying that this would endanger the happiness and stability of the marriage. Although the woman insisted she enjoyed the work and financial independence, the journalist implied disdainfully it was really because she wanted to be “comfortable.” That is to say, because she was too materialistic.

Even the most feminist advice cautioned women not to neglect the home, husband, or children when returning to or starting full-time work. Only rarely did a mainstream voice advise a reader that perhaps her husband should do more around the house when she returned to work. Otherwise almost no articles or advice columns that I encountered during my research suggested that men should alter their negligible contributions to household labor. Countless other articles worried about how children were being affected when their mothers returned to work. Mothers were criticized for either being selfish or materialistic when they chose to do so. A pointed comic strip appearing in *Panorama* in March of 1967 reflected how the quest for a higher standard of living also altered family structures and meant children were left in the care of others. In the comic a woman is washing clothes by hand when her little boy asks where Daddy is.

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73 See *Para Ti*, “Marido y mujer profesional: ¿Es inconveniente?” August 22, 1961, 76; *Para Ti*, 17 October 1961, 34; or *Para Ti* 12 September 1961, 6 for just a few examples.
She replies that he is in the office. The next drawing shows the mother suggesting to the father they buy a washing machine, who looks worried and thoughtful about the proposition. And in the final drawing the little boy asks his grandmother, who is washing clothes in a semi-automatic washing machine where both mother and father are. She snaps, “In the office!” The comic strip reflects the perceived irony that, while the wife may have her new washing machine, she is not there to use it or raise her child.

Figure 12: Appeared in Panorama in 1967.

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In order to dissuade women from eschewing their roles as wives and mothers, journalists and social observers editorialized on the importance and value of cooking, housework, and child rearing. Even though only roughly 24% of Argentine women worked outside the home in 1965, journalists and social critics urged women to not take women’s liberation to the North American extreme, where men had purportedly become docile and submissive to their wives.\(^{75}\) Quino made fun of those critical of “women’s liberation” and who idealized domestic drudgery. In a comic strip probably appearing after the civil code reform of 1968 that legalized de facto divorce and gave more rights to women, Susanita is enraged by the concept of “women’s liberation.” She yells that it is not slavery to cook, clean, and iron for a husband if a woman really loves him. She goes on to say, that if you do not love him, “Do you have a right to leave him? You do not. First because that would be an attack against the family, which is the base of society, and second because then you totally miss the opportunity to make his life a living hell every time you felt like it.”\(^{76}\) In this way Quino is questioning the true reasons why aristocratic, Catholic women really value the institution of marriage.

A return to the domestic arts was needed in the minds of conservative, Catholic forces because so many women had “abandoned” home and family in the quest for liberation and material goods. Prominent psychologist and feminist Eva Giberti urged readers of Para Ti to say with “pride and security” that she was a housewife.\(^{77}\) She also

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\(^{76}\) Quino, Mafalda, Siete días, date unknown.

firmly criticized women who renounced housework and cooking as dulling and mindless. Giberti argued that there are various forms of intelligence and dismissed the notion that the only way to prove that was by engaging in intellectual work. She continued, “An intelligent woman should know how to make a fried egg even if she is not interested because otherwise her intelligence is only partial.”

Journalists repeatedly assured women that housework was not “degrading” and that this work was necessary work needed to keep society functioning. When a particularly depressed woman wrote into *Para Ti* enumerating in how many ways she was miserable and felt that she had turned into a maid, the advice columnist urged her to not feel humiliated in her position as housewife. Magazines, particularly women’s magazines, continued to exalt motherhood and housewifery as the ultimate achievement for women.

A few articles scattered throughout the decade strove to assert that everyone—men, women, and influential opinion makers—were happy with women working and having more financial independence. *Panorama* congratulated women for forging their “own revolution” (using the parlance of the time) by realizing that they could take care of themselves without a husband. Young men today, the article stated, did not find femininity to be empty, docile, and inept. On this note, *Primera Plana* interviewed men in 1967 who said they were excited by women working: women who had their own

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79 Eva Giberti, “Tender una cama no tiene el mismo valor que descubrir el átomo, pero…,” *Para Ti*, November 27, 1967, 4-5.
interests and their increased independence meant women were happier. However, most of the feeble assertions by journalists claiming to support “women’s liberation” were drowned out by the voluminously negative coverage and portrayal of women in the second half of the 1960s.

**Unreasonable Consumers**

To be sure, consumption (seen in opposition to production) has been feminized and disdained since the turn of the twentieth century by Marxist thinkers and others. Old criticisms of women as materialistic, easily manipulated consumers who spent their husbands’ hard-earned salary re-emerged with force in the mid-1960s. As the popular sociologist Julio Mafud said in 1969, “[Men] only consume through women. Radio, TV, and magazines have begun to bombard and saturate women” and the media “not only throw women into the sphere of consumption, they sell them on the tiniest differences between products.”

The same proponents of a consumer society (as articulated by *Panorama*, *Confirmado*, and *Primera Plana*)—who encouraged high consumption as a way to stimulate economic development and industrialization—also held onto negative, gendered notions of a voracious and unreasonable woman consumer. They wanted the first (development) but not the latter (consumerism). The developmentalist journalists who theoretically argued that high consumption was a necessary part of industrialization often rejected the social and cultural changes that resulted from increased consumption.

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83. Mafud 145.
They especially rejected the focus it put on women as powerful consumers. This viewpoint began to be more forcefully articulated in the middle of the decade and became more pronounced and vindictive as women’s liberation gained currency and the reform of Argentina’s civil code codified these progressive tendencies. In March of 1964 a *Primera Plana* journalist explained to a presumed and apparently befuddled male audience the logic behind the latest consumer trend hitting middle-class Buenos Aires: switching out the range (stove) in one’s kitchen for a more modern model with better features. Normally, this switch involved some form of redecorating and implied a considerable cost to the household. In a condescending tone, the writer implored the head of household—the presumed reader of the article—to understand his wife’s desire to make these changes. The journalist explained that the pride she felt in her new kitchen would be similar to the pride he would feel acquiring a new car. While the husband may feel his wife’s desires are “unreasonable,” the author explained, Argentine men needed to understand this as a personal expression of identity and belonging and, indeed, this sort of consumer identification was a crucial part of an evolving consumer society.  

The journalist characterized the desires of the woman who wanted to modernize her home as “silly” and “materialist.” This tension—the drive to develop juxtaposed with dismissive attitudes that portrayed a women-driven, home-centered consumerism as frivolous—

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84 *Para Ti* enthusiastically supports the increasing importance of interior design (and the symbolic of importance of household appliances) by arguing that women are no longer limited to personal expression through dressing alone. The journalist gushed “The love of novelty, the pleasure of change is not limited in the modern woman to her dress and personal care. Her playfulness is made apparent in how she decorates her house...”
underscores how economic development policy unexpectedly clashed with deeply held, cultural views on gender.

The essayist Juan José Sebreli saw the new popularity of magazines, television, cooking, foreign music, and other things as fomenting an apolitical domestic life that directly challenged the Peronist, working-class culture he saw disappearing in the early 1960s. For Sebreli, whose ideas about gender were formed by Marxist thought, the newfound focus on the home and quotidian life emasculated Argentine popular culture into a bourgeois, apolitical, and feminine mess. He stated that the actual (physical) radios and television sets themselves had become “mirrors of supposed happiness, glorifying the domestic enclosure…[and] spreading the status quo.”

In other words, the programs and advertisements broadcast on Argentine televisions and radios promoted domestic, bourgeois, standardized, perfect lifestyles that he argued distracted Argentines from the “real” political issues of the day. He continued, “the world has been reduced to a happy home where the most important occurrences are culinary recipes, taking care of the kids, feminine beauty, [and] emotional advice…: an immediate, elemental, singular world where all social and political responsibility is hidden [emphasis added].” Sebreli and other intellectuals whose views on gender were formulated by Marxist ideas, believed that the increased importance of the “private,” feminine world came at expense of the “public,” masculine world; thus for Sebreli televisions and radios were part of this

85 Sebreli 94-95.
86 Sebreli’s emphasis on the importance of television, and not just radio, in spreading the consumerist messages reflect his Buenos Aires orientation. While television had been in Argentina for over ten years in 1964, a signal was being broadcast in only three other Argentine cities, Córdoba, Rosario, and Mar del Plata, and only starting to become influential outside the capital.
feminizing, corrupting force. Sebreli saw men as becoming passive, reduced to a mere contingency, no longer valued for the work they performed. The Peronist male worker no longer conveyed status and national pride; now status was conveyed through household consumption, especially items like refrigerators, televisions, blenders, and even cars. The appliances that figured so prominently in this new consumer-, domestic-oriented culture were no longer symbols of female domesticity and were now converting into “symbols of the consumerist alienation,” ways to put a working-class family in debt that could aide in displacing the father from his role as head of household. In addition, this consumerist world differed from the one encouraged by Peronist policies, which he understood to be genuinely Argentine rather than the creation of imperialist, foreign multinationals and advertising agencies. Later, in the 1990s he argued that young people never knew the burden of domestic work before the “technification of the home” and therefore were easily dismissive of how domestic appliances actually alleviated the burden of household chores, but in the early 1960s Sebreli strongly rejected what he saw as the “feminization” of Argentine culture.

The criticism became increasingly hysterical as the decade progressed. The prominent sociologist and essayist Julio Mafud wrote some of the most scathing words for the materialistic woman within Argentine society. In his 1969 tome Los Argentinos y el estatus, Mafud first asserted that women’s status was increasing within the home as a

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87 Sebreli 95.
88 Sebreli 199.
result of this “consumer society” gaining strength. He then repeatedly scolded materialistic women for postponing motherhood or reducing the number of children they bore so “as to achieve status” (since the less children one had the more cash was available to buy the latest technological items or records). Mafud and other journalists went even further, arguing that a woman’s materialistic and consumerist nature was endangering the Argentine family and hurting Argentine men. Mafud stated that consumer-obsessed, materialistic women were neglecting the well-being of their families: “not all too infrequently the television set, stereo, floor polisher or new range or refrigerator is substituting or reducing how much is spent on food within the household budget.”

Similarly, a journalist at widely read general weekly Confirmado stated that women became almost demonic in their quest for consumer goods. He noted that men “work to produce goods and earn money, women dedicate themselves to spending it. In that way… man becomes isolated, absorbed by the necessity to increase his income while the woman, attached to consumption, becomes a type of Moloch [an ancient Semitic god that in modern parlance is someone who demands costly sacrifices].”

Finally, a 1968 comic strip drawn by Quino appearing in Panorama depicted how a woman's consumer desires could drive her husband to death. The comic portrayed a husband and wife visiting a home-goods store over successive years. The wife first points to a refrigerator, then a washing machine, television, and finally car. The man gets progressively skinnier and

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89 Mafud 133, 146.
90 Mafud 157.
frailer looking until, in the final drawing, the wife is buying flowers for her dead husband.\textsuperscript{92} Thus, women's materialistic desires were repeatedly portrayed as destroying marriages and hurting the health of their families.

![Figure 13: A comic strip by Quino which appeared in Panorama in 1968](image)

The pinnacle of leftist criticism of a consumer society, though, is seen in the enormously successful play and later movie \textit{La Fiaca} (roughly \textit{The Lazy One}), which offers a biting commentary of how the lower-middle classes are particularly ill-treated by a consumerist system that disciplines them into working meaningless jobs for the benefit

of heartless corporations, the very wealthy, and materialistic women always wanting more things. This was one of the most successful Argentine scripts of the 1960s and I found ongoing commentary and references in popular magazines that spoke of its success over a period of about two years. The play was later staged in over thirty countries, mostly in Europe and Latin America. It was also awarded Best Theatrical Comedy in Argentina (1967) by the General Society of Authors in Argentina. Both *Primera Plana* and *Confirmado* regularly listed the play on their “entertainment calendars” for over a year, and *Gente* wrote at least three articles describing the “phenomenon” of both the play and the movie *La Fiaca*. As the movie was getting ready to premier, a February 1969 article featured an interview with the writer, star, and director of the movie in which the journalist characterized the play as the “most shocking theatrical boom of recent years” and encouraged Argentines see what the controversy was about for themselves.

Unlike the well-known Quino, little is publicly known about the author, Ricardo Talesnik.

*La Fiaca* recounts the story of a young, married office worker, Néstor, who one morning wakes up and simply refuses to go to work, an office job he finds pointless and routine. It is unclear at first what has pushed him to make this “drastic” decision, but his wife becomes increasingly concerned about his “irresponsibility.” She calls the office,

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93 According to Talesnik’s website ([http://www.autores.org.ar/rtalesniks/](http://www.autores.org.ar/rtalesniks/)), the play was scouted by Universal City Studios for a possible movie production. They thought Woody Allen would make a good lead role and described the play as “a wonderfully understated moral criticism of our business society [emphasis added].” The articulation of “our common business society” is interesting even though the writer of the memo is presumably American and the writer of the play is Argentine.

94 A 21 December 1967 article interviews the author on his new play; then a 9 May 1968 article describes a tour of *La Fiaca* in the United States and Europe.
which sends a doctor, and then she calls his mother. Néstor cannot be convinced to return to work and he decides to spend the afternoon in bed as his wife goes off to work for her half-day shift at an office. It becomes increasingly clear he resents working for a company that appreciates him only for his loyalty, and Néstor believes his work only results in making his boss richer: his labor buys his boss a new suit, a new car, or a bigger house. He wants out of a system that disciplines him as a loyal consumer and employee. After a week he still would not go to work and his wife leaves him when the home-goods store repossesses all the household appliances because he refuses payment on them. He is left in an apartment mostly empty of appliances except for a gas stove. Nestór falls increasingly into childlike behavior, playing soccer with a group of ten-year-old boys in the local plaza, and spending his day by the river. He finally realizes he cannot survive without money and agrees to return to his job. His wife cheerfully goes back to him and the same moment that she returns, so do all the appliances, returned to him by the store.95

In La Fiaca, Néstór’s resentment against consumer debt and installment payments is the key reason he decides to leave his job. At the beginning of the movie both Néstór’s wife Martita and his mother try to convince him to go back to work, emphasizing to Nestór that his salary was necessary to make the installment payments on their appliances and other electronic goods. Martita tells him as the camera pans across the apartment showing a blender, television, refrigerator, and record player that “you know very well what things we need to pay for.” Later that week, he becomes more resentful of a system

95 Interestingly, the play was reborn in Buenos Aires and a new version reflecting more contemporary concerns and globalization played in porteño theatres in 2005.
that seems primarily to benefit his bosses. One afternoon, he turns on the TV and confronts a barrage of advertisements urging viewers to buy everything on installment payments. Nestór directly connects the advertising messages with his situation as an unhappy, indebted, office worker. As the advertisements make him increasingly irate, Nestór marches straight to the store where he purchased the appliances. He tells the owner he simply is not going to make the payments anymore. Shocked, the owner seems not to understand but then reluctantly sends someone to pick up the appliances. His refusal to make the installment payments on the household appliances is seen by his wife and mother as a sign that he has become truly unstable. At this point Martita leaves him and only returns after he agrees to return to work and they are able to recuperate their appliances. Upon her return, Martita and his mother immediately begin to talk about all the new things the apartment needs, including how a floor polisher would greatly ease Martita’s workload. Nestór is sucked right back into the system he just recently rejected.

In Talesnik’s rendition, the cycle of debt needed to purchase modern day comfort benefitted Nestór very little but is embraced by the women around him. It is a modern-day ruse on the part of advertisers, bosses, industrialists, and women (who benefit more from the presence of these appliances) to make the average Argentine male a disciplined and loyal subject of the state and of his employer (indeed, a company employee tries to convince Nestór he should return by arguing that a good Argentine citizen would do so). For Talesnik, lower-middle class debt was one of the biggest social problems of the day—and one expressed in distinctly gendered terms.
Women were portrayed as the engines of this new consumerism in *La Fiaca*, a consumerism that Talesnik portrayed as disciplining the Argentine man into docility and obedience. Neither Nestór’s wife nor his mother in *La Fiaca* are capable of understanding his depression or his alienation from a system that forces him to work a job he felt was meaningless so he can make payments on items—most of which he did not use. Together the women urge him to “be responsible” and to maintain his wife and home, which was his duty. The filmmaker equated being a responsible husband with making a steady income that in this case paid for household appliances. Thus in Talesnik’s portrayal, Nestor’s wife and mother are the voices of the capitalist establishment, disciplining their son/husband into a quiet docility as they reap the rewards of the consumer society.

**Conclusion**

After an early support for women working and the liberating possibilities of household appliances in the early 1960s, in the late 1960s journalists and social critics increasingly became concerned at how perceived changes in gendered hierarchies were diminishing the perceived dominance of men in both the workplace and the home. It is only through the occasional, errant article that appeared in those same magazines where the reader finds an article that supported these changes, rather than speaking against them. The only progressive voice in terms of women’s liberation that had equal influence and circulation to magazines like *Confirmado, Primera Plana, Para Ti*, and *Panorama* was Quino’s comic strip *Mafalda*. 
However, this critique was complicated by a new, modern social reality: an increasing number of professional women worked after marriage and child-bearing. A growing unease emerged in the pages of Argentine magazines with regard to their desire for financial independence and their rejection of traditional roles within marriage or the rejection of marriage itself: consumerism affected how Argentine women enacted gender roles. Men’s supposed clout as the sole breadwinner and authoritarian head of household was perceived as being rapidly and seriously contested. Thus, Argentina’s consumer society—combined with a newly “liberated” woman—was seen by a small group of influential porteño journalists and intellectuals as challenging the masculinity and status of Argentina’s men.

These prominent thinkers argued in a widely circulated media how consumer culture, women working, and appliances together were supposedly humiliating men and disrupting traditional gendered power structures. Social critics and reporters vociferously urged women to stop inverting “natural” gender roles by masculinizing themselves through work and emasculating their husbands through overly exuberant quests for “liberation” or “emancipation.” In addition, they attacked irrational and voracious women consumers who disproportionately benefited from this iteration of a consumer society.

The prolific and surprisingly uniform nature of these voices would lead one to believe that massive changes in employment were taking place, yet the number of women working increased by only 17 percent, a significant but not overwhelming percentage. Thus, I conclude that the porteño intellectuals understood the changes in the workforce to
be more widespread than they actually were because it was mostly middle-class, well educated, and single women in Buenos Aires who sought work. In other words, these intellectuals personally saw the professions and offices of Buenos Aires changing and wrote extensively about it because middle-class women working in increased numbers affected their lives. Leftist critics who supported a more equal society in terms of class were surprisingly vitriolic in terms of their rejection of gender equality as seen through the discourse of women, work, and consumerism. Catholic critics were forced to modernize their discourse so they could combat and reject any modernizing of gender roles. I conclude that prominent critics and journalists partially channeled their anxieties regarding wider societal and political instabilities into a rejection of specific gendered, quotidian practices.

In addition, such a quick reversal in discourse from the early 1960s, which was one of enthusiasm and acceptance, indicates that journalists and intellectuals only had a narrow definition of how economic development was supposed to revolutionize Argentine society. To them it was simply an economic formula, a way to raise “the standard of living.” Proponents of development wanted appliances because they helped to industrialize Argentina and it meant Argentines could enact a first-world standard of living. But they rejected the cultural and social consequences such as more middle-class women who worked or were perceived to have more power in their roles as consumers. Thus, they had an incomplete idea of the changes they were actually pushing for because they excluded cultural considerations.
Conclusion

In 1973, Argentina was in one of the most politically and economically unstable moments of its history. Inflation was rampant, former president General Pedro Eugenio Aramburu recently had been kidnapped and killed by the Montoneros, and armed guerrillas fought in Argentine streets. Yet in May 1973, when President Hector María Cámpora made a speech to congress, he discussed the excesses of consumerism amongst other topics.\(^1\) He decried the fact that Argentina had become a “plundering ground for foreign interests” and was at the mercy of their financial interests.\(^2\) The leftist president went on to say, “The Argentine citizen should not be the target of systematic advertising that induces him to become an obsessive consumer of goods…” He reminded Argentines, “we should resist the temptation just to grow and accumulate goods, [to become] a society of concupiscence and consumption. We must remember development, in its true fashion, is a process that promotes [the advancement] of a complete human being.”\(^3\)

Cámpora’s quotation is unusual because it connects both development and consumerism. And, in many ways, Cámpora’s concerns about consumption and a consumer culture echoed those voiced by the conservative military dictator General Juan Carlos Onganía three years earlier when he asserted, “the advances of the industrial age…have given

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\(^1\) Cámpora served as president of Argentina just before the return of Perón from 25 May 1973 – 12 July 1973.


\(^3\) Cámpora 32-33 and 61-64.
birth to a consumer society whose dynamic is governed by the cold application of
economic laws. [These laws] conceive of individuals as only consumers, of a people not
as a community but as a market who must be managed and standardized so they [the
public] can assimilate the products they [the businessmen] want to sell. These
quotations emphasize how objections toward a consumer culture and the economic
models fomenting its expansion went beyond the usual political divisions pitting
conservatives against liberals or Peronists against anti-Peronists. Onganía was a strong
proponent of developmentalism, and his shift to a strident anti-consumerist vision
underlines how deeply ambivalent feelings about consumerism and its gendered nature
permeated the usual political divisions in Argentina’s society. Indeed, we must go
beyond these usual political partitions to see this dividing fault line that marked 1960s
consumer culture and its gendered relationship to economic development.

Argentina’s ambivalent relationship to consumer culture and capitalism continued
to undergo extreme cycles. Three years after Cámpora’s speech, the military junta
leading the National Process of Reorganization (1976-1983) — Argentina’s most
notorious dictatorship — sowed the seeds of a neoliberal economy. The junta
emphasized in its propaganda how it brought “liberty” to Argentina and often utilized the
term “liberty” and “liberating” to describe Argentines’ relationship to the economy. Part
of Argentines’ new liberty was the freedom to choose products in a free-market economy.
The government liberated imports, exports, prices, and controls. The junta also endorsed
the liberating potential of advertising. In fact, the rhetorical reform of Argentina’s

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4 Juan Carlos Ongania, V reunión de gobernadores, 3 April 1970, 8-9.
economy was almost as important as the purging of subversives. For instance, the pro-
regime lifestyle magazine *Gente* promoted the values of the military junta in 1980 in an
article entitled “Sí y no en 1980.” Amongst other things they proclaimed “no” to “the
moral crisis,” “bureaucracy,” and “expecting the government to fix everything” and yes
to “telephones that work,” “color television,” “efficient Argentine industry,” and “faith.”

5 These “values” were emphatically contested by those opposing the regime, many of
whom were disappeared. The entrenchment of neoliberal ideals reached its zenith in the
1990s, leading to most state-owned enterprises being sold off. By 2001, the economy
collapsed in spectacular fashion. Since then, the Kirchners have dominated Argentine
politics — first Nestór Kirchner and then Christina Fernández de Kirchner have been
president since 2003 — and have taken inspiration from old Peronist ideas about running
the economy. The economic cycles of boom and bust continue and Argentines’ feelings
about consumption cycle along with them, but the period of study for this dissertation
ends as its unique conditions dissipate – when the age of development lost its vigor, the
boom in media expansion slowed, and the relative economic stability that had given so
many Argentines the ability to participate as consumers disappeared.

In this study of 1960s Argentina, I have teased out the relationship amongst
economic development, itself an ideological construction, and rising consumerism
through analyzing the use, circulation, and meaning of household appliances. I show
how cultural values, in this case sexism and a resistance to a perceived change in gender
roles, produced an unexpected stumbling block in economic growth that proponents

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claimed was universal and acultural (i.e., unrelated to culture). While developmentalists wanted a robust consumer culture in Argentina to foment industrialization and economic development, they did not understand the “profoundly cultural” nature of consumption or, indeed, of the economic model they promoted. Instead developmentalists understood development to be an ahistorical, universal economic prescription that would “modernize” and “progress” the country. The developmentalists failed to take into account that some Argentines would feel their social standing was threatened by these changes (agricultural oligarchs or professional men, for instance) and thus resist them. When consumerism was perceived to increase the status of women and promote gender equality, developmentalists and its critics alike balked at the changes. In other words, the gendered reactions we see in the late 1960s transcended political ideology.

Studying the discourse surrounding the production, use, and meaning of household appliances reveals first the premature embrace and then the quick rejection of consumer culture and gender equality. The production of these appliances helped to industrialize Argentina, they were gendered as feminine (women used them almost exclusively), and they operated as status symbols in the consumer culture of 1960s Argentina. Thus, appliances offer a locus for discussing the gendered relationship between development and consumerism. In conjunction with studying economic imperialism and policies of industrialization, a study of consumer culture gives us a better picture of why developmentalism faced unexpected challenges.\(^6\)

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\(^6\) Fernando Rocchi and María Inés Barbero in their article “Industry,” which appears in *A New Economic History of Argentina*, argue that the programs of industrialization were successful.
Popular knowledge of economic development, the surge in the importance of household appliances, a boom in publishing, and relative stability made 1960s Argentina a unique time and place to show how gendered prejudices influenced programs of economic development. Critics worried over the increasingly ambiguous social and cultural changes they perceived and started to vocalize a resistance to this modernizing in the pages of magazines, newspapers, and essays. I argue that by the end of the decade, anxieties about consumerism’s threats to men’s authority had reached near hysterical intensity. Thus, over the course of a decade, I trace how a premature ebullience for economic development and the necessary resulting consumer culture quickly gave way to deep ambivalences regarding rising materialism, women’s roles, consumer debt, and social restructuring. This analysis allows for a better understanding of the quotidian experience of development in the 1960s in addition to the clashes between generations, the effervescent youth culture, and the like.

This dissertation charts how enthusiasm about gender equality and booming consumer culture gave way to a deep ambivalence, an ambivalence that has lingered, towards consumerism and capitalism in general. For many Argentines, consumer culture was both a blessing and a curse. The sharp reaction against consumerism perhaps came so quickly because, first, the changes were so rapid and, second, few if any negative effects had been anticipated. The negative reactions against appliances were expressed most vocally by those who did not primarily use them. To many of these men, the endless flow of money disappearing into installment payments as several new gadgets appeared in their home would not necessarily appear to be the best use of their hard-
earned cash. They did not personally experience the reorganization of their daily tasks, the alleviation of stress at knowing food would be better preserved, or relief as their backs stopped aching from scrubbing clothes all day long. They perceived certain effects they attributed to the arrival of appliances -- more women going into the workforce, having more financial independence within a marriage, or living on their own -- and didn’t like them.

I am able to see the connections between economic development and consumer culture for two principal reasons. First, I balance both material and discursive considerations through an unusual juxtaposition of sources. By laying traditional economic statistics next to, say, comic strips and films, we can see how economic development was experienced in the daily lives of Argentines. Second, I move beyond political left/right mapping of the actors in this story. While I certainly describe many of the actors as a “leftist intellectual” or a “conservative military dictator,” the similarity of their objections to a booming consumer culture indicates that those divides do not adequately explain the nature of their objections. The 1960s was a decade in which numerous new divides became apparent – generational, Peronist versus anti-Peronist, for example – but as this narrative shows, even the most exuberant proponents of economic developmentalism criticized the robust and gendered consumer society that resulted.

Beyond the confines of its historical moment, this dissertation reemphasizes how subaltern groups -- like immigrants, ethnic minorities, or in this case women -- are targets of anxiety and discrimination during periods of instability. These anxieties are expressed through deeply held prejudices that are often suppressed or unrecognized during periods
of abundance but emerge when a scapegoat is needed to explain a nation’s current problem. The policing of women and their bodies as evidence of that anxiety is a well-documented phenomenon. In Latin America, military generals policed the gendered bodies of Chileans, Argentines, and Brazilians from the 1960s through the 1980s. The vitriolic, gendered responses against consumerism and women in late 1960s Argentina reflect anxieties about changing gender roles, a strong consumer society, and a restructuring of the economy. While the nature of those criticisms was particular to the circumstances of Argentina in the late 1960s, these types of responses appear in various societies and across time periods when there is economic or political instability.7

Lastly my work contributes to conversations about development, consumerism, and 1960s Argentina. Scholars of development have done excellent work measuring how patriarchy restricts the potential of women. They do a first-rate job measuring and coming up with solutions for those human beings living in the worst poverty. They also add to understandings of how reproductive labor has been undervalued. Yet they have tended to ignore how consumption and consumer culture is part of economic development. Perhaps it appears too frivolous. But development scholars need to take consumption seriously as the “marketization” of the world economy continues. This is

7 Indeed, the United States is experiencing a similar rise in sexist, gendered anxieties during the current period of slow economic growth. In March of 2012, the US secretary of state Hillary Rodham Clinton noted at a Women in the World Conference, “Why extremists always focus on women remains a mystery to me. But they all seem to. It doesn’t matter what country they’re in or what religion they claim. They all want to control women.” Clinton continued, “They want to control how we dress. They want to control how we act. They even want to control the decisions we make about our own health and our own bodies.”

http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/03/16/women-in-the-world-summit-most-memorable-quotes.html

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especially true as the connection between consumerism and development has the potential to reveal deeply gendered prejudices affecting the strength of economic growth. This dissertation is a part of a surge of new inquiries on 1960s Argentina that opens up the narrative from one dominated by political explanations for how Argentina arrived to the crisis of the Dirty War. While others focus on youth, the family, and sexuality as central categories of analysis, I show how development permeated daily life through Argentines’ contact with consumer culture. Together these works move Argentina away from a teleological discussion of the country’s destiny to a more nuanced and complicated understanding of Argentines’ many experiences.

In this dissertation I detail the quotidian experience of economic development by studying both the material realities and discursive worlds of 1960s Argentina. By analyzing the relationship between economic development and consumer culture through the use and meanings of household appliances, I reveal the gendered relationship between the two. Developmentalists in the late 1950s and 1960s believed that their new economic model would finally provide the avenue for raising Argentines’ standard of living, making the Argentine economy as robust as those of the United States and Northern Europe. This economic model would be aided by new “scientific” methods promoted by quantitative social scientists. Argentina, developmentalists argued, just needed to progress through certain universal stages to become an industrialized, high consumption nation. These hyper-rational men saw their development model as outside of ideology and outside of cultural influences. However, I demonstrate how their models came up against cultural realities that limited the success of developmentalism. These roadblocks
arose in Argentines’ experiences with consumer culture – the form their quotidian
interactions with development took – and how that impacted family and gender
relationships. Educated and relatively powerful men in Buenos Aires resisted changes to
gender roles and women’s status in Argentine society.

In the early 1960s, when developmentalism was still more theory than practice,
even the strongest proponents of developmentalism claimed to favor gender equality.
However, as those visions became reality, they quickly opposed that change in status.
Ironically, the developmentalists’ fetish for collecting statistics revealed the extent to
which women controlled household purse strings, went to university, and stayed in the
workforce, perhaps fueling the backlash. They utilized women’s role as consumers to
articulate many of their protestations against gender equality. Consumer culture and
consumption gained more attention as driving the economy, and women were seen as the
figure making most of those consumer decisions. However, developmentalists’ Marxist-
influenced notions of both gender and the consumption/production dichotomy made it
difficult if not impossible for both proponents and critics of developmentalism to accept
this new empowerment. Not only did it not fit into their ideological frameworks of
gender, but the perceived mechanisms for raising women’s status – consumption and the
“liberating” household appliances – firmly opposed entrenched notions of productivity
and economic power.
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Biography

Katharine French-Fuller was born on 4 August 1977 in Greenwich, CT. She grew up in Massachusetts and spent a year in Chile and Ecuador before attending the College of William and Mary in Virginia. There, she majored in International Studies – Latin America and received her degree in May 2000. She received the Howard J. Fraser Memorial Award for her Honor’s Thesis. Katharine then received her Masters of Arts in Latin American Studies at the University of California – Berkeley. She graduated in December 2004. She published “The Role of Foreign Accents in the Acculturation Process” in the William and Mary Journal Monitor (1999) and a version of her Master’s thesis in an article entitled “Gendered Invisibility, Respectable Cleanliness: The Impact of the Washing Machine on Daily Living in Post-1950 Santiago, Chile” in The Journal of Women’s History (Winter 2006). Katharine also wrote the copy for the traveling exhibit, “I Have No Right to Remain Silent,” which commemorates the life of Rabbi Marshall Meyer. The exhibit was shown in Washington DC, New York, Durham, NC, and Buenos Aires. She received a Fulbright Research Fellowship in 2009, an Aleanne Webb Dissertation Research Fellowship, Duke Graduate School Summer Research Fellowship (2008 and 2011), the Anne Firor Scott Award (2006 and 2008), Department of History Summer Research Award, and Ford Foundation Pre-Dissertation Summer Fellowship to conduct her dissertation research. Katharine received a Duke University Competitive Fellowship (as the Hartman Center Advertising History Intern, 2010-2011/2011-2012)
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