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Kelsey Walker

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Kelsey Walker

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Approved:  
Advisor  
Dr. Martha Santos

Accepted:  
Dean of the College  
Dr. Chand Midha

Faculty Reader  
Dr. Tracey Boisseau

Dean of the Graduate School  
Dr. George R. Newkome

Department Chair  
Dr. Martin Wainwright

Date
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

On August 26, 1946, a few months after the election of Juan Perón to the office of the President of Argentina, TIME magazine reported that his wife, Eva Perón\(^1\), was the most powerful, shrewd and hard-working member of his cabinet. According to TIME, Eva had “set a pace for which only Eleanor Roosevelt had set a modern precedent.” For the next five years, the American press published positive images of a powerful and intelligent Eva Perón. She was the exemplar modern woman, public and visible. As late as 1951, TIME reported that the only barrier to Eva’s complete rise in the world of politics was the conservatism of the Argentine elites. Only the backwardness of her nation could stall Eva’s ascent as a modern woman. Surprisingly, just two years later, TIME presented a much more negative portrayal of Eva, characterizing her as a woman in power who was overly ambitious. This reversal in characterizations of Eva Perón as the modern woman coincided with changing gender roles in the US at the height of the Cold War. Between 1949 and 1952, the Cold War entered a new era, one where the U.S. lost its monopoly on the nuclear bomb, China was “lost” to the communists, investigations of espionage became common, from Judith Copolo to Alger Hiss to Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, the Korean War began, and Joseph McCarthy was elected to the US

\(^1\) Eva’s nickname was Evita, meaning “Little Eva.”
senate. These events, which changed the dynamics of the Cold War and heightened the anti-communist movement in the US constitute an important context that helps to explain why it was this specific period, 1951 to 1952, in which Eva and other public women began to be so critically maligned.

During the early Cold War, the anti-Communist movement, with its broad definition of ‘subversion,’ emerged in tandem with a reactionary desire to “contain” women’s (and other marginalized groups’) growing assertiveness, achievement, and visibility. These gendered battles produced a strong anti-feminist movement that was a reaction to women’s increasing legal and social equality during the mid-century. As such, the fierce anti-feminism and emphasis on women’s domesticity in the early 1950s should be viewed as a contestation over gendered power and authority. These battles were as much a part of the anti-Communist crusade as were efforts at counter-Soviet-espionage. Therefore, the backlash against Eva Perón as a modern woman is representative of a broader backlash against women as part of the international competitions of the Cold War.

It is no coincidence that after 1952, TIME began to depict Eva as little more than a trashy tramp, and as a vengeful, power-hungry shrew--images that still persist today. Clearly, the international reporters and publications who originally thought Argentine conservatism was the only thing that could stop Eva’s ascent were strongly influenced by changing gender relations in the early Cold War. Even more broadly, the case of Eva Perón’s representation in Anglo-American mass media between 1944 and 1966 reveals a shift in public opinion regarding women and their legitimacy in positions of political office and in publicly visible spaces. While traditional histories of the post-war era highlight the domestic ideal for women, I argue this ideal was emphasized in reaction to
women’s, and other marginalized groups’, increased public visibility, assertiveness, and access to political power. In the context of international Cold War competition, it no longer mattered that Eva was a modern woman. Rather, her version of modern femininity came to be viewed as a threat by the early 1950s. The emerging anti-Communist movement was tied to attacking “liberal,” and therefore effeminized, New Deal labor and social policies. Not only did the movement attack these institutions and policies but also any person perceived as “leftist,” especially those challenging the status quo. In this way, the anti-Communist movement tied not only liberal policies into its attack, but also attacks on women perceived as not only deviating from the sexual and gender norms, but particularly those women involved in New Deal labor and social reforms in the US. This association between anti-communism and anti-feminism further demonstrates how not only Eva Perón, but the excessive modern womanhood she represented, came to be a site of contestations over gendered power, where some tried to “contain” the growing power and visibility of groups that challenged the established authority.

Internationally, these competitions were a part of global geopolitical rivalries between the US and the Soviet Union. As Historian Peter H. Smith explains,

> The Cold War altered the logic of inter-American relations, elevating the protection of ‘national security’ to the top of the US foreign policy agenda and turning Latin America (and other developing areas) into both a battleground and prize in the conflict between communism and capitalism, East and West, the USSR and the United States.²

As such, the leftist ideology and liberal reforms supported by Eva Perón were seen as a threat in the context of heightening tensions and global rivalries of the Cold War. As

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Smith explains, “Locked in a nuclear standoff, the US and the USSR would engage in a geopolitical and ideological rivalry that interpreted the Third World as a global background.” Therefore, the domestic concern in the US about the rising visibility and power of women combined with international concerns about the spread of communism, helped to shape the altered representations of Eva Perón from a celebratory image of modern womanhood to characterizations of Eva as both a threat to the war on communism internationally, and representative of an “uncontained” modern womanhood that emerged alongside the anti-Communist movement.

While drawing mainly from TIME magazine articles published in the US between 1944 and 1977, this paper examines other news publications as well, including The New York Times, The New York Herald Tribune, and The Times of London. These publications had mass-circulation in the mid twentieth century, especially TIME, which was the most popular weekly news periodical at the time. Not only did these news sources reach a mass-audience, they also had strong ties with the US State Department.3 In the first section of this paper, “Background,” I lay out the context of a global modernity, specifically the archetype of a modern femininity that was circulating in advertising, consumption, and the mass media. It was from these global trends that the image of “Eva the modern woman” emerged. I then show how the current historical scholarship de-mythologizes Eva, even as it does not acknowledge the positive representations of her in the late 1940s English-speaking media. In the second section, “Eva the Modern Woman,” I argue that the early positive representations of Eva Perón in the English-speaking media did not contain the negative myths of the First Lady that historians like Maryssa Navarro have studied. Rather, the news articles published

3 Per verbal exchange with Dr. Elizabeth Mancke.
between 1946 and 1952 portray Eva as a powerful and independent modern woman. While the current historiography successfully deconstructs the negative mythology of Eva, the positive portrayals of Eva as a powerful modern woman are missing from the historical narrative. The third section, “Backlash: The Reaction Against Post-War New Womanhood,” lays out the reversal in portrayals of Eva Perón after 1952, where Eva was castigated for the same attributes for which she was once celebrated. To understand why this stark turn-about occurred, the fourth section, “New Perspectives on Gender in the Early Cold War” attempts to find meaning behind the various representations of Eva and how and why they changed. Here, I look to the context of changing gender relations in the early Cold War to help explain the “backlash” against Eva specifically, but also a mode of modern womanhood that was viewed as “uncontained” more generally. This paper then concludes with a section that explores the various avenues for future research this work leaves open.

I have placed my analysis of the shifting representations of Eva Perón in the international press within the context of two separate historiographical strands. The first is the international scholarship that traces the emergence of modern codes of femininity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Representations that celebrate Eva Perón are strikingly similar to the evidence historians have used to demonstrate the emergence of new models of womanhood and gender roles beginning during the period. While useful, this scholarship tends to end examinations of modern womanhood in the 1930s. I argue that it is possible to observe continuity in certain ideas about modern femininity that historians have found from the turn of the century to the 1920s, which extend into the representations of globalized modern femininity in the 1940s.
The second body of scholarship are analyses of women, gender, and sexuality in the post World War II era. Classic historical scholarship of the 1940s and 50s picks up the narrative of women’s “progress” with the growth in labor demand brought on by World War II. These “Rosie the Riveters” were encouraged to join the work force, thereby supporting the war effort as part of their patriotic duty. However, this traditional scholarship has tended to then gloss over or skip the intervening years immediately following the war to a 1950s conservative resurgence of the traditional housewife. According to this view, not until the 1960s and 70s with the emergence of “second wave feminism” were women able to realize their societal inequality and boldly participate in the public sphere. Drawing on the historical scholarship that focuses on women, gender, and sexuality in the post World War II period, this paper complicates such a narrative. It does so by not only seeking to connect this literature to the scholarship on modern womanhood and femininity in the first decades of the twentieth century, but also by examining the late 1940s and early 1950s within the context of the anti-communist movement to show a concerted and propagated effort to reassert male authority, both in the home and in the political sphere. Rather than examine the 1950s as a time where the tumultuous preceding decades spawned a renewed desire for stability, which resulted in the emphasis on the nuclear family and the baby boom, and drawing on post-War gender historians such as Joanne Meyerowitz, K.A. Cuordileone, and Landon Storrs, this paper argues such phenomena were in fact the result of a concerted and profound effort to reinstate male dominance in the wake of powerful alterations to the foundations of male supremacy, as well as other identity hierarchies such as race and class.
By drawing on these separate strands in the gender historical scholarship, I argue that the positive portrayals of Eva in the 1940s into early 1952 heralded the Argentine First Lady as the embodiment of an international modern femininity. The sudden change in portrayal reflected the ways in which international rivalries of the Cold War centered such anxieties in discussions of women and their role in society. Using Eva Perón as a case study, I will demonstrate how a publically prominent Latin American woman was celebrated in the US media throughout the late 1940s, presented as immensely powerful and influential, and then in the early 1950s derided in the context of the international Cold War for the same qualities these reporters once celebrated. This work also draws on a third body of historical scholarship that specifically focuses on Eva Perón. The scholarship published on Eva Perón in the US and Latin America beginning in the 1980s up through the 2000s attempts to deconstruct the vast mythology that surrounds this enigmatic figure. Historians, especially Maryssa Navarro, successfully demythologize the intensely negative portrayals of Eva Perón in scholarship, literature, and popular culture, including the 1996 Tim Rice film *Evita*. These scholars also discuss the source of Eva’s power as well as whether or not she can be seen as a feminist. However, these scholars have overlooked positive representations of Eva Perón in the international media.4

While often relying on traditional gender norms and stereotypes, the journalists from TIME analyzed here reveal a fascination and adoration toward the spectacular Argentinean First Lady. This portrayal complicates the historical scholarship that has

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otherwise so successfully deconstructed the negative mythology of Eva Perón. In contrast, by contextualizing Eva as a “modern woman,” this paper demonstrates certain continuities in constructions of femininity throughout the twentieth century in North and South America. The anti-communist assault on effeminized liberal institutions and ideologies, in turn, brought on a reaction to these constructions of modern womanhood, which came to be viewed as uncontained.

The methodological approach used here is intended to join the scholarly separation in gender studies that results from historical periodization and from focuses on specific geographic regions. This essay offers a transnational view, one that examines international portrayals of Eva Perón and modern femininity that drew on ideas that traversed beyond the artificial boundaries of the nation state and circulated throughout global mass-culture. Eva provides a lens to examine transnational representations of gender and of the status of women, while also joining together the artificial separation of women’s history in the US and Latin America. Representations and discourses of modernity were prevalent in both the US and Argentina in the 20th century. As such, to better understand these continuities in constructing modern womanhood at the turn of the century and their relationship to the representations of Eva Perón as a modern woman in the 1940s, it is first necessary to examine the various historical contexts and theoretical perspectives of gender and sexuality within modernity.
CHAPTER II
BACKGROUND

Historians generally begin their examination of the modern era with the age of industrialization, along with the rapid immigration and urbanization of the late 19th and early 20th century. “Modernity” itself has rather ambiguous meanings and connotations as a result of the vast social, economic, and cultural changes in the late 19th and early 20th century. Industrial growth, urbanization, and immigration/migration engendered not only important economic and political changes, but also changed gender and sexual roles within modern society. However, modernity itself, and the modern femininity constructed within it, were filled with inherent contradiction. On the one hand, modernity represented progress, improvement, and helped to further justify American superiority within its growing neo-colonial empire. Yet, on the other hand, modernity also carried anxieties about the direction of social and political changes. In this context, constructing womanhood became a central way to not only alleviate anxiety about socioeconomic changes, but also to reinforce male authority over women, and thereby other social hierarchies that rested on the dichotomous relationship of power between men and women. Even more, discussions regarding the ‘status of women’ became central tropes to measure the achievement of modernity by different nations and to compare those notions with one another. In the international context, gender-differentiated roles in a society served as a measure of that society’s civilization.
However, new conditions of the modern world and consumer capitalism opened new roles for women that challenged the domestic ideal.

Industrialization brought with it a huge need for human labor, mobilizing women in much greater numbers into the wage labor force. Urban growth, immigration and migration also brought women further into the public realm. Along with their working-class counterparts, middle-and-upper class women were also participating in much greater numbers in activities outside the home, which likewise became important characteristics of their modern identities. Beginning in the late 19th century US, these women had greater access to higher education, allowing them greater access to professions. These changes also provided women with more access to the public and political world through the temperance and other reform movements and organizations, women’s clubs, and church groups. Historians have also demonstrated that the relaxation of sexual mores and greater legal equality for women, combined with this greater access to paid labor and women’s participation in public life all represented a challenge to constructions of appropriate gender roles, which were central in maintaining patriarchal authority. Normative notions of femininity that confined women to the domestic sphere were important indicators of civility. Women’s public participation and visibility as working-class wage earners, or middle-and-upper class professionals, university students, and reformers, challenged the gendered order.

Just as historians have demonstrated for the US case, Argentina, too, was confronted by the massive socio-economic changes of industrialization with the coming of the so-called “modern age.” In the early twentieth century, Argentina underwent rapid industrialization. Immigration and rural migration to the capital swelled the city of
Buenos Aires, which was constructed and designed as a “modern” city, like Paris. As Navarro explains, Buenos Aires grew swiftly from the immigration and migration so that by the 1930s “it had been developed very quickly, but also in an expansive, turn-of-the-century spirit that would have appealed to Baron Haussmann, the creator of modern Paris. It was as cosmopolitan in its architecture as it was in population.” In fact, by 1915, “Argentina had already acquired the basic features of modern-twentieth century life: an economy integrated into the world market, a complex and cosmopolitan society, and a political life centered on political parties and a representative electoral system.”

This time period also saw a growth in the middle class in Argentina. Since the late 19th century, Liberal and Positivist thought nurtured a “generation of statesmen that attempted to bring their countries into the mainstream of European and North American ‘progress.’” At the end of the 19th and in the early 20th centuries, “Argentina became integrated into the global scene of massive world commodity exchange, vast international migrations, rapid urbanization, new forms of urban consumption, world sports competitions, and the circulation of mass-cultural products.” From the 1940s onward, Argentina, like other “Western” societies, was “in the throes of urbanization and globalization.” As in the US, these economic and social changes provided new spaces

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for women’s public participation, particularly for lower-class women who were
mobilized in greater numbers into the wage-labor force. In fact, according to historian
Eduardo Elena, by the 1930s, women made up over one-quarter of the wage labor force
in Argentina.\textsuperscript{10} Furthermore, in certain industries, like meatpacking and textiles, women
made up one-third to one-half of the labor force.\textsuperscript{11} Like their working-class counterparts,
middle-and-upper class women in Argentina, as in other industrializing societies, gained
greater public participation throughout the 20\textsuperscript{th} century through increased access to higher
education, entrance into the professions, and participation in reform movements. While
women were not granted equal access to education until the 1940s, historian Donna Guy
demonstrates their increased presence in professions by the 1920s and 1930s as social
workers, teachers, doctors, and lawyers. These women’s labor challenged traditional
gender formulations that idealized women’s domesticity.

Aside from women’s labor, another international shift brought on by the changing
socio-economic conditions of modernity was the world of global consumer culture. This
transformation also challenged existing gender roles. Modern consumer culture, and the
department stores, advertisements, cinema, leisure activities, and commodities that went
with it, as well as new forms of public media directed toward and featuring women,
brought women further into the public sphere. Advertisement, radio, the growth in
popular print media, and the growth in consumer culture, all served to further push
women and conditions of modern femininity within the public realm. As Elena points out,

\textsuperscript{10} Eduardo Elena. \textit{Perónism, Citizenship, and Mass Consumption}. (The University of Pittsburgh Press,
\textsuperscript{11} Mirta Zaida Lobato, “Women Workers in the ‘Cathedrals of Corned Beef’: Structure and Subjectivity in
the Argentine Meatpacking Industry,” in \textit{The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers from
the Household and Factory to the Union Hall and Ballot Box}. John D. French and Daniel James eds.
“Widely perceived as having the region’s wealthiest economy, Argentina stood at the forefront of these changes.”¹² In fact, “by the 1930s Argentina had many features commonly associated with a consumer society.” Buenos Aires, then the biggest metropolis in Latin America, with “grand department stores and shopping avenues presented unquestionable signs of a consumer society.”¹³ As in the US and in other developing nations, consumer capitalism drew women further into the public sphere, and “as the commercial offerings grew with each passing year in Argentina, so, too, did the demands on women as consumers. Positioned at the point where the household met the marketplace, female consumers possessed authority within the domestic sphere and, at least potentially, within everyday commercial spaces.”¹⁴

As historians of the US and elsewhere demonstrate, these economic and social changes were met in re-articulation of notions of appropriate gender norms that allowed for women’s greater participation in modern public life and consumption, while simultaneously confining that public visibility to spaces that were gendered feminine. Historian Susan K. Besse points out similar features emerging in modern Brazilian society, a trend likely occurring in other Latin American societies faced with industrialization, immigration, urbanization, and the socioeconomic changes they engendered. For Besse, “rapidly expanding urban freedoms for middle class women—by-products of the booming consumer economy, growing educational and professional opportunities, new ‘female’ jobs in the service sector, and the arrival of foreign cinematographic images of the sexy flapper and independent working-girl” challenged gender roles to the point where “a new gender system compatible with Brazil’s modern

¹² Elena, 12.
¹³ Elena, 21.
¹⁴ Elena, 33.
era” became necessary.15 As in other industrializing nations, likely including Argentina, “we can see the modernization of the gender system in early-twentieth-century Brazil as both part of larger international trends and particular to the specific social, economic, and political situation of that country.”16 These changes forced a redefinition of existing gender hierarchies that would reify male authority and “contain” women’s growing public presence. Besse elaborates, “once old definitions of the proper place of men and women had become obviously dysfunctional, the resolution of heated public debates over sexual difference became crucial to the process of legitimating authority and protecting power.”17 Thus, women’s increased public visibility forced a re-articulation of proper gender norms in an effort to maintain the established gender hierarchy. These new norms, drawn from internationally circulating trends, offered new models of femininity to women in modern consumer culture. Magazines, radio programming, film, and newspapers carried new arch-types of femininity like “the working-woman,” the “modern-girl, and the suffragette. In Latin America, cultural renderings “offered novel images of womanhood in which women transgressed the ascribed femininity of self-sacrificing motherhood and traditional piety, but remained women.” 18

While there is no historical scholarship that specifically examines representations of modern womanhood in Argentina, there is much evidence to suggest these ideological currents were circulating throughout Latin America. One work that examines how the changes of modernization were met with a re-articulation of proper gender norms drawn

16 Besse, 199.
17 Besse, 11.
from global trends of proper femininity is Joanne Hershfield’s study of the discourses of Mexican modern womanhood. Hershfield argues early 20th-century Mexican writers, intellectuals, and artists “made use of visual images to promote their version of a political modernity, an equally forceful campaign to advance a modern identity was forged in the sphere of a popular ‘transnational’ culture situated in the market.” La ‘Chica Moderna,’ similar to other countries’ constructions of modern womanhood was middle-class, white, tall, and slender. She had an “up-to-date” fashionable appearance, wore make-up, smoked cigarettes, and drove a car. In this way, she was part of the transnational marketplace and international ideology of modern femininity; she was “linked to the transnational distribution of ideologies and commodities of global style,” and as such, was a part of “global modernity.” Similarly, post-war Anglophonic media portrayals of Eva Perón contained many of the features of international new womanhood.

Australia, like the US, Western Europe, Brazil and Argentina, was influenced by the global trends in the mass-media and consumer realm of industrial capitalism. The “Modern Girl” was one of “the first cultural figure[s] to travel along the multi-directional flows of transnational capital,” writes Liz Conor in The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s. Conor notes the importance of visual culture in understanding femininity in the modern period. As Conor explains of the central tension of modernity and modern femininity, Modern Womanhood was defined by women’s entrance into public spaces. However, this made the distinction between the “independent ‘woman about town’ and the prostitute seem unclear.”

distinction created anxieties about proper gender roles, making debates about their redefinition central to modernizing nations around the globe. For Conor, although women did face new forms of social control and surveillance in modern society, with the emphasis on women’s self-display, new norms of femininity also gave women greater agency.\textsuperscript{21} As Conor explains, although new forms of censorship emerged under the scrutinizing gaze, “new ways were also inadvertently opened to women to articulate themselves as gendered, modern subjects by constituting themselves as spectacles.”\textsuperscript{22}

Conor analyzes representations of New Woman in images, arguing that the New Woman emerged through “visual conditions of modernity, and these conditions produced a new formation of subjectivity, which I call the Modern Appearing Woman.”\textsuperscript{23}

Conor argues that women who become aware of the surveying gaze and in response to that gaze honed methods of self-display or mastered “techniques of appearing,” articulated and conceived of themselves as subjects. For many women, this subjectivity provided them with new forms of agency. Such techniques are defined as “the manner and means of execution of one’s visual effects and statuses,” through which “women’s bodies became a place of action in modern visual culture.”\textsuperscript{24} Conor explains that such techniques required women to not only see themselves as objects of a gaze, but to hone their methods of self-display they also required the comparison to an idealized beauty, increasing the importance of actresses, models, and beauty pageants in defining women’s standards of beauty.

\textsuperscript{21} For more on “subjective agency” see Judith Butler \textit{Bodies that Matter}.
\textsuperscript{22} 18.
\textsuperscript{23} 2.
\textsuperscript{24} 4.
However, by adopting such techniques, women were able to become what Conor calls “modern appearing subjects.” As they were aware of the gaze they were under, they ceased to be mere objects. Instead, modern woman could manipulate that gaze, which made them subjectivized agents. Conor explains how shifts in meanings of femininity from “inciting modesty to inciting display, from self-effacement to self-articulation, is the point where feminine visibility began to be productive of women’s modern subjectivities.” These new ways of seeing and being seen produced new meanings of visibility, engendering women’s greater “social, political, and sexual agency.”

Department store displays, magazines, and photojournalists “promised that women could become modern through their spectacularization.” At the same time, women were still within the realm of panoptic surveillance. As such, they had to watch over their bodies by being aware of the ‘scrutinizing gaze,’ by thinking of themselves as spectacles, and by regulating and managing their visibility through techniques of self-mastery. However, if they mastered such techniques of appearing, women, as spectacles, were not only acceptable but celebrated in the modern visual world.

This argument serves to challenge the gendered dichotomous divide of the male subject versus the woman object. In the modern visual world, the subject/object divide is often seemingly reproduced into the spectator/spectacle gendered divide. While this division is gendered, it also obscures another view of the feminine spectacle, one that is “not exclusionary, one that challenges rather than confirms the traditional division

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25, 29.
26, 35.
27, 40.
28 For more on panoptic surveillance, see Michel Foucault *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the President.* (New York: Random House, 1975).
29, 42.
between spectator and spectacle, subject and object.”\textsuperscript{30} Conor argues against the historiography that sees the binary polarization of the subject/object because it has “kept us from seeing women as modern because they are spectacular.”\textsuperscript{31} One example of this obscuration is evident in the case of Eva Perón. Historians of Eva Perón, without Conor’s understanding of feminine visibility, have not only failed to discuss a positive portrayal of the Argentine First Lady, but also neglected the agency Eva gained through honing techniques of display in the performance of her modern identity.

It is this very agency that Conor sees in constructions of modern femininity in the 1920s that is central to the celebrations of Eva Perón as a spectacular modern woman in the 1940s. Eva followed the lines of feminine visibility that allowed women in the 1920s to be celebrated for their public attention, within the prescribed realm of spectacular self-display, and journalists in the US media praised her for it.\textsuperscript{32} While such agency and power were limited and “contained,” the next section places Eva in the ambiguity of the modern world to see how she was a master of Conor’s techniques of appearing. Eva, like other women who performed modern feminine identities, was the ultimate idealized beauty. She was a former actress and model, and as First Lady, she continued her fashionable and glamorous persona. Eva’s mastery of the “techniques of display” was central to the positive portrayals of her as a powerful and prominent First Lady. In presentations of Eva between 1945 and 1952, she was the true embodiment of the “Spectacular Modern Woman.”

\textsuperscript{30} Conor, 16.
\textsuperscript{31} 19.
\textsuperscript{32} Here, I use Conor’s theory that seeks to disrupt the gendered dichotomy of subject and object. Conor demonstrates how women were able to use their techniques of display to master the scrutinizing gaze, thereby manipulating it to their advantage. As “modern consuming subjects,” women had greater access to public space and power, but at the same time, those spaces were confined to ones already gendered feminine (like the world of commodity consumption and the mass media, which were adapted to allow women to participate).
As in the US, meanings of “modernity” in Argentina were contradictory. While modernity did represent progress, it also caused anxiety, particularly in regards to women’s changing social roles. These similarities demonstrate the global nature of not only the economic, political, and ideological trends of “modernity,” but also constructions of modern womanhood. The transnational flow of ideas and identities show the global connectivity of the modern world, demonstrating continuity and connection in the studies of gender historians of the modern US to scholars of Latin American history. Evidence of the importance of notions of modern femininity not only in the US but also in Argentina, and likely other places with access to mass-culture, is clearly demonstrated in the portrayals of Eva Perón in TIME magazine, which celebrate her as the embodiment of the ideals of modern womanhood.

The Scholarship of Eva Perón

As we will see, the literature on Eva Peron offers a complex analysis of the polarized views of the enigmatic First Lady. In fact, Eva was such a polarizing and controversial figure, there were several competing constructions of her public persona during her lifetime. For Perón’s political supporters, Eva was the mother of her people, the self-sacrificing and loving “spiritual leader of the nation.” For the opponents of Perón within Argentina, and for those who drew on these characterizations later, Eva was a vengeful and power-hungry woman who usurped the gendered order, emasculating her husband by taking on his role. However, there was a third representation of Eva that drew on internationally circulating images and ideas about women’s new roles in modern society.
These characterizations were prevalent in the English-speaking media between 1945 and 1952 and presented Eva as the model of international new womanhood. To understand the meanings of these representations, it is first necessary to provide historical context to the life and portrayal of the famous Argentine First Lady.

When Eva first met Juan Perón, he was a cabinet leader in the military government that had reigned since a bloodless military coup on June 4, 1943, ended the so-called “Infamous Decade” of the political rule of Ramon Castillo. Before the coup, the country was led by “a conservative landed oligarchy that managed to remain in power by rigging elections.”

However, the 1920s and 30s were a time of great economic and political change in Argentina. While the Depression hurt Argentine exports and manufacturing with diminished demand abroad, World War II opened up a greater demand for manufactured goods from Argentina that were no longer being made in the US and Europe, as their energies were directed to the war effort. As Navarro explains, “throughout the thirties, factories mushroomed and increased their output, reaching new peaks after World War II.” In fact, the Argentina that Perón came to power “was not only the richest country in South America, it was also one of the richest countries in the world. The war had left it a creditor nation; it was owed almost two billion dollars by Britain alone.”

An agricultural crisis that hit the country during the Depression caused a mass-migration of people from the rural countryside into the capitol to search for work in the factories. However, working and living conditions for the urban masses were poor, with

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35 Fraser and Navarro, 77.
little relief coming from the government. Aside from internal migrations, decades of policies beginning in the 1910s favored subsidizing European immigration in an effort to “whiten” the “inferior” races. This population growth added to the growing political mobilization of the working-classes in Buenos Aires. As Jorge Salessi explains, beginning in the 1880s, elites attempting to overcome notions of scientific racism that would prevent the country from achieving ‘progress’ because of its racial ‘inferiority,’ sponsored massive European immigration. These immigrants were thought to not only expand the labor pool, but were also thought to ‘uplift’ the population, through racial mixing, thereby enabling Argentina to achieve “modernity.”

At the beginning of the 20th century, the British heavily influenced Argentine politics and economics. As British power began to wane in the region, the US began to take a larger role. When World War II began, Argentina continued its policies of neutrality from the World War I. As Navarro points out, many works published about Eva were heavily influenced by the perception of the US State Department that this neutrality was a sign of the Peróns’ Nazism or Fascism. Although Perón was legally elected in 1945 by an overwhelming majority, the election was often portrayed as corrupt and forced. Perón remained a fascist dictator in the eyes of the US press and government. An article from The Times of London published in 1946 shortly before Perón took office discussed a memorandum published by the US State Department. The memorandum

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37 Within the historiography of Eva and Juan Perón, as well as of Argentina more generally in the mid-20th century, there is an extensive debate over how to characterize “Perónism.” For more on the debates regarding international perceptions of Juan as a Nazi, see Carlos Escudé, “Argentina: the Costs of Contradiction,” *Exporting Democracy: the United States and Latin America*. Also see, Peter H. Smith. *Talons of the Eagle: Dynamics of US-Latin American Relations*. (Oxford University Press, 2000).
accused Perón of organizing Fascist rebellions in Bolivia, Uruguay, Chile, and Paraguay. It also mentioned “evidence of a continuing partnership between the military dictatorship and an elaborate Nazi organization in Argentina.”

The current historical scholarship on Eva Perón, most notably by historian Maryssa Navarro, focuses on the various myths that were created about Eva Perón and her legacy and has attempted to deconstruct those myths. For these scholars, the negative mythology of Eva Perón in the US was laid out in 1952 with the publication of the biographies Bloody Precedent by an American journalist and magazine editor, Fleur Cowles, as well as Anglo-Argentine writer Mary Main’s The Woman with the Whip, which reflected the U.S. unfavorable opinions toward the Perónist regime. Based on the gossip and criticisms of anti-Perónist groups within Argentina, these books cast Eva as a power-hungry, vengeful slut whose sole aim was to acquire wealth and seek revenge against the upper classes that snubbed her. Cowles portrayed Eva as a social climber, who used her sexuality to get to the top. Nevertheless, as Navarro states, “the book includes no sources for its numerous quotations, no bibliography, and many inaccuracies.”

Yet, despite this lack of scholarship, Cowles’ book, along with Main’s, would help lay the foundation of the negative myth of Eva Perón. This negative

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39 Maryssa Navarro. “Wonder woman was Argentine and her real name was Evita.” Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies. 24, 48, 133-152. 1999. 22.
40 See Fraser and Navarro who explain of Main, “Maria Flores is a pseudonym for Mary Main, an Anglo-Argentine historical novelist who revisited Buenos Aires in 1950, when Evita’s power was at its height. All of her information was taken from the opposition and her book is consequently a compendium of the most virulent anti-Perónist gossip” (Notes, Chapter 1, No. 11).
mythology of Eva Perón in the US media, however, did not fully emerge until the height of the Cold War. In the context of international Soviet competition, “Popular political mobilization and strike activity, whether or not Communist-led, suddenly became Communist ‘inspired,’ Moscow-dictated, and therefore ‘subversive.’” As such, the negative representations of Eva Perón reflect broader changes and debates of the Cold War.

Clearly, international Cold War rivalries played a major role in presentations of the Peróns, particularly in the US, which feared the growing power of Peronist Argentina. Amid US international Cold War security concerns, the US viewed Argentina as the major road-block to hemispheric unity. Juan Perón’s “leftist” policies were not only perceived as Communist, but the growing economic and military might of Argentina threatened the instillation of US hegemony in the hemisphere. This political tension was central to both the US-Argentine relationship, but also to representations of Eva Perón in the English-speaking media. Although Argentina maintained neutrality during the war, fears of fascism, Nazism, and later, Communism tainted the United States’ views of Argentinean leaders. It is highly likely that this perspective heavily influenced writers such as Main and Cowles who both lived in the US by the time they wrote their biographies. These two works, drawing on both anti-Perónist gossip in Argentina and

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44 Other news organizations furthered these portrayals, insisting that Perón’s election was undemocratic. In 1946, The New York Herald Tribune discussed past Argentine elections where the oligarchy chose an “official” candidate who was assured of winning. Although these practices did not occur during Perón’s election and no official candidate was ever named, the article argued that he acted in the same capacity as previous “official” candidates. In the past, the police would act as regulators on behalf of the candidate to ensure they were elected. The article describes similar practices continuing with Perón, stating, “Midnight visits to police headquarters have often been cause for conjecture.”
anti-Perónist sentiment in the US State Department, set forth a narrative of Eva Perón’s life that still lasts to this day.

However, despite ample discussion and deconstruction of the dichotomous portrayals of Eva Perón, a different image is explicit in the US media before the rise and international uptake of the “Black myth” of the early 1950s. At TIME magazine and elsewhere before 1953, Eva appeared as the ideal “international New Woman.” Along with Eleanor Roosevelt and Mme. Chiang Kai-Shek, Eva was presented in the US press as a part of a small group of female leaders of her time. She took part in public political life at the highest levels in the late forties and early fifties, a time when very few women were doing so. She founded the Women’s Branch of the Perónist Party (Partido Peronista Femenino) and advocated the right to vote for women, which became legally effective in 1947. She made public speeches, accompanied Perón wherever he went, even attended meetings where the First Lady never before would remain present. She met with workers delegations, visited factories and union headquarters, and ran her social aid foundation. She was even to potentially run for the Vice Presidency, until she became too ill for this to be possible. For Navarro, although Eva had a brilliant political mind, all of her actions were meant to complement Perón’s agenda and policies. She understood that Perón was the source of her power and there is no evidence that she attempted to undermine his authority for her own purposes. Paradoxically, the images of Eva Perón in the articles in the US media during Eva’s life present a different image. For these American writers, Eva was powerful in her own right. She successfully manipulated gender norms to maintain a public presence and political authority in the face of societal norms that excluded her from these roles.
CHAPTER III
EVA THE MODERN WOMAN

Eva Perón is one of the most highly mythologized female figures of the twentieth century. While previous historical scholarship focused on deconstructing the negative portrayals, those representations examined here reveal a more celebratory view of Eva Perón. Eva was presented as a powerful figure, a strong feminist, and the embodiment of the modern woman. This portrayal is in sharp contrast to the typical Argentine emphasis on her virtue as a proper domestic woman, as well as in contrast to the negative portrayals of Eva deconstructed in the historiography. Instead, from 1946 until the early 1950s, an image of Eva Perón proliferated in the US, particularly in reports from TIME magazine, which portrayed her as a powerful and modern female leader, who although publically active, managed not to upset traditional notions of gender roles as her power was seen as contained by her role as First Lady and by her own spectacularized self-display.

On August 26, 1946, TIME reported, “Argentines, among the most socially conservative of all Latins, had never seen anything like it. For them, a lady’s place—and that went for a first lady—was in the home. Now Eva Duarte de Perón, handsome ex-screen star wife of President Juan Perón, was changing all that.”45 Although it is clear from this article that Eva’s place of power is something new and a challenge to any patriarchal society, her position was also not threatening or negative. Instead, she was the

45 “The President’s Wife.” TIME, 26 August 1946, 1.
“Modern Woman,” in contrast to the backward Argentine, especially her militaristic, traditional husband, Juan Perón. She was an ex-screen star, an integral aspect of the modern woman, an important part in legitimizing the public visibility of women. As historian Kathy Peiss explains of the importance of actresses in conveying notions of modern femininity to women through the mass-media, “as new visual technologies began to standardize female appearance, those standards became increasingly defined by actresses and professional beauties—no longer seen as women of questionable morality, but rather as celebrities and stars.” This version of feminine self-display increasingly relied on and glorified actresses and models, the ultimate ideal mode of spectacular self-display.

All importantly, as First Lady, Eva’s power did not stem from an elected position, but rather was an extension of her husband’s power, meaning her role was somewhat contained. TIME writers’ comparison of Eva to one of the most popular American First Ladies, Eleanor Roosevelt, reveals these journalists clearly perceived Eva’s power in a positive light, like the admired American First Lady. The article contrasts the image of Eva as modern with the “conservatism” of Argentine elite throughout these portrayals, as The New York Times reported, “Senora Perón’s ascent and her important role in governmental affairs and propaganda were all the more remarkable for the contrast that they presented to the conservative social traditions of Latin America, where women previously were seldom seen, and never heard, in public life.”

Such contrasts between the modernity of Eva Perón and the backwardness of her husband and the Argentine nation were prevalent throughout the period under study. In

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46 48.
1946, TIME reported, “Staid Argentines, whose daughters still may not date without chaperones, could hardly be expected to swallow all this without the occasional harrumph. One opposition deputy introduced a bill in Congress to forbid public activity by officials’ wives.”

Again, Eva was presented as challenging the supposed backwardness of her people, the new woman who could usher in an American model of modernity to Argentina. Clearly, the American writers associated women’s emancipation with a very American understanding of modernity that they hoped to export to the world. Yet, despite the internal reservations of the “conservative” Argentines, the author goes on to acknowledge Eva’s vast potential, “If Eva could hold her grueling pace, she might start a revolution deeper than any her husband might lead.”

This image of Eva was one of potentially vast power. It was not a political revolution she might spark, but a social one, bringing modernity to her backward country. The writers note of her ability to start a revolution, without seeming to be afraid of this potential. They seem to admire Eva as a woman of great power, who, with her glamorous career as a former actress, exemplified the modern woman, that could only be brought down by the conservatism of Argentine elites.

These representations that celebrated Eva’s power are in direct contrast to post-1952 portrayals that presented Eva’s power as excessive. For example, in her 1952 publication’s discussion of the events of 17 October 1945, later known as “Loyalty Day,” Main emphasized the role of Eva in orchestrating Juan’s release. Main writes

48 Ibid, 1.
49 Ibid, 3.
50 As Secretariat of Labor, Juan Perón began building ties with union leaders and gaining a reputation among the working-classes as an ally and supporter. Perón made use of the radio and media, giving speeches promising the workers a better life. As these speeches increased their radicalism, and as fears, mainly in the US State Department, that Argentine populism was another version of European Fascism or Nazism, Perón was forced to resign from his political posts on 9 October 1945. However, before doing so,
that while Perón “grumbled about the weather . . . Eva showed neither weakness nor hesitation . . . no sooner was he gone than she began to fly amongst her erstwhile friends, shrieking at them, bullying them, cajoling them and threatening them, demanding his release.” However, Main makes no mention of who these friends were, or how Eva, having no political leverage or connections yet, was able to bully them. Nor does Main explain how Eva knew who to contact, as she was as of yet uninvolved in politics. Cowles also characterized Eva as organizing the movement for Juan Perón’s release, writing, Eva “never stopped to weep. She went to work at once organizing her ‘shirtless ones’ with furious speed and dispatch, readying them to mass, to be available at her bidding.” Despite these portrayals of Eva as orchestrating the events of 17 October 1945, at the time, she was not yet Eva Perón, merely Eva Duarte. She was not married to Juan nor did she have the political contacts and influence their marriage would later grant her. Of these types of depiction, Navarro writes, “these descriptions are short on atmosphere and implausible dialogues, yet they are still widely accepted as historical reality.”

Perón made one last speech where he announced several measures favorable to his labor base of support. This rhetoric incensed the military leadership and led to his arrest. In reaction, labor leaders and union members began working to obtain his release. The General Confederation of Workers met to discuss a general strike in protest of Perón’s arrest the same day sugar workers also went on strike (15 October). By the 17th, a general strike declaration was no longer even necessary as workers “abandoned their factories en masse and invaded Buenos Aires.” By the end of the day Perón was released from prison and he returned to Casa Rosada in the government complex to address the strikers. However, many historians have claimed that Eva herself orchestrated Perón’s release and the mass strike of workers.

54 Cowles also lacks sources for her characterization and the “book includes no sources for its numerous quotations, no bibliography, and many inaccuracies.” Maryssa Navarro. “Wonder woman was Argentine and her real name was Evita.” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies.* 24, 48, 133-152. 1999. 14.
Despite such inaccuracies, the uptake of this myth in the US and British media was evident within months of their publication. *The Times* of London published a description of the 17 October events in August of 1952 that stated Eva “successfully urged 50,000 howling workers from the slaughterhouse district into the streets and got his freedom in eight days.”\(^5^6\) This portrayal of Eva as the organizer of such events served to emasculate Perón—a particularly damaging depiction within the context of highly gendered international Cold War competitions. However, the only historically verifiable information about Eva’s actual involvements in these events was her unsuccessful effort to attain a writ of habeas corpus for Perón’s release. Any additional involvement from Eva is pure speculation and most likely fiction.

Positive portrayals of Eva, particularly those that emphasized Eva as politically powerful and as a successful businesswoman are also in direct contrast to not only the negative mythology surrounding her, but also to the image of Eva the Peronists attempted to craft during her lifetime. The Perónist presentation characterized Eva as the loving and dutiful wife, a mother to her people and a help-mate to her husband. In her many speeches and radio addresses, Eva played up views of female spiritual superiority as well as traditional gender roles of women as loving wives and mothers.\(^5^7\) Although Eva never had any children, the pro-Perónist side portrayed her as a mother to her people, like the Virgin Mary, who sacrificed and suffered for her children, the Argentine populace. The


\(^{5^7}\) For more on the connections between the emphasis on motherhood as women’s idealized role, see Donna J. Guy. *Women Build the Welfare State: Performing Charity and Creating Rights in Argentina, 1880-1955*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009). Guy argues one way the changing social relations of industrial capitalism and women’s increased visibility were met with an emphasis on women’s ideal roles as mothers. Furthermore, Guy notes the importance of these constructions to Perón’s power struggles with female philanthropists and feminists, efforts that further made the term “feminist” a label Eva tried to avoid. As Guy explains, “As women increasingly mobilized to demand change, Perón needed to tap into this potential voters pool, but first he had to wrest the women away from feminism and non-Perónist female philanthropy.
effect of this language was profound on the Argentine populace, as Guy explains, “the use of caring language and a desire to share the pain experienced by poor children must have resonated among Argentines as revolutionary statements, something Eva intended. She also identified herself as the ‘spiritual mother of all children’ and as a woman who worked faithfully with her husband, ‘our great President Perón’ to solve difficult social problems.58 One way Eva enhanced this image was through her charismatic speaking-style. Having spent many successful years as a soap opera actress on the radio, she adapted that dramatic oratory to her political speeches. Maryssa Navarro writes, “Using a language that was extracted from soap operas, she transformed politics into dramas dominated by relentless invocations of love.”59 Eva professed an undying love for her people, even continuing her weekly radio broadcasts from her residence when she was too ill with cancer to continue working. It is as though she suffered and endured, sacrificing everything, even her very life, because of the great love she had for her people and devotion to her husband’s dream for Argentina. Navarro adds, “She was a Virgin-like figure . . . she was the childless mother who became the mother of all the descamisados, the Mater Dolorosa who ‘sacrificed’ her life so that the poor, the old, and the downtrodden could find some happiness.”60 However, whether pro or anti-Perónist, both sides presented Eva as a “king-maker” during the events of the 17th of October. Navarro writes,

For those who have loved her, there has been a faithful, suffering Evita who by her example inspired people to rise up on Perón’s behalf; and for those who have hated her, a liar, a scheming woman who drags Perón back to fulfill her desires

58 Guy, 80.
for power and revenge. But Perón in either case has been considered of little importance; it is Evita who has saved him in the hour defeat.\(^{61}\)

These dichotomous portrayals of Eva as either the hero (for Perón’s supporters) or the woman who stepped beyond the bounds of her proper role (to Perón’s critics) are not evident in TIME magazine’s portrayals of Eva before 1952. Instead, Eva’s role on that day was presented as further evidence of her ability to usher in modernity and American values to her backward nation.

Clearly, the American journalists writing before 1952 had a much different view of Eva Perón. It is likely that these presentations of the Argentine First Lady were influenced by internationally circulating trends regarding both US policy towards Latin America as well as gender ideologies. Since the 1920’s and 1930’s, American policy towards Latin America was focused on creating stronger ties within the hemisphere. Hollywood played a major role in the endeavor, exporting movies and images that portrayed women as independent working girls, modern heroines who could have meaningful roles outside the home. These movies also encouraged the creation of ideas of feminine visibility as central to the condition of modernity. Similar to the representations of working-class beauty queens examined by Mirta Zaida Lobato, images of Eva Peron “strengthened a particular notion of beauty that required care for physical appearance and was in many ways in line with the images in women’s magazines and the efforts of the cosmetics industry.”\(^{62}\) During the 1940’s, the U.S. expanded its efforts to export American popular culture to Latin America, as seen with the creation of the Inter-

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\(^{61}\) Fraser and Navarro, 58.

American Bureau, as a way to promote hemispheric solidarity and ‘pro-democracy’ sentiment. So, it appears as if for these writers Eva became the embodiment of the modern woman as understood in the U.S. compared to the primitive and backward Latin Americans.63

Historian Peter H. Smith explains that US foreign policy towards Latin America during the 1940s continued its goal from the 1930s to build cultural ties within the hemisphere, heavily relying on mass-media forums like magazines, films, and radio broadcasts. Moreover, “As World War II drew to a close, Washington seems to have envisioned a continuation of (or reversion to) the Good Neighbor Policy—including its assertion of hemispheric hegemony.”64 While inter-hemispheric security was still a concern, US policy makers promoted cultural connectivity as well. The ‘hard’ objectives of the US in Latin America had always been geopolitical, strategic, and economic. At the same time, it was felt “that the US had an interest, albeit ‘soft’ or ‘secondary,’ in the dissemination of US ideas and culture, the US economic model, and US political institutions.”65 The promotion of a common culture, through films, radio, magazines, and other media devices, was thought to bind the hemisphere together.

TIME also picked up on US State Department efforts to build inter-hemispheric cooperation, efforts which were complicated by the powerful Argentine president Juan Perón. As TIME reported in 1946, State Department official Jimmy Byrnes, General Dwight Eisenhower and Navy Admiral Chester Nimitz “asked congress for permission to

63 For more on the promotion of hemispheric cultural ties and the Pan-American system, see Cynthia Enloe. Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics.
train the Latin Americans in US military dogma and arm them with US guns, ships, and planes. They want the hemisphere (and Canada could come in, too, if it liked) equipped with interchangeable weapons and trained in a common technique.” However, Juan Perón was seen as obstructing these efforts, as TIME reported,

As the hemisphere’s Mr. Big, the US could take whatever line it pleased. But to do so belied a Good Neighbor’s concern for neighborly action. Some Latin American diplomats hinted that if the State Department did not change its tune, the ‘Pan-American system’ would go on ice for six years (i.e. as long as Perón was President). The question was how badly the US wants hemispheric unity. For hemispheric unity could not be had without including Perón.

In contrast to these negative presentations of Juan Perón, Eva figured as a symbol of hope, as a modern woman, opposed to her backward country and traditionalist husband, and who would usher in an American-esque version of modernity in Argentina, uplifting and modernizing her country and people.

Film, and the new public space of the cinema, were important mediums for the US and international corporations in fostering hemispheric ties. Hollywood movies not only promoted cultural ties between the US and Latin America, they also promoted US notions of ideal normative gender roles. Argentine historian Mirta Zaida Lobato writes,

It was a mass culture within which behavior and ways of thinking and acting were reformulated. The press, advertisements, mass-circulation magazines, radio, and film all crafted this mass culture, disseminating images of women to Buenos Aires and to the rest of the country that offered new possibilities for women as potential subjects and as objects.

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Elena points out, “Commercial culture was linked to the world of consumer goods most obviously through advertising, and business employed the pages of periodicals, radio waves, and movie screens to court potential customers.”

The department store, like the cinema, offered a new public space for women’s wanderings and spectatorship. But also like the cinema, it was contained within the realm of commodity spectacle. In this way, the department store, cinema, and world’s fairs made flanerie available to women, “but only in ways that played upon deeply rooted conceptions of gender roles.” These modern public spaces were ones safely contained in the realm of commodity and spectacle. Furthermore, shopping and leisure commodities were naturalized as an extension of women’s true selves as shoppers. In this way, shopping and consumption became a vital link to the identities of modern womanhood. Eva herself also drew on this construction of womanhood, as Elena explains, “the First Lady was something of the nation’s First Shopper as well. Accompanied by her closest aides and her mother, she regularly made shopping expeditions to Buenos Aires’ top department stores, boutiques, and jewelers.”

Capitalism required consumption, so new forms of socially acceptable feminine mobility were devised to allow for women to publically participate in commodity culture by linking women’s public movement to zones that specifically contained them within the realm of consumption and spectacularized display. As such, new public places for

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69 Elena, 12.
70 By flanerie, I refer to the concept developed by Walter Benjamin in the characterization of the 19th century French figure the flaneur. Flanerie, literally means a “wandering” or “strolling.” Benjamin shows the flaneur as the symbol of the modern city. The flaneur meanders the streets of Paris, exploring and observing the modern city. However, “flanerie” is expanded by gender theorists to denote a way of observing and understanding the world, to imply an awareness and consciousness of the new urban milieu.
71 74.
72 Elena, 161.
women like department stores and the cinema emerged as “highly-regulated gendered spaces.” 73 This new status for women as consumers within a growing culture of consumption “helped to shape new forms of subjectivity for women.” 74 These subjectivities were only possible in that they were contained in spaces gendered feminine, whether through consumption or the sexual division of labor.

As historian Carolyn Johnston explains of cinema in the early 20th century US, women’s relationship with cinema would also be one that created new ways of “contained” public participation for women. As Johnson argues,

> In the cinema and popular literature women could vicariously be glamorous and sexy, add a career if they wanted, and still get married to the men they loved. At the same time, the violence against women reminded them of the cost of too much assertiveness. 75

Both cinema as a new public space, and films that conveyed cultural norms and gender roles, served to contain women’s public participation with new forms of proper femininity that allowed for their public visibility and consumer participation. Therefore, Eva’s public participation was in keeping with her modern identity as she was “contained” by either occupying public spaces gendered feminine, like the cinema and department store, or through her own public self-display.

One of the first times Eva performed her public, spectacular self-display was during her 1947 trip to Europe. In the beginning of their rule, the Peróns planned a great European tour for Eva, later known as the “Rainbow Tour.” Eva designed this trip to visit the dignitaries of Europe, with stops planned in Italy, France and possibly Great Britain. Although the historiography demonstrates many negative portrayals of Eva and

73 Rabinovitz, 11.
74 Felski, 62.
75 Johnson, 140.
her European tour, at the time, the US media in 1947 portrayed it in a very positive light, stating,

And without a doubt, the triumphal tour of Argentina’s beryllium-bright First Lady to the musty corners of the Old World had its miraculous aspects. For sleek, 28-year-old Dona Maria Eva Duarte de Perón was no ordinary tourist . . . scarcely a newspaper from the Times of London to New York’s Daily Worker did not wonder aloud over the significance of the trip.76

Eva’s looks again appeared as central to the characterizations made of her. She was described as “beryllium-bright” and “sleek,” highlighting the importance of appearance to Eva’s modernity. These positive portrayals in 1947 are in direct contrast to representations made after 1952, which cast the tour as another example of Eva’s excess and frivolity. However, in the U.S. media before 1952, this trip was presented as one that news publications around the world took notice of. The writer stressed that people all over the world would find this trip exciting or titillating. At the same time, Eva’s visible role was contained by emphasis on her glamour, her former career as an actress, and light-skinned good looks.

Such emphases on Eva’s appearance were in-line with international constructions of modern womanhood, for which appearance and self-display were central.

As Eva was a former actress, a model of feminine self-display, early representations of Eva—as seen in the coverage of her European tour—were celebratory of the First Lady’s public prominence. While acknowledging the significance of the trip, the journalists did make note of the controversial nature of Eva’s position as a public woman both in Argentina and the global community, writing, “Evita was the talk of every town. Whether they considered her God’s gift to the working class or devil’s advocate against the established order, the citizens of Argentina, who are Argentine first and partisan

second, could not repress their pride in the First Lady’s spectacular accomplishments.”  

These Americans viewed Eva as a unifying figure, one that, although controversial in many regards, inspired a sense of national pride and unity in her accomplishment. Eva was portrayed as breaking down barriers and upsetting the established order, all of which inspired pride in her people. Yet, she also remained “spectacular,” an object to be gazed upon, but one who mastered that gaze and utilized it to the utmost.

Although there were rumors Eva would be snubbed by the Queen of England, the writers portrayed Eva as not being stopped by the potential snubs, stating, “But Evita was used to brickbats; they had not stopped her before.” The article presented Eva as one used to facing adversity and capable of rising to the challenge and overcoming it. As TIME reported the following week, “Britain’s press had warned of a frosty reception. The final decision would doubtless be made by Eva. She was used to having her own way as she was to snubs.” These reports presented Eva as able to overcome adversity, and placed her, and not her husband—who was not once mentioned—in the position of power to make decisions. Eva was the actor, the decision-maker, and fully able to handle any snubs cast her way. In many ways, the writers discussed Eva as they would an actress, as a sex symbol, the “Modern Appearing Woman.” Her trip was seen as important to the Argentine nation as well as to the world community, highlighting her role as the modern woman who used her glamorous appearance to legitimize her place outside the home, which increased her and her country’s standing in the world community.

77 Ibid, 1.
80 “Modern Appearing Woman” is Liz Conor’s “New Woman” who mastered practices of self-display, legitimizing feminine visibility (2).
Eva was also shown to be a hard-working and shrewd businesswoman. TIME reported,

every day, after breakfast with her husband at 7, she shows up in her office, to
work from 9 to noon receiving delegations of workers and trade unionists, hearing
hard-luck stories and doling out advice and aid. . .(after a quick lunch) Evita is on
her rounds again, visiting factories, addressing workers or distributing largess in
the best bread-&-circus style. 81

In Argentina, Eva’s move to the Secretariat of Labor was significant. It was used as a
means to make it appear that her role was just an extension of her husband’s, as this was
his old office. By moving her here, Perón sent the message that he had not ceased to be
Secretariat of Labor, as the closest person to him was assuming his duties. In a regime
founded on the support of the working-classes, this appointment held strong symbolic
importance. However, as seen in the articles from the U.S., Eva’s position had tangible
significance as well. Her effectiveness in processing requests created concrete evidence
in the eyes of the workers that she eased their conditions and represented a “bridge of
love between Perón and his people.” 82 Although the traditional historiography sees Eva’s
power as a direct extension of Perón, the TIME articles reveal a new dimension. By
characterizing her as being powerful on her own and as pursuing goals outside the
confines of the home she shared with Perón, a new image of Eva was created. This
image celebrated Eva as a powerful, hard-working, and modern First Lady, visible
outside the home. Although the correspondents were careful not to define her power as
autonomous, their portrayal of her as a hard-working businesswoman and politician
revealed that she was, in many ways, seen as powerful because of her abilities and
accomplishments.

81 Ibid, 8.
On October 11, 1948, in an article titled “Evita and the Press,” this image of the hard-working, shrewd business woman was expanded, when TIME reported, “Argentina’s First Lady Eva Duarte de Perón was on the way to becoming First Lady of Argentina’s press. Last week she took over her third Buenos Aires newspaper.” Eva took over the newspaper, while her husband’s name was not once mentioned in the article. Eva was the sole actor. As seen in the characterization of her business practices, Eva made smart decisions for her company, “Prosperous Noticias, an afternoon sheet, is a logical buy for Eva’s holding company, Editorial Democracia, which already owned the dailies Democracia and Laborista.” Eva was not only the main actor; she was also a good business woman making “logical buys.” Furthermore, her advice to these papers was also seen as relevant and important, “For the most part, Evita does her editing by telephone. When she does come around for a news conference, her editorial directors invariably find her advice excellent.” Rather than characterize her power as an extension of Perón, as the Peronists did, these writers portrayed her as an important figure on her own. TIME stated of her, “Shrewd Evita Perón knew a good chance when she saw one” and that “Evita had made the most of her chance.” Her autonomy and assertiveness were symbols of her modernity. This image of a powerful and effective Eva, independent of her husband, was unique to the US context in this time period. At no other time or place would Eva be characterized as a powerful leader in her own right. Even in present times, as historians attempt to de-mythologize her, she is never presented

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84 Ibid, 1.
85 Ibid, 2.
as a solo actor with power.87 In fact, other news publications also highlighted Eva’s power vis-à-vis her husband’s. As The New York Times reported in 1952, “Although Senora Perón insisted repeatedly that she was only interested in social work, political observers began to credit her with influence in government affairs that was second only to her husband’s—if indeed that.”88

It is important to remember that alongside representations of Eva as a powerful modern woman, there were also ambiguities and tensions. While still portraying Eva as powerful, the reports began to reflect more anxiety and to diminish Eva’s autonomy, beginning around 1951. In these news reports, Eva was no longer presented as the sole actor, and Juan Perón figured in a somewhat more prominent place. In part, this change was due to the fact that after 1950, Juan did begin to take control of many of Eva’s duties, likely as a result of her deteriorating health. However, the increasing ambiguity of these portrayals also stemmed from the context of changing social and gender relations in the US. While the articles occasionally represented Eva as powerful in her own right, others cast Juan as the “affable male” and Eva as “the good help mate.” Despite these gendered roles, these representations continued to emphasize that Eva was powerful and held vast potential to cause great change. In an article titled “Little Eva,” the author discussed Eva’s involvement in political decisions stating, “At his side [Juan’s] Eva Duarte discovered within herself a deep compassion for the underprivileged. She planned labor reforms, became head of the Radio Association, and took to calling her coworkers my

87 Despite TIME’s emphasis on Eva’s role in running the newspaper, Democracia, Navarro and Fraser explain her actual involvement was quite minimal. “She did not play a great part in ruling Democracia; once a new staff had been recruited and the paper’s general policy had been defined, it functioned of its own accord, presenting in tailored form and with many photographs a simple, highly partial account of the incessant ceremonies of the Peronist regime.” (Fraser and Navarro, 82).

children.”89 Reporters in the US, like Eva’s self-promoted image in Argentina, represent Eva as a mother-figure in an effort to ease anxieties about the possibility that she was upsetting the gendered order.

Despite autonomous presentations of Eva’s power, these journalists often displaced anxiety about challenges to normative gender roles, at times worrying about the possibility of Eva’s power becoming “uncontained.” As TIME reported, “Evita was pleased as a ten-year-old over her new home, but for all that she had no intention of settling down to housekeeping, even in a presidential mansion. Opposition papers were soon sniping at Argentina’s ‘dual presidency.’”90 Here, the tensions of “modernity” are apparent and the ambiguity of the figure of the modern woman becomes evident. On the one hand, Eva performed all the requisites of the modern woman. She was a public spectacle, glamorous and fashionable. Yet, on the other hand, Eva, like all modern women, as a public figure, also challenged traditional gender roles, causing anxiety about maintaining the status quo, in both Argentina and the US. Historians Elizabeth Otto and Vanessa Rocco explain this ambiguity, “from the start, the New Woman was a specter of controversy. She was a symbol of progress and modernity and at the same time seemed to embrace decadence and decay.”91 Such conflicting representations of the New Woman were no different in the characterizations of Eva Perón as the embodiment of modern womanhood examined here. However, “even superficial representations could function

89 Ibid, 4.
90 Ibid, 7.
as a powerful tool for redefining gender norms."92 Historian Susan K. Besse explains of this ambiguity surrounding images of the Modern Woman,

As the modernization and beautification of mushrooming urban centers displayed accumulated wealth and technological progress, the images of independent working girls and sexy flappers symbolized changing social relations. Alluring yet frightening, the ‘modern girl’ was at once proudly displayed as a demonstration of national progress and denounced as a threat to national tradition.93

Such ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding the image of the modern woman were no less true in representations of Eva Perón.

Despite these anxieties, Eva was not characterized as emasculating her husband, as was often the case in the negative portrayals of Eva from post-1952. Rather, the journalists at TIME in the late 1940s allowed for Eva Perón to upset certain “traditional” gender norms, like the gendered division between private and public space, without upsetting the entire gendered order. Although post-1952 portrayals of Eva as a powerful leader were part of a gendered attack on the Peróns, these journalists characterized Juan much differently. In fact, the correspondents portrayed Juan as the “affable male,” one who allowed his wife certain latitudes, giving her a “Free Hand.” As TIME reported, “Devoted and well aware of his wife’s value as a press agent, Juancito gave her a free hand with her campaign for women’s suffrage, her labor reforms, and her peripatetic philanthropies.”94 Although Eva was not the sole actor, by casting Juan as the “affable male,” the writers gave legitimacy to Eva’s position of power, without seeing her as a threat to the established order. This portrayal allowed Eva to be viewed as having vast

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92 Otto and Rocco, 8.
94 Ibid, 8.
authority and capabilities, without showing her as upsetting traditional gender norms too much, as she was under the direction of her husband.

Although contained, Eva was still shown to have power in her own right and as being able to effectively wield that power. This positive version of Eva as powerful was repeated in the section titled, “The Good Helpmate,” which demonstrated a non-threatening version of a powerful female leader, stating,

Juan gave his wife a desk and a few chores to do at the Secretariat of Labor, his old post. Within weeks, the Secretary of Labor was running Evita’s errands, and Evita was running the show. Politicians who had ticked her off as a giddy blonde, clinging to Perón’s coattails, found instead that she as an energetic young woman with a will of iron, a rudimentary political sense and all the nerve in the world.95

By casting her position as an extension of Juan Perón, the journalists diminished any negative connotations that might be brought to the minds of contemporary readers when viewing a woman in power. She was his “help mate,” without upsetting the established gendered order. However, she was also “energetic,” with a “will of iron” and strong nerve. She went beyond the confines of the home to potentially exceed the power of her husband. Her effectiveness was not diminished because she was a woman, but rather highlighted and viewed in a positive light. Ambiguous and contradictory interpretations of Eva’s power reveal the context of anxieties about changing gender norms within modern society.

In a similar vein, the article went on to emphasize that Juan and Eva were co-rulers. In many ways, the reporters contrasted Eva’s modernity with Juan’s militaristic paternalism and backwardness. By casting her as the modern woman, the journalists were able to de-legitimize Juan, who was viewed as a potential threat to the political order in the Western hemisphere. Fears of Juan as a Nazi or Communist, as well as his

95 “Love in Power.” TIME Magazine. 21 May 1951.
economic and social policies made for difficult relations between Argentina and the US.

Casting his wife as the modern woman made Juan appear primitive and archaic.

However, despite these attempts to characterize Juan Perón as a strong-arm tyrant, the correspondents were not uncomfortable with a strong woman in a position of visibility and power. The reporters frequently compared Eva to other powerful women, as seen earlier in her comparison to Eleanor Roosevelt in 1946. These comparisons continued, as evident in an article published in 1951, which stated,

[Perón] does not govern alone. Beside him rules his glittering wife Evita, a 5 ft. 2, pale-skinned, dark-eyed dazzling blonde of 32. Their man and wife dictatorship has few precedents. Some have compared it with the dual reign of Spain’s Ferdinand and Isabella. Perhaps a closer parallel in history was established by the Eastern Roman Emperor Justinian, who married Theodora, onetime actress and reputedly the most beautiful woman in Byzantium, and enthroned her as co-ruler at his side.96

Again, Eva’s appearance as “pale-skinned,” “glittering,” and “dazzling” with her blonde hair made her the ideal image of American beauty, white skinned, spectacular and glamorous, enhancing her image as the modern woman. Not only was the pair presented as co-rulers, but the startling nature of this to contemporaries is revealed in the author’s attempt to find historical comparisons. As a historical figure, Theodora, like Eva, was a former actress until she married Emperor Justinian, highlighting the centrality of Eva’s star quality to her modern identity. As Susan Besse points out, the “actress” was an important symbol of modern womanhood, “Hollywood stars—especially female stars—became the heroes and symbols of modern life.”97 At the same time, the writers again referred to the rulers as dictators, furthering the image of Juan Perón as a militaristic authoritarian leader, in contrast to his wife, who seemed to represent modernity and

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96 “Love in Power” 21 May 1951.
The writers continued to portray Eva as the wielder of power and influence. Her husband may have been there at her side, but Eva was viewed as the main actor, “It is Evita, not her Juancito, who performs most of the hatchetwork in Argentine officialdom. Evita, not Juan, slings great, vulgar sums of money around . . . nobody can be neutral about Evita.”98 Although recognizing the controversial nature of Eva’s position, they did not discredit or diminish her accomplishments or attempt to portray Juan as emasculated by his powerful wife, in stark contrast to the mythology that would later surrounded the pair. Instead, the reporters used her public power, a symbol of the modern woman, in to highlight Juan’s “backwardness.” As modernity often created anxieties, these writers did worry at times over her position as a powerful woman, as seen in the statement that

Perón recently told a friend: ‘these are my three instruments of power—the C.G.T., the Perónista Party, and the Perónista women’s party.’99 The two significant things about this statement: i) Ex-Colonel Perón did not even mention the army, and 2) Evita bosses two of the three key groups.100

However, despite the fact that the authors may be uncomfortable at times with acknowledging the position of this powerful woman, they did not take it so far as to use it as a tool to make Perón appear weak or as a means to de-feminize Eva, as was evidenced by the statement that appeared a few lines down from the above, “Perón still makes the decisions in Argentina, but now it is often Evita who follows through.”101 The journalists

98 Ibid, 6.
99 The Peron’s Women’s Party (Partido Peronista Feminino) was founded by Eva Peron in 1949. While the party allowed for women to enter the political space, it was characterized as a Women’s party, not a Feminist one. For further reading on this topic see J.M. Taylor. *Eva Peron the Myths of a Woman*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 1979.
100 Ibid, 8.
101 Ibid, 8.
were not too uncomfortable with her position so as to portray her as controlling her husband, yet, she remains the real actor, not him.

While these representations of Eva between 1946 and 1952 demonstrated ambiguity regarding the idea of a woman in power, they did not have the fiercely negative assessments of Eva’s power that were evident in post-1952 portrayals. These later representations of Eva used her power as a means to emasculate her husband. The later negative portrayals of Eva commonly characterize her as inverting traditional gender roles and claimed that she was in fact the true power behind Perón. They often emasculated Juan Perón, making him appear weak and powerless, while Eva appeared strong and aggressive. For example, Main described Perón after his arrest in 1945 as wanting to run away to Uruguay. In response, Main wrote that Eva replied to him “Don’t be stupid! You fag! They are not going to do anything to you! . . . For once in your life, behave like a man!”

102 Although Main provides no documentation for these quotes, these portrayals reflect deeper international anxieties about gender transference, particularly acute in the international Cold War context. As Navarro writes of Main’s portrayal of Eva, “She acts as he should have done, and in so doing, she further emasculates him and reveals her own masculinity.”

104 Portrayals of Eva that emphasized her as upsetting

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102 Main, 39.

103 “Gender transference” refers to a term used by Kathy Peiss to describe a common theme in portrayals of the New Woman reflecting anxiety over “manly-women” and effeminized men. As Patricia Marks demonstrates in Bicycles, Bangs and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press through an examination of satire published about the New Woman, there was anxiety about a reversal of sex roles from these emancipated women. Marks uncovers that the shift towards “Rational Dress” in the early twentieth century was a by-product of women’s new role in society. As Marks states, “her increased intellectual development and involvement in social and worldly affairs manifested themselves in changed manners and costume.”

103 Marks explains, Rational Dress eliminated corsets and heavy petticoats and skirts and “was almost immediately seen as a threat not only to the female image but to the male status. The simplified clothing adopted by the New Woman reaffirmed the public fear that reform meant the rise of a hybrid, the ‘manly woman.’”

traditional gender norms, delegitimized both her and her husband. As Navarro explains of these portrayals, “She was out of control because her husband was incapable of imposing his will.”

Instead of portraying Eva’s power as emasculating her husband, there are numerous pre-1952 examples that celebrated Eva’s power, as evident in TIME’s coverage of the build-up around Eva’s possible run for Vice-Presidency in the 1952 election. In 1951, the only thing that might have stopped Eva was the social conservatism of Argentina, “The only doubt seems to hinge on whether the idea is too shocking to the Argentine tradition of male superiority. If Eva gets the green light, there may be no limit. She already has risen to greater heights of power than any woman in Latin American history.” Not only was the only inhibitor of Eva’s rise the “Argentine tradition of male superiority,” but she was characterized as the most powerful woman in Latin American history. This is not only significant because her power was seen as non-threatening, but also because it celebrated her attempts to break-down the patriarchal order.

Later articles continued this sense of wonder at the possibility of a woman Vice President, “The calling of the rally meant that Perón and Evita had made up their minds to go full speed ahead with their plans, breaking all precedents.” Despite the fact that she may be “breaking precedents,” this was not presented as something negative or threatening, but instead the writers marveled at the meanings of this, “Never before in Argentina—or any other country in the hemisphere—had a woman been groomed for

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106 Ibid, 9.
Vice President.” The article went on to describe Eva’s decision to run for office as “a
great moment for the onetime actress who is now the most powerful woman in the
Americas.” Again, Eva’s role as a former actress was highlighted, emphasizing her
modern image. While she was celebrated as powerful, her status as a former actress eased
potential anxieties about her position of power. As a modern woman, Eva was contained
within the realm of the spectacle. However, referring to her as “the most powerful
woman in the Americas” was no small matter, as these characterizations would not
continue beyond 1952. In no other arena did this characterization of Eva as “the most
powerful woman in Americas” exist. Yet, American writers in the late 1940’s and early
1950’s, at least initially, seemed excited and awed at the possibility of a woman Vice
President, rather than shocked at her upsetting of gender expectations.

These positive discussions over the possibility of a woman Vice President started
to become more ambiguous in the early 1950s. When looking back on Eva’s potential
Vice-Presidential run, the journalists in late 1951 seemed a little more uncomfortable
with the prospect of a politically prominent woman, even if she was modern. Despite
initial excitement over the possibility of a woman Vice President, the writers understood
Argentine reluctance at accepting the seemingly shocking idea of a female political leader,
stating of her refusal of the position,

Some Perónista chieftains began to complain that too many traditions were being
broken too fast and that the Señora had better restrain her ambitions for a while. At the last minute, moreover, Argentina’s soldiers were bridling at the
unspeakable thought that if Perón should die, a woman would be commander in
chief of the Argentine army.108

107 “Big Buildup.” TIME  27 August 1951.
108 “The Answer is No” TIME 10 September 1951.
Again, Argentina and Perón’s government were presented as backward, calling Perónist officials “chieftains,” in line with an American image of Latin American countries as “Banana Republics,” a term used to describe countries perceived as limited to specific agricultural production, ruled by corrupt oligarchs and dictators, and as economically and politically inferior to the modern US democracy. Despite expressing concern over the possibility of a woman commanding an army, Eva’s powerful modern identity served as a contrast to the backwardness of Argentine government and society. Early coverage of the Vice-Presidential election emphasized that Eva certainly had the ability and political support to achieve elected office. TIME reported, “she sat at her husband’s side in the vice president’s traditional place—the place she would have occupied in her own right had army opposition not forced withdrawal of her nomination last year.” It was army opposition and Argentine Conservatism that prevented her rise to the Vice-Presidency, not her own limitations or the limitations of her sex.

There were other characterizations of Eva as powerful, particularly in reports that cast her as a feminist. She and those in her party were careful not to present her as powerful or as a feminist. Such a careful avoidance of the label “feminist” was necessary in Argentina where the term was viewed as a foreign or American idea, out of step with Latin American realities. Despite efforts of the Peróns to disassociate Eva from the feminist movement, early on, the American journalists did associate her within feminism. As seen in “The President’s Wife” June 1946,

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109 For more on ‘banana republics’ see Cynthia Enloe Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of World Politics.
110 “Somber Inaugural” TIME 16 June 1952.
At her office on the fourth floor of the Central Post Office Building she received trade union delegations before her neighbors along the swank Avenida Alvear were out of bed. Nurses and teachers, quick to spot a militant feminist, mayors and cabinet ministers eager for Evita’s views on public issues, jammed her waiting rooms.112

Not only was Eva seen as hard working, but the authors also stated that “nurses and teachers,” a group of women not only associated as being likely to have feminist leanings, but a group that was publicly seen as escaping the confines of the household, and therefore as modern women who recognized Eva as a fellow “militant feminist.” While the term “militant” denotes disdainful attitudes towards the feminists, it is mitigated by the views of feminism as an American concept being exported to the primitive Latin Americans, allowing them to be brought into the modern era. While Americans viewed Argentine gender relations as traditional and backward, this view was in contrast to their own society’s modern gender roles. However, American attitudes toward the Feminist movement were changing at this time in the international context of the Cold War, which helps explain the ambiguities in the descriptions of Eva’s role as a feminist. Although Eva avoided the label “feminist,” she did encourage women to fight for greater rights, as historian Donna J. Guy explains,

> Eva Perón played her first public political role in the battle for female suffrage. Before her trip to Europe, Eva delivered in January 1947 a series of radio speeches advocating suffrage, but not from a feminist perspective. Instead she described herself as Perón’s most dedicated servant. In March Eva exhorted women to take to the streets to demand their rights and defend their homes.113

Although Eva carefully avoided the label “feminist,” her actions could also be interpreted as a manipulation of societal gender models in an effort to break those boundaries, as she did by merely being a public and political woman.

112 “The President’s Wife.” TIME. June 1946
These references to Eva as a feminist appeared again a year later, when TIME reported, “On the radio other feminists were silenced to make Evita’s voice louder.”\textsuperscript{114}

With the words “other feminists,” the writer clearly associated Eva with this movement. Indeed, in the same article, the author states,

As a First Lady, there had never been anything in Argentina like Eva. Just as Perón, the savior of the descamisados, had expertly risen to power by expertly playing on the feelings of Argentina’s unhappy workers, so Eva made women’s liberation her battle cry. She was the New Woman, free and untrammeled.\textsuperscript{115}

By calling Eva the “New Woman,” the author made reference to the changing gender roles in the U.S., but while Eva would never have called herself a “New Woman,” the writer seemed to celebrate her as thus. The image of the “New Woman”\textsuperscript{116} was a transnational one, as Rocco and Otto write, the New Woman was a global image “instantly recognizable anywhere on the planet.”\textsuperscript{117} Eva, like other “New Women,” was “free and untrammeled,” like the new generation of women that seemed to be emerging in the U.S. during and even after World War II. The modern woman was a glamorous spectacle, who had clearly gained independence and autonomy during the war years, which did not end the moment the war ended.

\textsuperscript{114} “Little Eva” 14 June 1947, 6.
\textsuperscript{115} “Little Eva” 8.
\textsuperscript{116} As Charlotte Rich explains, the origins of the term “New Woman” was a “social and literary phenomenon in Britain and the US that flourished from 1890s-1910s and offered a liberated womanhood in contrast to the Victorian ideal of propriety.”(22). She was likely to be college educated, among the professions, more physically active, wary of marriage and tended to view it as an egalitarian partnership, rather than one of patriarchal dominance. However, such a construction of modern femininity continued well beyond this period, and consolidated into a global image, recognizable in all consumer-capitalist societies. Charlotte J. Rich in \textit{Transcending the New Woman: Multi-Ethnic Narratives in the Progressive Era}.
\textsuperscript{117} Otto and Rocco, 6.
A Cinderella Story

Although upper and middle class Argentines scorned Eva for her lower class background, articles in the US media in the late 1940s up to 1952, celebrated it. Like the “American Dream,” Eva was presented as pulling herself up by her bootstraps to achieve the heights of great success. The emphasis on her appearance as “pale-skinned” and blonde demonstrates her perceived racial status was “white,” thereby mitigating the negative connotations of her impoverished background. Epitomizing upward mobility based on merit of achievement, it is not surprising that the authors of these reports found a scintillating tale for their American audience in the story of Eva. Furthermore, Argentine historian Eduardo Elena explains the prevalence of ideas of success based on merit, not class, which were also circulating in Argentina. Elena writes, “there existed something of an ‘Argentine Dream’—a sense that this was a land where status was not necessarily fixed by family or birthplace but could improve with hard work and luck.”118 Such characterizations of Eva are evident in The New York Times in 1952, which reported, “The child of a poor village landowner who had been separated from his first wife, she rose meteorically through a brief radio and motion picture career to become the first lady of her land and one of the most influential women in the Western hemisphere.”119

In explaining the disdain the upper- and middle-classes had for Eva, the reporters emphasized that it was not due to her possibly illegitimate birth and undeniably poor background, but was rather due to her acting career and her use of men to further it. As seen in an article dated June 14, 1947, “I don’t care what she was,’ said one. “I just hope

she can do what she promises.” “I don’t mean to be snobbish. I don’t mind her humble
origin in the least; many of us descended from poor immigrants, but there are other
considerations.” The fact that Eva was a poor immigrant from the countryside does
not matter to this speaker; he looks at her acting career as the source of controversy.
Again, this theme recurs in 1948, “Rainbow’s Start. It was not the humble swamp from
which the Argentine rainbow first rose that earned her the haughty looks of B.A.’s
(Buenos Aires) aristocrats; it was the murky clouds through which she had climbed to
arch so gracefully over their heads.” It seems the journalists believed that the
Argentine people, like the American audience they were writing to, did not have
contempt for a leader from a lower class than them. The report emphasized Eva’s rise
from obscurity and poverty as a sign of strength. While she may have had affairs, these
accusations did not carry the biting sting of future works that portrayed Eva as little more
than a prostitute. For example, TIME reported in 1947, “with energy and persistence, she
managed to wangle a few small parts in radio and the movies. . . There had been many
men to help her on her way, and she had soon learned to pick the comers among
them.”

It becomes clear that while the reporters perpetuated rumors that Eva used men to
advance her career, these reports lack the aggressively harmful angle of later portrayals,
particularly in the neutral discussion of Eva’s possible illegitimacy. Instead, these reports
focused on her ‘star quality,’ her glamour, a spectacle who manipulated her looks and
sexuality to get ahead perhaps, but still as one who embodied the ideals of the modern
visible woman. American audiences loved a good rags-to-riches success story, and were

120 “Little Eva.”
121 “Shimmer and Impulse” TIME 16 April 1948.
perhaps more forgiving of Eva as a modern woman who may have used any means necessary to achieve her position. These portrayals of Eva’s origins sharply contrast with later portrayals that emphasized Eva’s illegitimate background as the source of her scorn for the upper classes and her quest for vengeance against them. Such representations are completely opposed to post-1952 mythology that emphasized Eva’s illegitimacy as what “explained her motivations. Her presence could thus be reduced to a simple cycle of wound and revenge, envy turned to vindictiveness.” In fact, “everything she had achieved—her movie career, her entry into politics, the Foundation—was the result of a single-minded quest for revenge on the world, while she revenged herself on men by seducing them in order to humiliate them.”

Cowles wrote in 1952 that Eva used her power “for revenge, to get rich, at the same time accumulating a vast secret fortune.” She went on to castigate Eva’s motives as “springing from a hatred which stemmed from her early life as the daughter of a woman brothel-keeper . . . she openly set out to repay snubs she had received from Argentine society.” Controversy over Eva’s origins resurfaced, as Main alleged Eva was born in a brothel, which also furthered associations with Eve and prostitution, highlighting her “dangerous” or “uncontained” sexuality. However, such emphasis on Eva’s perilous sexuality, which was not prevalent in the US media until after 1951, reflected a concern over female sexuality in the early cold war US, when, as Cold War historian Robert Dean explains, anti-communists would “couch discussions of sexuality in a language of national security.” As such, “gender, sexuality, and the production and

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123 Fraser and Navarro, 179.
124 Cowles, 181.
control of sexual secrets played a central role in many political struggles of the Red Scare era.”

The negative portrayals of Eva’s origins after 1952 were evident in the controversy over Eva’s birthday. As the New York Herald Tribune reported on 27 July 1952, “Her origins were best forgotten by those who sought favor with the Perón regime. She was born in the pampas town of Los Toldos on May 7, 1919—although she later claimed to have been born in 1922.” Maryssa Navarro, one of the most prominent scholars in the field of Eva Perón and Peronism, explains the controversial nature of the history of Eva Perón,

Even her birthplace and her birthdate are not clearly established. Some authors indicate she was born in Los Toldos on 7 May 1919; others agree that her birthplace was Los Toldos but change the date to 26 April 1922. As for Evita, she always claimed to have been born in Junín on 7 May 1922 and so does the birth certificate she presented for her marriage to Perón.

However, before 1952, portrayals of Eva’s origins emphasized her upward ascent as a rags-to-riches success story, rather than follow the negative mythology of Eva’s life as one of poverty, which instilled in her a desire to get revenge against the upper classes. In the negative mythology that arose internationally in 1952, Eva was portrayed as a no-talent actress, a slut who hopped from one sugar daddy and lover to the next in an effort to climb the social ladder. She was vengeful, vulgar, and the puppeteer behind Perón, the ambitious wretch bent on revenge against the upper classes who snubbed her.

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125 Robert Dean. Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy. (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002).65.
126 Even Eva’s actual birthday is something historians still debate, but Maryssa Navarro concludes it was most likely in 1919 Los Toldos.
However, portrayals that celebrated Eva as a Cinderella success story were evident even in early 1952 when TIME reported, “Only nine years ago, Eva Duarte was just a beguiling girl from a modest home in the pampas. Her assets—a trim 5-ft.-5-in. figure, a cold and sexy manner and a shrewd if untutored brain.”129 Her birth was seen as “humble” or “modest,” while later, authors like Main and Cowles portray Eva’s origins as the source of her vengeance. Instead, the writers at TIME saw her “trim” figure as not only a symbol of her modernity, but also as a useful tool, a key component of the modern woman who was aware of the gaze she was under and manipulated it to cease to be a mere object, but actually mold herself into a subject. The correspondent celebrated Eva’s humble background and her ability to overcome it to achieve success. As Elena explains,

Derided as a tacky social climber by some, Eva Perón was embraced as a paradigm of rags-to-riches aspiration by countless others. Even as she emerged as a political figure in her own right, one who exerted power behind the scenes and took an increasingly public persona as the defender of the humble born, Evita retained a self-consciously ‘feminine’ image of glamour through her appearance.130

*The New York Times* furthered this image in 1952, when it reported, “ambitious, ruthless, untiring, clever and strikingly beautiful, Maria Eva Duarte de Perón had in large measure many of the qualities needed to lift her in a dozen short years from obscurity to fame, wealth and power on the unpredictable currents of Argentine political life.”131

Furthering this theme of the rags to riches success story was the writers’ frequent characterization of Eva as a Cinderella figure. Although the Disney film *Cinderella* was not released until 1950, the writers at TIME focused on this theme as early as 1947. Under the section titled “Cinderella,” TIME reported, “thin, dark, energetic little Eva had

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129 “Cinderella from the Pampas” 14 August 1952.
130 Elena, 161.
other ideas. Movie magazines were full of Cinderella success stories. . . Eva knew what she wanted.132 This image continued, as seen in an article that appeared in May 1951, “glittering with jewels. She is well aware that in the eyes of many a descamisado she is Cinderella in the flesh. With sound political instinct, she dresses the part.”133 While later, references to Eva’s jewelry collection would have the negative connotation of her excesses or vindictiveness, here, the authors associated her modern trappings with her “sound political instinct,” recognizing that Eva was aware of the importance of the symbolic role she played. They credited her with taking an opportunity to increase her and her husband’s prestige. As Maryssa Navarro explains, Eva used her appearance as a political tool to convey a message to the working-class Argentinians. Navarro writes,

Her keen eye for theatrical effects was particularly useful in molding her public image, and she was most careful of her hair . . . her jewels, extravagant hats, and elegant clothes. Although she knew the oligarch criticized this image, she sensed the descamisados approved of it, and indeed they looked at her with a strong sense of feeling of self-satisfaction and pride.134

Even in 1952, reports continued to appear that contained this Cinderella motif, as seen in an article titled “Cinderella from the Pampas,” according to which “Evita, shrewdly aware that the people wanted their Cinderella fittingly got up, met her public wearing Paris dresses which cost her $40,000 or more a year, and up to a quarter million dollars worth of jewels.”135 Again, the journalists recognized that Eva was using her costumes as a tool to enhance her esteem in the eyes of the descamisados, not as a frivolous act of vengeance, as the later mainstream narrative described her. Here, Eva was portrayed as

133 “Love in Power” 14 May 1951.
135 2 August 1952.
having a “modern” appearance; glamorous, spectacular, the embodiment of the visible woman.  

The portrayals of Eva in the U.S. media during the late 40’s and early 50’s recognized that Eva used her fancy dress and jewels as political tools, symbols to show the Argentine people that she, who was once poor like them, rose to success and achievement through Perón, symbolizing to the workers that they too could do the same. This image was developed in an article from the New York Herald Tribune titled, “Modern Cinderella,” which explained the use Eva made of the Cinderella image in gaining popularity and support. While alleging that Eva owned a jewel collection comparable only to Cleopatra’s and three rooms serving as storage for her clothes, it went on to explain that Eva “would depict herself simply as the shirtless one who has made good on Perón’s paradise, where she and her husband were working to provide such benefits for all.” Just as Liz Conor argued of the US and Australia, Argentine historians Elizabeth Otto and Vanessa Rocco write of the political use of appearance for modern Argentine women. Some women, like the “white” elites of Buenos Aires, could adopt these models of feminine comportment to allow for greater physical mobility and public participation. “In these women’s public and private lives, appearance could be strategic and even political, and for many it offered new experiences of the political sphere.”

136 In fact, Eva’s ability to use fashion as a political tool was something novel. As there was no precedent for women anywhere in the world for the kind of political power Eva wielded, she manipulated her style and clothes to great effectiveness. Fraser and Navarro explain, “There was no rule for what she should wear in a political context since there were no precedents for what Evita was doing . . . But she was already aware of the function of clothing in political life and there were occasions when she would assert herself in this area.” (Fraser and Navarro, 81-82).

The descriptive words these reporters used regarding Eva furthered the image of Eva as the embodiment of modern new womanhood. They depicted her with terms like “glittering,” “shimmering,” “enchanting,” and a “dazzling goddess.” In an article subtitled “Shimmer and Impulse,” TIME reported, “Her ‘official velocity,’ as the girls (in radio) called it, was under way. Spiraling vortexlike in the wake of a revolution, it was to carry Eva to dizzying heights.”

In the next section, I demonstrate how beginning in 1952, an intensely negative portrayal of Eva emerged in the international press, which I argue, rejected growing anxieties regarding the power and visibility of modern women within a Cold War context.

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138 “Love in Power” 21 May 1951.
CHAPTER IV

BACKLASH: THE REACTION AGAINST POST WAR NEW WOMANHOOD

By late 1952, the celebratory images of Eva Perón as a powerful modern woman completely disappeared. After this point, the news articles examined in TIME magazine picked up the narrative set forth in the biographies by Mary Main and Fleur Cowles. These presentations are caricatures of the modern woman that Eva was previously admired for. The very same characteristics earlier portrayals praised as signs of Eva’s modernity became the source of scorn after 1952 when Eva became the embodiment of an uncontained and excessive femininity, one who threatened to upset the entire gendered order. Eva and proper femininity became a vehicle for combating communism in the context of international Cold War competition. The backlash against Eva Perón was part of a broader backlash against women, and other marginalized groups, which were increasingly associated with the “leftist” ideologies and institutions attacked by anti-Communists.

The effect of this backlash on the writers at TIME was clearly evident in a 1952 interview Fleur Cowles gave after the release of her biography, Bloody Precedent. In an

139 In this portrayal, Eva was a no-talent actress, a slut who hopped from one sugar daddy and lover to the next in an effort to climb the social ladder. She was vengeful, vulgar, the puppeteer behind Perón, the ambitious wretch bent on revenge against the upper classes who snubbed her. Her main concern was with gaining jewels, expensive clothes and wealth, with Main and Cowles inaugurating “the theme of the road to promiscuity, riches, power, sickness and early death, a path almost all future biographers would tread.” Alberto Ciria, “Flesh and Fantasy: the Many Faces of Evita.” Latin American Research Review. Vol. 18, No.2 150-165. 152.
article titled “Not a Woman’s Woman,” Cowles recounted her visit with the Argentine First Lady that took place in 1950. Using her own “sharpened intuition” to analyze Eva, Cowles began by noting the large diamond orchid brooch she wore, estimating its worth to be $250,000, as well as the other pieces of jewelry Eva was wearing. Descriptions of Eva’s jewels and clothes as excessive were central parts of the myth of “Eva the Bad,” who was obsessed with diamonds, jewels, furs, fashion and the latest hairstyles because of her impoverished background and vengeance toward the upper classes. The Argentine land-owning opposition and writers like Fleur Cowles often criticized Eva for her vast wardrobe and glamorous appearance, writing, “I yearned to expose her as a tyrant to the world outside, which was so bedazzled by her clothes and jewels and treated her as a movie star.”

This characterization, which was cemented in 1952, demonstrated a powerful reaction against the visible modern woman, Eva, with her glamorous appearance and star quality that were once celebrated. No longer were her glittering looks celebrated as symbols of her modernity, but were cast as signs of her excessive femininity.

The article continued after describing Eva’s jewelry to state Cowles reaction to her first encounter with Eva, as she “stared back at me at first with a cold, unpleasant look, but after she’d taken in every part of me (including the black pearl and diamond pin I wore) she asked me to stay a while.” Then, Cowles noted, “She kept eying the jewel I wore. Perón winked at me and said in his halting English, ‘that’s one she can’t have.’” Cowles, in this article as in her biography Bloody Precedent, cast Eva as greedy and vindictive. Cowles wrote that Eva used her power “for revenge, to get even with the rich,

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141 “Neot a Woman’s Woman.” TIME 14 January 1952.
at the same time accumulating a vast secret fortune.”\textsuperscript{142} She went on to explain Eva’s motives as “springing from a hatred which stemmed from her early life as the daughter of a woman brothel keeper . . . she openly set out to repay snubs she had received from Argentine society.”\textsuperscript{143} No longer was Eva portrayed as the Cinderella who rose from rags to riches, perhaps using unscrupulous means, but still celebrated. Here, she was cast as the vengeful and power-hungry daughter of a “brothel-keeper.” Cowles summed up her opinion of Eva in her interview with TIME, which stated,

\begin{quote}
in her woman’s-magazine style, ‘Not a woman’s woman, with a warm remembrance for moments spent like any other woman with friends . . . not a man’s woman either, even if she once may have been, but a woman politico . . . a woman too fabled, too capable, too sexless, too driven, too overbearing, too slick, too sly, too diamond-decked, too revengeful, too ambitious—and far, far too underrated far, far too long by our world.’\textsuperscript{144}
\end{quote}

Cowles and the journalists at TIME began in 1952 to portray Eva as going too far, having too much ambition, too much power, with no one to contain her.

The negative portrayals that emasculated Juan Perón and cast Eva as overly ambitious (i.e. masculine) and vindictive—and in a sense, overly-feminine—became apparent by 1952 in discussions of Eva’s run for the Vice-Presidency. Rather than celebrated as powerful, as in the earlier coverage of the election, Eva was now derided for these very same acts. Eva’s vice-presidential run was portrayed as uncontained. TIME reported in 1952,

\begin{quote}
Ambitiously, she eyed the Vice-Presidency. Only the army, still one of Perón’s major props could balk her. Top officers, bridling at the prospect of a woman commander if Perón should die, demanded that Juan Perón put his foot down. Evita laid aside her ambition, explaining with pretty prevarication that she had not
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{142} Cowles, 181.
\textsuperscript{143} Cowles, 183.
\textsuperscript{144} “Not a Woman’s Woman.”
\end{footnotes}
yet reached the minimum legal age of 30. (She was 32. Her true birthday: May 7, 1919.)

Now, the authors appeared much less confident about a woman in power. Eva was too ambitious, which frightened the journalists who saw her as stepping beyond her proper boundaries. These writers seemed to desire along with the Argentine people that Perón should “be a man” and “put his foot down.” They feared what would occur if a female Vice President were to take full control.

By 1953, positive images of Eva as a powerful woman leader were completely absent. In these later portrayals, her husband was portrayed as being in charge, with Eva there to support him. In an article that year titled “The Decline of Eva,” it seemed only a few months after her death, the reporters agreed that people in Argentina had already forgotten the once-beloved First Lady. Perón was portrayed as having no difficulties ruling without his enigmatic wife, as TIME reported, “whatever the loss of his wife has meant to Juan Perón, the loss of his co-ruler has not yet affected the power of Argentina’s dictator.” The article went on to explain that already, the grand monuments planned to honor the Argentine First Lady were halted and people no longer wished to see the memorial film created about her. The article stated that people were already beginning to forget about Eva. Not only was this an inaccurate portrayal, it reveals the changing U.S. opinion towards women in public. No longer remembering her as the “most powerful woman of the Americas,” now, she was already almost forgotten by her own people.

Again in 1960, the vindictive portrayals of Eva continued, in contrast to the earlier positive portrayals of Eva’s political influence. In this report looking back over Eva’s life, Juan was viewed as the main political actor, with Eva there playing a minimal

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145 “Cinderella from the Pampas” 4 August 1952.
role. She was presented as vengeful in the founding of her Social Aid Foundation and in acquisition of jewels, gowns, furs, etc. TIME reported,

As a way of getting back at snooty Buenos Aires society women who froze her out of their charities, she founded her own Social Aid Foundation. It built costly homes for the aged, for working girls, for indigent mothers. Her blonde hair drawn back, her dark eyes flashing, Evita showed up at workers' rallies in jewels and Paris gowns that cost the foundation some $40,000 a year.147

Clearly, there was a backlash against the previous portrayals of Eva as powerful, shrewd and independent, as the writers were much more critical and uncomfortable with her position of power. Once praised for her use of wardrobe and glamour as signs of her modernity and as useful political tools, these same characteristics were derided after 1952.

147 “Ghost from the Past.” TIME. 30 March 1962.
CHAPTER V

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER IN THE EARLY COLD WAR

The sudden change in representations of Eva, from being praised as the emblematic modern woman between 1945-1951 to the fiercely negative portrayals after 1952, raises the question as to why there was such a strong backlash in the US media towards Eva Perón and other glamorized public women more generally. While before 1952 TIME depicted Eva as a strong and modern female leader, a feminist even, a Cinderella who pulled herself up by her bootstraps to become a hard-working politician and shrewd businesswoman, writers in the English-speaking news media completely reversed gears, which reached a turning point after the publication of the biographies by Main and Cowles in late 1952. Afterwards, the writers at TIME and other media outlets were not only more leery of the idea of a woman in power, but they completely took up the mythologized narratives of these two biographies, which further discredited the woman they once celebrated. This seems an astonishing reversal in a matter of only a few years. Yet, an examination not only of the political and economic circumstances in the US and Argentina, but also of the changing roles and understandings about gender and feminism provides a deeper understanding of why there was a backlash against Eva Perón and also against women who were perceived to be usurping traditional power arrangements based on gender.
Economically and politically speaking, relations between the U.S. and Juan Perón’s government improved in the early 1950s. While there was much controversy surrounding Juan Perón’s policies in the aftermath of World War II, with Perón cast as a Nazi, then a Communist, political relations began to improve after an economic crisis in 1951 forced Perón to slash social welfare spending and get tough on labor unions. In order to recover economically, Perón needed loans from the US. As Perón began to turn away from leftist policies that were perceived as socialistic in the US, he began breaking up union strikes and turned more towards his conservative base and the army for support. These actions were seen as favorable changes by the U.S. government, as fears of Communism began to rev up in the early Cold War period. In fact, Escudé writes that the period between 1950 and 1955 was characterized by the US government’s “full-fledged effort to seduce Perón and make him a friend of the US.” Paradoxically, despite improving relations between the Argentine and U.S. governments, it is in this period that the backlash against Eva occurred. To understand why Eva would be cast in a positive light during the early part of the Peróns’ leadership, and demeaned at the same time relations with her husband improved, it becomes necessary to look at the changing understandings about gender and gender power during the Cold War era. This approach requires a deeper understanding of how women in the U.S. were perceived after World War II, and the reaction against women’s positions in the height of the Cold War. This understanding suggests that women’s increased autonomy and prominence during and after World War II did not end until there was a backlash against these changing gender relations. In turn, the backlash was part of the anti-Communist effort that began to enfold

issues that came to be perceived as social ills, which included the greater strength and visibility of women’s roles in society at large.

Historians have long noted the increased prominence of women in the workforce during World War II. As “Rosie the Riveter” worked in factories during the war effort, she gained increased skills, independence, and confidence. However, historians have not given ample attention to how these women, with their new abilities and autonomy, continued to play a prominent role in public society after the war ended. This analysis suggests that perhaps these women continued to play a bigger role in American public life, until the anti-Communist movement expanded its agenda to react against not only the New Deal labor policies, but women and other marginalized groups in general. In the context of international Cold War competition, attacks on Eva for the same qualities she was once celebrated reflect larger reactions in the US against the leftist leanings of the Argentine leaders. These attacks on Eva and other modern women associated with leftist political ideologies served as a forum for international Cold War rhetorical assaults against communism. As Elaine Tyler May points out, women’s entrance in the wartime workforce and anxieties regarding female sexuality became part of the anti-Communist movement, underlying the emphasis on the cult of domesticity during these years.149

This understanding of the anti-communist movement views the emphasis on women’s domesticity as a constructed ideal in reaction to a perceived broadening in women’s independence, rather than a reflection of a trend that was actually occurring. Viewed in this light, the post-war years can be seen as a time of continued development in women’s opportunities, with an anti-Communist movement that then reacted against these challenges to male authority. The implication of this setting for the representations of

Eva Perón is that in the context of international competition in the Cold War, it no longer mattered that she was modern. As the anti-Communist movement broadened its agenda, gendered attacks on those associated with liberal institutions and ideologies, like Eva Perón, can be seen as “proxy wars” for fighting international Communism. Taken further, the case of Eva Perón demonstrates a broader anti-Communist attack on any woman that threatened the domestic ideal, a fundamental component of Cold War ideology.

Beginning with the New Deal\textsuperscript{150} and its growing bureaucracy’s need for clerical and bureaucracy workers, the greater availability of new jobs with higher wages had a significant impact not only on women’s everyday lives, but also on their conscience as well. With the mobilization of the wartime economy, women were exhorted to believe that it was their patriotic duty to join the wage labor force while the men were away fighting. However, women were also told that these new roles were temporary. Ironically, women “were expected to be strong and independent while the men were away but return to home eagerly after the war and be submissive again.”\textsuperscript{151} Although there was a concerted effort to reinstitute an ideal of female domesticity as “propaganda prepared women to return to the home after the war, no amount of propaganda could keep women from realizing their own competence and independence or from developing different aspirations for their daughters.”\textsuperscript{152}

Therefore, while domesticity was constructed as an ideal for women in post-war America, this ideal conflicted with the reality of most women’s lives. Just as consumerism gave women more social, economic, and political power in the early 20\textsuperscript{th}

\textsuperscript{150} On women and the New Deal, see also Susan Ware. \textit{Beyond Suffrage: Women and the New Deal.} (Harvard College, 1981).
\textsuperscript{151} Johnson, 200.
\textsuperscript{152} Johnson, 195.
century, the consumer boom of the post war expanded this trend. As Johnson writes, “Consumerism, the boom in the American economy and rising expectations of lifestyle standards sent millions more women into the labor force.” Once there, they discovered “a deep disparity between their covert power at home and their relative powerlessness in the public sphere.” Women’s growing “covert” power in the 1940s and 50s caused widespread anxiety. In response, a feminine domestic ideal was promoted to counter any real or perceived threats to the established power structure. Although women’s power was actually in many ways growing throughout the 1940s and 50s,

Antifeminism was widespread during the era and seemed to be cloaked with the authority of social science. Outspoken antifeminism of the 1950s reflected alarm about the possible threat to the traditional family by material transformations, the entrance of millions of women into the labor force and their growing dominance at home.154

Other gender historians are challenging portrayals of the domestic ideal 1950s housewife, which they argue obscures the complexities of women’s lives and their gendered worlds. As K.A. Cuordileone points out, “An exclusive focus on domesticity—with its implicit assumption of female subordination or conformity—as the sine qua non of women’s postwar existence obscures other aspects of women’s lives and changes in relations between the scenes that revisionist historians are unraveling.”155 By challenging the assumption of female subordination, a new history begins to emerge, one that sees the emphasis on domesticity not as actual evidence of the reality of women’s lives, but as part of a backlash against the increased presence and autonomy of women in post-War

153 225.
154 227.
US society. As Cuordileone explains, we are accustomed to thinking of this era as one limited and conservative for women, yet, writers in the 1950s were reacting to a heightening female self-assertiveness, nourished by World War II and the space for female autonomy it created and by postwar affluence, which brought Americans of both sexes greater expectations for individual self-fulfillment. Recent scholarship has suggested that mid-century American women asserted themselves in public life in highly visible (and no doubt unsettling) ways. And male observers at the time perceived a growing sexual equalitarianism in private life.156

This increased assertiveness not only stemmed from women’s participation in the wartime workforce, but as part of a general trend of women’s increase in opportunities for employment even after the war ended. As Cuordileone explains,

Yet domesticity was not a monolith even within the white middle class. Its revival coexisted uneasily with other trends, including the continued rise of a female (and married) workforce, women’s participation in reform politics, peace movements, and organized labor, a new awareness of female achievement and capability born of wartime experience, and a common assumption, voiced often in men’s writings, that women were finally now politically, personally, and sexually emancipated.157

The author notes that both men and women were writing at that time about a vision that women were now politically, personally and even sexually liberated during the aftermath of World War II.

These observations coincide with the evidence presented in this paper regarding the media’s acceptance of Eva Perón as a strong First Lady during the period before 1952. The iteration of the domestic ideal for women was a reaction to women’s growing equality. These reforms, and those achieved by other marginalized groups, caused anxiety. As reform movements, the New Deal, and women and minorities’ growing access to power were all associated with “leftist” or liberal institutions, the anti-Communist

156 Courdileone, 527.
157 Courdileone, 526-527.
movement attacked these groups. The invisibilization of the celebratory portrayals of Eva Perón as a powerful modern woman coincides with the broader conservative movement within the early cold war to diminish the societal gains achieved by “modern women” in general. It is therefore necessary to view the 1950s housewife, epitomized in the June Cleaver image, as an ideal, rather than a reflection of the reality of most women’s lives.

As historian Walter L. Hixson explains,

The ‘Father Knows Best’—June Cleaver representations between the late forties and early sixties marginalized women, who had grown more assertive as a result of taking on new roles in wartime process acquiring increased confidence and independent-mindedness. The emphasis on conformity and the nuclear family associated with the 1950’s often featured sharp anxiety about female influence.158

Focusing on the domestic ideals espoused in the late 40’s and 50’s has obscured a potentially more complex scenario.

The New Deal increased the bureaucracy of the U.S. government in profound ways, opening up space not just for women, but also homosexuals to work in places like Washington D.C. and form communities more accepting of alternative lifestyles.

Historian David K. Johnson discusses the rise of these communities and the little-told tale of the hysteria that began in 1947 over homosexuals in the federal government. The New Deal and its need for an increased bureaucracy brought many homosexuals to Washington D.C. where they developed their own subculture, which flourished under the loosening mores of World War II. However, Joseph McCarthy’s 1950 speech about communists and other “security risks” in government incited a backlash that saw potential spies everywhere. McCarthy and his supporters attacked the federal bureaucracy, including foreign policy bureaucrats, as liberal institutions. McCarthy and his allies

effeminized and emasculated these federal employees and the institutions they worked for, even casting them as homosexuals. McCarthy’s attacks on elite privilege as ‘weakening the nation’ and ‘subverting manliness’ led State Department leaders to a “purge of the perverts.” Amid this anti-communist hysteria, rhetoric about subversion included not only individuals with ties to communism, but was also increasingly targeted the liberal policies and institutions that began with the New Deal, as well as the individuals who were employed at those agencies. For their part, homosexuals were cast as “security risks” because, for many conservatives, they were susceptible to blackmail by the Soviets due to their unorthodox sexual activities. As a result, thousands of accused homosexuals lost their jobs, or worse. David Johnson connects the persecution of gays to the wider conservative agenda, which attempted to effeminize the New Deal liberal agenda.¹⁵⁹

This analysis of the anti-communist movement, with its broad definition of “subversion,” could also be expanded to include not only the persecution of gays and lesbians in the early Cold War, but also women, especially those who were seen to have gained some measure of societal power or public participation. Just as Johnson sees the anti-communist movement as encapsulating a reaction against a gay and lesbian community that was gaining strength and empowering its members, other historians are beginning to see a similar growth in communities of increasingly prominent women. Such analyses support the understanding of the backlash against Eva Perón as part of a broader backlash against women who were seen as challenging normative gender prescriptions.

¹⁵⁹ For more on early Cold War efforts to effeminize federal bureaucracy and bureaucrats, see Robert Dean. *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy.* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002).
This increased focus on public women in general is evidenced in Margot Canaday’s *The Straight State*, which emphasizes the growing importance placed on women in general as they gained more legal and social rights by the middle of the 20th century. By moving closer to first class citizenship, women were becoming a more important group to observe and control. Canaday explores this intensified focus on women after World War II through a legal examination of the military. Extreme state repression of sex and gender non-conformity was partially the result of the sudden visibility of gays and lesbians after WWII. As the state expanded, it gained the means, knowledge and power to effectively regulate sexuality. In so doing, federal policy helped to “produce the category of homosexuality through regulation.” Canaday argues that “the state’s identification of certain sexual behaviors, gender traits, and emotional ties as ground for exclusion was a catalyst in the formation of sexual identity.” In this way, the state did not just regulate homosexuality “but also constituted homosexuality in the construction of a stratified citizenry.” During WWII, women were needed by the military as clerical workers and bureaucrats. However, their choice of work over marriage made them suspect. As such, the sexuality of these women made them even more threatening, and therefore in need of reified methods of control.

In this light, the anti-Communist movement is revealed as a Conservative reaction to a changing social world, one with an increased emphasis on sexuality, but also against women associated with leftist ideologies or institutions. Anxieties about Communism were displaced onto discussions of women’s proper sexualities. As Cuordileone explains, while World War II altered sexual relations, “the exaltation of the nuclear family and the

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161 Canaday, 4.
revival of domestic ideals emerged in part as a defense against an unrestrained (female) sexuality and the rising tide of working women in the 1940’s and 1950’s.”¹⁶² During the 1940s, women’s sexuality was perceived as a major threat to traditional gender norms, and therefore the framework of power those norms supported. As John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman in Intimate Matters explain, the reproductive focus of sexual experiences was gradually shifting beginning in the first half of the twentieth century, partly due to the greater prevalence of birth control¹⁶³ and the loosening of the link between sex and reproduction. Part of this shift was caused by commodity culture that increasingly pushed the private world into the public one, especially through advertisements that led to the commoditization of the household. Consumer capitalism pushed once private activities, like bathing, dressing, and cleaning, into the public world of print advertisements, department stores, and other places in “modern” consumer culture. Part of this push included references to sex and sexuality, references that included women who were already identified as consumers. The shifting of the once private world of sex into the public through consumption and mass media helped loosen the link between sex and reproduction, towards a gradual shift that associated sex, for both men and women, as a pleasurable act. As such, women’s sexuality in the 1950s was especially dangerous for conservatives who were attempting to redefine the nuclear family, and push women back into the home under patriarchal control. It is not surprising then that especially in this anti-communist agenda with its link between public women and subversion, controlling women’s bodies would be a major focus. Anxieties about women like Eva Perón, who were associated with socialistic or communistic ideologies,

¹⁶² Courdileone, 528.
¹⁶³ Donna Guy also notes the wide availability of birth control throughout the period in Argentina.
were represented in attacks on women’s proper sexual roles. In this way, focus on Eva and other prominent women’s sexualities served as a “proxy war” for anticommunists to attack prominent leftist women at a time when male power seemed to be under threat at home. This concern in the early 1950s US over women’s sexuality helps explain why journalists turned on Eva’s once celebrated physical beauty, ‘sexiness,’ and her ability to use it to get ahead.

An article by historian Landon R. Y. Storrs that traces an interesting case parallel to Eva Perón’s offers insights into how the anti-Communist movement attacked liberal women as a means of reinstituting male authority. Storrs writes, “recent scholarship has begun to demonstrate that there was a more vital left-feminist scene in the 1930’s and 1940’s.” This increasingly prominent left-feminist scene was tied to issues of labor reform, social welfare, peace movements, and other “liberal” reforms and policies. With the increase in opportunity brought on by the growth in bureaucracy under the New Deal, Storrs argues that the emerging anti-Communist movement was tied to attacking not only New Deal labor and social policies, but also to the women attributed to working to further those initiatives. In this way, the anti-Communist movement enfolded attacks on liberal policies and institutions, especially New Deal labor and social reforms into the war on Communism. While these leftist ideologies and institutions were labeled ‘subversive,’ so too were any persons perceived as deviating from the established gender and sexual norms. As Storrs explains, “this essay proposes that neither the stunting of the New Deal nor the antifeminist climate of post war decades can be fully explained without appreciating how accusations of disloyalty silenced or discredited women who had

become advocates of left-liberal social policies.”\footnote{Storrs, 496} Storrs even goes so far as to suggest that women’s increasing role through the New Deal and wartime work effort, similar to those new roles that David Johnston found for homosexuals in Washington D.C., led to the possibility that “for a brief moment, left-feminists were positioned to exercise direct influence over American policy making.”\footnote{Storrs, 497} This helps to explain why, at the height of the anti-Communist movement, journalists who once celebrated Eva Perón as a strong political leader, turned on her so quickly, as most of her major goals and policies were viewed as “leftist” or “liberal,” such as her efforts to promote social welfare, worker’s rights, and other policies much like those in the New Deal. The anti-communist rhetoric tied fears of communism with an anti-New Deal (i.e. liberal) agenda, which further absorbed anxiety about and attacks on homosexuals and women, especially those tied to the liberal institutions the conservatives were attacking. This association between anti-communism and anti-feminism further demonstrates how not only Eva Perón, but the excessive modern womanhood she represented, became a site of broader contestations of gendered power, where some tried to “contain” the growing power and visibility of groups that challenged the established authority.

Storrs’ inquiry into the investigation of Mary Keyserling, a government employee accused of espionage in 1951, also helps to explain the possible reasons why writers who once praised Eva as a feminist barely even mentioned that women voted for the first time in Argentina in 1950. Because anti-communism became tied up with anti-feminism earlier in its development, the label ‘feminist’ would not be celebrated in the US in 1950. As Storrs writes, “I conclude that anticommunist attacks on women in government and

\footnote{Storrs, 496.}
\footnote{Storrs, 497.}
policy circles curbed both feminism and the social democratic potential of the New Deal."167 In this view, anti-Communism is revealed as a tool to redefine the US against the tide of social change.168 In many ways, the anti-Communist movement was an attack on an increasingly liberal society. Moreover, the anti-Communist movement used debates about femininity as a vehicle to wage the broader war against Communism. As such, anti-communism came to encompass not only Communist governments, but more broadly any person associated with leftist ideologies and institutions. As Cuordileone explains, “the liberal was—in much right-wing rhetoric—feminine in principal, effeminate in embodiment, andemasculating in effect.”169 Not only were liberals cast as effeminate, but the anti-Communist movement became a way to counter these changes. As Hixson explains, “national identity fostered an extraordinary linkage between counter subversion and the demasculinizing forces of femininity, homosexuality, and ‘deviant’ behavior.”170 As a way to counter this ‘deviance,’ the anti-communist and counter-subversion movement attacked both prominent liberal women and anyone seen as challenging heterosexual normality. This understanding of the counter-subversive movement helps to explain why Eva Perón’s image underwent a drastic change at the same time in which the height of the anti-Communist movement was taking place. As Hixson explains,

The countersubversive movement brought roaring to the surface the profound identity-driven social anxieties over gender and sexuality. While China was unambiguously red, many domestic subversives were labeled pink, suggesting borderline or overt radicalism but also a color associated with femininity. The

167 Storrs, 496.
168 Cuordileone, 539.
169 Cuordileone, 522.
campaign against pinks thus simultaneously linked assertive women with Communist sympathizers.\footnote{Hixson, 209. For more, see John D’Emilio. *Lost Prophet: the Life and Times of Bayard Rustin*. (New York: Free Press, 2003).}

Furthermore, these associations also linked labor and social issues with assertive women, as Hixson describes, “cultural hegemony associated social welfare programs such as national health, public housing, and child care with the menace of femininity and moved to contain them.” This containment of femininity proved so pervasive that it virtually obscured “the existence of the women’s movement between the achievement of suffrage and the ‘second wave’ of activism.”\footnote{Hixson, 209.} This containment included women such as Betty Friedan, whose persecution during this time forced her to quell her activism until the emergence of a stronger feminist movement in the 1960s. However, it is important to note that while feminists were linked with the anti-Communist movement early on, it is the emphasis on any woman perceived as “uncontained,” and therefore as a potential threat, that made this trend so destabilizing. By accepting that there was indeed a more vital and growing women’s movement, in terms of personal and political opportunities, one may come to a new understanding of anti-communist movement as a means of fighting against a perceived emancipation of women and increase an in their sexual autonomy.

In an interesting parallel to Eva Perón, Veronica A. Wilson highlights another side of the conservative agenda of the 1950s, which obscured the prominence of women’s activities after World War II. Wilson uncovers a deeply mythologized history of a prominent anti-communist woman who was both active and publicized, but later obscured by the anti-communist conservative agenda that made this figure almost

\footnote{Hixson, 209.}
invisible to history. Just as Eva Perón was spectacularized and glamorized in the US media in the 1940s, then remembered as a deeply mythologized persona thereafter, so, too, does Wilson’s examination of media portrayals of Hede Massing emphasize how they changed from the 1940s to the 1970s.

Massing was born in Vienna, where she lived and later worked as an actress until she moved to Berlin in the 1920s. Massing travelled in literary and scholarly circles, where she first established connections with communist thinkers. When Massing moved to New York in 1926, she continued her associations with American communists. However, after an unsettling trip to Moscow she began to doubt her communist thinking in the face of Soviet oppression. In the 1930s, Massing became a staunch anti-communist and later began a career publishing anti-communist writings. Most famously, Massing testified in the 1949 trial of Alger Hiss, an accused Soviet spy. While Whittaker Chambers’ testimony in the trial of Alger Hiss solely relied on Hede’s corroboration, “Chambers is famous, but Massing is virtually forgotten.”

In large part, this “forgetting” was a direct result of the evolution of the mythology of Hede Massing in the media. Hede was initially portrayed in the media of the late 40s as a glamorized seductress-spy, an exotic adventurer and femme fatale. Like Eva, Hede was a spectacle, a modern woman whose public visibility and societal power were legitimized through her self-display. Later, conservatives drew on this mythology, but de-emphasized Massing’s role in the political maneuverings, instead, she was a “minor adjunct to the heroic Whittaker Chambers” and was cast as a woman “whose subversion had been directed by men, her radicalism dictated by naïve love or

problematic sexual desire.” Wilson shows how this change in representations of Massing “served various interests and perpetuated certain ideologies and assumptions about communism, espionage, and women.” 174 While the backlash against Eva attempted to malign her reputation, the backlash against Massing attempted to obliterate her from the historical narrative.

Wilson describes Hede’s 1940s media portrayals as the “embodiment of illicit sexuality made even more exotic by her connections to radicalism and espionage.” Drawing on notions of women’s sexuality as dangerous when uncontained, Hede was portrayed in popular print as a “woman with a past,” drawing on both gender preconceptions as well as an American fascination with the communist underground as a “forbidden exotic place.” Writers at publications like TIME, Newsweek, and The New York Times evoked a sense of glamour surrounding the public image of wartime Europe and the intrigues and mysteries of the world of espionage. Hede, like Eva, was romanticized for her status as an actress, with journalists describing her as the “vampish Viennese actress” during her spy days, who was still “chic and coquettish at 49.”175 However, Hede’s glamour and spectacle were contained by the time she became the center of the public eye by the fact that she was the “turned temptress,” with a now firm commitment to fighting communism, as evidenced by her testimony against Hiss.

Like Eva, Hede’s portrayals as an exotic actress, which drew on symbols of modern identities, ceased to exist after the early 1950s. While Eva was maligned, Hede was made invisible. Both Hede and Eva were women once associated with Communism. Both were also celebrated in the 1940s as glamorous spectacles, characterizations that

174 Wilson, 699.
175 Wilson, 709.
legitimized their public participation and visibility. Then, both women’s portrayals abruptly changed in the early 1950s. While Eva was maligned, Hede was erased from the historical narrative, yet both were part of a larger re-writing by anti-Communists in an effort to use debates about proper femininity as a tool to wage the war against Communism.

This link between the anti-Communist counter-subversion movement and not only feminists but any women perceived as aggressive, public, reformist, or pushing the bounds of employment, appropriate gender roles, or normative sexuality, is useful in analyzing the backlash against Eva Perón in the US media, which began at a very critical moment in Cold War history. While noted earlier that the backlash against Eva Perón began in 1951 and reached a critical turning point in 1952, the concurrence of this time period with other historical events is interesting. Between 1949 and 1952, the Cold War entered a new era. The US lost its monopoly on the nuclear bomb, China was “lost” to the communists, various accusations of espionage were investigated, from Judith Copolo to Alger Hiss to Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, the Korean War began, and the election of Senator Joseph McCarthy. All of these events changed the dynamics of the Cold War. As Storrs notes in her examination of the US government’s Loyalty Investigations, over 2,700 federal employees whose cases were cleared in 1947 were reopened beginning in 1951. It is no coincidence that these events occurred as fears of the Cold War increased dramatically. Furthermore, these events and their effects on heightening the anti-Communist movement also help to explain why it was in this specific period, 1951 to 1952, that Eva and others began to be so critically maligned, as part of a reaction to an “uncontained” femininity.
The rise and fall of Eva Perón’s portrayals in popular culture during the late 1940s and early 1950s raises many questions. By placing these portrayals within not only the scholarship on Eva Perón and US-Argentine relations, but more broadly within the vast historiography of gender throughout the twentieth century, my aim is to be more suggestive than conclusive. The research presented here suggests that rather than take the emphasized and idealized gender norms of the 1950s as representations of reality, they should be seen as representing relationships of power.

Gender historians of the modern era argue that women’s confinement to the domestic realm was a construction emphasized in response to women’s continual challenge to those norms in the context of modern society. In fact, their own identities as modern and the identity of the nation as modern depended on women’s participation in the public world, albeit in confined and “contained” arenas. Similarly, this work adds to the scholarship on gender in the Cold War that seeks to deconstruct the narrative of women’s brief participation in the public realm during World War II and its eclipse by the desire for security and stability that resulted in phenomenon like the nuclear family, the baby boom, and the June Cleaver housewife ideal. It is my contention that this
narrative obscures a concerted effort to construct this idealized image at exactly the same time it was being challenged most.

The celebrations of Eva Perón as a modern woman in the 1940s, along with the few case studies of American women like Mary Keyserling and Hede Massing, all demonstrate the active participation of some women in public and political life. This evidence suggests that the transition from women’s growing empowerment during wartime, which perhaps continued to grow in the years following, elicited a strong reaction by conservative (white, male) elites. Just as elites did at the turn of the century against the threat of the “New Woman,” this evidence suggests a similar anxious response to women’s heightened access to the public realm and to what was perceived as the world of male authority. Eva Perón, Hede Massing, and Mary Keyserling are similar in that all three are to some degree celebrated in the public media in the 1940s, yet encounter a conservative backlash beginning in the 1950s, whereby all of their stories end in their mythologization, invisibilization, or defamation. These case studies of three very different women who all received media and popular attention are not meant to be representative of the vast majority of women’s experiences. Rather, they suggest avenues for future research in examining constructions of femininity and relationships of power during the Cold War era, which go beyond focusing on the hegemonic discourse that perpetuated and instituted them.

Behind the emphasis on the ideal domestic housewife, safely contained within the nuclear family, was a message propagated by a conservative white male elite in response to women’s continuing growing economic, political, and social achievement. Women such as Eva Perón and Hede Massing, who were once celebrated for their modern
participation in public life, were, by the early 1950s, cast as a threat to not only the family, but society at large and the nation itself. I urge future research that examines gender in the early Cold War era both within an extended view of twentieth-century gender history, but also beyond the paradigm of the domestic housewife.

As the few case studies examined here also reveal, more research is needed that examines whether the trends like feminine visibility and modern femininity of the early 20th century, were still in existence in the late 1940s. By examining women’s participation in the public realm of the modern world, which included a space for women to exercise their power as consumers and spectacles, the conservative backlash against women such as Eva Perón and Hede Massing seems all the more striking. While it is my assessment that such a sudden shift away from celebrating these women as modern public spectacles, represents a continuity from earlier definitions of femininity, the abrupt abandonment of these portrayals in the early 1950s remains unexplained. In fact, the evidence here suggests that this reversal, which I characterize as a conservative backlash anti-communist movement, needs to be examined in much more depth in future historical research.

As consumers, women in the 1950s maintained a certain domestic power they began to cultivate in the modern age. Women also did not simply forget the skills and autonomy of the previous decades of work experience, particularly immediately after World War II. These changes, viewed within the context of the early Cold War, were as threatening to male autonomy in the post-war era as the socioeconomic changes and “New Women” were to male authority at the turn of the century. The backlash against Eva Perón is indicative of a broader backlash against the growth in women’s participation
in public society. In response to this anxiety, it seems likely that the strategy of de-
legitimizing Eva Perón and other public and prominent women who challenged male
authority, was part of a larger effort to delegitimize such “new women” throughout the
US. Why this anxiety became the predominant expression, countering decades of
portrayals that celebrated women’s spectacularized public participation, begs future
historians to more critically examine gender relations in not just the early Cold War, but
within the larger context of gender studies throughout the century and around the globe.

This research also suggests further examination of concepts such as “modernity”
that look across artificial boundaries such as the nation-state. A transnational approach to
gendered modernity and gender in the early Cold War era is yet incomplete. Although
some recent scholarship attempts to look at the global modern woman, much work
remains to be done to illuminate the complexity of the construction of this identity as part
of a global phenomenon. A serious examination of representations of “modern
womanhood” as central to constructions of modern national identities in Argentina is not
yet in existence. Much work remains to be done in evaluating not only representations
and their meanings within the context of Argentina, but also new frameworks that allow
for a local and global reading of such a figure. While The Modern Girl Around the World,
The New Woman International, and even this essay are beginning to analyze the various
constructions of modern womanhood, they only begin to scratch the surface of media,
visual, and popular culture representations of proper or normative gender roles,
particularly in the case of Argentina. While Susan Besse in Restructuring Patriarchy
studies this topic in Brazil, as does Joanne Hershfield in Imagining la Chica Moderna
does for Mexico, such studies are lacking in the literature on Argentina. The evidence
presented here suggests that this oversight is not because the image of the modern woman was not important in Argentina. As the historiography clearly demonstrates, the articulation of the Argentine nation as “modern” was central throughout the period. Topics such as the link between modernity and nation in Argentina, how they intersected with categories of race, class, and sexuality, and how these correlated with imaginings of the nation-state, are open for exploration and analysis.

This research also touches on interesting connections between constructions of Argentine national identity and Perónism, particularly as they intersect with discourses of race and gender. While this topic is not fully covered here, conceptions of race and gender played a central role in formulations of the Argentine nation, which underwent fundamental changes with the mass political mobilizations of Peronism. More research on how these formulations were complicated by issues of gender is still unexplored. Moreover, further scholarship on US efforts towards Pan-Americanism and attempts to establish cultural hegemony would shed light on the changing perceptions and representations examined here.

Positive portrayals of Eva Perón as Argentine First Lady in the US media in the 1940s into 1951 reveal American journalists’ admiration and celebration of a modern woman in Latin America, a woman that challenged the supposed traditionalism of Latin American culture and embodied values exported in Hollywood films. These images valued women’s assertiveness, independence, emancipation and modern visibility. These values went along with those that were formed with women’s increased participation in the work force during industrialization and particularly so during the labor shortage caused by World War II. The backlash against Eva Perón in the post 1952 Anglophonic
press might be explained by perceptions of Eva as embodying uncontained modern femininity, and the threat that women and marginalized groups who attempted to become equal with men represented the political sphere in the US in the 1950s. These changes also coincided with anti-woman and anti-communist rhetoric in the US after World War II but especially into the height of the Cold War. Tracing the rise and fall of representations of Eva the “Spectacular Modern Woman,” further reveals changing social roles as well as challenges to and affirmations of the established power base by hinting at the fall of the transnational modern woman more generally.
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