

New Directions in the History of Peronism

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When scholars who work on Peronism reveal their area of expertise to non-Argentinean colleagues, reactions tend to fall along two lines. Most respond eagerly with their favorite anecdotes about Juan and Evita. But some have a perception that research on Peronism has been exhausted or that the subject is *passé* – or as one colleague put it, with a suitably outmoded expression, “Isn’t Peronism old hat?” The reality is that the field of “Peronism studies” shows few signs of stagnation. Indeed, the quantity of publications on Peronism appearing each year is daunting, to say nothing about the high quality of many works. Although researchers are scattered across the globe and represent a range of disciplines, the bulk of this scholarship is produced in Argentina, which explains, regrettably, its partial invisibility to academics elsewhere. For non-specialists perhaps most surprising is that the majority of new works are not studies of organized labor. This is not to say that labor is “dead”: far from it, as excellent labor studies continue to be produced and to ignore working women and men in the study of Peronism would be foolish. Yet the problems of state-labor relations that once defined the field have given way to broader research agendas and methodological experimentation.

That the study of Peronism has branched out in multiple directions is undeniable; making sense of where the recent literature may be headed is trickier. The dilemma lies partly in the centripetal tendencies of contemporary academic disciplines, where an explosion in output has come at the price of diminished intensity of debate around shared concerns. Nevertheless, the lack of overarching unity has not prevented researchers from clustering around certain topics and interpretive approaches. This essay examines a few nodes of activity to assess how recent research has both widened and deepened our understanding

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of Peronism. To be clear from the outset, my objective is not to provide a comprehensive review of the scholarship on Peronism from the 1940s to the present. This article is bounded in at least three ways. First, the emphasis throughout will be on the discipline of history, without entirely ignoring the social sciences and cultural studies. Next, the focus falls on the *primer peronismo* (1943-1955). Although I shall gesture to research on the post-1955 years, the first Peronist era has attracted the most sustained scholarly interest from historians. Lastly, the essay profiles “recent” scholarship, which I define, somewhat loosely, as works produced from the 1990s to the present. There are fine historiographic reviews and bibliographies that cover earlier decades, but we have fewer guides through the current literature.¹

This last point requires clarification, for I am not pulling that ancient conjuring trick: divide the scholarship into two camps, the “new” and “old,” and ally oneself implicitly with a progressive vanguard against the outmoded traditionalists. To do so would be a distortion because, in general, researchers working on Peronism have not positioned themselves in insolent rebellion against the earlier sociological and labor-centered scholarship. Moreover, my own experience of completing a book on Peronism has led me to realize just how often older interpretive problems get re-worked as new ones. This is not to discount the creativity of many recent studies or the pressing need to overcome those aspects of an earlier literature that are wrongheaded or no longer useful. But if one surveys the scholarship on Peronism, it is possible to discern problems that appear repeatedly, if in different guises – issues marked by keywords like power, democracy, hegemony, populism, and social justice. These terms are vital to understanding not only contemporary Argentina, but also other societies across the globe, which helps explain why Peronism remains an object of widespread fascination despite the occasional jabs from colleagues.

Governing Midcentury Argentina

The political tradition known as *peronismo* (or, if one prefers the more formal term, *justicialismo*) is more than 70 years old, and it shows few signs of vanishing from the earth anytime soon. The longevity of Peronism is especially remarkable when compared to other midcentury mass political movements. If Peronism has been around for so long, why, then, has its study experienced something of a resurgence? There are multiple answers to this question, including causes unrelated to the methodological shifts usually identified in historiographic reviews. For researchers based in Argentina, the burgeoning scholarship owes much to “structural” factors such as an increase in the number of Ph.D. hold-

ers, the formation of new public and private universities, publishing incentives placed by state funding agencies, and the appearance of new journals and book publishers. Since the mid-1980s, Argentina-based scholars have enjoyed greater, though by no means complete freedom to pursue research in areas of Peronism that were previously off-limits. Naturally, a different set of conditions has shaped scholarship elsewhere. Yet regardless of their physical location researchers have been affected by larger trends in contemporary Argentinean society – not least of which has been Peronism’s centrality to political life throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Peronism has proved enormously adaptable, spawning different sub-movements such as Menemismo and Kirchnerismo. These developments have sparked scholarly interest in revisiting *justicialismo*’s history and, accordingly, recent studies better reflect the heterogeneity of the Peronist movement over its storied past.

That said, academic researchers tend to hunt in packs, and Argentina specialists are no exception. Certain subjects in the history of Peronism have attracted widespread attention lately, particularly the Peronist state and its methods of rule. The state has long been an object of inquiry for political historians elsewhere, who have sought to “bring the state back in” and investigate “everyday forms of state formation.”² But research on the state in Peronist Argentina cannot be solely explained by this external influence, for it also represents an attempt to grapple with longstanding unknowns in the history of Peronism. The role of the state under Peronist rule has always attracted attention (there was never really a need to “bring it back in”). Nevertheless, what has for decades received little empirical attention is the question of exactly *how* the state and its closely allied institutions – what together could more accurately be called the “regime” – exercised authority. The blame lies primarily in Argentina’s tumultuous half-century from the 1940s to 1980s. The fractious contests between Peronist and anti-Peronist forces, punctuated with repeated repression of intellectual life, made it nearly impossible to research the first Peronism’s inner workings. In this climate scholars were more likely to debate rival classifying schemes (“is Peronism populist, bonapartist, aberrant, or something else?”) than to examine specific policies. Moreover, the state was often imagined as the mere mechanism through which Perón implemented his will. This tendency was partially the result of modernization-era treatments of populism that stressed personal charisma and social control of the masses.³ Peronist authorities themselves planted this seed by presenting Argentinean society as an obedient “Organized Community,” while anti-Peronist rulers after 1955 sustained it to criticize the regime’s “totalitarian” characteristics.

Researchers are now challenging the received wisdom about the state and are offering a more finely grained understanding of how Peronists governed

Argentina. Within this subfield, Peronist welfare programs have garnered the greatest interest – not surprisingly, given their fame and their importance to the regime’s midcentury model of social justice. Historians have investigated core areas of state action during the *primer peronismo*, especially healthcare, public housing, and other social infrastructure projects.⁴ These works have considered as well the programs run by the Fundación Eva Perón (FEP) and other non-state branches of the movement. The FEP took a leading role in welfare by the early 1950s, not only managing housing and healthcare projects but also offering direct assistance to needy populations (such as impoverished families and orphaned children).⁵ The goal of welfare programs during the first Peronism, in theory if not always in practice, was the comprehensive elevation of living standards. Accordingly, social policy encompassed broader areas ranging from the provision of public health and education programs to the orchestration of tourism and leisure programs.⁶

Such listing of themes does not capture the merits of each scholarly work, but it is possible nevertheless to discern overall contributions in the literature on Peronist social assistance. Recent research has allowed us to better appreciate the regime’s bureaucratic capacity, including the types of technical expertise and knowledge marshaled by its institutions. Contrary to images of a monolithic state, they have exposed the rivalries that existed between various levels of government and between state and para-state organizations vying for influence. In addition, these studies have traced how social policy evolved in conjunction with shifting budgetary fortunes, popular aspirations, and political pressures. Major questions remain unanswered about how beneficiaries sought to access Peronist welfare and how the wider public viewed these interventions. On the whole, however, this scholarship has provided a clearer sense of the impact of social programs – the numbers of facilities built, their location within the national territory, and the groups and individuals they served – that guided the “democratization of well-being” in midcentury Argentina.⁷

A few studies have explored the roots of Peronist welfare in the early twentieth century (by contrast, we lack good historical studies of the welfare state’s “decline and fall” in the second half of the century). Donna Guy’s *Women Build the Welfare State* places Peronist social programs within the context of early twentieth-century programs run by charitable organizations and ethnic associations.⁸ Guy shows how elite and middle-class women became protagonists in creating and managing social programs for poorer women, children, and families. The Eva Perón Foundation represented, in many respects, a culmination of these trends, as it, too, was led and staffed largely by women and relied on a mixture of public and private funds. Peronist social programs quickly subsumed the remaining charitable and mutual aid projects, a change driven in part by the

desire to satisfy a broader spectrum of needs rather than offer more pinched forms of poverty relief.

The Peronist state provided, of course, far more than welfare. Researchers have investigated an array of areas of state intervention, while weighing similar questions of change and continuity. For instance, new studies have reconsidered the problem of Peronism's origins by probing the expansion of the state during the 1930s and wartime debates over state planning. They have revealed significant changes in the bureaucratic structure of the state in the early 1940s, upon which Perón's administration would later build. The latter topic has been approached from several angles, ranging from institutional histories of planning agencies and economic policymaking to cultural analyses of the imagery and discourses of the Peronist Five-Year Plans.⁹ In general, historians are now more likely to envision Peronist planning and its ambitious role for government as the outgrowth of an earlier process of state reorganization than as a dramatic rupture or wholesale innovation.

A related line of inquiry has delved into the social composition and internal frictions of the Peronist state. One of the most important works in this vein is Raanan Rein's *In the Shadow of Perón*.¹⁰ Rein supplies a series of perceptive profiles of the regime's "second line" leaders – that is, officials like Juan Atilio Bramuglia who occupied positions of great influence, but were overshadowed by the cult of leadership surrounding Juan and Eva. The careers of these second line leaders often ended abruptly, in some cases with the expulsion of so-called "Peronists of the first hour" – a clear sign of the intense jockeying for power that occurred behind the façade of a unified regime. Scholars like Rein have also worked to illuminate related aspects of Peronist politics previously hidden from sight, including state diplomacy.¹¹

As these examples suggest, researchers must contend with the fact that the border between state practices and partisan politics in the Peronist *Nueva Argentina* was always blurry. It makes sense, then, to read studies of the state alongside the growing literature on the Peronist Party. This topic had attracted scant curiosity from historians, in part because they assumed that the Party was merely an appendage of the national government. A series of new studies by scholars like Nicolás Quiroga, however, has contested this view by exploring party politics in different provinces and by considering in greater detail the Party's organization and tactics of alliance-building.¹² These works share affinities with the vast political science literature on party politics in contemporary Argentina, especially in their focus on formal institutions and electoral contests. Most tell a story of early fluidity followed by the Party's consolidation into an increasingly rigid and vertical organization. Carolina Barry's *Evita capitana* takes a slightly different tack by exploring the intriguing history of the Partido Peronist Feminino

(PPF), the Party branch founded and led by Evita to court newly enfranchised women.¹³ Barry supplies an analysis of elections and organizational structure, and she also pays close attention to the gendered nature of this political experiment. Particularly noteworthy is her treatment of local party cells known as *unidades básicas* and her insights into how the PPF's female activists envisioned their roles within the Peronist movement.

If books such as *Evita capitana* help us make sense of the tangle of institutions that constituted the regime, another set of recent studies shed light on a related facet of Peronist rule: namely the regime's relationship with actors in civil society. This methodologically varied literature defies easy categorization, as it encompasses the histories of religion, commerce, the media, industry, and intellectual life, among many other topics. Although most of these works are not explicitly state-centered histories, they enable us to appreciate how Peronist rule was conditioned by civil organizations and interest groups. Two leading studies are Lila Caimari's *Perón y la iglesia católica* and James P. Brennan and Marcelo Rougier's *The Politics of National Capitalism*, each of which transforms our understanding about state interactions with major players – the Catholic Church and business organizations – that have long been topics of debate.¹⁴ These books eschew the simplistic dichotomy of opposition versus support, and stress the range of reactions provoked by Peronist rule. In the case of the Catholic Church, the familiar story is one of early support for Perón followed by violent crisis in the early 1950s that precipitated the regime's downfall. Without rejecting this narrative entirely, Caimari shows internal differences of opinion within the Church to Peronism as well as the variety of strategies pursued by the clergy vis-à-vis the state. Similarly, Brennan and Rougier demonstrate the spectrum of business responses to Peronism, spanning outright resistance to cautious consent to active collaboration. Their book combines economic policy analysis with an investigation of individual firms, and it breaks free from the standard 1943-1955 periodization to examine state-business relations through the 1970s. In each book, the incompleteness of the Peronist regime's drive to organize society comes into sharper focus, as does the underlying fragility of state interventions.

For the regime's skeptics and opponents (who represented roughly a third of society), Peronist rule was hardly weak or short-lived. Research on anti-Peronist sectors offers crucial insights into the regime's relationship with civil society. Several works have looked at the actions of opposition parties, organizations representing writers and artists, and other spokespersons critical of the repressive aspects of Peronist rule.¹⁵ Books by Jorge Nállim and Flavia Fiorucci consider how intellectuals responded to Peronism as a popular movement and to the regime's efforts to control spheres of public expression and the media.¹⁶ With political views across the era's conservative-liberal-leftist spectrum, many

intellectuals shared little other than an abiding distrust of the Peronist exercise of power. Opposition to Peronist rule often grew out of wartime anti-fascist activism in Argentina. Yet these authors demonstrate the wider intellectual reactions masked by the era's political confrontations: the rapprochements of some artists and thinkers with the state, the debates about resistance tactics, and intellectual uncertainty about how to interpret Peronism's place in the sweep of Argentinean history. This perspective has much in common with studies of the media under Peronist rule, which have also revealed how opposition newspapers like *La Prensa* reacted to the regime's growing political power and dissemination of propaganda through print, radio, and film channels.¹⁷

The greatest strength of recent works on the Peronist state, mass politics, and civil society has been their empirical orientation. This is an especially welcome trend given the excesses of theory-making that characterized the field's early days. These contributions are all the more laudable considering the formidable obstacles to researching the history of Peronism in Argentina: state archives in decay after decades of institutional instability, the purposeful neglect and destruction of documents, and an unwillingness to allow full or easy access to private holdings – conditions so bad that they might even surprise fellow Latin Americanists. Naturally, empiricism has its trade-offs. The question of exactly how to categorize these complex political arrangements has not always received the rigorous theoretical scrutiny that it deserves. Nor, for that matter, have scholars sufficiently placed the regime's initiatives in comparison with trends elsewhere in the midcentury world (such as the formation of welfare states), which would have helped sharpen Peronism's distinctive characteristics and commonalities.

In general, however, we have a far more nuanced understanding of the politics of Peronist rule. Rather than a smoothly running machine, the regime can be better seen as a constellation of state agencies, party organizations, and close allies – a concentration of forces marked by overlapping aims, partially realized projects, and internal rivalries. Although no one would deny the importance of Juan and Eva to understanding Peronism, recent works have moved us beyond narrowly biographical treatments of the era's mass politics. Between the charismatic leaders and masses that have long been central to the history of Peronism, lies a middle stratum of mediating institutions staffed by bureaucrats, technical experts, and operatives. With these allies behind them, the supreme Peronist authorities used both the carrot of access to state resources and the stick of repression and censorship to bring potential supporters and reluctant actors into their orbit. Nevertheless, rulers often saw their grand plans hemmed in, if not thwarted and overtly resisted, by non-state actors, a contest that represented yet another source of friction in the campaign to build the *Nueva Argentina*.

The Politics of Culture

For non-specialists, the greater scrutiny of political institutions and civil society may not seem that unusual – after all, classic Peronism studies focused on union relations with the state. Perhaps more surprising might be the intense attention devoted to the cultural dimensions of Peronism. Cultural historians have provided a fresh view of Peronism’s past by considering aspects of life in the New Argentina that were previously overlooked or dismissed as irrelevant, but which in fact reveal the operation of power in spheres of everyday life. At one level this shift, too, is a familiar story. Since the 1980s, the so-called linguistic and cultural turns have swept through the historical profession, and the Argentinean academy’s long tradition of engagement with intellectual trends beyond its national borders ensured that the cultural turn’s impact was felt strongly. But the interest in cultural history has also been driven by a frustration with the constraints of earlier sociological treatments of Peronism, especially its paradigms of populist control and mass mobilization. In seeking to move beyond these tired concepts, scholars have employed cultural methodologies to gain a richer understanding of how Peronism was imagined by citizens, how its politics penetrated into different routines and areas of existence, and why this mass movement left such lasting marks on society.

As in other Latin American contexts, the tumultuous transition from the heyday of social history to the new cultural history was more muted in Argentina than in places such as Britain and the U.S.¹⁸ One of the most-discussed studies on Peronism of the last twenty-five years – Daniel James’s *Resistance and Integration* – provided an early example of how labor history concerns could be merged productively with cultural approaches. While firmly rooted in the genre of labor history, the book also considers the question of Peronism’s appeal to laboring Argentines by drawing on influences ranging from Gareth Steadman Jones to Pierre Bourdieu. In James’s view, Peronism offered working-class sectors a “credible vision” of social change rooted in material improvements; at the same time, it represented for working people a “heretical” challenge to existing cultural hierarchies, social exclusions, and norms of decorum.¹⁹ With its careful treatment of language and quotidian experience, *Resistance and Integration* inspired scores of subsequent experiments to study the culture(s) of Peronism.

The first major work that styled itself overtly as a cultural history was Mariano Ben Plotkin’s *Mañana es San Perón*. In this trailblazing book, culturalist methods are applied to the world of mass politics, in particular to “the mechanisms for the generation of political consent and mass mobilization created by the Argentinean state during the Peronist regime.”²⁰ The book analyzes the construction of a “Peronist subculture” based on partisan myths, symbols, and rituals deployed

to generate active support and ensure passive consent. It explores how Peronist authorities crafted this political imaginary in practices such as the commemoration of official holidays, the design of school textbooks for primary schools, and attempts by the *Partido Peronista Feminino* to court grassroots followers.²¹ Plotkin bucked the prevailing trend of equating Peronism with the unionized working class by insisting that historians probe the experiences of women, children, and other social sectors. Above all, his book opened new frontiers of research by addressing an impressive variety of topics – intellectuals, welfare, media policy, youth, and sports, among others – that have become objects of more sustained inquiry.

Subsequent research has sought to unravel further the complexities of Peronist political culture. Topics that a generation earlier were considered superficial or mere rhetoric, beneath which lay truly weighty socio-economic matters, are now lively sites of academic scrutiny. Scholars in communications and cultural studies have investigated the characteristics of Peronist discourse, while their historian counterparts have tracked down written sources and visual materials (street posters, pamphlets, and films, among others).²³ Two works in this latter vein are María Helena Rolim Capelato's *Multidões em cena* and Marcela Gené's *Un mundo feliz*.²⁴ The former compares the propaganda machines of Peronist Argentina and Vargas Brazil; it is a rare example of a comparative study of political practices that exposes the shared ambitions of state authorities. By contrast, Marcela Gené's book focuses on visual culture and working-class identity. Reflecting the growing prominence of gender analysis in the study of Peronism (a subject for the next section), Gené's study examines not only the iconography of the burly, shirtless laborer, but also that of female wage-earners and scenes of domestic bliss centered on the multigenerational family. Rolim Capelato and Gené reach similar conclusions about the heterogeneity of Peronist propaganda, as officials borrowed visual tropes from many domestic and foreign sources to forge their own mass politics.

These studies of political culture have resulted in a deeper appreciation of the regime's mechanics of rule and the saturation of Argentina with Peronist symbols, images, and discourses. Yet such approaches have shortcomings as well. The most obvious criticism of works like *Mañana es San Perón* is that their analyses of culture pay scant attention to social reception, especially to how popular sectors engaged and interacted with the official Peronist subculture. The problem lies, to an extent, in the difficulty of locating sources. Clearly, the search for "agency" in other fields has become exaggerated at times, and the notion of "reception" can be employed in narrow ways. Nevertheless, these concepts are particularly sensitive issues in the study of Peronism, thanks largely to the decades-long dominance of theories that presented Peronist supporters as little

more than mindless crowds controlled by demagogues. Studies of imaginaries and propaganda have by no means accepted this view, but most works emphasize the production and meaning of political culture over its consumption, interpretation, and adaptation.

Scholars have begun to respond to these challenges by combining cultural history methodologies with greater awareness of Peronism's presence in different social and material contexts. One of the most creative examples is Anahí Ballent's *Las huellas de la política*. This work approaches political culture from the vantage of the history of architecture and urbanism.²⁵ It includes not only expected topics such as public works and architectural design, but also the broader politics of space in housing, leisure, social assistance, propaganda exhibitions, and shopping. The author analyzes a variety of textual and visual sources, balancing an appreciation for the regime's internal contradictions and the heterogeneity of its spatial interventions. Rather than look for one signature Peronist architecture, Ballent highlights the diversity of styles adopted by the Peronist builders (modernist, rustic *californiano*, and neo-classical, among others). She exposes the operation of politics in spaces of all types, from the planning of urban infrastructure to the layout of units in a public housing complex. This approach does not fully resolve the dilemma of how different social sectors "lived Peronism" in new habitats. Yet rather than presenting propaganda as a static container of ideology, *Las huellas* explores how mass political impulses gave shape to physical landscapes and thereby structured quotidian routines.

Over the past decade, scholars have used cultural history to consider other areas of material life and everyday experience. One vibrant subfield interrogates the relationship between Peronism and the worlds of mass consumption and consumer culture. The history of consumption is a vast topic, one that lends itself to many approaches. Researchers have delved into the individual acquisition and consumption of clothing, fashion, appliances, and commercial entertainment as well as forms of "collective consumption" like housing and social welfare. Recent studies have investigated the breadth of the marketplace and the intimacies of household consumption under Peronist rule, including the era's history of food (most notably, in Natalia Milenesio's work on the politics of beef and Rebekah Pite's study of the life and times of Doña Petrona, Argentina's most celebrated cookbook author).²⁶ Historians like Matthew Karush have traced the origins of Peronist politics to interwar consumer culture's treatment of class and melodrama in radio, film, and music.²⁷ His book *Cultures of Class* demonstrates how Peronist politics shares affinities with the moralizing discourses that circulated through the commercial marketplace. Likewise, other authors have explored the legacies of the first Peronism on consumer society in the post-1955 decades.²⁸

Historians have subjected culture and consumption during the *primer peronismo* to book-length treatments. These works include my own study *Dignifying Argentina*, which examines consumption to shed light on Peronist understandings of citizenship, progress, and social justice.²⁹ It investigates how Peronist actors redefined membership in the nation around expansive promises of a “*vida digna*,” which encompassed not only the satisfaction of basic wants, but also the integration of working Argentines into a modern consumer society. My research illustrates how the consumer aspirations of citizens overlapped, if imperfectly, with paradigms of state-led development, thus offering new answers to the classic question of why Peronist formulations of justice struck such a powerful chord in Argentina. Historians have explored other major aspects of Peronist-era consumption. Natalia Milanésio’s *Workers Go Shopping in Argentina* considers the transformation in consumer habits among working-class sectors in the Peronist era from the vantage of broader trends of commercialization and socio-economic modernization.³⁰ Milanésio shows how Peronist political struggles were, in turn, informed by consumer practices: mass consumption became central not only to working-class aspirations but also middle-class and elite resentments and anxieties over loss of status. Her work represents a key contribution to both the social history of mass consumption in Latin America and, more broadly, to the cultural history of Peronist rule.

While all these works differ in their approaches to Peronism and material consumption, they share a few common impulses. These studies can be viewed alongside other efforts to expand cultural history into new areas, motivated by the hopes of spurring creative discussions about material inequality, market forces, and national development.³¹ Many authors have returned, whether consciously or inadvertently, to issues identified (but never adequately explored) in some of the earliest works on Peronism, such as the links between midcentury populism and the so-called “revolution of rising expectations” (that is, the problem of consumerism in an age where information travels rapidly and encourages transnational comparisons).³² Of course, some studies of consumption are more cultural in their methodology than others, and there is excellent research being done in economic and business history less affected by the cultural turn.³³ Yet many works on Peronist consumption are marked by this blending of methodologies and borrowing of categories of analysis from several historical genres.

Two edited volumes, one published in the United States and the other in Argentina (both in 2010), exemplify the possibilities of cultural history more generally. The first collection of essays, *The New Cultural History of Peronism* shows how cultural history can illuminate a wide range of interactions among the regime, its supporters, and their antagonists. The volume addresses subjects such as the history of gender and sexuality (the rituals of working-class beauty

pageants); the history of race (state relations with indigenous protest movements and anti-Peronist racism); the history of consumer society (Peronist appropriation of melodrama, folklore, kitsch aesthetics, and norms of good taste); and the history of memory and violence. The second volume, *Políticas del sentimiento*, considers questions of aesthetics and analyzes representations of Peronism in the arts.³⁴ The contributors hail primarily from literary and cultural studies, and their essays draw on official propaganda sources to consider topics such as sexuality, childhood, beauty, and the body. The dividing line of 1955 that orients most historical studies is breached, as many contributors delve into questions of how the *primer peronismo* is remembered and represented in contemporary times.³⁵

It is not easy to find a common thread that unites these cultural histories of Peronism. This can be taken as a sign of vitality or as a cause for anxiety; but for all their self-declared “newness,” cultural histories of Peronism speak to some enduring interpretive problems. Practitioners of cultural history have pondered questions of change versus continuity as well as why Peronism generated such lasting extremes of support and opposition. The impact of cultural history in Peronism studies remains unclear, as this is still very much an unfolding trend. There are, naturally, pitfalls to avoid. As cultural history has become a leading, if not dominant, genre in many fields, there is a danger that it will lead to unimaginative thinking. In the case of Peronism, there is not yet cause for grave concern. The emphasis on cultural conflict has not led historians to adopt mono-causal explanations for Peronist/anti-Peronist friction that ignore factors such as party competition, class struggle, and clashing economic interests. There is much for cultural historians to explore within the study of political culture and propaganda, but especially promising are projects that cross-fertilize cultural methodologies with other tools, categories, and disciplines.

Widening Peronism

As we have seen, recent Peronism scholarship has been characterized by a proliferation of new approaches in the study of the state and cultural history. Nevertheless, there are certain impulses that cut across these areas. A driving concern has been a desire to consider a greater variety of actors than previous studies, which, for all their merits, focus on the male, urban, and unionized working-class and top state officials. This inclination to widen our view of Peronism’s protagonists can be found in the most methodologically adventurous and in more conventional scholarship alike. It derives from the influence of transnational academic trends, but also from a greater appreciation for the movement’s historical ability to integrate and antagonize diverse segments

of the population. The fact that organized labor no longer holds the place of prominence in contemporary Argentina that it once did – thanks in part to neo-liberal reforms pursued by Peronists in the Menemista 1990s – has no doubt encouraged historians to explore more diverse actors and social contexts than in the past. Together, recent works aim to better capture the shape-shifting nature of Peronism over its long history, while illuminating underlying continuities in Argentinean political life.

Arguably one of the strongest manifestations of this trend has been the surge of interest in the history of women and gender. As we have seen, women feature prominently in studies of political institutions as well as in the history of political culture, space, and mass consumption. This reflects the paradigm shift in the historical profession associated with the rise of gender studies, but it derives as well from the specific characteristics of Peronism. Thanks to Evita's centrality to the era's politics, the role of women in Peronism has always attracted commentary, and now researchers have begun to examine women's experiences more broadly in the New Argentina. In addition, several studies place gender relations and sexuality at the very center of discussion, particularly as they ponder previously marginalized or ignored issues, such as domesticity, healthcare and social welfare, childrearing, and education.³⁶

Gender has become not just a useful category of analysis, but even a ubiquitous one in the study of Peronism. At the risk of overstatement, one might say that gender is rapidly occupying the place that class did a generation or two ago, becoming the central category that attracts the most scholarly scrutiny and enthusiasm. To be sure, major issues remain underexplored, especially those topics outside the history of women strictly defined. But here, too, advances are being made at a rapid pace, including innovative projects like Isabela Cosse's history of family formation, childhood, and reproductive policy during the first Peronism.³⁷ Historians and cultural studies scholars are investigating aspects of sexuality and masculinity in their analyses of fiction, film, and the visual arts. Academics are, in a sense, only now catching up with the insights of writers and artists like Rodolfo Walsh, Néstor Perlongher, Tomás Eloy Martínez, and Daniel Santoro, who began as early as the 1960s to explore the role of gender and sexuality in their interpretations of Peronism.³⁸

The interest in gender has also breathed new life into familiar subjects such as the history of labor. Daniel James and Mirta Lobato have led the way in their multifaceted research on working-class women. James's *Doña María's Story* provides a life history of one woman worker, María Roldan, who was a meatpacker, wife, union member, and Peronist.³⁹ This biographical treatment is unprecedented in the field, and James uses Roldan's story to discuss changes in gender and labor relations from the first Peronism onward. By comparison,

Lobato places the political transformations of the first Peronism in wider perspective by surveying the history of women workers across the twentieth century, the experiences of women in factories, and the cultural history of working-class beauty contests.⁴⁰ Moreover, James and Lobato are collaborating on a long-term oral history project in the meatpacking town and Peronist stronghold of Berisso, which places gender at the forefront of analysis.⁴¹

If these studies emphasize the diversity of actors, another major trend has been a growing interest in Peronism's diversity of territorial locations. In particular, historians have looked at Peronist politics across Argentina's vast provincial "Interior." These scholars have sought to write the history of Peronism not only *in* the provinces, but *from* the provinces – that is, from the perspective of populations located in various "peripheries" connected, if loosely, to Argentina's political "core." Historians have long considered Buenos Aires and its environs as Peronism's birthplace and home; this orientation has its logic (after all, the metropolitan region was home to a third of the nation's population). But it derives as well from the persistent *porteño* bias of Argentinean intellectual life, and it flies in the face of the contrary evidence that many zones of Argentina's Interior have been bastions of Peronist support.

Many such histories offer analyses of party factionalism and policymaking at the provincial and municipal levels, but researchers have considered social and cultural issues as well.⁴² Take the example of Tucumán province, where the impact of Peronism was manifested in electoral contests, the union organizing of sugar workers, and folk music and popular festivals.⁴³ "Provincial" studies are not simply filling in gaps in our knowledge; they are raising new questions about Peronism's characteristics as a mass movement. Mark Healey's *The Ruins of the New Argentina* has gone perhaps the furthest in exploring the potential of writing Peronism from the vantage of the supposed territorial "periphery."⁴⁴ *The Ruins* offers a detailed case study of the January 1944 earthquake that leveled the city of San Juan and the painful reconstruction efforts that followed. It emphasizes the achievements of Peronist rulers in generating legitimacy and support, but also their repeated failures to rebuild San Juan. Turning the conventional wisdom on its head, Healey argues that Peronism's origins should be traced to these visions of national reconstruction following the natural disaster; only later, in his view, did it become the more familiar urban, union-centered movement.

As these examples suggest, it is no longer possible to see leaders like Perón or male unionized workers in greater Buenos Aires as the era's sole protagonists (although one should not discount their importance either). In smaller clusters of activity and in still emerging ones, scholars are exploring other ways to understand the attitudes and experiences of "ordinary" Peronists – populations defined variously as the masses, working-class, popular, and subaltern. Oral his-

tory offers a crucial tool by generating new narrative sources for interpretation. Creative use of printed material, film, photography, and music has also allowed cultural historians to glean insights into quotidian life. Historians have uncovered evidence of popular communications practices, such as letter writing, hidden away in archives that reveal Peronism's social reach. Researchers have used Peronist-era letters to investigate subjects such as state planning, civil society, consumer activism, and welfare provision from the vantage of women and men located far from the regime's commanding heights.⁴⁵ Scholars are making use of related types of documents, such as denunciations presented to state officials against rivals and enemies.⁴⁶

These methods and sources may help illuminate those segments of the population who participated only intermittently in formal Peronist institutions. Historians have been slow to answer Plotkin's call to study non-unionized popular sectors, but social scientific works on present-day Peronism have delved into the lives of shantytown dwellers and grassroots activists.⁴⁷ This shift in focus to clientelism networks of the indigent as opposed to the mass politics of a unionized working-class reflects contemporary changes in Argentinean society. Nevertheless, non-unionized workers were integral to the first Peronism as well, even if the ties that joined them to the regime's institutions remain somewhat murky. By contrast, another important, "unorganized" segment of society – the middle class – has attracted more sustained attention. Historians like Ezequiel Adamovsky and Enrique Garguin see anti-Peronism as a foundational element in middle-class identity from the mid-1940s onward.⁴⁸ The trajectory was not simple, however, as these scholars make clear: middle-class identities predated Perón's rise; the first Peronism also garnered a measure of middle-class support (from white-collar state employees, among others); and middle-class youth would be drawn in greater numbers into Peronism's orbit in the 1960s and 1970s.

The challenge for historians moving forward may be to find ways to trace unseen connections between categories such as class, gender, region, and culture. This process is beginning to take shape in different subfields, including in one of the newest areas of inquiry: the history of Peronism and race. For instance, Oscar Chamosa's study *The Argentine Folklore Movement* considers how indigenous and mestizo ancestry (often coded as "*criollo*" in Argentina) informed cultural nationalism in the twentieth century; the book's final section considers the popularization of folklore music and celebrations during the first Peronism.⁴⁹ Chamosa examines the racial politics of folklore under Peronist rule by drawing on sources as varied as Atahualpa Yupanqui songs and state reports on tourism. Other scholars have joined in this project by analyzing the racial stereotyping of anti-Peronist sectors, the regime's relationship to Jewish populations, and how labor leaders like Cipriano Reyes used *criollo* discourses to assert racial

harmony.⁵⁰ Studies currently underway consider Peronism in relation to Cold War racial ideologies in the 1960s and in comparison to the racial politics of other Latin American nations.⁵¹

Research on Peronism and race has already managed to generate some controversy. Indeed, some historians have dismissed this trend on pseudo-nationalist grounds, claiming that the obsession with race that characterizes U.S.-based Latin American studies is “invading” Argentinean historiography. There is no denying that enduring global asymmetries ensure that U.S. publishers, employers, and foundations shape dominant intellectual fashions and exert great (and at times stifling) pressures on scholars. But in this specific case the anti-imperialist critique is misguided. The recent interest in the racial politics of Peronism stems from multiple sources, including those homegrown in Argentina. There has been a growing public debate about race and national identity in Argentina, and multiculturalist ideals have informed the official 2010 Bicentennial celebrations and Kirchnerista cultural policy. Historians of Peronism have taken cues from these trends (without, it must be stressed, uncritically accepting ideologies of multiculturalism). They have relied as well on the work of anthropologists and sociologists studying Argentinean populations of indigenous and African descent as well as immigrants from Bolivia, Paraguay, and other countries. In this case, a better understanding of the racial dimensions of populism in midcentury Argentina may allow fresh insights on how Peronism has articulated a polarizing vision of the nation premised on popular inclusion and a “heretical” challenge to hierarchies.

Conclusions

Similar controversies have accompanied efforts to address the history of Peronism with new cultural and gender methodologies, among other approaches. The fact that the field’s researchers can still find ways to shake up tired thinking is fitting for a political movement like Peronism, which has defied easy categorization and fixed definitions. Moreover, a measure of controversy is necessary for a field to remain vital, as it serves to focus group attention and prevents its members from spiraling out into an infinite number of individualized subfields. As this essay has suggested, the latter is a possibility given the growth in academic production over the past two-and-a-half decades. Indeed, the variety of this literature makes it impossible to end with a nice tidy statement about the field’s future direction. It is likely that the forces behind academic professionalization will ensure a further proliferation of research (unless, of course, funding for the humanities and social sciences is eviscerated entirely). We should welcome the

widening and deepening of the field, even if certain avenues of investigation lead to dead ends, even if the quantity of output sometimes supersedes its quality, and even if it makes keeping up-to-date with the latest works occasionally exhausting.

By way of conclusion, we might return to a variation of the colleague's question posed at the beginning of the essay: is the study of the history of Peronism really old hat? The answer is, as always, "yes" and "no." Recent research demonstrates that the field is hardly frozen in time; leading works in the history of the *primer peronismo* have made important innovations that draw on influences from neighboring disciplines, transnational methodological trends, laborious empirical research, and a creative reading of present-day conditions in Argentina. At the same time, however, the study of Peronism remains old hat in at least two largely admirable ways. Most scholars retain respect for how the field has evolved over time and, in some cases, have kept alive an interest in topics such as class, capitalism, and nationalist politics that fell out of fashion in other circles. Equally important, recent histories of Peronism have found new ways to reframe older interpretive problems, including questions of populism as a historical rupture or continuity, the relationship between the state and civil society, the popular resonance of mass politics, and the fractious pursuit of progress in the midcentury moment. Each generation of scholars writes the history of Peronism from the vantage of its own intellectual preoccupations and perceptions of the present-day (it could hardly be otherwise). Yet each forms part of a longer interpretive tradition, willingly or not, as scholars are drawn time and again to a historical phenomenon that so powerfully illustrates the contradictions of modern life and that has integrated itself so thoroughly into Argentinean society.

Notes

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- 2 Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent, eds. *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).
 - 3 The emblematic work is Gino Germani, *Política y sociedad en una época de transición: de la sociedad tradicional a la sociedad de masas* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1962).
 - 4 Peter Ross, “Justicia social: una evaluación del los logros del peronismo clásico,” *Anuario IEHS* 3 (1993): 105-24; Colin M. Lewis, “Social Insurance: Ideology and Policy in the Argentine, c. 1920-1966,” in Christopher Abel and Colin M. Lewis, eds. *Welfare, Poverty, and Development in Latin America* (London: MacMillan Press, 1993), 175-85; Horacio Gaggero and Alicia Garro, *Del trabajo a la casa: la política de vivienda del gobierno peronista, 1946-1955* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 1996); Patricia Berrotarán, Anibal Jáuregui, Marecelo Rougier, eds., *Sueños de bienestar en la Nueva Argentina: estado y políticas públicas durante el peronismo, 1946-1955* (Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi, 2004); Anahi Ballent, *Las huellas de la política: vivienda, ciudad, peronismo en Buenos Aires, 1943-1955* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, Prometeo, 2005); Rosa Aboy, *Viviendas para el pueblo: espacio urbano y sociabilidad en el barrio Los Perales, 1946-1955* (Buenos Aires: San Andres/Fundo de Cultura Económica, 2005); Eduardo Elena, *Dignifying Argentina: Peronism, Citizenship, and Mass Consumption* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), 99-153.
 - 5 Néstor Ferioli, *La Fundación Eva Perón* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1990); Mónica Campins, Horacio Gaggero, and Alicia Garro, “La Fundación Eva Perón,” in Castro Gomes, et al, eds., *Estado, corporativismo y acción social en Brasil, Argentina y Uruguay* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, Fundación Simón Rodríguez, 1992), 49-108; Mariano Ben Plotkin, *Mañana es San Perón: propaganda, rituales políticos y educación en el régimen peronista (1946-1955)* (Buenos Aires: Ariel Historia Argentina, 1993), 227-34; Carolina Barry, Karina Ramacciotti, and Adriana Valobra, eds., *La Fundación Eva Perón y las mujeres: entre la provocación y la inclusión* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 2008).
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 - 8 Donna Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State: Performing Charity and Creating Rights in Argentina, 1880-1955* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009). See also Laura Golbert, "Las políticas sociales antes y después de la Fundación Eva Perón," in *La Fundación Eva Perón y las mujeres*, 19-50.
 - 9 José C. Villarruel, "Los conflictos entre el estado," in Waldo Ansaldi, Alfredo R. Puciarelli and José C. Villarruel, eds. *Representaciones inconclusas: las clases, los actores y los concursos de la memoria, 1912-1946* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 1993); John Eipper, "On Utopia, Infiltrators and Five-Year Plans: Argentine Populist Writings and Early Soviet Russia," *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 7:1 (1998): 95-110; Patricia Berrotarán, *Del plan a la planificación: el estado durante la época peronista* (Buenos Aires: Imago Mundi 2004); Eduardo Elena, "The Promise of Technocracy and Populism in Postwar Argentina," in Marcela García Sebastiani, ed. *Fascismo y antifascismo, Peronismo y antiperonismo: conflictos políticos e ideológicos en la Argentina entre 1930 y 1955* (Editorial Iberoamericana, 2006), 133-60; Daniel Campione, *Orígenes estatales del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila, 2007).
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 - 11 Raanan Rein, *The Franco-Perón Alliance: Relations between Spain and Argentina, 1946-1955* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993); David Sheinin, *Argentina and the United States: An Alliance Contained* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 84-110
 - 12 Darío Macor and Eduardo Iglesias, *El peronismo antes del peronismo: memoria e historia en los orígenes del peronismo santafesino* (Santa Fe: Universidad Nacional del Litoral, 1997); María M. MacKinnon, *Los años formativos del Partido Peronista* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI-Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, 2002); Nicolás Quiroga, "El Partido Peronista en Mar del Plata: Articulación horizontal y articulación vertical, 1945-1955," *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana "Dr. Emilio Ravignani,"* 26 (2004): 75-100; Julio Melon and Nicolás Quiroga, eds. *El peronismo bonaerense: partido y prácticas políticas* (Mar del Plata: Editorial Suárez, 2006); Oscar Aelo, ed. *Las configuraciones provinciales del peronismo: actores y prácticas políticas, 1945-1955* (La Plata: Archivo Histórico de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, 2010); Oscar H. Aelo, *El peronismo en la provincia de Buenos Aires, 1946-1955* (Caseros, Argentina: Editorial de la Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero, 2012).
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 - 17 Doris Fagundes Haussen, *Rádio e política: tempos de Vargas e Perón* (Porto Alegre: EDIPUCRS, 1997); Raanan Rein and Claudio Panella, eds., *Peronismo y prensa escrita: abordajes, miradas e interpretaciones nacionales y extranjeras* (La Plata: Editorial de la Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 2008); James Cane-Carrasco, *The Fourth Enemy: Journalism and Power in the Making of Peronist Argentina* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011). For new looks at the old question of fascism and the origins of Peronism, see Sebastiani, ed. *Fascismo y antifascismo*; Federico Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism: Ideology, Violence, and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy, 1919-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
 - 18 Barbara Weinstein, "Buddy, Can You Spare a Paradigm: Reflections on Generational Shifts and Latin American History," *The Americas* 57:4 (April 2001): 453-66.
 - 19 Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class, 1946-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Other scholars have continued to produce important works that address the politics and sociology of organized labor. Recent works include Juan Carlos Torre, *La vieja guardia sindical y Perón: sobre los orígenes del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana/Instituto Torcuato di Tella, 1990); Torcuato S. Di Tella, *Perón y los sindicatos: el inicio de una relación conflictiva* (Buenos Aires: Ariel Historia, 2003); Marcos Schiavi, *La resistencia antes de la resistencia: las huelgas metalúrgicas y las luchas obreras de 1954* (Buenos Aires: El Colectivo, 2008).
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 - 21 *Mañana es San Perón* builds on an older interpretive tradition concerned with hegemony and strategies for rule. Precursors include Alberto Ciria, *Política y cultura popular: la argentina peronista, 1946-1955* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 1983).
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- 28 Laura Podalsky, *Specular City: Transforming Culture, Consumption, and Space in Buenos Aires, 1955-1973* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).
- 29 Elena, *Dignifying Argentina*.
- 30 Natalia Milanesio, *Workers Go Shopping in Argentina: The Rise of Popular Consumer Culture* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013).
- 31 See Eric Van Young, "The New Cultural History Comes to Old Mexico," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 79: 2 (May 1999): 211-47.
- 32 Torcuato S. Di Tella, "Populism and Reform in Latin America," in Claudio Véliz, ed. *Obstacles to Change in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).
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